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SERMON XXII.

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THE GREAT PREACHER.

“AND there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: and the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.”—ISAIAH 11: 1-4.

HERE it is distinctly prophesied that our Saviour, when he should come into the world, would be peculiarly endowed, by the Holy Spirit, with wisdom, discernment, and might in speech, such as should make him a remarkable preacher.

Many other passages of the word of God show that his great work was to make atonement for sinners. But while he was to

SERMON XXIII.

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THE CHURCH OF CHRIST THE TEMPLE OF GOD.

“WHETHER is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?”—MATT. 23 : 17.

IN the former days, Jerusalem was known as the City of God ; the mountain of his holiness. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, was Mount Zion, the City of the great King. God was known in her palaces for a refuge. There too was built the temple, the house of the Lord, whither the tribes went up unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord. This city lying on the hills of Salem, with its formidable battlements and towers, was both the wonder and the envy of surrounding nations, but the pride of the Hebrew, his happy home, which he preferred above his chief joy. The temple was of fair proportions, adorned with goodly stones and gifts, finished and furnished within and without with great beauty of workmanship and costliness of material. It was filled with vessels and symbols and ornaments, whose value could not be computed. The house itself was overlaid within with pure gold. But the gold and the silver and the precious stones, whose profusion filled the temple with so much splendor, did not constitute, or impart to it, its true value. Its real value consisted in the simple fact that it was the dwelling-place of God. There, in the holy of holies, above the mercy-seat, rested the mysterious symbol of the divine presence—the visible glory of Deity. There, the great Jehovah promised to meet and commune with his chosen ones. There were all the people to come and pay unto God their vows, and do outward homage to his holy name. There, generation after generation had they communed with him, beheld his glory, and felt his power. For such reasons the temple was held in most sacred regard by the whole people; it was to them of all other places the most holy; the place of their highest joy. And so the psalmist, in the spirit of a true worshiper, exclaims: “How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! my soul longeth, yea even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord; we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple.” Thus was the temple consecrated, as it was the dwelling-place of God; and so did the temple sanctify the gold and the precious stones, the ornaments and outward adornments, which beautified the house of the Lord.

Now, since this material temple has accomplished its purpose, a spiritual house, of which it was the type, supplies its place. Since the ending of Christ's visible ministry, Jerusalem ceased to be the only appointed place of worship; and God thenceforth chose for his dwelling a spiritual temple, into which as living stones all true worshippers are builded. The Christian Church is God's invisible, spiritual house; composed of that innumerable company, sifted from successive generations, who are called the chosen of God; being built on the foundation of apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone, in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord; in whom all true believers are builded for an habitation of God through the Spirit. However scattered and divided in name this Church may be, it is still one building, whose spiritual beauty and grace shall more and more clearly appear; for God's promise of old is sure of fulfillment, wherein he says: "I will lay thy stones with fair colors, and thy foundation with sapphires. And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones." The elements of this spiritual house, having been made partakers of the life of Christ, are living stones; they constitute one vast temple, spiritually glorious and beautiful to the eye of faith, in which God is truly worshiped, in which he takes up his abode, and manifests his glory far more wonderfully than he did in the material temple of the olden time.

Now, as in other days, the temple had its gold and silver, and its manifold adornments, its rites and ceremonies, its offices and services; and these were the ways and forms in which religious life expressed itself in that age; so now, the spiritual temple composed, not of gold and goodly stones, but of souls redeemed, alive by union with Christ, gives one kind of expression to its spiritual life, in all those things which give visibility to the Church, its houses of worship, its services and sacraments, its offices and outward order. But these things are to the Christian Church what the gold and goodly stones and gifts were to the temple. Of old, the temple was consecrated because God made it the place of his peculiar dwelling; and so it sanctified all that pertained to it. So whatever there is of form and order, which may be needful for the manifestation of spiritual religion, or necessary to show forth its nature and power, is now of real value only because each individual Christian, and all together, constitute the temple of God, in which he dwells, as the home and sanctuary of his holiness in the world.

