

THE TEMPLE BUILT BY ZERUBBABEL, AND ITS SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICATION

Preached on Lord's Day Morning, March 19th, 1854, at Oakham

"The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto you." Zech. 4:9

The history of the Old Testament is little else but a record of the perverseness of man, and of the goodness and mercy of God. From the day that the Lord brought the children of Israel out of Egypt to the close of the canon of the Old Testament, their history is but one unmingled series of perverseness and rebellion. And all God's dealings with them from first to last were but repeated instances of His unparalleled long-suffering, rich forbearance, and unspeakable goodness towards them.

But though the Lord thus displayed His goodness and mercy towards them, we must ever bear in mind that He hated their sins, and was justly provoked by their iniquities. He, therefore, from time to time, raised up prophets to testify against their sins, and to denounce His displeasure against them. And not only so, but He sent chastisement after chastisement, and sold them again and again into captivity, in order to bring them to repentance for their disobedience. The most remarkable instance of this is what is generally called the Babylonish captivity, when they were sent captive to Babylon, and there continued in durance vile for seventy years. But at the end of seventy years, when the time fixed by God's purposes was completed, He stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, the king of Persia, to permit them to return to their own land.

"Now in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus, king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth: and He hath charged me to build Him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all His people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel (He is the God), which is in Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:1, 2, 3). This permission being granted, a remnant of the captivity returned to Jerusalem. Their first object on their return was to rebuild the temple, which lay in ruins, having been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. By so doing, they showed a zeal for God's honour, and clearly manifested where their heart and affections lay. The leaders of the remnant which returned were two, Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, their temporal head, being a lineal descendant of the last king of Judah; and Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, their spiritual head, the lineal descendant of the last high priest. Thus, under the rule and guidance of these two heads, their spiritual head in the person of Jeshua, and their civil head in the person of Zerubbabel, they returned to their own land. As it would take a considerable time to re-build the temple, the first thing they did was to build an altar on which they might offer sacrifices morning and evening, according to the Levitical law. The next thing was to lay the foundation of the temple, and this was done by the hand of Zerubbabel, in the presence of Jeshua, the high priest, and the assembled people, with great ceremony, of which an account is given in the third chapter of the book of Ezra. But this good work was scarcely begun before it was interrupted. To see the temple of God commenced stirred up the enmity of adversaries, and these adversaries had such power and access to the

successive kings of Persia, that the completion of it was hindered for nearly twenty years. At length, by God's good hand turning the heart of Darius, king of Persia, in favour of the undertaking, the top stone was put on, the temple completed, and the house of God shone forth in its beauty and glory, inferior indeed in every respect to the temple of Solomon, but honoured above that, according to Haggai's prophecy, by the personal entrance into it of the promised Messiah. "And I will shake all nations, and the Desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. The silver is Mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts" (Haggai 2:7, 8, 9).

Now all this was not merely a literal, historical transaction, but there was also something typical and figurative intended thereby. Thus the words of the text contain not only a literal promise for the comfort of the desponding Jews, who saw their temple so many years unfinished, but a promise for the Church of God to the end of time.

In considering, therefore, the text this morning, I shall endeavour to explain it, if the Lord enable, in a spiritual and experimental sense. "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house, his hands shall also finish it, and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto you."

I. The first point which, with God's blessing, I shall lay down and enforce is, the spiritual and typical meaning of the temple.

II. Secondly, whom Zerubbabel typically represented in

laying its foundation. *"The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundations of this house."*

III. Thirdly, the completion of the work which he had with God's good pleasure begun. *"His hands shall also finish it."*

IV. And fourthly, how in the beginning, carrying on, and finishing of this temple the authority of God in sending His servants to prophesy good of it is made manifest. *"And thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto you."*

I. The temple was a type and figure of two things; chiefly and primarily of the human nature of the Lord Jesus Christ. As He Himself said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Holy Ghost expressly tells us this, "But He spake of the temple of His body" (John 2:21). The second typical meaning of the temple I shall presently explain. But as a figure of the human nature of the Lord Jesus the temple was very significant. Let us devote a few moments to the consideration of this figure.

