

Zion, Beloved of God

The LORD loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. (Psalm 87:2)

“The Gates of Zion.” All or parts of three meanings may be applied to this phrase. We may think of the gates as the entrance, the barest beginning of what is to be found in the city. Or, we may think of gates as access, that which opens the whole of the city to the visitor or resident. Or, we may think of city gates in a sense often used in the scripture, as the seat of judgment, the “courthouse,” a place where matters of public concern were settled, recorded and published. Such is the sense in which Boaz utilized the gates of the city when he sat down at the gate, gathered the witnesses, executed and confirmed transfer of the right of redemption of Elimelech’s estate from the nearer kinsman to himself. A beautiful picture of our Lord’s transfer of our sins to Himself, and His wealth to us in His suffering outside the gates of Jerusalem. In this sense, “the gates” stand for, and represent the whole city. It is the seat of governmental powers, as “Washington” stands for the U.S.A.

“The dwellings of Jacob.” This can be none other than the houses, or the families of God’s people. As God’s interest is not in the brick and mortar of Zion, but its people, so His care is not for the structure which shelters people, but the family who dwells there. In this respect, New Covenant language is being employed. Between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, there is a very interesting contrast in the words used to describe what we now commonly call “the home.” “Family” is the Old Testament word. It appears nearly 300 times in reference to a group of people of common natural generation. Persons gained entrance into the Old Covenant by means of natural birth. The covenant was with Abraham and his children. Families are not pre-designed and planned by the parents. They simply grow out of whatever and whomever is born. By contrast, the word “family” appears only once in the New Testament, and here it does not refer to a natural family, but “the whole family in heaven and earth.” The New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament “family” is “house.” A “house” is deliberately built by someone (Hebrews 3:4). It is a specifically designed structure of selected materials. Every detail is pre-planned. Only those items chosen by the architect and builder may be incorporated. And when all these have been put in their proper place, the house is finished. This is a striking illustration of the contrast in the Covenant Theology of the Old Testament, which responds to natural generation, and the New Covenant under which we now live, in which God’s house is built according to sovereign election by supernatural regeneration. The former is totally carnal, temporal and earthly, the latter completely spiritual, eternal and heavenly.

The dwellings of Jacob refer to the households of God’s *individual* elect. Zion (“the gates of Zion”) speaks of God’s *corporate* elect, the church. However reluctant we may be to grant the summation of the scriptural statement in focus, it is inescapable. The Lord loves the church *more* than any single individual elect person. The church is the beloved bride. And as the husband loves his wife more than any particular part of her body, so the Lord loves the church. It would be within reason to say that I love my wife’s eyes because they are *her* eyes, not for anything they are in themselves. Who are these “lone rangers” claiming an intimate relationship with God, yet refusing to be a part of the Christian community? Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:22 that we are “*built together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.*” God’s house is His corporate people, not separate individuals. Peter tells us that we are “*living stones built up [into] a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ*” (I Peter 2:5). It seems that it is the “house,” the priesthood, which offers spiritual sacrifices, not the individual “stone.” Not only does the Lord love the church more than any elect person, but He loves the church more than the home, more than all the homes put together, more than all the “Christian homes” put together. “More than all the dwellings of Jacob.”

Now, that is a jarring statement, given all the religious press we have had on the home in recent years. We have been told, for example, that God founded the home before He did the church. Not so! The church was chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4, II Tim. 1:9). When God created the woman from the man as recorded in Genesis 2, He was painting a picture of something already in existence, the church. Paul is careful to tell us that what he has been speaking of in Ephesians 5:23-32 is not the home, but the church. The church is the reality, the substance, of which marriage is only a dim shadow.

We have also been told that we cannot have strong churches until we have strong homes, that the church must have the home to survive, that the church is in a mess because the home is awry, and that we cannot expect revival and spiritual awakening in the church until we get the home shaped up. Where do such ideas come from? Not from the Bible. God will very quickly sacrifice the home for the sake of the church. Abraham, “the father of us all,” was called to forsake his home, get out from among his natural people. In Abraham’s so doing, God promised to make of him a new nation, in effect a “new home and a new family.” Jesus came promising to immediately disrupt families, son against father and father against son, daughter against mother and mother against daughter, and that a man’s foes should be those of his own home (Matt. 10:35-36). Such casualties in the home may be justly blamed on the church, for the Lord plainly declares that love for Him must take precedence over the dearest of human relations. Mother, father, children, husbands and wives must give way to the Lord as He builds His church.

The church does not depend upon the home for its health. The very opposite is true. Homes can survive, can be truly homes, only by means of the church. It is the church, not the home, that is the pillar and ground of truth. What value, what virtue, what right, good and wholesome thing, can the home bring to the church that it does not first receive from the church? From whence shall the home bring its principles of manhood and womanhood, except from the Creator preached and taught in the church? Certainly, no other earthly entity or institution holds forth those sacred, unchanging relationship of husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, children, as submission, obedience, discipline, self-denial, responsibility, reverence, holiness, purity, trust, faithfulness, sacrificial love. In recent years some “conservative politicians” have seized upon some of these principles and touted them as the means to solve the nation’s social ills. “Christian psychology” has flourished far and wide, preaching these as cures for the crisis in the home. These are both certain to help neither society nor church, for the motive preached is too weak.

Men and women in a state of moral ruin will not abandon their evil and perverse lifestyles in order to salvage nation, society, family or marriage. They will let all of these go down the drain to satisfy their own lusts, greed, selfishness and perversions. It will do no good to “educate” them on how to do better: They already know to do better. They do not wish to do better, had rather do worse. The only thing that will affect a change in their lifestyle is a new heart and a consequent bowing before a holy God in Whom we all have life and breath, in Whose sight we all live and to Whom we must all give account. This God was manifested in the flesh in Jesus Christ, justified and vindicated by the Holy Spirit in His resurrection, witnessed by angels, preached unto the ends of the earth, believed on by every nation, received up into glory and seated in absolute authority (I Tim. 3:16). Now, where is that truth coming from? Not from the government, the media, the entertainers, the schools or the home. This, the “**KEY**,” this great mystery of godliness, the sole redemptive truth for all time and eternity, is in the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of truth. Without her, it would perish in less than a generation. The knowledge, fear, and love of Almighty God is the only motive powerful enough to deliver the sodomite from his perversion, the fornicator from his lust, the rebel from his anarchy, the drunkard from his bottle, the addict from his drugs, the idolater from his religion. It will make saints from sinners, devoted husbands from deadbeats, virtuous wives and mothers from harlots. That is only one of the many reasons why God loves the gates of Zion more than all the habitations of Jacob, and why His focus is on the church, not on the family.