

## A NEW CREATURE

When David was king over Israel, and was not at war with the enemies of Israel, he, having his own grand house in which to live, pledged to build such a house in which God might dwell. (2 Samuel 7:1, 2) God commanded Nathan the prophet to tell David that in the time that God was with Israel, He never commanded anyone to make a house for Him. (2 Samuel 7:4–7) David desired to build a house for God, but he did understand that God's throne is in the heavens. He wrote in the Book of Psalms, "The LORD is in his holy temple, the LORD'S throne is in heaven," and "The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all." (Psalm 11:4; 103:19) David did not build such a house for God, but his son, Solomon, did. Solomon, like David his father, understood that God has no need of a house; indeed, God is too great for any house. Solomon, at the dedication of the temple he built, prayed, "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?" (1 Kings 8:27 = 2 Chronicles 6:18)

In the days of the divided monarchy of Israel and Judah, the people of God were exceedingly wicked. So God sent to them prophets to warn them of coming judgment, and to call them to repentance. To Judah, God sent the prophet Isaiah, who rebuked the people for their sins, including their hypocritical worship. The people regularly broke God's moral law, but they kept his ceremonial law, offering sacrifices for their sins. Because they were impenitent, and their offerings merely formal, and not from the heart, God despised their sacrifices, and did not accept them. Isaiah warned the people that, if they did not repent of their sins, and do right, then God would punish them. (Isaiah 1) He would cause the army of the Babylonians to conquer the Kingdom of Judah, and to carry the people away into exile. God in his justice promised judgment, but in His mercy also promised restoration. He would destroy the city of Jerusalem and the temple there, but He would also restore His people to a new land with a new Jerusalem and a new temple, and all would be well. He said, "For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying." (Isaiah 65:17–19) In the end, this city would not be a material one, but a spiritual one; it would be all the people of God. The temple would not be a physical one, but a spiritual one; it would be God dwelling in His people. He would dwell in the righteous, and not in the unrighteous. He would dwell in the penitent, and not in the impenitent. He would dwell in the humble, and not in the presumptuous. He said:

The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word. He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol. Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations. (Isaiah 66:1–3)

"Saint John had a vision of this new heavens and new earth, with a new Jerusalem and new temple. He wrote:

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. (Revelation 21:1–4; compare Hebrews 12:22, 23)

Through Isaiah, God spoke concerning Zion:

Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child. Who hath heard such a thing? who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? or shall a nation be born at once? for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children. Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth? saith the LORD: shall I cause to bring forth, and shut the womb? saith thy God. (Isaiah 66:7–9)

God likened Zion to a woman who, before she experienced any pains of labor, was delivered of a male child. Israel were quickly and easily, without tribulation, as in the Exodus, returned to Zion. In like fashion, the new Israel, with the outpouring of God's Spirit on the day of Pentecost, would be quickly born, and would rapidly become a great nation. God did not prepare His people for deliverance only to abandon them; He is faithful to His promises. He promised, and He would deliver.

As God would restore His people, He called upon them to rejoice. He said:

Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all ye that love her: rejoice for joy with her, all ye that mourn for her: That ye may suck, and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations; that ye may milk out, and be delighted with the abundance of her glory. For thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream: then shall ye suck, ye shall be borne upon her sides, and be dandled upon her knees. As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem. And when ye see this, your heart shall rejoice, and your bones shall flourish like an herb: and the hand of the LORD shall be known toward his servants, and his indignation toward his enemies. (Isaiah 66:10–14)

All those that loved Jerusalem, and what she stood for, should be glad. All those that mourned for her should rejoice. Not only the Jews, but also the Gentiles, would rejoice at the new birth, and be blessed by the new Jerusalem. God would cause there to be peace between Himself and the Jews, and between Himself and the Gentiles, and between the Jews and the Gentiles. All the nations would be one people of God. The grace of God would begin in the city of Jerusalem, and spread out over the entire earth. Jerusalem would mourn at her destruction, but, as a mother comforts her child, God would comfort His people. Saint John wrote of his vision:

And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the

tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. (Revelation 22:1, 2)

When the Son of God came into the world, He began the work of building His church, the New Jerusalem. After He was baptized, and received the Holy Spirit, He proclaimed to the people, “Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matthew 4:17) He then called twelve disciples, and sent them to the Jews to preach to them the same message. As proof of their authority to proclaim such a message, Jesus gave them power to restore sick men to good health. They were to take with them no provisions, but rather rely on others to provide for them, for they deserved compensation from others. In every city, they were to find the house of some good person who would give them room and board, and there remain until it was time for them to depart for the next city. If anyone would not receive them, then they should immediately depart from that city, and leave it to the judgment of God. (Matthew 10:5–15 = Mark 6:7-12 = Luke 9:1–6)

