SERMONS,

PREACHED IN

THE PARISH CHURCH OF GLASBURY,

BRECKNOCKSHIRE,

AND

ST. JAMES’S CHAPEL, CLAPHAM,

SURREY.

**BY**

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SERMON III.

THE BUILDING OF THE HEAVENLY TEMPLE.

1 Kings vi. 7.

*The house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither; so that there was neither hammer, nor axe, nor any tool of iron, heard in the house while it was in building.*

The house built in this mysterious silence, was the first temple at Jerusalem. Of all earthly objects, this, to the ancient Jew, was the most sacred and dear. If he loved his God, it was the scene of his sweetest joys. If he loved him not, he loved his temple. It was the subject of his earliest impressions; he saw in it a memorial of the past history and honours of his nation; he looked on it as a magnificent display of his country’s wealth. It was his glory, and he made it his pride. We accordingly find the recollection of it associated, in his mind, with every thing he deemed excellent or great.

The men who wrote the scriptures, partook of this feeling. Would they raise the believer in Jesus to his highest honour? “Know ye not,” says one, “that ye are the temple of God?” Would they describe the church in her brightest glory? The beauty of Zion is made an emblem of her. The church is represented as “an holy temple,” designed and building for its Creator’s praise.

And where does this new and living temple stand? Let us look at it as resting on its ever­lasting foundation in the lofty heavens. There its walls have long been rising; there “the whole building, fitly framed together, groweth;” there, in the end, will all its grandeur be displayed. The subject before us then, is a view of the redeemed church as a temple now building by God in an eternal world.

I. In thus contemplating it, look, first, at *the materials of which it is composed.* And what are they? They came to it from a very far country. Heaven itself could not supply them. In them­selves, they are worthless; but the means which have been employed to remove them hither, have made them costly, precious. They are an innu­merable multitude of sinners, brought from the fallen world on which we are standing—materials strange indeed to be employed in such a place, but better calculated than any other, to manifest the wisdom and the power of God.

They are well described as “stones made ready.” A stone, in its original state, is rough and unshapen, incapable of separating itself from its native rock, and even if separated, unfit for the workman’s use. It may serve for the wall of a mean and humble structure; but the builder of a temple will not touch it. Now this is precisely our natural state. It was once the state of all the redeemed. Isaiah tells us so. “Look,” says he, “unto the rock whence ye were hewn; and to the hole of the pit,” the quarry, “whence ye were digged;” reminding us, that as the rude stone not only belongs to the rock, but forms a part of it, so they who are now shining in heaven, not only once lived in a world of sinners, but were them­selves sinners; involved in the same darkness, and guilt, and wretchedness, as ourselves; ignorant of the glorious end to which they were destined, incapable of contributing the least to its accomplishment. They might serve the purposes of this lower world, be useful and even ornamental in it; but there was no place for them in heaven. They would have sullied its purity, and defaced its beauty.

But a blessed change at length transformed them. These stones were “made ready” for a glorious building: these senseless, mean, sinful beings, were prepared for heaven. And the work was God’s. He selected them, chose them out from among their fellow-sinners, and then formed them a people for himself. Putting into their hearts his Holy Spirit, he did what none other could accomplish—he rent them and the world asunder; separated them from it; made them weary of it and unlike it; taught them to look higher, to think of heaven and seek it; and then, by a series of providences, by disappointments, and tribulations, and conflicts, by consolations and mercies, by motives drawn from his love, and hopes and fears resting on his word, he made them meet for the employments and joys of heaven, prepared for glory. They are now “without spot, or blemish, or any such thing.” Even in his sight who “chargeth his angels with folly,” they are “all glorious within,” all splendid with­out. The exterior of his earthly temple at Jeru­salem was of polished marble; it glittered, we are told, with a snowy whiteness; and nothing was seen within but cedar and gold: but as for his heavenly house, he calls its walls, “Salvation,” and its gates, “Praise.”

