

Temple Ordinances not in Heaven (Sermon 4 of 4)

By Thomas Boston

And I saw no temple therein. (Revelation 21:22)

IT would be a token that ye have not been kept in the outer court this day, if you have got a view of the spiritual glory of the ordinances; for that glory is all but borrowed from Christ. Any glory that is in the temple ordinances is a reflex of the glory of him that is greater than the temple. It is the stamp of divine authority seen on ordinances, the presence of God felt in them, and in the sacrament the sacramental union betwixt the signs and thing signified, perceived by an eye of faith, that makes them glorious in the believer's eye. And they that see and feel none of these things will be in no hazard of missing them sore, come what will; if they can get that which lies nearer their hearts than Christ and ordinances. But those that have met with Christ in the ordinances, and those also that are mourning under a disappointment, as they will be glad there is no temple in the celestial city, so it will be the comfort of their souls that yet there is a temple here, where souls may get a mediate enjoyment, till they come to the immediate one. Good reason have they for this value they set on ordinances, that if they could miss anything in heaven, it would be these.

Yesterday I entered upon a second point of doctrine plainly intimated in the text, viz.

POINT 2. The precious ordinances are not in heaven; there is no temple there, and it is not missed there.

Upon this branch I have showed that there are two ways by which we form our notions of God and heaven, in this our present imperfect state; and these are by the way of similitude and negation, by comparisons drawn from the most excellent things on earth, and denying or abstracting from earthly things whatever argues imperfection or defect.

I then proceeded to show that there are no temple ordinances in heaven, however valued and esteemed by the saints here, because in the celestial state grace is perfected, and the saints are arrived at the very top and summit of

felicity, where Christ is all and in all, the everlasting bond of union between God and the saints for ever and ever.

Then I enumerated several means and ordinances which are not in heaven nor missed there, and illustrated only one of them, viz. That there are no sacraments there. I now proceed to a particular consideration of the other means and ordinances which are precious to the saints here, but are not in heaven, nor missed there.

1. There are no prayers there. Prayer is a temple ordinance, which falls with it honourably, after it has served the saints in the way home to their native country. Then prayer shall be turned into praising, and crying for help into shouting for the victory obtained. Hence, we find the saints represented walking in heaven (Revelation 3:4) and standing before the throne (Revelation 7:9), but never upon their knees or upon their faces, but when praising (Revelation 7:11-12). The cry of the souls under the altar is represented as in the temple; but it is not to be understood properly, seeing there is no temple in heaven. Yet prayers are not missed there. For,

(1.) There are no wants there to be supplied. All the petitions of the saints are granted, which the Spirit of Christ puts into their mouths, and they are not capable of other desires there; though it be not so here, where they have some desires, which the Lord, in kindness to their souls, will not grant. But when they arrive in heaven, what have they more to desire of our Father which is in heaven? Then his name is hallowed, his kingdom is come, and his will is done. They have got their daily bread, and have had their debts forgiven them, as they forgave others; and then they are for ever delivered from temptation. And therefore, there remains nothing for them but to ascribe to their almighty Sovereign the kingdom, and the power, and the glory for ever. Amen.

(2.) As to the eternal continuance of this their happy condition, Christ is there, living ever to make intercession for them (Hebrews 7:25), efficaciously willing, that, upon the infinite value of his sufferings, their happiness be spun out through all the ages of eternity; a sketch of which you have: 'Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me.' And so although they sent up their petitions into his

hand from the temple below, yet being where he is, they will not mix their voice with his.

2. There are no temple praises there. Those here are as like heaven as anything out of heaven can be, though some sit mute like fishes at them. How would these like heaven, where songs of praise never go out of the mouths of those who are there? But no temple praises are there; and they are so far from being missed there, at if the present temple praises were there, they would quite mar the harmony. For,

(1.) The instruments are cracked by the fall, and they are not fit to be used in the praises in heaven. 'Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God' (1 Corinthians 15:50). They would not sound with the air of Immanuel's land, in the best case ever they are in the temple: nay, they would undoubtedly be struck dumb, they would burst, break, and flee all in pieces there. And therefore that they may sound in the temple here, the Lord spreads a cloud between the temple and the throne (Job 26:9). So, then they must be taken down and new made, and this corruptible put on incorruption, before they be fit for the praises there.

