

DOES YOUR SOUL HAVE A TEMPLE OF GOD?

We open our lesson this morning by reading from the Book of Jeremiah, 30: 18,19

The children of Israel and their country and the city of Jerusalem were being attacked by an enemy that was fierce and relentless. Day by day they were becoming weaker and weaker.

Jeremiah had clearly revealed to him by God the subsequent course of events which literally and actually came to pass. The city was to be captured and destroyed by the enemy, and the children of Israel carried away captive to Babylon.

Yet, and this is the amazing thing, after seventy years the captivity was to end, the captives were to return and their city should be 'builded upon her own heap.' That is the good news, the amazing news of God's action. Let us consider it and apply it along the following lines.

Consider in the first place, the task with which the gospel is confronted. The city of Jerusalem was in ruins, in a heap. Jerusalem was the city of God and the pride of the people, the city of which the psalmist had so frequently sung and whose virtues and excellences had been so regularly acclaimed.

She was indeed a wondrous city, rightly regarded as in every respect the earthly habitation of God Himself. For in Jerusalem was the Temple where all the people met to worship and whither they came with their offerings and sacrifices.

There the great festivals were all celebrated and the highest hours in the lives of the people had been experienced. It was there they had felt the presence of the living god, it was there they had communed with Him and thanked Him for His blessings. In addition, the city was remarkable for its strength and power:

Its commanding position on the rocks, its towers and turrets, its walls and buildings. Furthermore, it was a city that had never been conquered. But alas, owing to the sin of its people, owing to the disobedience and falling away from God, owing to their neglect of His commandments both in their individual lives and the life of the city, the defenses had become weak and the people themselves were lazy and unconcerned.

At last, the enemy from the outside, taking advantage of all this, had attacked them and sacked their city and reduced it to ruins. Jerusalem is demolished. The Temple had been destroyed and its marvelous treasures of gold and silver carried away.

The altar had been broken down. Everything had been demolished. The walls were razed to the ground, the turrets and towers had come crashing to earth—the city of God was in a heap. All that had been the proud boast of the Jews for centuries was now nothing but a mass of ruins.

The glory had departed, the greatness had gone, the most marvelous city on earth was a formless, shapeless mass of refuse. "Some of you are going to ask, "What in the world has

all this to do with the task of the Gospel?' The answer is that what we have just described is a perfect picture of the soul of man as the result of sin.

In the Biblical doctrine of "types" and "shadows," Jerusalem frequently stands for the soul. God made man perfect. Man was made lord of creation. He was to rule and to dominate the life of the world. Like Jerusalem set high upon a rock, so man was to stand out in greatness and in majesty above all else in the world. Furthermore, God had endowed man with power and faculties that were to make him unique and remarkable.

And then above all was given to man that unique quality described as the soul or the spirit. Man was created with all these unique and distinct powers and possibilities—and what is infinitely important for us to realize is that he will be judged according to that standard.

As God gave the city of Jerusalem to the children of Israel, so He gave to men their souls. As God held the children of Israel responsible for what they had done with their city, so God holds us responsible for what we have done with His greatest gift to us—the soul.

What HAVE we done with it? What is true of us? What of the state of your soul? Let us face that question in terms of this picture and let us ask a few simple questions. The first is general.

Do you find that you conform to that exalted standard? Had you realized that that is the true nature of man and that that is what you were meant to be?

How have you thought of yourself and of your life? Has it been in terms of God and the infinite possibilities open to your soul, or has it been merely in terms of the world and the flesh and the things of the senses? Have you realized that your life is a great, noble and exalted thing, higher than anything else in this whole world?

Are you aware of the privilege of being a living soul and of being a unique and special creation of God? But let us come to the details and to the important particulars. What of the wall around the city of your soul, what of the turrets and battlements and defenses?

Are they all intact? You know who your enemy is, do you not? As soon as we begin to think for ourselves at all we are aware that we are surrounded by enemies that are constantly attacking us. Temptation and sins and suggestions to evil begin to assail and to bombard our defenses.

You have known it. But what has happened? Have you kept your defenses intact? Have you held the enemy at bay? Are there any breaks in the wall? Have you preserved your purity and chastity? Have you maintained your character? Looking back across your life what do you find?

Has not the enemy come in? Have not the walls and the towers been smashed and broken? But still more closely, what of these gorgeous palaces and buildings which once were the pride of Jerusalem? Are they still standing? What has happened to the power that God implanted with man and therefore in you?

What have you made of them and what has become of them? What real use have you made of your mind? To what occupation and tasks have you put it? Has it been used as it was meant to be used for the intention and expectation of the great things of life, for thoughts and ideas that should be raised to noble heights, and uplifting?

What of these palaces, these great buildings? In whose possession are they? Indeed, are they; still standing?

Why do I ask these questions? Simply because of what is to be seen round about us at the present time in our society and our world. All these great powers and faculties that God gave us are being used to the gratification of the flesh only.