Here, brethren, stands revealed that truth, which every view that we can take of heaven confirms—“Ye must be born again.” You must be wrought on, changed, sanctified by the Holy Spirit, or never see your God. And this work must be done ere you die. The stones were made ready, not in this house, but before they were brought thither.” No axes nor hammers were found there to prepare them. Nor are any means of grace to be found beyond the skies. There no preacher warns, no afflictions soften, no patient Saviour entreats, no Spirit strives. Thousands of sinners have been glorified in eternity, but not one converted, not one sanctified, not one pardoned. The ground you are standing on, is the only ground in the universe of God, on which the sinful can be made fit for heaven. Leave it in love with the world and sin, not separated, not made ready, and as surely as the only book which brings “immortality to light” is true, you will be cast aside by the great Lord of all as a mean, polluted thing, not meet for his use; unfit for that building where the glories of his grace are seen, and suited only for that dreadful place which is destined to show forth the terrors of his wrath. Marvel not then that he who spake as never man spake, has so often said to you, “Ye must be born again.”

II. Let us look, secondly, at *the foundation of this heavenly building.* And how wonderfully adapted is this to the materials of which it is composed! The sinners who are now rejoicing in glory, had another world once given them. It was a good, a fair and happy world: but they lost it; at least, they lost its happiness, and covered it with misery and death. They have now another kingdom bestowed upon them; but will they not lose this also? The fallen angels once possessed it; but, though they excel in strength, they kept it not. How then shall worms of the dust be safe in so high a station? The same omnipotent Being who redeemed their soul from destruction, and formed them for heaven, has covenanted, pledged himself, to keep them secure for ever. Hence, if we speak of them as a building, the Holy Spirit testifies of him as the foundation on which it stands. He is its chief “corner-stone,” the support, the security, the immovable resting place of the whole fabric. The apostles and prophets are indeed spoken of as its foundation, but only because they bear testimony to Christ; because they all unite in this saying, “Other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

He sustains this relation now to the church on earth, and he is as ready in his love, as able in “the greatness of his strength,” to bear the weight of the far loftier and wider church above. He does bear it. There is not a sinner in his kingdom, who does not depend on him for every moment of blessedness he enjoys. It is he who preserves him from the enemies that harassed him below. It is his grace which keeps his robes so white, his palm so green, his crown so glorious.

And it will always be thus. The redeemed will ever need a support, and they will ever find one in the Lord Jesus Christ, a quiet resting place, “a sure foundation.” The convulsions that shake the worlds from their places, will not throw down a pillar, nor even loosen a stone of this mighty structure; the events of eternity will not move it. There is underneath it a living, an everlasting Rock, on which it is not only built, but to which it is united. It is in it, become a part of it; so that it can no more be torn from it, than that Rock itself can be shivered and destroyed. “In Jesus Christ,” says Saint Paul, “all the building groweth.” “In him ye also are builded together.” “Because I live,” says the eternal Saviour himself, “ye shall live also.” “The glory which thou gavest me,” said he to his Father, “I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one.”

And does not this exercise of the Redeemer’s grace endear him, brethren, to your hearts? It endears him to his Father. Saint Peter speaks of him, not only as “chosen of God,” but “precious” to him; and why? Because he is the chief corner-stone of his spiritual house. There is a suitableness in him for this office, a sufficiency, a display of care, and love, and strength, which delight even an infinite God. O with what in­conceivable complacency will his Father say of him, when he looks on his finished work, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased!”

III. We may go on to notice, thirdly, *the. manner in which this temple is built.*

1. Like almost every work of its great Author, it is accomplished *gradually.* The first stone of it was laid on its sure foundation, when righteous Abel found himself in glory; and since that period, another and another has been added, according to the good pleasure “of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.”

Sometimes it has risen slowly; at other times it has advanced with wonderful rapidity; but, at all times, “the God of all grace” has been em­ployed on it, so that the building has increased in height and glory through all generations. In the present day, the Lord is hastening his work. He is “adding to his church daily such as shall be saved and after he has made them ready, he takes them from this his earthly habitation, and fixes them, one after another, in their places, in his fairer temple above.

