



Temples of the Holy Spirit

All of us right at this very moment are in one kind of difficulty or another. There are difficulties in our personal lives and difficulties with other people. We usually attribute our problems to unforeseen circumstances or to difficult people: "If only this or that hadn't happened to us, then we would be a lot happier." Or, "If only this or that person were different, and not so hard to get along with, then things would be much better between us."

So, it is our inclination to want to change our circumstances or to change other people. The fact of the matter is, however, that there is a very little we can do about changing our circumstances or about changing other people. There is, however, a lot we can do about changing ourselves. That change has to come about from within. Ultimately it is the work of the Holy Spirit. Only through the Holy Spirit can we learn to be content no matter what difficult circumstances or difficult people we have to deal with. God gave his Holy Spirit to the church at the time of Pentecost. He gave that Holy Spirit so that He could take residence in us. Now we may be temples of the Holy Spirit.

God's presence and the tabernacle

What exactly does that mean? How does that make a difference in our own lives? We can only understand this if we look at it first of all from the perspective of the Old Testament. When Israel was rescued from Egypt God made his dwelling among them (Exodus 25:8). He pitched his tent among them. As Israel traveled through the desert and the people moved their own tent from the one location to the next, they did so also with the tent, known as the tabernacle, in which God dwelled. God constantly dwelled among them. They were reminded of his presence by the cloud that rested above the tabernacle by day and by the fire in the cloud by night.

It was a beautiful symbol of his deep interest in their plight as they made their way through the desert and as they encountered various dangers and temptations along the way. He showed them that He was intimately involved in their lives and that He greatly cared about them.

However, God did not dwell among them in the same way as they dwelled with each other. No, God is a holy God. Because of his holiness they could not just drop by and enter his tent as if He were just another friendly neighbour. No, the only way that the people could have access to God was through sacrifices made by the priests on their behalf. There had to be atonement for their sins. The priests themselves were given elaborate instructions as to how to conduct themselves in the tabernacle. They had to make extensive preparations. Because of God's presence in their midst, the people themselves had to be fully aware of their own conduct. Since God is a holy God, they too had to be holy in their conduct.

The impact of God's presence for Israel

You can imagine that God's presence in their midst made a tremendous impact on them. The Israelites found themselves quite vulnerable in the desert because of the many enemies that surrounded them and because of the austere conditions. But they knew that God was among them. They knew that He was not some ordinary creature, but that He was the Almighty Creator Himself, who was unique and holy and all-powerful. As they went through the desert, they were often under attack and found themselves in difficult circumstances. Nevertheless time and again God came to their rescue. He rescued them from their enemies and gave them food and drink even when this seemed impossible to acquire.

When the Israelites came into the Promised Land they no longer lived in tents, but exchanged them for more permanent homes. And so it was only natural that also the Lord God would have a more permanent home among them. For that reason Solomon was commanded to build a permanent temple for God to dwell in. God remained in their midst and continued to show his greatness and his holiness.

God's presence in the New Testament

In the New Testament God's presence amongst his people becomes even more significant. God sent his Son to dwell among us (John 1:14). While the Lord Jesus was on earth, He showed the great power of God in the many miraculous things that He did and in the words that He spoke. How great it was to have Him walk on earth. He healed the sick and the lame; He forgave the sins of many and showed his great compassion and mercy to all those who would listen to Him and obey his voice. The greatest blessing of his presence was that He took upon Himself the sins of all those who heeded his presence.

But that was not the end of God's presence here on earth. Once the Lord Jesus was seated at the right hand of his Father, He made his presence known through his Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost He sent his Holy Spirit to the church and to the members of the church. Now God is spiritually present in the hearts of all his children.

The wonderful difference the Holy Spirit now makes

What a difference that makes today in our lives! Paul says in 2 Corinthians 6:16 that now we are the temple of the living God. He then quotes from Leviticus 26:12 and reminds the Corinthians that God had said:

"I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."

Paul was keenly aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit within him. When he wrote his letter to the Philippians Paul was in some very difficult circumstances and had to contend with some very difficult people. In the first place he found himself in prison. He did not know what was going to happen to him. He had no earthly comforts to speak of. Even some of his friends abandoned him and attacked him. He writes in chapter 1:15 that there were some who were envious of him and they preached Christ out of rivalry.

Paul knew that he could not change his circumstances and that he himself could not change those people who opposed him. Paul, however, could do much about his attitude in the midst of all this. Rather than complaining about those who oppose him, or complaining about his dire circumstances, he rejoiced. He rejoiced in the fact that God was with him and that the Holy Spirit lived in his heart. He rejoiced in his wonderful salvation through Jesus Christ and in the great hope that he had for the future. That is why he writes at the end of his letter to the Philippians, *"I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want"* (Philippians 4:12).

When you are full of the Holy Spirit then you cannot help but rejoice even in the midst of adversity. The Holy Spirit enables you to be joyful even when the whole world around you may be falling apart. For then you know that in spite of everything God is with you. As the Lord Jesus said just before his ascension, *"Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"* (Matthew 28:20).

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