1. First, in this temple God specially dwelt. He is said therefore in Scripture "to dwell between the cherubims," which He did in the manifestation of His glory in the divine Shechinah, the holy light which rested on the top of the ark. In this sense the temple was a representation of the human nature of Christ, for as God visibly and manifestly dwelt in the temple, so the fulness of the Godhead dwells in Jesus bodily. 2. Again, it was in the temple, and in the temple only, that sacrifices were offered. Sacrifice was not allowed to be offered anywhere else. "Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt-offerings in every place that thou seest. But in the place which the Lord shall choose in one of thy tribes, there thou shalt offer thy burnt-offerings, and there thou shalt do all that I command thee" (Deut. 12:13, 14). Now

this prohibition plainly signified that the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross is the only propitiation for sin, the only sacrifice which God has accepted, and with which He is ever well pleased. 3. Thirdly, in the temple was all spiritual worship offered up. In the dedication prayer of Solomon, as recorded in 2 Chron. 6, there were special petitions put up that the Lord would hear the prayer of those who prayed toward that place. Therefore we find that the publican went up to the temple to pray. And so we read in the Acts of the Apostles of the disciples, Peter and John, going up together into the temple at the hour of prayer (Acts 3:1). Yea, we find their divine Master Himself continually resorting to the temple, especially in the last week before His crucifixion. Thus all spiritual worship is only acceptable to God as it is offered in and through Christ, the temple in which the fulness of the Godhead dwells. No prayer, petition, supplication, or desire is ever acceptable to God except as passing through the mediation of the Lord Jesus, for He is the only Mediator between God and man. Viewed in this light, the temple stood forth as a beautiful and blessed figure of the Lord Jesus, and especially of His human nature as God-man Mediator.

2. But the temple has a further signification. It signifies also believers in the Lord Jesus. The Apostle therefore says, "Know ye not that your bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost?" intimating thereby that every believer is the temple of God, because in him God dwells; according to those words, "I will dwell in them and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (2 Cor. 6:16). The believer is also the temple of God, because God has set up in his heart His spiritual worship, and given him an altar on which is laid the sacrifice of a broken heart and a contrite spirit. Thus the temple of old had a double signification, but in both represented the temple of mercy; first, in the human nature of the Lord Jesus, and secondly, in the person of a

child of God.

II. But I pass on to consider the laying of the foundation of this temple, which was by the hands of Zerubbabel. Now as the temple was a typical thing, so was Zerubbabel a typical person. He was, as I before pointed out, the son of Shealtiel, sometimes called Salathiel (1 Chron. 3:17); and also in the New Testament (Matt. 1:12). This Shealtiel, or Salathiel, was the son of Jeconiah, or Jehoiachim, king of Judah, and died in Babylon. Zerubbabel was now, as his heir, the lawful king of Judah, and therefore, though not actual king, the right of the crown belonged to him. In this sense, he was a lively type of Jesus, representing Him as king, but not as priest. Here is the inferiority of all human type and figure. It could not be said of him, "He shall be a priest upon his throne," as was said to Joshua, the son of Josedech (Zech. 6:13), for he did not unite in himself, as the Lord Jesus does, the distinct offices of priest and king, being merely a temporal prince. But as civil ruler, temporal head, and royal prince, Zerubbabel was a type and figure of the Lord Jesus Christ, King in Zion. It is worthy of note that both Zerubbabel and the Lord Jesus were of the stock and lineage of David, so that each might be called the son of David. Zerubbabel, then, as king of Zion, laid the foundation of the temple at Jerusalem. Here he was the representative of the Lord Jesus.