(2.) There are always some jarring strings, some mistuned voices in temple praises, that greatly mar the harmony; Look to the church at this day among professors that praise the Lord, and among them that are singers by office (Isaiah 52:8), who are to go before others in the work; how much jarring is there! Look into families, what jarring is there! Look into thine own heart at its best: is there ever wanting something or other to mar the harmony there? For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other (Galatians 5:17). The sense of this makes the saints often ashamed to let their voice be heard, though the Lord can take pleasure in it as it is. 'Let me hear thy voice,' says Christ to the spouse, 'for sweet is thy voice' (Canticles 2:14).

(3.) At best they sound too low. The mistuned tunes of the temple praises are too low for the upper house. And therefore, the saints, when they come there, get a new song to sing (Revelation 5:9). Indeed there is so much of heaven in the temple that the words and matter of the songs of the temple (Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood,' etc.) are the same with the song in glory: but they get a pure new tune to it there, which it enters not into the heart of man to

conceive here; and that makes it a new song. The sweet singer of Israel found himself often out of breath in the temple praises; he could not raise the song to the height he desired; and therefore, he calls to sun, moon, stars, heaven, earth, dragons, deeps, etc., to help up with it (Psalm 148). But now he has no complaint to make of his singing in heaven.

3. There is no temple sabbath in heaven. It is the blessed day here, and the day of blessing, the best day that ever dawned in the world since Adam's fall. Men can make no holy days, because they cannot fix a blessing to a day: but God has made his day, so that it is not to be reckoned among the rest, because he put a particular blessing in it, which the saints often suck the sap of in the temple. But there is no sabbath there, and it is not missed, because they have an everlasting day there. The sun never goes down in Immanuel's land, nay, it is always in its meridian brightness. 'There shall be no night there' (Revelation 21:25). And that day is an everlasting sabbath: 'There remaineth a rest (a sabbatism, or keeping of a sabbath) to the people of God' (Hebrews 4:9). Their labouring days are over then; they rest from their labours, and enjoy an eternal repose. And amongst all the multitude there, there will not be one that will have the least thought running through the heart, saying, 'When will the sabbath be over?'

4. There will be no reading of the Word in a Bible there. Here it often brings down heaven into the soul, so that they can say with David, 'At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee, because of thy righteous judgements' (Psalm 119:62). And I am sure, if they were allowed to carry anything out of earth away to heaven with them, it would be their Bibles. But, ye saints, ye must even drop your Bibles, as Elijah did his mantle, when the fiery chariot appears, to carry you to the land of glory. For no Bibles are there, and ye will not miss them.

(1) Because there is a more clear body of divinity put in the saints hand in heaven, even Christ, in whom the fulness of the Godhead dwelleth bodily. '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' (Revelation 21:3). They will have the perfect light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ there. And though nothing on earth can make up the loss of the Bible, yet the full enjoyment of the personal Word will never let the written Word be missed.

(2.) Because they have the full enjoyment and clear discovery of the thing there that is wrapt up in the Word here. The bride will never miss the Bridegroom's picture drawn in the Word, when she has his immediate embraces; nor yet the looking-glass wherein the glory of the Lord appears, when she sees face to face. The saints will not miss the map of the holy city drawn in the Bible, while they are walking the streets of it. Though there be no Bible there, they will see more into it than ever. The light of glory will be a complete and clear commentary on it, and lose all the hard and knotty questions in divinity; so that the least saint that is there will clearly see what puzzles the greatest heads now.