Now he takes one from this congregation, and puts him in the place designed for him; then he goes to another people, and finds there the soul that is to shine in glory next. At one period, he prepared almost every stone from one pit; took his redeemed chiefly from one nation, the seed of Abraham his friend. Now he goes from country to country, from island to island, from clime to clime: one hour, calling to his kingdom a sinner of Christian England; the next, saying to one of heathen Africa, “Come thou also hither;” now bidding an aged pilgrim “depart in peace” to his long wished for rest, and now stooping down, and bearing some new-born babe to an unlooked for glory. He says to the north, “Give up;” and then he turns to the south, and says, “Keep not back. Bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth, even every one that is called by my name; for I have created him for my glory; I have formed him; yea, I have made him.”

2. This temple is building also *constantly,* stea­dily, surely; without interruption or hindrance. Earthly structures do not proceed thus. Unfore­seen difficulties embarrass, and unavoidable delays retard. Sometimes the design of the builder is changed; at other times, he is baffled in carrying it into effect.

It is not so however when God builds. His purposes never change; they can never be frus­trated. “Before the mountains were brought forth,” he formed the stupendous plan of his heavenly house. It was the work, the master­piece of his infinite skill; and it contains “trea­sures of wisdom and knowledge,” which angels cannot explore, nor eternity unfold. The direc­tions given for the Jewish temple were minute; but in this more glorious edifice, nothing was overlooked. It was “ordered in all things, and sure.” In those eternal councils of which human folly may speak, but concerning which human wisdom can form not one faint conception, all that respects the salvation of the church was for ever established. The means of carrying it into execution; the time when its great Author should be revealed; the sinners who should attain its blessedness; the station they should each occupy below, and the place they should fill above; the instruments by which they should be turned to God; the afflictions which should subdue, and the consolations which should refine them; “the work of faith, and labour of love,” which they should perform;—all were fixed by “the deter­minate counsel and foreknowledge of God,” and never have they known alteration, or seen the shadow of a change.

We know but little of the magnificence of this plan, but were it possible that it could be yet more vast, we know that there is ability in Christ to perform it all. His people, though more numerous than the stars of heaven, shall all “be willing in the day of his power;” and as for his enemies, they can no more impede his designs, than a host of worms could delay the rolling of the glorious sun. “I will work,” says he, “and who shall let it? My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.” And what is this pleasure and this counsel? He himself informs us; “I bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off: and my salvation shall not tarry; and I will place salvation in Zion for Israel, my glory.”

3. Thus goes the building on, gradually, con­stantly; but yet, all this time, *silently.*

Turn again to the Jewish temple. “There was neither hammer, nor axe, nor any tool of iron, heard in the house while it was in building.” This silence has something in it deeply myste­rious. It could not have happened from mere chance. It was undoubtedly enjoined by God, and intended to impress on the minds of the Israelites some important truth. The question is, What is that truth? And this is not easily answered.

We shall not however materially err, if we say that the stillness with which the building of the temple proceeded, intimates, first, *the unnoticed and secret manner in which God carries on his purposes of grace in a tumultuous world.* What is the history of the world? A history of commo­tions. Its great men have seldom moved, but “confused noise and garments rolled in blood” have marked their footsteps. Strifes and con­tentions have been necessary for the accomplish­ment of their designs, and they have freely raised them. They have struggled, till whole kingdoms have resounded with their deeds, and this poor, distracted earth has resembled “the troubled sea, when it cannot rest.” But God, in the midst of them, unperceived and almost unthought of, is bringing his own purposes to pass; is making “the wrath of man to praise him,” and the wick­edness of man to do his will. He presides in the storm. The waves thereof toss themselves, but he turns every billow that swells to the fur­therance of his own glory. “The Lord sitteth above the water-floods; yea, the Lord remaineth King for ever.”

