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Some Principles of the House of God

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Reading: Psalm 132

"Then Solomon began to build the house of the Lord at Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the Lord appeared unto David his father, which he made ready in the place that David had appointed, in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite" (2 Chron 3:1).

There is much related Scripture which we ought to read, but must only refer to as we proceed, because of our limited space.

It needs no arguing amongst us, I think, that the centre of God's presence among men, namely, the house of God, is a matter of first importance. I have said the centre of God's presence, for the house of God embraces and relates to everything else which is of concern or interest to the Lord. The house of Lord is within a wider range of God's interests and concerns. Ultimately, there will be wide ranges to which it ministers, to which God manifests Himself through it. It is the centre of His presence.

From a consideration of its great type here in the Old Testament, the temple, we are able to learn something of the principles which constitute the foundation and basis of that central dwelling place of God.

The Triumph of Faith and Obedience

The passage which we have just read is a key to so much, both historically and spiritually. I begin by pointing out again that the first principle of the house of God, the dwelling place of the Lord, is the triumph of faith and obedience when all else has been brought down to the dust. All Abraham's hopes and expectations, and the promises of God and the covenant of God with him, centred in Isaac. Beyond and apart from Isaac, Abraham had nothing. And then God said, "*Take now thy son ... Isaac...and offer him...for a burnt offering*" (Gen 22:2). In the words from Job: "*Lay thou thy treasure in the dust*" (Job 22:24) And the writer to the Hebrews makes a point of that - that he in whom all the covenant and promises were centred was being offered up by Abraham (Heb 11:17,18). Looked at from one side only, Abraham was severing the very arteries of life, parting with everything of hope, prospect, possibility; all was, from that stand point, brought to ashes. But for the intervention of God, Isaac would very soon have been reduced to ashes. In effect he was. So far as Abraham's heart attitude and obedience were concerned, Isaac was already in ashes. The wood was there for kindling, the altar and the knife were ready. But faith triumphed through obedience, and that very mount Moriah subsequently became the site of the temple, the house of God. The house of God is built on that sort of thing.

This foreshadows Calvary. From purely earthly standpoints Calvary was the end of all hope. It was a laying of treasure in the dust; it was ashes; it was an end. We know how it was for those around that Cross: it seemed the end of everything. But on the part of the one central figure of that great universal drama it was faith's obedience unto death, yea, the death of the Cross; and the house of God was and is built upon that. It is a principle. It is the great reality, the great doctrine of Christ. But it is of practical application, namely, that the house of God can only be grounded and founded and built as that sort of thing goes on.

The Laying Down of Life

A related principle is the continuous laying down of its own soul by the Church, letting go of its own life in obedience and in faith, when all is dark, when all seems hopeless beyond. Some course of obedience is required, calling for us to do that which seems to be without prospect or hope, and which involves, therefore, the laying down of our lives, of our souls. It is the way of building. It has ever been like that.

When young men and women have given up all the prospects of this world and laid their treasures in the dust and gone forth at the command of the Lord, they have laid everything in ashes so far as this world's hopes and prospects are concerned. The Church has been built in that way. Even when it is not like that in great acts of life's vocation, it is a daily thing, a letting go of our own interests in obedience to the Lord, in faith in the Lord. It is thus the building goes on. I could work that down to very fine points and show how often the house of God is delayed and arrested in its progress by the withholding of something on which the Lord has laid his finger and said 'I want that'.

However there is the general principle, the triumph of faith through obedience when all is in the dust. Abraham believed God, and that great triumph provided God with the site for His temple, the great example and type of that spiritual house which is central to the fulfillment of all His purposes. God dwells in that sort of thing. But that central thing has to go through the depths. That which is the very heart of God's presence, to which He commits Himself, has to know stripping more than others. This involves a deep work where faith is brought to perfection through very deep testing.

Fellowship With God in His Sacrificial Love

Alongside of that there is that factor of perfect fellowship with God in His sacrificial love. We have often made that point when speaking of Abraham's great step into the heart of the One who withheld not His Son, His Well-beloved, but freely gave Him up for us all. It was indeed a movement right into fellowship with the sacrificial nature, the giving unto cost, of the love of God. That is the only way in which the house of God is established. There has to be a giving unto cost because of love. It is quite evident that Abraham loved God more than he loved Isaac, dear and important though Isaac was. Abraham saw that to obey was of greater importance than even to keep this tremendous treasure; and that is love. That is what the Bible calls the fear of the Lord - that element of fear in love.

I am sure you know what that means. If there is someone of great account to you, and whose love you esteem very highly, you are always very sensitive about causing that one disappointment. That is the nature of the fear of the Lord. Abraham feared God. The house of God is built upon that kind of fear. It is of very practical and every day meaning - the love of God in our hearts leading to costliness in our sacrifice, our giving.

The Glory of Man Abased

Then passing from Abraham to David; this threshing floor of Ornan, the site of the temple, represented and stood for the undercutting of Satan's man-glorifying work and the deep abasement of man himself. You remember that Satan incited David to number Israel - a thing which even a carnal man like Joab could see through, for he said, *"The Lord make His people a hundred times as many as they are: but, my Lord the King, are they not all my Lord's servants? why doth my Lord require this thing? why will he be a cause of guilt unto Israel?"* (1 Chron. 21:3). 'The Lord has done very much, and will do more, but do not begin to count heads, to take account of how big your resources are and to glory in the greatness of your kingdom'.

