"A House of Prayer For All People"

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Reading: 2 Chronicles 6; Isaiah 56:6-7; Mark 11:17; Ephesians 6:18.

"My house shall be called an house of prayer for all people."

The sixth chapter of the second book of Chronicles is a magnificent example and illustration of these words of the Prophet. In the dedication of the House by Solomon, prayer of a universal kind inaugurated the ministry of the House, introducing its function. The characteristic words of that chapter are: "This house" and "thy name". "When they shall pray toward THIS HOUSE, because of THY NAME which is upon it...".

You will remember the words of the Apostle concerning certain people, that they 'blasphemed that holy name which was called upon you'. The House is the link between the two passages historically and spiritually, and the Name called upon the House.

What was true of the temple of Solomon, as the House with the Name called upon it, is true of the Church, the Church of Christ, with the Lord's Name upon it. We have no difficulty in identifying the anti-type of Solomon's temple as being the Church. You are no doubt sufficiently acquainted with the Word to make it unnecessary to quote Scripture in this connection. Many passages will come to your mind which bear out that statement. The Church is God's House; "whose house are we", says the writer of the letter to the Hebrews; "a spiritual house to offer up spiritual sacrifices", says Peter. The identification is not at all difficult. And that the Name is upon the House is also quite clear. It was because of the Name which they bore at the beginning that the Church was so mighty in its going forth. The power of the Name was ever manifesting itself in their ministry. That is all very simple and needs no labouring. Then there are these other factors.

SONSHIP MARKING THE HOUSE OF THE LORD

The temple of Solomon was really the temple of David. It came in in revelation through David, and in realization in sonship, David's son. We know that in the Word both David and Solomon are types of the Lord Jesus, that He is great David's greater Son, and that He combines all that is spiritually represented by David and Solomon of sovereignty, kingship, exaltation, universal triumph and glory. You will remember how the Lord sent Nathan to David, to tell him that though he himself should not build the House, he was nevertheless to be the one to gather all that was necessary for it, and so be the instrument of making it possible. This so satisfied David that in the inspiration of it, and the tremendous stimulus of it, he went out and subdued all those nations which had been historic thorns in the side of Israel. And when he had subdued all the nations round about, and a universal triumph had been established, then the House came into being through Solomon.

We carry that forward into the triumph of the Lord Jesus by His Cross. He possesses the universal victory. He is exalted, enthroned, in virtue of all His enemies being overthrown by His Cross, and on resurrection ground the declaration is made: "Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten thee." A fresh declaration of sonship is made, by reason of resurrection, and in resurrection, and in that sonship He builds the House, and the Spirit of sonship enters into every member of that House, and it becomes a 'sonship House' (Acts 14:33; Galatians 4:6).

THE MINISTRY AND VOCATION OF THE HOUSE

That all leads the way to this particular thing, namely, the ministry and vocation of the House, of the Church. The House itself has to provide the Lord with a place, a sphere, a realm, a vessel, through which He can reach all people. That is the working outwards; that is God securing to Himself a means of universal blessing. God moves universally through His House, and therefore He must have a House constituted on a prayer basis. Do you notice the two movements in this chapter of 2 Chronicles 6? There is a movement outwards, and a movement inwards. The outward is through the House, with Solomon, so to speak, ministering the Lord. He is, as it were, bringing out from heaven the gracious goodness of God, the interventions, the undertakings and resources of God, world-wide. He is making the House the vehicle of what God is, and what God has, unto all peoples. When you reach a certain point in the chapter the movement changes, and you see people coming to the House because of the Name. That is the movement inwards. They shall "pray toward this house, because of thy great name", said Solomon. That means that the circumference is going to find, not a direct access to God, but its blessing through the House of the Lord.

I suggest to you that those two things very greatly govern the New Testament revelation of the Church, and the

Church's vocation. The one thing which embraces all is that God in Christ has bound Himself up with His Church, the Body of Christ, for this world's good, and that the fullness of the Lord will never be known nor entered into in an individual or individualistic way; that anything like mere individualism, separatism, will mean limitation. Any kind of detachment and isolation leads to being deprived of the larger fullnesses of the Lord, or, to put it the other way, to come into the fullness of the Lord we have to come into the fellowship of His people as the House of God. That is one law, and that is established.