5. There is no preaching of the Word there. That is a precious temple ordinance. 'It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe' (1 Corinthians 1:21). See the use of it, and the term of its continuance: 'He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ' (Ephesians 4:11-13). It must stand while the temple stands, that is, while the world stands (Matthew 28:20). Many a time saints have been beholden to it for direction, instruction, comfort, upstirring, etc., and ordinarily for their conversion. 'Faith cometh by hearing' (Romans 10:17). But there is no preaching in heaven, and it is not missed there. For,

(1.) There they shall be fed by the immediate hand of the chief Shepherd and Bishop of souls (Revelation 7:17). Moses' wish will be granted the saints in perfection: 'Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them!' (Numbers 11:29) They will need no teachers then, for their knowledge shall be perfect. He that supplies to them the want of the text, the holy Bible, will much more supply the want of sermons upon it.

(2.) There are no sinners to convert in heaven (1 Kings 6:7); no weak saints there' to be strengthened and stirred up, no mourners to be comforted, none fearful to be encouraged and heartened, etc.

6. I mentioned in the preceding discourse, that there are no sacraments in heaven, no communion table there, and that they are not missed there. For,

(1.) The marriage supper of the Lamb is there; and therefore, the feast of espousals, which the saints enjoy here, will never be missed. The former far excels the latter. I observed four things wherein the two differ.

[1.] There are none there wanting the wedding garment, being all clothed with the righteousness of Christ.

[2.] There are none there but get a mess out of the King's hand, even the hidden manna.

[3.] There is never a dead soul there, but they are all quickened by the Spirit of Christ.

[4.] There is never a sleeping soul there, but all their graces lively, and in full exercise.

I go on to add,

[5.] There is no banner in the banqueting house there. Ye have not looked well about you, if ye saw it not in the banqueting house here (Canticles 2:4). Did ye not hear the voice from the temple, saying, 'Eat, for ye must work; eat, for ye have a great journey to go; eat, for ye must rise and fight, your spiritual enemies will be upon you; and ye must not submit to them, nor make league or truce with them; and ye must not flee, but fight them'? But there is no temple in heaven, and therefore that voice is not heard there, but an everlasting sound, 'Victory, victory for evermore;' for there the Captain of the Lord's host lays by the banner, the soldiers put up their swords, and put on their crowns; for the enemies they see today, they will see no more there.

[6.] There is no drawing of the table there. Now, eternity is a necessary ingredient in perfect happiness. Ye see our temple table is drawn already, and, if the projects of enemies miscarry not, there may be sad work ere it be covered again. But there is no temple in heaven, and therefore the table is never drawn there. 'Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God' (Luke 14:15). If their feast could ever have an end, the saints would not be fully happy there; for the fear of the loss of it is inconsistent with perfect bliss. The longest feast we read of on earth lasted but one hundred and eighty days (Esther 1:4). But the marriage supper of the Lamb will last for ever and ever; and after millions of ages are past and gone,

it will be as fresh, sweet, and delicious to the guests as when they first sat down at it.

[7.] There are no disappointments there. When the temple table is covered, disappointments are readily one dish at that feast; and they are sometimes all that falls to the share of some of the children of the family. But if the Lord reach them to you with his right hand, they are not so ill fare as ye imagine. How may we know that? say ye. I answer, If they come that way, they will be appetising, they will sharpen your appetite after a meal to your souls, and cause you resolutely to hang on about the Lord's hand, till ye be filled. And so, you will find the good of them afterwards, so that though they be bitter now, they will be such a sauce to an after enjoyment' as will make it more sweet than otherwise it would have been. 'I will rise now,' says the spouse, 'and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. The watchmen that go about the city, found me: to whom I said, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth? It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me' (Canticles 3:2-5). But left-hand disappointments blunt the appetite after Christ, and make it more keen after the world and lusts; and so the poor creature goes to seek what it misses in Christ, in these sinful gratifications, like those mentioned in Numbers 11:4-6: 'The mixed multitude that was among them, fell a-lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic: but now our soul is dried away; there is nothing at all, besides this manna, before our eyes.' But in heaven there is no temple, and therefore no disappointments are there.