The silence in this temple may remind us also of *the secret operations of God in the souls of men.* Sometimes he turns their thoughts to him­self by the wind, the earthquake, or the fire, by means which are visible and striking; but it is generally in “the still small voice,” that he mani­fests himself as the God of their salvation. The seed is sown in their hearts they know not when.

“It groweth up they know not how.” It brings forth fruit, of which they themselves are often unconscious. They are ripened for heaven in a way which they understand not; and then they die, and go there by a road which none can dis­cover. They lie down in the grave, and all is silence. And what a peaceful world do they enter! How unlike the restless, jarring, feverish scene, which they have left behind them!

The stillness among the Jewish builders might be designed to remind us of the quietness of this world, of *the peace of heaven.* All there is un­broken calmness. Changes and afflictions have ceased. The souls they so often assailed and wrought on, need them no more. They are no longer earthly; they are heavenly and faultless now. All is purity, and perfection, and bright­ness. The work is done; the instruments there­fore are thrown aside; and, valued as they once were, who will wish to feel them again? Not a sound is heard, but the voice of overflowing blessedness and the songs of praise.

Now what may we learn from this part of our subject? We are taught *not to despair of the cause of God even in the darkest scenes.* Look where we will, the state of the world is indeed deplorable. It ought to cause “rivers of waters to run down our eyes.” But then, brethren, let us not forget that amid all its clamour and strifes, the work of God is going gradually, surely, silently, on. Let us remember that one proud, contentious man will make more noise in his way to a world of discord, than many holy men will make in their way to heaven. We hear the voice that is lifted up in the streets, the conqueror’s shout, the wrangler’s curse, and the worldling’s song; but we hear not the prayer of the broken heart, we see not the bended knee, we mark not the spirit that in this cottager’s hut, or in that poor man’s dwelling, bursts joyfully from its prison of clay, and is carried home by the angels to its God. “I am left alone,” was once the natural language of a despairing prophet; but what saith the answer of God unto him? “I have reserved to myself seven thousand.” “Who hath believed our report?” asks the Christian minister in sorrow and perhaps in tears;—at the very moment, the man who from sabbath to sab­bath has listened unheeded to his voice, may be in tears also, and this secret cry may be going up like incense to the skies, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.”

We may learn here too *the character of true religion.* Nothing is more common in some parts of our land, than an ostentatious, noisy display of affected piety. Many have learned to dispute and decide, who have never yet learned to cast down one proud imagination; never even tried to humble themselves and mourn.

The young especially are in danger of falling into this evil. They have vain hearts, and what­ever offers to make them great, will often lead them captive. Let the young then remember that “there was no noise heard in the house while it was in building.” Beware of a love of dis­play. Beware of a bold, forward, unmeaning tongue. It will please, it will deceive none but the simple; it will disgust all the wise. Let your tempers, let your lives speak with a louder voice, than your words. True religion is a silent, hum­ble, retiring thing. It communes with its own heart, and is still; it prays in secret; it weeps apart and alone. It will indeed unbosom itself freely at times, but not in a crowd. It is as modest, as it is bold. It will come into public notice, rather than leave misery unrelieved, ig­norance unaided, or any duty undone; it will brave the opposition and cruelty of a whole world, rather than sin; and then it will retire into its closet, and be seen only by its God. You have beard “of the calm retreat;” you have sung perhaps of “the silent shade.” O let them not be known to you merely in poetry and in song. Seek them; love them; let them be daily wit­nesses of your prayer and praise.

IV. There is one point more to be considered— *the great end for which this heavenly temple is raised.* And this perhaps is too often overlooked. We frequently think of salvation as merely an act of mercy; as designed for no other end than the rescuing of a multitude of immortal beings from a wretched hell, and the carrying of them to a glorious heaven. But this is nothing more than the means for the accomplishment of a farther and a higher end. And what is that? The manifestation of Jehovah’s glory.