It will be observed, then, that this spiritual temple is complete in itself, and in reality needs not these visible tokens to give it perfection. The true Church of Christ is therefore the invisible habitation of God; made up of living material, a spiritual house, in which all true prayer and praise, all holy desires and affections, are individual offerings, spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by

Jesus Christ. All that is external and visible, its forms and order, its services and sacraments and solemn assemblies, are but the means of showing forth its influence and its power, its conflicts and its victories. These things are sanctified and rendered significant by the fact that they are the visible proofs of that invisible building of God, which he has chosen for his dwelling-place. They are but the gold and gifts of the temple, infinitely less than the temple, and not even necessary to its existence or perfection.

That these visible things are not essential to the completeness of the Church, appears from the nature or character of the component parts of this invisible house. They have been made alive from the dead through faith in Christ; for he is the believer's life. They have a living union with him separately and conjointly, by virtue of which union all spiritual life is continued and nourished and invigorated. He is the vine, they are the branches; from him as the body all true life flows into them as the branches. They are in him by faith, and he dwells in them; for whosoever hath the Son hath life. They are individually and collectively complete in him, who is the head. The Scriptures every where assert the doctrine that Christianity is a thing of life; that the Church is a living thing, drawing its life continually from Christ, the great fountain of spiritual life. If there were but one true believer in Christ, united to him by a living faith, he would constitute the Church; he would be God's building, and those sacred words of the Apostle would still be true: "Know you not, that *you* are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in *you*?"

It is ever to be remembered that they only are of the true Church of God, and constitute his spiritual house, in whose hearts religion has a real life. This life, strictly spiritual in its nature, has a kind of visibility wholly distinct from the services and sacraments and outward order of different Christian communities. For, since religion has a life and growth, as truly as any other thing that lives and grows, it must have some natural forms which are inseparable from it. The *principle* of *religious* life is one and the same, wherever it is found; the forms which are sometimes called religion are many and various. And though we never find true spiritual life without some form, yet we often find some forms of it without the life. In this respect it has many resemblances in the living world around us. All life without us is known only by our sensible apprehension of its forms. The principle of life we never see; it is an invisible agency, the working of which appears to us in the flower, the tree, the man. These are its forms, its attributes, its properties, or whatever else you please to call them; the bodies in which the vital energy exists and works. And yet how often do we find these forms of life without their living power. The flower may be preserved,

unchanged in all its parts; the delicate hues unfaded, the glistening greenness of its leaf the same; and yet the tender-looking thing be stark in death. The stately tree which breathed its life out under the hard frosts of winter, may have the same form unchanged in summer as when it went to sleep in autumn. How often do we see in the human form in death a startling resemblance to that same form when full of life:

“Thus a false smile will play around the dead,
And flush the features when the soul has fled.”

So it is sometimes with the forms of religion; they may appear when there is no spirit, nor life, nor power of religion—the body of religion without the soul of it—and it may be so perfect in shape and members as to deceive the eyes of men, and make them think it does really live and grow by the energy of a spiritual life within. But the natural forms of religion, which are inseparable from it, and are essential to the manifestation of its life, and which sometimes appear when there is no spiritual life, are the graces of the Christian character. Being united to Christ, partaking of his divine life, the Christian grows into him; he puts on Christ, really resembles him in moral character. These elements of Christian character are the peculiar but natural forms, with which God has invested the principle of vital godliness. They appear in a greater or less degree of moral beauty and perfection, according to the power or energy of the divine life in the souls of those who constitute the spiritual house of God. When a vital union with Christ is once established, and spiritual life has its beginning in the soul, then do the graces of the Spirit appear to be the natural production of that union. The principle of religious life, like the principle of life wherever found, produces and perfects its own essential forms. Thus do those who are truly united to Christ continually grow in him, or experience the increase of their spiritual life; ever advancing towards perfection in him; by whom all his peculiar people, fitly joined together into one harmonious church, grow continually towards completeness and spiritual maturity. Now it is because religion is one and the same in its life principle; and because it is nourished and invigorated from the same source and by fixed laws, bringing forth in all the same essential forms of its life, that there can be one harmonious Church, embracing all that invisible company, chosen from among all peoples in all ages, who have a living faith in Christ. They resemble each other in the great essential attributes of Christian character; they are quickened by the same Spirit; they are members of Christ's body; they are the living stones of God's spiritual house. All similarity of character, and oneness of spirit, and grace of spiritual architecture, arise from the sameness and divine origin of individual religious life.