[8.] There is no scanty entertainment there. Here the saints sit down by the streams, and they are fed but with sips and drops. But there is no temple in heaven, and therefore no scanty entertainment there. They shall there be set down by the spring-head (Revelation 7:17) and be filled with all the fulness of God. They will not be stinted to any measure there, but shall have all they can hold. They will be fully satisfied according to their enlarged capacities; as where bottles of different sizes and measures are filled, some have more in them than others, yet all of them have as much as they can contain.

(2.) The feast of espousals, the holy sacrament, will not be missed in heaven, because there are no doubts of the love of God there. The everlasting marriage covenant betwixt Christ and sinners is proposed in the gospel; but so vast is the disproportion betwixt the Bridegroom and the bride, so great is her vileness and sinfulness, that though pressing need makes her put forth her hand to sign the contract, yet she often signs it with a trembling hand, fearing he will loathe her, and not love her. Therefore, he has appointed sacraments as his seal to the covenant, that the believer may see with his eyes how Christ loved him, and that his unbelieving fears and doubts may be looked out of countenance. But all has enough ado to effect it. But there are no doubts in heaven. The saints will be perfectly satisfied in that point, which they are now ready to question on every turn. When the bride is brought home to the Bridegroom's Father's house, she will doubt no more of his love, or that of his Father. The black band of doubts, fears, and jealousies of the Lord's love, whatever reason they now pretend to build their conclusions on, will then, as ashamed, hide their faces, wrapping themselves up in everlasting obscurity, where she shall never see one glance of them more. The saints will not be set to persuade themselves of God's love by marks and signs, but shall have a perfect intuitive knowledge of it. They will see with their own eyes the room which they had from all eternity in the heart of God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

7. The temple government is not in heaven. That is a precious temple ordinance, as necessary to the church as the political government to the state, a helm to the ship, or the walls and gates attended by the porters were to the Jewish temple, to keep it from profanation. So, Jesus Christ has appointed a temple government. 'God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues' (1 Corinthians 12:28). 'Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves' (Hebrews 13:17). And this government he hath lodged in the hands of church-officers acting in parity: 'Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister' (Matthew 20:25-26). This government is a great eye-sore to many; and some are very indifferent about it: but to

many 'Of the saints, especially in this church, it has been dearer than the apple of their eye, and they have wrestled for the maintenance and recovery of it even unto blood; whose example we ought to follow, as we are called.

I know some will be saying with Judas in another case, 'What needs all this waste? what matters it whether this or the other form of government take place in the church?' I hope, sirs, ye will allow us the utmost concern for holiness, the repairing of the lost image of God in us. And if so, ye will allow us the same for the proper means leading us thereto: for in vain will ye grant us to look after the end, if ye will not allow us the means, to wit, temple ordinances, all which have an eye to the place where no temple is. Now, what makes a thing a proper means for holiness, but a word of divine appointment or institution? Your bread would be no more proper means to feed you than a stone, if it wanted the word of divine appointment for that end. And if ye think less may serve to make a thing a proper means of holiness, than of feeding your bodies, I doubt if ye know anything either of God or holiness. Seeing it is so then, let those that would set up another form of government, show us the word of divine appointment for it, or let them annex a blessing to that human ordinance; neither of which they can do for that, more than for their unscriptural ceremonies in the worship of God. Or else let them acknowledge that it is no proper means for the advancing of holiness: and that is a truth. And it is a truth that has been confirmed in Scotland by national experience, where, both in its former and latter reign, the higher it arose, the lower was true godliness sunk in the land. The altar of Damascus may be far more pompous and glorious than the brazen altar which was before the Lord; but being no divine ordinance, it is no proper means to bring us to God. Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, may be broader, and pleasanter to the eye, than Jordan; but Jordan has one thing these rivers want, a word of divine appointment, without which we cannot think they will contribute to the cure of our leprosy of sin. Therefore, wonder no more at our concern for the temple government. But it is not in heaven. I own Christ will be the King of his church for ever, as well as her Prophet and Priest. But temple government is not in heaven, and is not missed there.