Now in order to see how the foundation of the temple of Christ's human nature was laid, we must look back into the ancient settlements before the world had a being, because it was in the mind of the Three-One God that the foundation of this temple was originally laid. It was the eternal purpose of God to make manifest His glory. It was for this purpose the world was formed. It was for this purpose Adam fell. It was for this purpose the Mediator came. For God can have no higher, no dearer object than His own glory. We may even

say, though we approach the subject with solemn awe, that hell itself was made for the glory of God, and that all things in heaven, earth, and hell, were made that this glory might be made known.

But chiefly in the work of sovereign grace and distinguishing mercy does the glory of God shine forth; and therefore the foundation of the temple of mercy, which was to be built upon the Person of the God-Man Mediator, was laid in the mind of God from all eternity. That this foundation might be fixed and firm, the whole was settled by divine decree, so that it never should be moved. The waves of time were to beat against it; Satan was to assault it with all his force; the Fall of man, the ruin of the creature with all the sins and evils of the human heart, were all to conspire to overthrow this temple of mercy. It was necessary, therefore, that the foundation should be laid broad and deep. Therefore we read of the Lord swearing thus, "My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of My lips. Once have I sworn by My holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure for ever, and His throne as the sun before Me" (Psa. 89:34, 35, 36). And again in the same Psalm (verses 19, 28, 29), "Then thou spakest in vision to Thy Holy One, and saidst, I have laid help upon that One that is mighty; I have exalted One chosen out of the people." "My mercy will I keep for Him for evermore, and My covenant shall stand fast with Him. His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and His throne as the days of heaven."

But we must draw a distinction between the foundation as laid in the mind of God, and the actual laying of this foundation stone. The foundation stone was first actually laid when He became incarnate in the womb of the Virgin Mary. The moment when the Son of God took the flesh and blood of the children, as conceived by the Virgin Mary, under the

overshadowing of the Holy Ghost, He laid the first foundation stone. The foundation being thus laid on earth, the next step was to rear up the walls. These walls are the work of salvation, as the Lord speaks, "Salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks." Thus His holy life from the moment of His birth to His death on the cross; all His words, actions, miracles, with every thought which passed through His holy bosom as working out salvation, were rearing the walls and bulwarks of the temple, piling up, as it were, stone upon stone. When He came to the cross, and said with expiring lips, "It is finished," this reared up the last stone of the dome. And when, on the resurrection morn, He left the sepulchre, and rose triumphant from the dead, then He put on the last and topstone of the temple, and the building, not made with hands, shone forth in all its glory and beauty. Thus the hands of Zerubbabel laid the foundation, and the hands of Zerubbabel brought forth the topstone of the spiritual temple with shoutings of Grace, grace unto it.

This divine Mediator is now in heaven, sitting at God's right hand to lay the foundation, and rear up the walls, and put on the topstone of every temple of mercy here below. And this brings us to the work of grace on the soul, to the experimental teaching of the blessed Spirit in the heart, whereby the temples of the Holy Ghost have their foundation laid, their walls reared, and their topstone put on. To help us in our meditations upon this sacred subject, we will give a glance at the condition of the first temple when their captivity was turned, and the forlorn exiles returned to Jerusalem. In what condition would they find the temple? In ruins. What desolation must have been made in the space of seventy years, especially in that hot climate, when buildings soon fall into ruin. What rank vegetation in the space of seventy years would be spread over those ruined heaps on which fire had previously done its work. What then would

they find where the beautiful temple of Solomon formerly stood? On that noble site they would now find little else but a mass of heaps of burnt fragments covered over with thorns and briars, where serpents and vipers were creeping in and out at every hole, and where the owls of the night and jackals of the desert found shelter.