The forms of religious life which have now been alluded to are essential to the manifestation of that life, and can not be altogether separated from it. And those who possess this life and its attendant forms, are God's peculiar people; they constitute the Church of the first-born, whose names are enrolled in heaven.

But it has already been intimated that the spiritual temple, the true Church of Christ gives expression to one form of its spiritual life, in all those services, and sacraments, and offices, and outward order, which render it a visible Church. And that these things are to God's spiritual house what the gold and goodly stones and gifts were to the temple of old; they are immeasurably less than the real Church; they are not necessary to its completeness or its existence.

While there is general authority in the Scriptures for the organization of visible churches, with forms of worship, and modes of administering sacraments, and methods of government, these are not to be relied upon as sources or means of spiritual life. They may be suited to our infirmities, they may be helps to our devotions, encouragements to faithfulness, and instruments of good to a world lying in wickedness; but they can not give increase to our religious life, or, independently of real communion with Christ, advance us in any degree towards maturity of Christian character. The forms which give visibility to the Church have in them no life; nor does their existence imply religious life in those who use them. So far as they are of human origin and construction, they are dead as any other forms which human hands can make. Men may imitate a living thing in stone or brass, or on the canvas, but they can not breathe into it a living soul. So, however beautiful, or imposing, or simple, or useful, however ancient or ridiculous these borrowed forms of religion may be, they are utterly destitute of all life-imparting power; nay, in themselves considered, they are as dead as the meanest picture of death himself. They derive all their significance from the fact, that they are used as means of manifesting to the world the character and power of the invisible Church, of which Christ is the only source of life.

The forms of worship, the manner of administering the sacraments, and the kinds of government, differ in different Christian communities. They are to be regarded as aids to devotion, and encouragements to fidelity, and as a means of holding forth the light and knowledge of salvation to the world. But they are not to be regarded as possessing in themselves any life-giving energy. They can at best be only a means of directing the humble mind to that great source of vital power, from whence all true and spiritual life descends.

Prayers, whether read, or recited from memory, or dictated at the moment of utterance, are but different forms, and nothing in

themselves but words; and as such one may have no preëminence above another. It matters not where or when men pray, or whether with this form or that, or without any, if each prayer begins with a sincere desire of the heart. The sigh of the truly penitent is no sooner breathed, than it reaches up to heaven to the ever attentive ear of Him who hears the humble when they cry. True worship consists not in mere words, by whomsoever uttered; not in attractive or imposing ceremonies, accompanied with rich and varied music, and men in mystic vestments. Such were the forms of religion for a semi-barbarous people, and are now two thousand years behind the age. It is not the form which some call beautiful that constitutes true spiritual worship; it consists, rather, in the beauty of holiness. We ought to be jealous of any kind of so-called worship, which so occupies our minds with its forms, as to satisfy us with that which is sensible rather than spiritual; remembering that God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. As the temple was greater than the gold, which ornamented and adorned it, so is the spiritual, invisible temple greater than any forms of worship which pertain to the visible Church, which can neither give nor increase life to those who constitute the body of Christ, and live alone by virtue of their union with him.

Again: the manner in which the sacraments of the Church are administered, can neither impart spiritual life, nor increase the life of the true Christian. Indeed, the sacraments themselves, baptism and the Lord's supper, are not absolutely necessary to the salvation of men, as some vainly affirm. The one is a seal of God's covenant with his people, and a rite of initiation into the visible Church: the other is an affecting memorial of the death of Christ. These sacraments have in them no life, no power, by whomsoever or in whatever way they may be administered. If they have in themselves no quickening, saving power, of how far less importance is the manner of their administration. Are those who compose that spiritual temple, built up of lively stones, better fitted for their place in that habitation of God, because in the rite of baptism their foreheads were signed with the sign of the cross; or because they were plunged beneath a flood of waters; or because they were but simply sprinkled with this emblem of purification? Certainly not. Baptism, by whomsoever administered, in any or every possible way, neither washes away sin, nor imparts spiritual life. So, too, the bread and cup, which are set forth as emblems, and emblems only, of the body and blood of Christ, can not raise the sinner who receives them, from spiritual death into newness of life. They do make the gold greater than the temple, who exalt these sacraments into the instrument and means of spiritual regeneration and life. They think more of the body of religion, and the decorations of that body, than the soul of it; more of its outward ceremonies than its inward life.