That is the line which is more severe. There is a frown, perhaps, about that. It sounds hard. But it is the warning note which is very necessary, and especially in the light of the fact that there is a continuous, unceasing, incessant drive of the adversary in the direction of separation, isolation and detachment. It seems that at times the devil releases his forces and concentrates them upon people, to get them to run away, to get out of it, to break away, to quit because the strain seems so intense. Their whole inclination is to get away alone. They think that they are going to get an advantage by that. They are sometimes deceived into thinking that it will be for their good if only they get right away alone. They sometimes put it in this way: that they 'want to get away and think it all out'. Beware of the peril of thinking it all out! You can never think out spiritual problems. The only way of solving them is to live through them. If you have tried to square down to your spiritual problems, and bring your mind to bear upon them, and to solve them by 'thinking it all out', you know that you never get anywhere, and that the Lord does not meet you in that way. Spiritual things have to be lived through to clearness. We can only get through to clearness in spiritual things by living through them. If you do not understand that now, you probably will understand when you come up against another experience of this kind. Thus one aspect of the enemy's drive is to get you to run away. Why does the enemy want us to get away? Why is it that this whole force, this whole pressure, is to make us quit? He has a very good reason. He knows that it means loss and limitation. The Lord, to put it in a word, has bound up all His greater fullnesses with SPIRITUAL relatedness, and there can be nothing but grievous loss in failing to recognize the House-law of God, the fellowship-law, the family-law. There can only be loss if we TAKE OURSELVES out of God's appointed relatedness. Be very much aware of any kind of movement or tendency which is in the direction of either detachment or putting you into a place where you are apart. The enemy has many ways of getting his end. If he cannot drive us out from the midst of the Lord's people, he very often tries to give us a too prominent place in the midst of them. He can isolate us just as much by our being too much in the limelight, and we at once become uncovered, exposed. There is no more dangerous place than to be made too much fuss of, to be SOMEONE. There is such a thing as finding a hiding within the House of God.

But our particular consideration at the present time is this vocation and its outward direction, the House of prayer for all peoples. The Church, the Lord's people, form for Him a ministering instrument by which He has ordained to reach out to all the ends of the earth, a universal instrument wherever gathered together, even when represented only by two or three. The test of any company of the Lord's people, and of our position, is this vocation.

THE FACT OF REPRESENTATION

You begin with the representative fact, the fact of representation. Representation begins with two or three, and that immediately swings us completely clear of all earthly grounds of judging and estimating. It indicates the essential heavenly nature of the Church. In the Lord Jesus every member of the Church is included. If Christ comes, the whole Church comes. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the whole Body, uniting all the members in one. You cannot be in the spirit and in Christ anywhere but what you are there in the SPIRITUAL REALM, in the HEAVENLY REALM, with the whole Body, and the whole Body is there spiritually. Two or three? "There am I"! The whole Body, then, is bound up with the two or three. The fact evidences the heavenliness of the Church, the Body of Christ. This is not a possibility on the earth. You cannot bring the whole Church together in any one place on this earth literally. It is not the Lord's way, and it cannot be done. The Church is scattered world-wide, so far as the earthly aspect is concerned. And yet the Church is a heavenly thing gathered up in Christ, its Head, by one Spirit baptized into one Body, and when we come into the Spirit, into the heavenly realm, we are in the presence of the whole Body; not with earthly intelligence, that is, the whole Body is not conscious of the fact from the earthly standpoint, but spiritually it is true. That is the whole Church represented in the two or three if truly "in the Name". What the two or three may do in the Holy Ghost becomes a universal thing.

THE PRAYER MEETING

What we are seeking to press home is that this is so different from having a local prayer meeting, in the usually accepted meaning of that term. Suppose that where such an outlook obtains the announcement is made: 'We will have a prayer meeting on Monday night.' Who will come to that prayer meeting? People will say among themselves: 'Shall we go to the prayer meeting?' or, perhaps: 'Well, it is only a prayer meeting!' That is one way

to look at it, as a local thing in a certain place at a certain time. But if I were to say: 'Will you come and minister to the whole Church of Christ universally in such-and-such a place at a certain time, and your business is to go and minister in that range to the whole Church!' that puts another point of view. It gives an altogether new conception of what we are called to. Let your imagination take flight, if you like, and see the whole Church from the ends of the earth literally gathered together, needing to be ministered to, and the Lord saying to you: 'Now you come and minister to the whole Church! Thousands of thousands, and tens of thousands gathered together, and I want you to minister to them. I have placed the resource at your disposal and will enable you to do it.' Perhaps you might shrink, and be fearful, but you would see the tremendous significance. You would not stay away because you were unimpressed with the importance of it.

This is not exaggeration. We are not straining the point. We are seeking to get to the heart of this ministry which is ours. When two or three are gathered together in any place, and they pray in the Holy Ghost, that is what is possible and it happens. They represent the whole Church, and become the House of prayer, functioning for all peoples, a universal ministry. We need to lift the prayer business on to a higher level. When we see the range, the significance, the value of a time of prayer together in the Name of the Lord, we shall stop our trivialities and take things seriously. We shall come together saying: 'Now, here are nations to be entered into tonight, and things which are world-wide and of tremendous significance to the Lord Jesus, and we are called to deal with them in this place!' There is no greater ministry. It is a tremendous thing to have a ministry like that.