Some time after, Jesus sent out seventy disciples, two by two, to do the same work, and to them Jesus gave the same instructions. To every place Jesus planned to go, His disciples would first go to prepare the way for Him. There was much work to be done, for there were many whom God had chosen to be His people, and few to proclaim to them the gospel. Jesus told His disciples, “The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest.” (Luke 10:2) Jesus warned them of the difficulties they would face: He was sending them as lambs among wolves. They were never to be discouraged, however, if anyone rejected them: the kingdom of God had still come. If any would not receive them, then the judgment upon them would be worse than the judgment that came upon the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Some would reject Jesus’s apostles. After all, some had rejected Jesus Himself. Jesus He said:

Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell. (Luke 10:13–15)

Jesus had preached in the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, and He had proved Himself with many miracles; yet, the people in those cities did not believe in Him. So, their judgment would be great. In the days of the Divided Monarch, God had destroyed the cities of Tyre and Sidon for their wickedness. Those cities had Ezekiel to prophet, but they did not repent. (Ezekiel 27, 28) If the people of those cities had had the Son of God in their midst, and had seen His mighty works, then those people would have repented. The people of the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaiad, and Capernaum, were even more wicked than those other cities. They did have the Son of God with them, and they did witness His miracles, and yet they did not repent. So, in the final judgment, their punishment would be the more severe.

To believe the apostles’ preaching is to believe Jesus Himself, for He sent the apostles to preach with His authority. To reject Jesus’s apostles was to reject Jesus by whose authority they preached and performed miracles. Jesus said, “He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me.” (Luke 10:16)

Jesus’s disciples went out, and preached as Jesus had commissioned them to do. Saint Luke records the result:

And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven. (Luke 10:17–20)

When the seventy returned from their mission, they were full of joy because of the great power they had to fight against evil. They reported to Jesus that even the demons that possessed men were subject to their authority. Jesus told His apostles that He saw the fall of Satan himself, the ruler of the demons. The apostles' casting out demons was a demonstration that Satan's kingdom was being overthrown, and the kingdom of Christ being established. The Jesus would later say to His enemies:

If I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you. When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: But when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils. (Luke 11:20–22)

Jesus gave His apostles power to perform mighty works to undo the works of the Devil. After all, for this purpose the Son of God was manifested, Saint John wrote, that he might destroy the works of the devil. (1 John 3:8) When the Devil tempted Jesus to test God's faithfulness by throwing Himself off the pinnacle of the temple, he cited two lines from one of the psalms: "For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." (Psalm 91:11, 12) Of course, Jesus replied, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." (Luke 4:9–12) The following line of that same psalm reads, "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet." Jesus conferred upon His apostles this power, to be understood in the sense of the power to conquer spiritual evil. This is truly a great power, and a thing over which to rejoice. Yet, of greater importance than this, and the cause of greater joy, is their names being written in heaven, which is to say, in the book of life. In that book are written the names of all those who are right with God, and whose home is heaven. Jesus would later warn that His conferring upon a man these great powers was no guarantee of that man's right standing with Jesus. He said:

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. (Matthew 7:21–23)

Jesus told a woman of Canaan that He was "not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matthew 15:24) When He sent out His twelve apostles, He told them, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matthew 10:5, 6) It was the same for the seventy. This was to change, however; Christ's apostles were eventually to preach the good news to all nations, as the prophets had said. They preached that God by faith in Christ justifies every man as a man. Two errors arose in this regard, which Saint Paul addressed in his epistle to the Galatians. He wrote:

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith. Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand. As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh. But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God. (Galatians 5:7–16)

Some held that if a man has faith in Christ, it is enough to save him; he need not do good works. To that one, Saint Paul warned that a man reaps what he sows. If a man lives for his sinful desires, then the result will be his destruction. If a man lives by the Spirit, then the result will be his everlasting life. It may seem difficult and unrewarding work to do good; but it is like planting and harvesting, and takes the patience of a farmer. The Christian ought not to grow weary of doing good, but patiently to do it, knowing that he will one day reap for himself eternal life. So, the Christian ought to do good to all men, as made in the image of God, but especially to other Christians, as made in the image of Christ. Others held that a Gentile, if he would be right with God, must become a Jew, receiving circumcision, and keeping all the law of Moses. Saint Paul warned the Galatians that such men cared nothing for them, but only wished to avoid the persecution of the unbelieving Jews by maintaining the law of Moses, and requiring Gentile proselytes to do the same. Such men were hypocrites, because, although they insisted that Gentiles had to keep the law of Moses to be right with God, they themselves did not keep it. Saint Paul would boast in nothing but the cross of Christ, by which the apostle himself was dead to the world, and the world to him. When a man is united to Christ, circumcision is neither here nor there. What matters is being a new creature in Christ. As Saint Paul wrote earlier in his epistle to the Galatians, “For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.” (Galatians 5:6) Whether Jew or Gentile, a man is right with God by faith in Christ, but by a faith that works through love.

Let us remember both the justice and the mercy of God. Let us understand that if a man would be right with God, then he must believe in Jesus, the Son of God. Let our faith in Jesus work through love.

Now unto the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, be glory and dominion, for ever and ever. Amen.