Again: the order or government of the visible Church is, for the most part, of human arrangement, and is, therefore, to the Church invisible, as the gold and outward adornments to the temple. No particular form of ecclesiastical order has any efficiency or direct agency in the salvation of the soul. No one, therefore, may find spiritual life in one form, rather than another. It is not in *this* or *that*, or any *form*. He only, that believeth in the Lord Jesus Christ, shall be saved. He that is joined to the Lord, united to him by a living faith, receives his spirit, and becomes a partaker of the divine nature. And when false teachers arise and say, lo! here is Christ, or lo! there, believe them not. Christ himself declares that the kingdom of God cometh not with observation; it is not confined to one place or form: the living truth is a free spirit, omnipotent and immortal, whose home is the invisible habitation of God. The authority of the Church is in Christ; it has never been transmitted to men of certain names or office, in the visible Church. So long as the worship and services of a Christian community are conducted decently, and in order, there can be no lawful exercise of authority, one over another. For where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. No authority can be derived from tradition; from the corrupt usage of corrupt men in corrupt times; from records of unreal and shadowy men, sometimes called the Fathers. It can be found alone in the teachings of Him, who is the head and life of the Church invisible and universal.

There are those who claim for the Church on earth an outward uniformity and visible unity, consisting in fixed forms and ceremonies, and a threefold order of priesthood. These things may indeed belong to a visible Church, but they are not Christianity; they are no part of the true Church; they are not necessary to its existence or perfection. They are not necessary to the life of religion in the hearts of men, or for its advancement in the world. We may safely say, that while the true spirit of Christ is in the hearts of his people, there may never exist *such* a visible universal Church, embracing all who are and shall be the chosen of God, and builded into that glorious temple which he has made his resting-place and the home of his holiness. It is not necessary for the incoming and progress of God's spiritual kingdom in the world, that the Church should be one in its visible form; nor is there any evidence in Scripture or reason, that such will ever be the case in this world, subject as it must be to so many diversities and imperfections. It is true that our Lord prayed that his people might be one, and so they may be in religious principle, and in the simple and inseparable forms of religious life; but they never will be in ecclesiastical visibility, nor was this intended. It will be composed of that invisible company, "a part of which have crossed the flood, and part are crossing now," perpetually increasing with passing generations, which, sanctified and purified by the

blood and truth of Christ, he will present to himself at last, a glorious Church, divinely beautiful, holy and without blemish. This inspired thought can not refer to any mere visible Church, embracing a part only of the elect of God. It should be considered also, that the visible unity, or outward uniformity of a Church is no evidence of its inward purity or its spiritual life. Indeed, the true life of religion would be likely to disappear beneath the burden and bondage of fixed forms and ceremonies. In such circumstances, the unity and peace of a Church might continue for ages, showing to the world a mere formal Christianity, unmoved by those causes which sometimes disturb the quiet of others, whose forms are fewer and unfix'd, and are often changed or displaced by the energy and force of an inward life. A religion of mere forms and names is dead; it may continue outwardly the same, generation after generation, until some vital energy finds its way into it. Dead things of this sort do not change. But a church is none the better for its outward unity, and its magnificent and beautiful forms, if it have no inward life, and no beauty of holiness. "A living dog is better than a dead lion." A living tree, though it shows about it some unnatural offshoots, some crooked growths, yet, if its branches bear some pleasant fruit, is far better than a dead tree of stately form and formal stateliness, whose heart is rotten, and whose fruit is cast or withered. There is, away in the Eastern hemisphere, a body of water, whose surface the winds and storms of heaven never ruffle; its outward form is always the same. But those waters are black, and bitter, and heavy; no living thing is in them; and beneath them are unsepulchred Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities of the plain: they call it the Dead Sea. So a Church may have an outward uniformity, and boast of its unchanging forms and ceremonies, and yet have no living thing within it. It may be like the garnished sepulchers of the Jews, beautiful in outward appearance, and within the dwelling-place of death. When the visible Church, of any form or order, is unduly exalted, and its ceremonies and government too highly valued, the only source of spiritual life, and the only means of spiritual growth, are likely to be neglected. When the gold seems greater than the temple which sanctified the gold, then the evidence of union with Christ is incomplete: for he is not the head of any particular visible church, but only of the Church invisible and universal. And all true believers seek their spiritual life in him, by direct and intimate commerce of the soul with the spirit, not through any human mediations, or church order, or sacraments, or rites and forms of worship.

