

THE BUILDING AND DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE (1 KINGS 5–8)

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As we approach these chapters, we find ourselves faced with the question, 'How are we to understand the Old Testament?' 'How does all this relate to our life today?' All this seems so remote, so different and so far removed from our life today. I believe that the link between these events of many centuries ago and our present experience is **Jesus Christ**. Is there any point in our studying this lengthy and detailed description of the building and dedication of the Temple? Yes—if we learn to read the Old Testament in the light of JESUS Christ. We are not to read the Old Testament as Jews. We read the Old Testament as Christians, as those who believe that the Old Testament story has reached its fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

Is there a way in which we are to find living truth in all of this? Yes, there is. Jesus Christ is the Way. He is the true and living Way. As we look to the Lord Jesus Christ, we will discover lessons of vital importance in this description of the building and dedication of the Temple.

We may begin with Solomon's words in 5:5—'I purpose to build a house for the name of the Lord my God'. What do we have here—a detailed course in Church architecture? God is concerned with building His house, but He is more concerned with people than He is with buildings. When we think of God's great purpose of building His Church, our thoughts may move towards the Day of Pentecost, that great day when the Holy Spirit was poured upon Christ's apostles in power. That was a day when the Church was being built. Here, we have *the Lord* building His Church—'The Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved' (Acts 2:47).

Solomon had a vital part to play in the building of the Temple. What kind of man was Solomon? He was a wise man—'Blessed be the Lord this day, who has given to David a wise son to be over this great people' (5:7). The Bible speaks much of wisdom. There is one aspect of wisdom which is very directly related to the Building of the Church—'He that winneth souls is wise' (Proverbs 11:30, A.V.). Those who are truly significant in the ongoing purposes of God are those who are fully committed to building the Church as 'a spiritual house', not made with stones but with people, people concerning whom God's Word says, 'Once you were no people but now you are God's

people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy' (1 Peter 2:5, 10). This is the work we are called to do. In this work, we can learn from Solomon, the wise man who purposed to build a house for the Lord his God.

As we read the story of the building and dedication of the Temple, we must notice that the building of 'the house of the Lord' is dated in relation to the Exodus, the great event when 'the people of Israel came out of the land of Egypt' (6:1). This is not merely a matter of historical detail. There is spiritual truth here. Only those who have been redeemed by the Lord can build for the Lord. The people of Israel had been redeemed by the Lord. Now, the Temple was being built for the Lord. First, we become 'God's own people', called by Him 'out of darkness into His marvellous light'. Then—and only then—, we are given a work to do for Him, the work of building His Church by 'declaring the wonderful deeds' of Him who is our Saviour (1 Peter 2:9).

If we are to be used by God in this work of building His Church, we must learn to be obedient to Him—'Concerning this house which you are building, if you will walk in my statutes and obey my ordinances and keep all my commandments and walk in them, then will I establish my word with you, which I spoke to David your father' (6:12). There can be no blessing if there is no obedience. The way of obedience is the way of blessing. God is doing a work, but He will do this work only through an obedient people. The work is God's work. He gives His promise to His people—'I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake my people Israel' (6:13). The work is done under the leadership of Solomon—'So Solomon built the house, and finished it' (6:14). God is doing a work. He calls us to be part of that work, but we must never imagine that we can ever do a real work for God by ourselves and without God. The work of God must be done in the power of God who dwells among His people, the God who will not forsake His people.

What kind of people does God use? In 7:13–14, we are told of a man who was useful in the work of building the Temple. He is described as a man who was 'full of wisdom, understanding, and skill'. In Scripture, these are not regarded as merely human

qualities. The Book of Proverbs was written 'that men may know wisdom and instruction, understand words of insight, . . . that . . . the wise men also may hear and increase in learning, and the man of understanding acquire skill . . .' (Proverbs 1:2-6). These words are followed by this clear statement, 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge' (Proverbs 1:7). If we are to be useful to God, we must learn 'the fear of the Lord'.