The temple of Solomon was not built for this single purpose, that it might be “a house of prayer for all nations.” It was designed to be the habitation of God, the seat of his presence, and a monument to his name. And this heavenly temple is erected for the same purpose; not so much for the sake of the living and shining stones that compose it, as for the honour of its great Builder; not so much for the salvation of the poor outcasts of the earth, as for the glory of the power, wisdom, and grace of the great God of heaven. “Not for your sakes do I this,” said the Lord God to Israel, even of the temporal deliverances he vouchsafed them, “but for mine holy name’s sake.” “This people,” says he of his redeemed, “have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise.” “He hath chosen us,” says Saint Paul, “that we should be holy and without blame before him in love”—for what end? “to the praise of the glory of his grace.” “In the dispensation of the fulness of times,” says the same apostle, “he will gather together in one all things in Christ; both which are in heaven and which are on earth, even in him; in whom also we have obtained an inheritance;” and still the same great design is before him—“that we should be to the praise of his glory.” The exalted Saviour too, when he sends his errands from heaven to the churches, speaks the same language; “Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God,” a monumental column to his praise.

And this consideration, like every other in which the divine glory is involved, is full of un­speakable comfort to the Christian heart. It would be sweet to live in heaven, as the angels live there, happy in the sight of God, and re­joicing in his love. But when I enter heaven, I shall stand there as a monument to my Redeemer's honour. I would honour him on earth. My heart’s desire and fervent prayer is to testify my love for his blessed name. But this treacherous soul of mine is often cold in his service. And when I would glorify him, I sometimes cannot; flesh and heart fail me, even when my love burns. There have been times too, when my base words or actions have dishonoured that worthy name by which I am called. But my warfare will soon be ended. I can never disgrace my Saviour then. The grace that has saved me, will be displayed in all its wonders. I shall become a spectacle to angels and to men. The hosts of heaven, as they look on me, will adore with deeper reverence Jehovah’s greatness; and when my feeble voice is heard among them, O with what a burst of praise will they exalt the power, the love, that could raise one so vile to so high a place! To be a pardoned sinner on earth is a mercy so great, that it sometimes overpowers me; but to be a pardoned sinner in heaven, to afford, as it were, a fresh revenue of glory to its great King in his own house—this is a mercy which passes all my thought! It is worth even the precious price that was paid at Jerusalem to make it mine.

Brethren, will this blessedness be ours? The edifice of which you have been hearing, is not a creation of fancy, the baseless fabric of a dream; it has as real an existence, as the building which now shelters us. It is as true that there are pardoned sinners joyful in heaven, as that there are dying, suffering sinners within these walls. It becomes a question then, and a very solemn one, Shall we ever see this glorious temple? Shall we ever form a part of it? To answer this question we must ask another,—Are we made ready? At any rate, is the work of preparation begun? Are we separated from the world? living above it? desiring a better country? seeking it? Are our souls emblems of this great building? Are we now the “temples of the Holy Ghost,” “ha­bitations of God through the Spirit?” Is Christ in us “the hope of glory?” If it be thus with us, O how blessed is our condition! We were “once strangers and foreigners;” we are now “fellow-­citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.” And what shall we be soon? “It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him.”

With such a weight of glory before us, shall we repine at the strokes which are making us ready for its honours and happiness? Shall we murmur at the blows which are preparing us for heaven? Let us rather wonder at the conde­scension which can bestow a single look on materials so worthless. Let us lie meekly and submissively before our God, content to let him carry on his design of mercy in his own way; im­ploring him never to forsake the work of his hands, and trusting that he who has begun, will surely complete it. What if the blows fall heavy and fast? The sound of the axes and hammers will the sooner cease; or if not, the more honourable will be our place in the building, the more shall we show forth in heaven the glory of the Lord. And what if, amid all the labour bestowed on us, the work within us appear for an hour to stand still? This is the word of the Lord, saying, “Not by might, nor by power, but my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.” “The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it. He shall bring forth the head-stone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace, unto it. ”