(1.) Because the saints will not be capable of disorders there. 'He that sat upon the throne, said, Behold, I make all things new' (Revelation 21:5). What might disorder or profane the place, cannot enter there. 'There shall in no wise enter

into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie' (Revelation 21:27). There can be no outbreakings of corruption there, where it is for ever rooted up; nor no inbreaking of it either, where they are no more in a state of trial, as Adam in paradise was, but in a state of confirmed perfection. No divisions can be there; for then they will all see with that one light of glory: therefore, there will be no difference of judgement, but they will be of one mind perfectly, and then they will have a complete harmony. The children then will all be past their minority, and therefore will never miss their sometime tutors and governors appointed by their Father.

(2.) Because 'God will be all in all' (1 Corinthians 15:28). He will be instead of all persons and all things. They will never miss their leaders, 'for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall lead them' (Revelation 7:17). And they will receive the word of command immediately from himself; and the glorified company shall walk under the immediate and only command of the Captain of the Lord's hosts, without in the least breaking of their ranks.

I shall shut up this subject with a short practical improvement, and that by way of information. This doctrine shows us,

1. That there will be a temple here while the world stands: for that there is no temple in heaven, is one of the great differences betwixt the earthly and the heavenly Jerusalem. 'Lo, I am with you alway,' says Christ, 'even unto the end of the world' (Matthew 28:20 and Ephesians 4:11-13, forecited). The adversaries of God and his work would fain have no temple here, not out of love to heaven, but out of their hatred against heaven. But they shall as soon pull the shining sun out or the firmament, as they shall root out the gospel, and overturn the foundations of the temple of gospel ordinances. Perhaps enemies may be permitted to tread down and make the outer court a den of thieves, and to lay waste the open courts of the Lord's house, so that for a time ye may have no sermons and no communions, yea, not get leave to keep your family worship. So, they have done ere now. But blessed be our God, there are rooms in the temple into which their ungracious feet can never carry them. They cannot block up your communion with God by his written Word, though they should rob you of your Bibles again, seeing ye have a copy of it where they cannot reach. And where is that? Even where they have it not, in the heart: 'I will put my laws into their mind, and write

them in their hearts' (Hebrews 8:10). Again, they cannot block up your communion with God by prayer, as long as ye live; for ye can be at that work when they cannot hear you, though hard by you. Let them carry you where they will, there is a little sanctuary which they cannot hinder you to carry about with you (Ezekiel 11:16).

2. Holiness is the great end of all temple ordinances. For why is there no temple in heaven, but that the means are laid aside, the end being in perfection obtained? So that when it is said there is no temple there, it is saying in effect they are perfectly holy there. Would ye know if ye have got any good by this ordinance, if it has had a blessed efficacy upon you? Look and see if it has a sanctifying influence upon you. Though ye could say, ye have been filled with joy at this ordinance, ravished with delight formerly unknown to you, so that your souls have been made to leap within you, I would not give one of those groans mentioned (Romans 8:26) for it all, unless it have a sanctifying influence on you: unless it tend to make you more holy towards God, and more just, righteous, merciful, and charitable towards your neighbour; unless it incline you to the obedience of the commands of the first and second tables of the law too. Nay, unless this be the effect, it is worth nothing; nay, it is worse than nothing, because it is but delusion. And delusion it is, if it tend not to sanctification, the great end of all temple ordinances, and of the enjoyment of God in his temple. And if ye be never so much dejected, thinking yourselves disappointed, if this ordinance has had a sanctifying influence on you, bless God and be thankful; ye have got the greatest and most valuable good of it, that is better than the most elevated comforts.