What does it mean to fear the Lord? We must put out of our minds the negative connotations normally associated with 'fear'—paralyzed by fear, afraid to move. 'The fear of the Lord' is not a paralyzing thing. Those who fear the Lord have been set free to live for the Lord. They have had a glimpse of the glory of God. They have been touched by the power of God. Set free by the God of mighty power and great glory, we are no longer afraid to move—'We . . . , beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another' (2 Corinthians 3:18). 'The fear of the Lord' fills our lives with the glory of the Lord. 'The fear of the Lord' equips us to be servants through whom the glory of God shines (2 Corinthians 4:5-7, 15).

Filled with the glory of the Lord, we become fruitful in the service of our Lord Jesus Christ. The concluding sentence of chapter 7 reads: 'And Solomon brought in the things which David his father had dedicated, the silver, the gold, and the vessels, and stored them in the treasuries of the house of the Lord' (v.51). The life of fruitful service, described in terms of 'gold, silver, precious stones', stands in radical contrast to the unfruitful life—'wood, hay, straw' (1 Corinthians 3:12). If there is a real desire in our hearts to be true servants of the Lord, we will learn much from the account of the dedication of the Temple in chapter 8.

In 8:6, we learn that 'the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the Lord to its place, in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the most holy place'. A few verses later, we are told that 'the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord' (8:11). The glory of the Lord fills the house of the Lord whenever the Word of God is honoured by the people of God. As we reflect on this vital connection between honouring God's Word and experiencing God's glory, we must remember that, in Scripture, Jesus Christ is proclaimed as the Word of God (John 1:1,14). As we look to Jesus Christ, we see the glory of God (John 1:14; 2 Corinthians 4:6). The glory of the Lord fills the house of the Lord whenever Jesus Christ is given the place of highest honour among the people of God.

As Jesus Christ is exalted among us, we will come to share His view of the Lord's house: 'My house shall be called a house of prayer' (Matthew 21:13). As we learn to pray, the focus of our attention will be upon the God whom we worship rather the place where we worship—'Behold heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built!' (8:27). Whenever attention shifts from the God whom we worship to 'the place where men ought to worship' (John 4:20), we need to be reminded that 'the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth' (John 4:23).

True 'spiritual worship' affects the whole of life. As

we worship, we are to 'present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God' (Romans 12:1). We are to do 'the will of God, which is good and acceptable and perfect' (Romans 12:2). We are, in worship, inviting God Himself to 'incline our hearts to him, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, his statutes, and his ordinances' (8:58). To those who worship, God Himself is speaking. He says to each of us: 'Let your heart therefore be wholly true to the Lord your God, walking in his statutes and keeping his commandments' (8:61). This is what it means to be holy. We are to be wholly true to the Lord.

The holy life, the life which is wholly true to the Lord, is a life of joy and gladness. At the end of chapter 8, we read that the people 'went to their homes joyfully and glad of heart for all the goodness that the Lord had shown to David his servant and to Israel his people' (v.66). There is no suggestion, in Scripture, that the life of holiness is a 'kill-joy' affair. The Bible teaches us that we were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26). True joy and gladness come to us as we are being 'renewed in knowledge after the image of our Creator' (Colossians 3:10). God is at work within us. He is seeking to fulfil His purpose in us—that we might be 'conformed to the image of his Son' (Romans 8:29). This is the way to true joy. There is no real happiness without holiness. We were created for God. We cannot find fulfilment apart from God.

In this short study of the building and dedication of the Temple, it may seem that we have spent a great deal of time in the New Testament. This is how it should be. How can we, who have come to know the love of God in Jesus Christ, read the Bible—even the Old Testament—without keeping Jesus Christ at the very centre of our thinking? When Jesus Christ is not the central theme of our study, our preaching and our living, everything else gets out of focus. We cannot read about Solomon without allowing our thoughts to move beyond Solomon to the One who is 'greater than Solomon' (Luke 11:31)—our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In this short study, we have moved beyond the Temple built in Old Testament times. Our interest has not been merely historical. We have searched for spiritual truth. As we have read of Solomon's Temple, our thoughts have turned to the words of the New Testament: 'Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God' (1 Corinthians 6:19). We have read of the glory of the Lord filling the house of the Lord, and our thoughts have moved towards the New Testament's call to holiness: 'You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body' (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). We who confess Jesus Christ as our Saviour and Lord cannot rest content with a purely historical study of the Old Testament. We must always look for Jesus Christ 'in all the scriptures' (Luke 24:27).