Mind and ingenuity, cleverness, feeling and emotion—all the great gifts of man—have been prostituted to the service of self and the body. The very powers that were meant to be the glory of man have become his shame. We find man today has sold his soul, his abilities and even his name to unworthy causes.

But face it personally and individually. To what do you give your time and your energy and your money? What is it that really appeals to you and pleases you? To what use do you put your mind and intellect and these other powers? Are they really standing at all?

But come right to the point! What of the temple? For that was the chief glory of Jerusalem after all—its temple. What of the temple of your soul? The place of God? The place of communion with the Eternal, the place of hearkening to His voice? What of it?

You may have felt that you could argue that some of the wall is still standing and that some of the great buildings are still intact, but what of the greatest building of all—the temple? Do you know God? Is God real to you? Is there a 'holy of holies' within you where He lives and dwells?

Is there an altar in your life? These are not mere idle questions. Neither are they meant merely for certain people. They apply to all. God meant man to dwell with Him and to commune with Him. He made and created man with that possibility and therefore holds him responsible for that. What of the soul, my friend? What of the city? Is it not in ruins?

The enemy has broken down the defenses, has entered in and captured the city and demolished its buildings and plundered and destroyed its temple. There is no need to argue, we have but to face the facts. Sin has ruined the soul, the city is in heaps, the enemy has carried us away captive. Such is the task that awaits and confronts the Gospel. The soul of man is in that state and condition. It has fallen, it is ruined and destroyed, it is in heaps.

The fact is, it is a task with which the Gospel alone can deal. Our analogy of the city of Jerusalem makes this abundantly clear. The children of Israel after the destruction of their city were carried away captives to Babylon. Their position was one of utter and complete helplessness.

Their city was in ruins and they themselves were not only far away from it, but they were also in the hands of a powerful enemy. They are powerless and can do nothing whatsoever. There is no need to elaborate. But can you see that precisely the same thing is true of the soul?

Alas, there are thousands today who are not aware of the state of their souls and who, when told, do not care.

Nothing awaits them but destruction. But I speak now on the assumption that you are alive and awake to the situation, that you see that your soul is in a desperate plight and that you long to be what you know you ought to be. Have you realized your helplessness and that the Gospel alone is equal to the task?

If not, face it again and see what a perfect parallel is provided by the condition of the children of Israel of old! Can you not see that you cannot even commence upon the task? You may decide to turn over a new leaf and live a better life, but that is no more dealing with the situation than certain schemes of moral reformation among the children of Israel in Babylon would have been.

For the question of the past still remains. You cannot start from where you are for that still leaves the old legacy untouched. What has happened has happened, and the ruins are there, and to start building elsewhere and on a new foundation is of no value.

But you cannot deal with the past. Nothing that you may do can affect it. There it remains and you are helpless. Before you commence to struggle with the power of sin, face the prior question of the guilt and the pollution of your past sin. But to prove this still further, let us turn again to the details. Can you rebuild these old walls and defenses?

Men prefer the easy, the superficial, the enjoyable and cannot make the sustained effort essential to real advancement and progress. It may be argued that just a few by means of a great effort of the will can succeed in the greatest thing of all?

Can they find God? Can you find God? Can you rebuild the ruined altar of your soul? Can you bring back the holy of holies and recreate that which is most sacred and spiritual? It is just here that every human system and ritual utterly breaks down.

Man is meant for God and as St. Augustine put it so long ago, 'we cannot find rest until we find our rest in thee'. We cannot deal with the past, we are defeated in the present, we fear the unknown future. Deep within us is a sense of failure and of sin.

When we cease to argue and to be clever and listen to the voice of our better self we know that we are failures, miserable and wretched. We have disobeyed the noblest promptings and yielded to our lowest desires in spite of the warnings of conscience; we have been conquered. We are failures.

And over and above that there is within us that voice of God, that feeling that He is, and that we are responsible to Him, and that we shall have to face Him. But oh, how can we find Him? What right have we even to look for Him at all? But we long to know Him!

Our sin has not only allowed the enemy to reduce that city of our soul to a heap, it has also made us miserable, wretched and unhappy. We see an occasional saint and hear and read of others. Oh, how wonderful it would be to be that person, we think!

Oh, that we might be like them! Oh, that we might know God and feel His presence. Oh, that we might experience His strength and power and feel our souls being cleansed and renewed by Him.

Have you not felt like that? Do you not feel like that even now? Are you not like these Israelites in Babylon? Too late you see your mistakes and your folly. But you can do nothing. There you are in Babylon a prisoner and Jerusalem is so far away. You think of it, you long for it, you yearn for it, but all seems to be in ruin.

The city is in a heap, and you are helpless. The task is too great. All the efforts of men and of the world together cannot give man what he really needs and what in the depths he longs and yearns for—the world in its cleverness can do much but it cannot even start upon the work of building a new Jerusalem, of renewing our soul.

That is a task to which the Gospel alone is equal. Before we close, let us return to the picture. There are the children of Israel in their utter helplessness in Babylon. The situation seems hopeless. But to them in that very situation comes the message. 'Thus saith the Lord; Behold I will bring again the captivity of Jacob's tents, and have mercy on his dwelling places; and the city shall be builded upon her own heap, and the palace shall remain after the manner thereof...'