It is in this point that the temple, as typical of a believer, differs from the temple as typical of the human nature of the Lord Jesus. There was, there could be, no heap of ruins in the latter; there is little else in the former. Now, is not this state of ruin in which the returning exiles found the temple, a lively type of the state of the soul of man when the hand of the spiritual Zerubbabel comes to lay the foundation? Is not the site overgrown with weeds, thorns, and briars—a desolate ruin, a heap of rubbish? The fall of Solomon's temple is a lively figure of the fall of man, the building of God hurled down into a mass of ruins. What, then, would be the first thing which the returning exiles would do before they could take the first step in erecting the building? They could not lay the foundation without removing these heaps, cutting down the briars and thorns, driving away the wild beasts, and burning the serpents out of their holes. Heaps upon heaps of rubbish were to be wheeled away before Zerubbabel could come and lay the foundation of the temple. So in grace. The soul, being through the fall a heap of ruins, needs much preparatory work before the foundation stone can be laid. And this is of God, according to the blessed Spirit's testimony: "The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the Lord" (Prov. 16:1). We must neither despise nor set aside preparation work, for it is of God; and in most cases there is much preparation work before the foundation stone is laid. Heaps of rubbish are to be removed; in some, of open profanity, in others, of graceless profession, worldly besetments and connections in

which we are entangled, family ties and ensnaring acquaintances, hard to be thrown aside; the hypocrisy, self-righteousness, and delusive religion in which we have been cradled and brought up, have all to be wheeled away.

The mattock and spade of the law must be used to remove these heaps of rubbish. And till this is done there is no possibility of laying aright the foundation. But do you not see that there is a wide distinction between the foundation and the foundation stone? Let me illustrate this. Here is a site for a noble building, but it will not do to take a huge stone, and lay that as a foundation stone upon the top of the ground on the loose sand and hollow soil. If there be rubbish, it must be removed; if loose soil, the soil must be taken away. Before the dimensions of the building can be traced out the spade and mattock must be set to work, not only to remove the rubbish, but also to dig down deep, so as to make a firm and solid place for the foundation stone to be laid. So in grace. The work of the law in the conviction of sin, the manifestation of God's holiness and justice to the soul, is not only to clear away heaps of self-righteousness, but also to dig deep into the human heart to make a suitable place for the reception of the foundation stone.

But what is the foundation stone? In the temple rebuilt by the returning remnant the foundation stone was laid by Zerubbabel. This points out that it must be the hands of Christ which lay the foundation stone in the heart. This foundation stone is, then, the first manifestation of mercy to the soul, the first application of the gospel to the heart, for as the law came by Moses, so grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. Thus the first promise that comes home to the heart, the first testimony of interest in His precious blood and righteousness, the first smile from His heavenly countenance that raises up a good hope through grace, we may believe,

agreeably to Scripture and experience, to be the foundation stone laid in the heart by the hands of the spiritual Zerubbabel.

But what took place almost immediately upon the foundation stone being laid? It appears that the adversaries of Jerusalem employed all their influence to defeat the project and prevent its being executed. If you read the first six chapters of the book of Ezra, you will find a detail of the difficulties and impediments thrown in the way of the completion of the temple. And so successful were the enemies of Zion in their machinations that for nineteen or twenty years the building was suspended. Is not this an emblem of the opposition made by sin and Satan to the building of the spiritual temple? What opposition do most of the children of God find from without and from within to the work of grace! What with their own carnal mind, and the workings and risings of sin within them, what with their own desponding feelings, and the doubts and fears by which they are often beset after some manifestation of mercy, the work seems at a standstill, and as if it never would be completed. When the Lord has given the soul some testimony of interest in Christ, this is laying the foundation stone, and it seems to believe that the work must and will go successfully and happily on. But this very testimony raises up the malice of the enemy; sin, Satan, unbelief, and all the associate evils of the wicked heart, combine to hinder the carrying on of the good work. But, doubtless, this foundation stone, being very small compared with the whole building, lay much concealed from observation. During also these twenty years, briars and thorns must have grown over it, the dust of the wilderness must have swept over and overwhelmed it, so as well nigh to bury it utterly out of sight. Thus there would be seen, after the lapse of twenty years, but few traces of the foundation stone which the hand of Zerubbabel had laid. Many gloomy

doubts and much fearful despondency would therefore take possession of the breast of those that feared God, seeing so little yet done, and so much remaining to be accomplished. Well might they fear whether the whole was not an act of presumption in them which God would not sanction; and therefore suffer their enemies to prevail against them.