It may be inferred from this subject, that the peculiar glory of the Church of Christ, consists in the growth and increase of the divine life, in the individual members of it. In order to secure this increase, the vital union of the soul to Christ must be appre-

hended as a divine truth. He must be regarded as the only source of spiritual life, which flows into his people only as they seek a closer union with him. To grow into his divine likeness, to possess a greater sympathy and similarity of character with him, will enable his people most effectually to declare the excellency and power of real Christianity. As they are drawn into closer union with him, they will more readily acknowledge his right to their whole being. They will feel the force of the apostle's exhortation: "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your *bodies a living sacrifice*, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." Then, too, will that great truth become more practical and significant, which declares: Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, whom ye have received from God; and ye are not your own; for ye are bought with the price of Christ's blood. Glorify God, therefore, with your body and spirit, which are God's by creation, and redemption, and habitation."

It may be inferred also, from the nature of religious life and its essential forms, that the spiritual power of God's people diminishes as they exalt the forms and order of a visible Church. The graces of the spirit, the virtues of a good character, find not their nourishment in mere carnal observances, in pomp and show, in festival and fast, in imposing rights and ceremonies. Such is not the food by which spiritual natures grow. The forms, therefore, which may be needful to a visible church organization, ought to be as few and simple as possible. Religion, in its true character, is pre-eminently spiritual; and it appears most advantageously, both in individuals and churches, in the garments of simplicity. Whatever of form tends to excite wonder and admiration, tends also to deaden the religious sense; to draw the mind from spiritual things to sensible; from the substance to the form; from the only source of life to the mere elements of death. The spiritual life of the Church, as it has had visibility in the world, has been wasted, as its outward pomp, and showy ceremonies, its worldly state and riches were increased. For then the true spiritual temple was no longer regarded as greater than the gold of the temple, and its manifold adornments. When the Church was in the wilderness, persecuted and driven from the abodes of men, and had its places of worship in the caves of the eternal mountains, lifting to God the voice of prayer and praise only in the night-watches, it possessed a far higher degree of spirituality, and greater means and power of doing good, than when it found a stately repose in vast cathedrals, and multiplied its services, and, by costly array and outward show, attracted the multitude to its formal worship. And so it is that the gold and goodly stones and gifts of the temple are of little value, if God no longer dwell therein. His presence is the glory of his spiritual house; and nothing more is needed for its perfection.

It may be inferred also, that there is a sense in which there can be no salvation out of the Church. This declaration can be true only as applied to the Church universal and invisible. This, doubtless, was its signification in its early use. It is wholly devoid of truth when uttered in reference to any visible Church, and is the contracted thought of unscriptural sectarianism. For the Church, in its highest significance, as the idea of it is developed by inspiration, embraces all who are united to Christ by a living faith—that great multitude out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation, who have been redeemed unto God by the blood of the Lamb. This noble and innumerable community, the apostles and martyrs of the early Church, the disciples of all times and of every name, those who have been found in palaces and in dens and caves of the earth; these are the Church of God, which he has purchased with his own blood. These are the living stones of his spiritual house, where he dwells, and in which incense and a pure offering, and all spiritual sacrifices shall be offered continually, to his holy and glorious name.

SERMON XXIV.

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THE PENITENT THIEF.

“AND one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.”
—LUKE 23 : 39-43.

THE malefactor, whose repentance is here described, bad as his life had been, was not ignorant of religious obligations. Being a Jew, he had been taught the laws of God, though he had sadly departed from them. He had, before that day, known of Christ and of the character of his claims, perhaps too of his miracles and the spirit of his teaching. But whether he had known much or little of Jesus, not being hardened in sin, like his companion, and being so near to death, all that he saw and heard in these eventful hours, would make a strong impression on him.