

LOVE FOR THE HOUSE OF GOD

"Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thine honour dwelleth." Psalm 26:8.

Though loaded with the cares of royalty, and encircled with the splendor of a court, the psalmist expressed his delight in the public services of the temple. He said, "Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine Honour dwelleth." I should like to show the importance of the public worship of God, and the benefits resulting therefrom.

1. With respect to God.

Since there is a Supreme Being Who created the world, He ought to be worshiped by His creatures, with every outward expression of submission and honor. In the light of the many blessings which we have received from Him, we should acknowledge them with gratitude, express our dependence on Him and offer our prayers and praises to Him. This obligation extends beyond private devotion to public expressions of loyalty in worship. Sincere gratitude is always of an open and diffusive nature. It delights to pour out as an acknowledgment of honor to a benefactor. God is highly pleased when He beholds His children assembled for the express purpose of declaring publicly the reverence, gratitude and love which they owe to Him.

2. With respect to the world.

When we survey the prevailing conditions, we find people continually immersed in worldly affairs, engaged in the provision of the necessities of life, occupied in the pursuits of their pleasures, or striving for their personal advancement. Public worship of God is necessary for the maintenance of the public safety and order.

3. With respect to every individual.

The ends for which we assemble in the house of God are two:

(1) To worship God.

The public worship of God is the chief and most sacred purpose of every assembly of Christians. It is not the uttering or the hearing of certain words that constitute the worship of God, but it is the heart that prays or praises. If the heart does not accompany the words that are spoken or heard, we offer the sacrifice of fools.

(2) To listen to religious instruction.

Attention and reverence are necessary for this.

Most of us are reticent about our deeper emotions and affections. Yet we are glad when someone expresses them for us in an accurate way. That is what the psalmist does in this text. He is giving expression to an affection we know and an experience we share when he says, "Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house." From his statement, let us note: --

1. The object of his affection.

"Thy house." As used throughout the Book of Psalms, it applies either to the Tabernacle or to the Temple. Both had a Divine appointment, and an exclusive sanction. There and there only the sacrifices must be offered so as to be acceptable. There only the high priest could, as the representative of the people,

enter within the veil as a prevailing intercessor. There only was the Shekinah, the visible sign of the presence of the invisible Jehovah. There only was the mercy-seat, in regard to which the solemn promise, "There will I meet with you," referred. But, there is no such house of God now. No spot on earth is thus exclusively distinguished. And yet, most certainly, in a very true and a very important sense, where the Lord manifests His glory to His people — where He performs His works of mercy and dispenses the bounties of His salvation, we may truly speak of that place as the house of God. It is well to remember that all that is essential in Divine worship is ever the same. We are ruled by the same will, animated by the same impulse, contemplate the same objects, exercise the same graces, and share the same joys as they were and did in those days.

2. The declaration of his affection.

"Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house." This is not the only place in which this profession is made by the psalmist. Throughout this book many strong declarations are made precisely to the same effect. "I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness." To be there warmed his heart and set it all aglow — "Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house: they will be still praising Thee."

3. The reasons for his affection.

(1) Present experiences.

a. The enjoyment of God's presence.

- (a) The place of the Divine manifestation and work. "To see Thy power and Thy glory."
- (b) The place where mystery was solved and sorrow quelled. "When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me, until I went into the sanctuary of God."
- (c) The place of conscious shelter and inward repose. "In the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; in the secret of His tabernacle shall He hide me."
- (d) The place of holy gladness. "We have thought of Thy loving-kindness, Of God, in the midst of Thy Temple."

b. The enjoyment of brotherly sympathy.

Coming together with a common purpose and a living sympathy, heart blends with heart, and mind blends with mind. Thus Divine mercy sanctifies and uses one of the mightiest forces of human life. Men never know the fulness of life and its force except in sympathy. "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord." "I went with them to the house of God." This arrested attention, excited affection, inspired resolution, cheered their spirits, and refreshed their bodies.

c. The enjoyment of soul-profit.

For all spiritual growth and vigour, we must partake of and assimilate the Divinely-appointed food. If you would have full spiritual health and glad energy in your soul, you must go to the banqueting house. Some say they can do as well at home, hence they eat their morsel alone. But they are neither to be envied nor imitated. Observation teaches us that they who neglect the house of God, or come to it reluctantly or rarely, are invariably dull in their spiritual conceptions, cold in their affections, wavering in their convictions, and useless in Christian work, while

they are easily led away by the force of temptation. On the other hand, those who are constant in their attendance on the means of grace are usually an example, an inspiration, and a joy to their fellow Christians.

(2) Future Prospects.

- a. Nobler Service
- b. Purer joys.

From our standpoint, this love for the house of God is a long growth in our lives. It is rooted in childhood days when we went to the services and sat with our parents. It has been nurtured by many succeeding experiences. All through the years our love for the house of God has grown stronger and deeper. The richness of the gathered experiences of the years is in this statement, "Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house."

This love for the house of God is a strong influence in our lives. Real life is always found in what we love. A man's life is not in his possessions; nor is it in his activities. It is in his love. If we let ourselves love the mean, our living will become shoddy. The richness of life is found in loving the best. Jesus expresses the highest and the holiest in such an attractive manner and with such compelling power that we are awakened to a response.

I. Why Should We Love The House Of God?

Because of:

1. The One to Whom it belongs.
There the presence of God is manifested.
2. The company it provides.
We have fellowship with God and with His children.
We worship with the very best people.
3. The blessings to be found there.
Pardon, peace, joy, instruction, guidance, and comfort are offered to those who are there.

It affords guidance for our judgments. We have all known times in which we were faced with critical decisions. We have faced the temptation of making the easy and selfish choice. We have been tempted to accept the lower standards of those around us. We have wanted to satisfy some desire in ourselves or to avoid some difficult challenge. What has kept us from giving away and making the wrong decision has been this love for the house of God. It has strengthened our loyalties to Christ and enabled us to make the right and Christian decision.

God can minister to the lover of His house in a way in which He cannot minister to others. The casual attender at worship sometimes wonders why people come regularly. The casual attender sees all the defects in the church; he sees how ordinary are the people; he notices the limitations and peculiarities of the minister; he feels that what is said and done is all very commonplace and drab. But, the lover of the house of God sees through and beyond all these human elements. When we love the house of God we come to worship God; we come to

rejoice in the love of God; we come to learn of Christ; we come to pray for others and to share with them. We come in the spirit of love and God is able to minister to the lovers of His house.

4. The habits it induces.

Praise, prayer, and the reading and exposition of the Word of God.

II. How Should We Show Our Love For The House of God?

1. By regular attendance upon its services.
2. By active participation in its services.
3. By inviting others to attend its services.
4. By contributing to the support of its services.
5. By praying for the Lord's will to be done.
6. By working for the salvation of others.