Now what did the Lord do under those circumstances? He raised up two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, and sent them with a message in their mouth to stir up as well as encourage the hearts of the desponding people. The message of Haggai was a mingled one. Sometimes he rebukes them for saying the time was not come to build the temple of the Lord, and for dwelling in their cieled houses whilst the house of God lay waste, and sometimes he encourages by promises, such, for instance, as that the glory of the latter house should exceed the glory of the former. But Zechariah came chiefly with words of promise, especially in the chapter from which the text is taken. How encouraging to them must have been the words of the text, declaring that as "The hands of Zerubbabel had laid the house, his hands should also finish it;" and assuring them thereby that when this was accomplished, it should be known that the Lord of hosts had sent His prophet unto them to testify of this.

IV. And this brings us to our fourth and last point, how the truth and authority of God in sending His servants is made known by the carrying on and finishing of the temple of mercy. It is here we see the peculiar work as well as the benefit of the ministry of the gospel. Haggai and Zechariah urged the people on, sometimes by promises and sometimes by sharp rebukes, and thus instrumentally helped on the building of the temple of the Lord. So the ministry of the gospel is specially designed to carry forward the building of the temple of mercy. The ministry of Zechariah was evidently

intended to inspire in the hearts of the people a confidence that, as Zerubbabel had before their eyes laid the foundation stone of the temple, these same hands would, by the special appointment of God, surely finish it. Before this, all imaginary difficulties would disappear. "Who art thou," the prophet says, "O great mountain?" However lofty thou mayest be, art thou too great to be removed? "Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain." How many great mountains stand in the way, especially after the foundation stone is laid. Doubt and fears whether the work be genuine, an evil conscience loaded with guilt and fear, deadness of soul in the things of God, coldness of affection toward the Lord Jesus Christ, hardness of heart, and darkness of mind—how all these things apparently hinder, though they cannot frustrate, the completion of the spiritual temple. But the Lord still says, "Who art thou, O great mountain?" be as great as thou may, let thy height rise up to the skies, let thy roots sink down into the deep, let thy dimensions be ever so broad or long, let thy materials be ever so hard and compact, still the same question comes from the Lord's mouth, "Who art thou? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain." It shall be as though thou wert not. Thou shalt disappear into the valley, and My people shall pass over thee as over a perfectly level spot. Now who has not, more or less, this great mountain to encounter? Some trial, some temptation, some besetment, some cause of daily anxiety. The mountain may not be great in itself, but it may appear so to us, for as faith makes mountains into mole-hills, so unbelief makes mole-hills into mountains. But the Lord still says, "Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain." In spite of earth and hell, in spite of every difficulty or obstacle, He will, in His own time and way, "bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it." Thousands have proved this, and thousands will prove it again. Many a dear child of God, who all his lifetime, through

fear of death, has been subject to bondage, when he has come to a dying bed, has had such a blessed manifestation of the love of God to his soul, such a clear testimony of his interest in the precious Redeemer, and such a firm persuasion of an eternal inheritance in the realms of bliss, as to make his bed of bodily pain a bed of roses. Death, which previously had been such a subject of dread and horror, loses its sting, and is welcomed as a release from sin and sorrow, and a gate of entrance into an eternal weight of glory. As this is realised, there often comes with it the remembrance of days gone by, and a sweet persuasion of the mercy and love of God in sending His servants in days past to promise to them in their low estate that this deliverance would surely one day come. Now then that they are in the enjoyment of the promised blessing, they have in their own consciences a firm and clear evidence that it was the Lord who sent His servants unto them in their days of darkness and trouble to prophesy unto them blessings to come. When the returning exiles witnessed with their own eyes the topstone put on, in spite of all their former fears to the contrary, what an evidence would they have that the Lord spake in and by His prophets. Now you may have sat under the ministry of the gospel for years, and not yet have had that clear testimony and blessed revelation of the love and blood of Christ to your soul which you have been long desiring and seeking after. But if the hands of the spiritual Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of the temple of mercy in your heart, His hands will surely finish it. But do not think that you have derived no benefit from the gospel because it has not yet come in demonstration of the Spirit and of power so as to set you free from all your fears, and bless you with an overwhelming manifestation of God's love. It is a great and blessed thing to have received any token for good, any mark of God's favour. Has it not from time to time, in the midst of your doubts and fears, raised up a blessed persuasion that the Lord has done