Joab was a carnal man, but it seems that some carnal men sometimes see more than Christians do as to principles. But David set aside Divine wisdom and good human wisdom, and insisted on the numbering of Israel. You know the result. All came from Satan's prompting of David to do something which would glorify man and make much of his resources and achievements. The Lord came out and smote it hip and thigh, and that Satanic work of glorifying man was undercut and man was deeply abased. David was a sorry picture when he came to the threshing floor of Ornan. Oh, that man is now humbled to the dust!

This has to be done before there can be any building of God's house. Satan's work to make much of man has to be completely undercut. The glory of man, and man's desire for any kind of glory for himself, have to be abased. This is a house for the name of the Lord and for no other name in heaven, in earth, or in hell. *"My glory", says the Lord, "will I not give to another"* (Isa. 42:8).

The Lord does that all the time. Oh, the horrible display of human flesh in the realm of Divine things! Oh, the reputations made in the realm of what is of God! Oh, the delight to have a place in the Church! Oh, how often this flesh is active for its own pleasure and gratification! The Lord is hitting it hard all the time, driving hard blows -to ensure that His house is on the right foundation, not on any thing that is of ourselves. It does come home to us.

"Lord remember for David all his humiliations" (Ps. 132:1). That last word is more accurate than the one used in our translation. "Afflictions" is the word in the text, but that does not convey the true meaning unless you add other words and say, 'The afflictions with which he afflicted himself'. He is saying, 'How I humiliated myself! I would not allow my eyes to have sleep, I would not allow my bed to entice me, I would not enjoy my own house; I humiliated myself, deprived myself, in order to find a place for the Lord'. And the Lord does require that humiliation. He brings about this breaking down of man in order that the house should be rightly based. That explains His dealings with us. He will not let us be anything.

If we are really to be the dwelling place of God, then we are to be nothing in ourselves. Do not look for reputation, do not try to make an impression, do not stand on your own dignity, do not do any of those things in any way whatever which will give you prominence with people and make them think something of you. It will not pass with the Lord.

So let us get rid of it, every bit of it, and recognize what we are in God's sight. He is going to bring that about; so if we try to make people think we are other than we are in order to get an advantage, we are contradicting the principle of the house of God. All self-importance must go, and all desire for recognition. All that sort of thing has to be wiped out. The house of God is not founded on that. God will not have it. Man is abased, and all the other is the devil's work. It comes from him in whose heart pride was found.

The Meeting of Mercy and Judgment

Then let me remind you that the threshing floor of Ornan, the site of the temple was the place where judgment and mercy met. We sing

'With mercy and with judgment
My web of time He wove'.

There must be judgment. It was so in the case of David. But judgment is only one side. Judgment and mercy met on that threshing floor that day and kissed each other, and the temple resulted. Judgment has to begin at the house of God, but, thank God, it is not judgment unto utter destruction. It is mercy mingled with judgment, and the end is the triumph of mercy over judgment. That is Calvary, that is the house of God. We shall find it like that all the time. There will be judgment; it has to be; we know it quite well.

The Lord does not let pass things that are contrary to the principles of His house. If we only knew it, as Paul tried to make the Corinthians know it, many are suffering today in numerous ways because they are not observing the principles of the house of God (*1 Cor. 11:30*). There is that side; it goes on. But oh, God only does that in order to have mercy. It is mercy that is His end. So He founds and so He builds His house.

God Under No Debt to Man

No indebtedness to man is allowed to be represented by God's house. How insistent David was, how alive now to Divine principles! The refining fires wake us up to principles. It was so with David on another occasion. You remember how the ark was put on the cart. David had forgotten the Scripture. He went through a time of suffering until at last he came to see the Divine principle in the

Word of God and put things right (*1 Chron. 13 & 15*). Here he is alive to principles again. When Ornan wanted to give David the threshing floor, David said, 'No, I will pay you in full. No man shall ever say that the house of God is in debt to men; no other shall ever be able to say afterward, "Yes I gave God that; the site of that temple is my gift"'.

No Ornan is brought out of all holding. Man has no place as a creditor in the house of God; there is no debt to man, he is brought right out. You can apply that.

The Threshing of the Corn

This was a threshing-floor, the place where all is threshed out before the Lord. No chaff here; nothing that is not real, genuine, true, solid; nothing that will not contribute to building up. It must be the true corn. God is always seeking to do this. The house of God is a threshing-floor. All our chaff, our vanity, our emptiness, is being got rid of, all that really does not count. God is after that which builds His house, or, to change the metaphor, the Body. He is after the corn. The chaff must go. In our very relationship to the Lord amongst His people, as forming His house, we find He is winnowing, threshing, getting rid of our vanity, our unreality, our chaff. But in so doing He is getting reality. He is getting what is solid, what will stand, what will feed. This is the basis of His building.

All that we have said should work out in very practical ways. The figures employed are but types and symbols, but the realities are in the hands of the Holy Spirit, and He will unceasingly press for their fulfillment in the lives of God's people. Let us see to it that as He works in our case He has our full co-operation.