And it actually happened. It was actually fulfilled. When the men themselves had utterly and completely failed, God came in and gave them their heart's desire. He brought them back to Jerusalem and actually upon the old site, in the former position, the new city was built with its walls and battlements, its palaces and buildings, even its temple.

On the very heap and ruins of the old city the new city was built. The old site, but a new city. All this is but a picture, a parable of what God does to the soul. He offers to do the impossible. And He does the impossible. He comes to us and speaks to us in our deepest trouble and woe.

He comes to us when we are defeated and helpless and miserable, realizing what we have done and our desperate plight.

He comes to us and announces what He purposes to do. It is His moment, His action, His initiative. He announces that He is going to work a miracle upon us – 'the city shall be builded upon her own heap'. He promises us life and joy. Just when we are most unhappy and forlorn the wondrous word comes.

How does it come? In and through Jesus Christ, the Son of God. How does He do it? Our picture illustrates it perfectly. What do we need? First and foremost we need to be brought back to Jerusalem and to have the rubbish and ruins of the past cleared away.

That is always our first problem. How can the guilt of our past, the wreckage of our life be dealt with? How can it be removed? Remorse and sorrow cannot remove it. Efforts in the present and the future cannot atone for it. There it remains. How can it all be cleared away? There is but one and only answer:

“There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel’s veins;
And sinners plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.”

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, by dying that death on Calvary’s hill has cleared away the ruins and the wreckage. He has borne your guilt and borne it away. He has paid your penalty and died your death, 1st John 2:2,
“He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”

You cannot deal with your past. He can and has done so. The old site has been cleared from the ruins and the wreckage of the past. The old foundation is again revealed. He has cleared away the rubbish. But He does not stop at that. That is merely the beginning, the preliminary work. Alas, there are many who seem to think that that is the whole story of the Gospel, that it just tells us that God will forgive us.

As if God were to do no more than clear away the ruins and wreckage produced by the work of the enemy and then leave the old site vacant.

But a site, however clean, is not a city and for God to end there would really mean that He had been defeated by the enemy. But He does not stop there. He only starts there! “The city shall be builded upon her own heap”! Jesus Christ the Son of God not merely died for our sins.

He rose again and ascended into Heaven, and from Heaven He sent the Holy Spirit who brings us a new birth and a new life, who creates us anew and makes of us new men and women in Christ Jesus. You are offered not merely pardon and forgiveness, but a new start and a new life. A new Jerusalem is built on the old site. And YOU can become new.

Let me emphasize the word ‘YOU’. For it is the great word here and expresses the whole marvel and wonder of the Gospel. A city bearing the name of Jerusalem is not built somewhere else, but actually on the old site, in the same place, on its ‘own heap’. A new city on the old site.

Still Jerusalem but a new Jerusalem. YOU, the same person with the same essential personality and individuality, YOU are offered a new nature and a new life with new desires and interests, new hopes, new possibilities and above all a new temple, a new altar.

What could appear to be more impossible than that creatures such as we have been, soiled by sin and alienated from God, could ever hope to commune with Him and to find joy in doing so! But that is precisely the miracle of grace. Having forgiven you, God assures you that you are His child. He smiles upon you, blesses you and even dwells within you.

You still have the same name, you are still the same essential individual in your natural make-up, but you are a completely new man. The site is the same, but the city is new. You say, therefore, with Paul—‘I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.’ (Gal. 2:20).

But it does not stop even there. ‘What of the old enemy?’, you ask. ‘He will still be there and will try to defeat me again and I am afraid of him.’ You are quite right. The enemy remains and will remain, but God in Christ offers to make you more than a conqueror. Before, you fought him alone and you were too weak. He conquered you.

But now the One who conquered him offers to dwell within you and to strengthen you. He will be your strength and your stay. He will nerve and empower your feeble arm. He will renew your strength again day by day. And He will never leave you nor forsake you. ‘The city shall be builded upon her own heap.’

Yes, in the very place and places where you were formerly defeated you shall now triumph and prevail. Such are the blessings offered you by the Gospel. In spite of your condition, ‘with God all things are possible’, and that is what He offers to do.

All who realize their condition will gladly accept.

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to the world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” Amen.

We are always glad to give Scriptural advice and counsel to those who desire to write us about their problems, and to remember their requests for prayer in our services.

In addition we publish sermons on other subjects, which take up in detail teaching on how to deal with God successfully and be delivered out of all our troubles. We will gladly send them to those who desire them for their own use or for others.

Reproduced by: First Century Gospel Church (MD, VA, Washington DC Metro Area Branch)
11960 Glen Alden Road, Fairfax, VA 22030 U.S.A.

Headquarters: First Century Gospel Church
Box 99 - Pottersville, NJ 07979 U.S.A.
www.fcgchurches.org, www.fcgchurches.com
e-mail: FCGCUSA@yahoo.com, pastor@fcgchurches.com

September 3, 2006