It all comes back to asking whether this is true of the Church. What does this mean? Is it merely a passage of Scripture? Is it a nice idea, but falling short of any real meaning? What is the meaning of: "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all people"? It certainly does not mean that the whole Church can literally be gathered together in one place to pray, and it certainly cannot literally mean that the whole Church can pray together at the same time, though scattered. The situation is different in all countries. Day and night govern different parts of the world, and other factors come in. It is necessary to get away from the earth to explain this. And if you get off the earth and see that where two or three are gathered together into the Name all the rest are represented, and because the one Spirit is there the whole is therefore touched through that one Spirit, as well as involved, then the possibilities are tremendous. "A house of prayer for all peoples" is God's ordained way of ministry.

THE NEED FOR PRAYER MINISTRY

Leaving the great spiritual truth, and coming to what is immediate, so far as one's own heart is concerned, in this word, I do feel that there has to be a fresh registration in our hearts of a call to this ministry and the need for it. We may pray a lot, but I feel that we have to take this matter of the prayer ministry even more seriously, to regard it as our supreme ministry. The order is EVERYTHING BY PRAYER; not everything and then prayer, but everything by prayer. Prayer comes first. Everything comes by prayer. Prayer is the basis of everything, and nothing else must be attempted or touched except on the ground of prayer. We have to gather into our prayer the universal interests of the Name of the Lord. "Because of thy name"! The Name is in view, and is involved. It is the interests of the Name which govern the functioning of the House, and all the interests of the Name of the Lord have to become the definite and solid prayer business of the Lord's people. Oh, the Lord cut clean across that thing which makes us so casual, and which makes corporate prayer times so optional, and bring into our hearts, with a strong, deep, set conviction, the witness that prayer is universal business, and that we are called to it!

It may be that before long there will be very little else that we can do. It may be that before long the Lord's people world-wide will find that their other activities are brought to a standstill, and they are shut up. What is going to happen then to the Lord's interests? Is that the end of ministry? Is that the end of functioning, of value, of effectiveness? It may be that before long the Lord's people in all the earth will need, as they have never needed before, the prayer co-operation of other members. It may be that the Lord's Name has suffered because we have not regarded this ministry as we ought to have done. We are not blaming anyone, but simply saying that there is room for far more serious entering into this tremendous thing which the Lord has appointed for us. Only to dwell upon the words quietly and thoughtfully will surely mean that their implication will come upon our hearts? The Lord has not said that He is going to move directly out to the universe. He has said: "My HOUSE shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." To put that in other words we might state it thus: 'I have ordained to meet universal need through an instrument, through a vessel, and My people, My Church, form that vessel. That is My appointed way. If My Church fails Me, if My instrument does not take this matter seriously, is occupied with itself rather than with the great world-wide needs of My Name, then I am failed indeed!'

Now this means that we must recognize that where but two or three gather into the Name, where it cannot be more, there is nothing merely local about such coming together in prayer, but that the farthest ranges of the

Lord's interests can be advanced, helped, ministered to, by the twos and threes. If it is possible for more to gather, then the Lord desires that, but it is ministry to the Lord by prayer for which He looks to us. We must see to it that it is our first, our primary business to pray. It is strange that so many more will come to conference meetings than to prayer meetings! Is the mentality behind that, that it is far more important to hear teaching than it is to pray? Would it not be a great day and represent some tremendous advance spiritually, something unique, if the prayer gatherings were bigger than the biggest conference gatherings, or at least as big as the biggest?

Let us lay this to heart! Remember that the enemy is always seeking to destroy the essential purpose of the House of God. "Ye have made it a den of robbers." That was one attempt of his to put out the real purpose by changing the whole character of things. God forbid that anything like that should be true in our case, but it is just possible to allow the primary thing to take a secondary place. The primary thing is prayer for all peoples. That, the Lord says, is what His House is for, and that is our real ministry. We cannot all be in the ministry of the Word, but we can all be in this ministry. We can all be in spirit out to the Lord for the interests of His Name.

There seems to be weakness and failure along this line: that we are not functioning in prayer to the point of seeing things through. We pray about many things, and we preach many things, but we do not see them through in prayer, and the Lord's Name is involved in that. You will know whether the Lord is speaking to your own heart. I believe this is a fresh call to the primary ministry which is so very, very much needed. All those who go out into the nations need very strong prayer support. If we fail them we do not know what may happen. They may be in all kinds of difficulties which they need not get into if we were wholly faithful in this prayer ministry. The Lord lay it upon our hearts as a burden!

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