something in your heart which you hope will one day prove to have been the earnest of good things to come, yea, of every blessing that God can give? Thus it is good to be found waiting upon the Lord in hearing the preached gospel, for every blessed persuasion raised up in your soul that you are a child of God will strengthen your faith and hope in the Lord. Nay, have you not found sometimes that in comparing your experience with the experience brought forward, you have derived great comfort and encouragement? "Well," you answer, "I must say I have an evidence that I have gone through the things that I hear traced out as marks and evidences of grace, and I feel thus far a sweet persuasion that the Lord will perfect that which concerneth me; that He will show me those things which at present I do not know, and will never leave me until He has done all that good which He has spoken to me of." Now this is not to be thought little of, or rejected, nay rather, it should be highly prized and closely cleaved to. So should any mark communicated to your soul whereby you are encouraged still to hope in the Lord, to wait on Him in faith and prayer, and reject all hope of salvation in any other way than by grace, or through any other channel but the Saviour's blood and righteousness. The Lord in His own time and way will do you more good than He has yet done; will bring forth the headstone in your soul with shoutings of Grace, grace unto it; and when this shall come you will have in your conscience a clear testimony that the Lord of hosts sent His servants unto you to strengthen the work of grace in your soul, to point out Christ as the way, the truth, and the life, and to preach the gospel with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. Many of the dear children of God have said on their deathbeds, if not before, "O I have now a firm conviction that what I experienced in days of old under such and such a minister was the real teaching of God, and though I could not see it then, I feel it was His blessed work upon my soul. I have a testimony in my own conscience

that the Holy Ghost spoke in and by His servant, for I have the substance of the gospel he preached now in my heart." Such a one can now bless the Lord for bringing him in the leadings of His kind providence under the sound of the gospel, for convincing him of sin, for beginning the work of grace in his heart, and leading him to Jesus as the Rock of ages under the preached word. He can now bless the Lord a thousand times for His wondrous superabounding grace, feeling how it has superabounded over all his sins and backslidings, guilty doubts, and enslaving fears.

The whole work of salvation is of God's good pleasure from first to last. Here is no admixture of human will and worth. Merit and power are excluded here. The hands of Zerubbabel lay the foundation, the hands of Zerubbabel build the walls, and the hands of Zerubbabel bring forth the topstone, and it is all of grace from first to last. Can you subscribe to this with heart and soul? Is there no secret if or but? Can you receive this as the truth of God, agreeable to all true Christian experience, and especially to your own? Have you love or enmity towards this precious gospel? Does this joyful sound raise up hope or rebellion in your heart? What is the effect of the gospel upon you? To soften and encourage hope, or to stir up opposition and dislike? Now if the gospel is to you a sweet message, does it not seem to bring a measure of peace with it, and encourage you to hope in the Lord? The gospel is a savour of life unto life, as well as a savour of death unto death, and if to you it be a savour of life, it will bring sweetness with it. Bless God then for what you have attained unto; enjoy it to the utmost of your power, for the Lord will perform all His promises, and will not let one word fall to the ground. For it will be as surely with the spiritual temple as it was with the literal temple, that as the hands of Zerubbabel laid the foundation, his hands will also finish it.