Whenever we read the Old Testament Scriptures, we must learn the lesson of the mount of transfiguration. The Old Testament characters—Moses, Elijah . . . David, Solomon . . .—are sent from God to point us in the direction of the Lord Jesus Christ. Once they have done their God-given work, they step aside,

and we lift up our eyes and see 'no one but Jesus only' (Matthew 17:8). The 'heroes of the faith' (Hebrews 11) stand back, and we are left 'looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith' (Hebrews 12:2). This is the way of spiritual growth. This is the way of wisdom and understanding. This is 'the fear of the Lord'. 'Therefore since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every

weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus . . .' (Hebrews 12:1-2).

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REJOICE!

Derek Thomas

Philippians 4:4

'Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!'

'The Holy Spirit has exhorted the faithful to continue clapping their hands for joy until the advent of the promised Redeemer' wrote John Calvin,¹—and Paul would agree! *Joy* is what this epistle to the Philippians is all about. The opposite of joy is misery and miserable is something we are not meant to be. The Reformers caught the centrality of joy in the affections of Christians when they insisted that our chief goal in life is 'to glorify God and enjoy Him forever'.²

What Paul alludes to here is what the rest of Scripture echoes. For the psalmist, God is 'my joy and my delight' (Psa. 43:4). We were always meant to enjoy the presence of God and Adam and Eve in their state of innocence no doubt did just that. Eden was a place where our first parents enjoyed both God's immediate presence and the Garden which He had made. Sin robbed them (and us) of the joy that God intended and only heaven will restore it to its full and glorious intensity. This explains why Jesus, in His High Priestly Prayer is constrained to pray for joy: 'I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them' (John 17:13). Of all the matters that must have occupied the mind of Christ in those hours, it is surely of immense significance that our joy should have taken so central a place.

So much is Philippians about joy that George B. Duncan once referred to it as *'The Life of Continual Rejoicing'*³; and noting our Lord's concern for our joy at the end of his life, we should not find it strange that one of Paul's letters should be so dominated by a concern for Christian joyfulness. Joy is *the* theme of the epistle: Paul prays for the Philippians with joy (1:4); some preachers were preaching Christ from false motives—out of envy for Paul's gifts, but no matter, Christ was being preached and for the apostle

it was a cause of rejoicing (1:18, 19); Epaphroditus, Paul's right hand man, was being sent to the Philippians, a matter which called for rejoicing on their part (2:25, 28); and time and again the Philippians had met Paul's practical needs, something which seemed to fill the apostle's heart with joy (4:10). And, at what appeared at the time to be the end of the letter, Paul writes, 'Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord!' (3:1), but discovering that he has much more to say, goes on to say it and returns to the exhortation again: 'Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!' (4:4). J. I. Packer is surely right when he says: '*Joy* and *Rejoice* are the keywords of Philippians'.⁴

We are *commanded* to rejoice. That in itself poses a difficulty, for how can we make ourselves rejoice when we don't feel like rejoicing? This raises the question as to the place of feelings in the Christian life. 'True religion, in great part, consists in the affections', wrote Jonathan Edwards.⁵ In fact, Scripture abounds with commandments that have to do with our affections, including: hope (Psa. 42:5; I Pet. 1:13); fear (Luke 12:5; Rom. 11:20; I Pet. 1:17); peace (Rom. 5:1; Col. 3:15); tenderheartedness (Eph. 4:32); brokenness and contrition (Psa. 51:17); gratitude (Eph. 5:20; Col. 3:17) and lowliness (Phil. 2:3). Together, these commands inform us that we are never to give in to our feelings. Our Christian faith is to dominate every part of us, including the way we feel. We must never adopt the attitude that just because we feel miserable, there is absolutely nothing we can do about it. We must challenge the way we feel. When our Lord prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, 'Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done' (Luke 22:42), He was testifying to the opposition of His feelings to the course which was laid out for Him. It is part of Christ's triumph