

CHAPTER 9

TABERNACLES - THE FEAST OF JOY

“And thou shalt rejoice in thy feast, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite, and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are within thy gates” (Deut. 16:14).

Israel continued to live in peace and prosperity as long as they obeyed God and walked in His ways. But with disobedience came drought and famine and depression — and the Feast of Tabernacles ceased to have any real meaning to them. It is just as true with the Church of Christ. And though the Church as a Body has never really observed this Feast, there were nevertheless periods in her early history when she had a foretaste and an earnest of its glory. Our testimony is therefore that of Joel:

“The field is wasted, the land mourneth; for the corn is wasted; the new wine is dried up, the oil languisheth. Be ye ashamed, O ye husbandmen; howl, O ye vinedressers, for the wheat and for the barley; because the harvest of the field is perished. The vine is dried up, the fig tree languisheth; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree, even all the trees of the field, are withered: because joy is withered away from the sons of men” (Joel 1:10-12).

The new wine, the corn, the oil, the wheat, the barley, the palm, the apple: all these speak of the abundance of spiritual blessings and the joy which they impart to the saints. And because of the spiritual drought in the Church: “Joy is withered away...”

THE BLIGHT OF BABYLON

This hilarity of our modern churches is not the joy of the Holy Ghost. In most cases it is the song of Babylon. In other words, it is an attempt of the enemy to lull the saints to sleep and to cause them to forget their heritage in the Spirit. By Babylon we mean what it meant to Israel; bondage in a strange land. When Israel walked in disobedience they lost their glory, their beautiful temple, their place of worship, their prominence as a nation and kingdom. And when the Church of Christ walked in disobedience, she too lost her glory, her beautiful temple was destroyed, and from her lofty position as a “holy nation” and a “royal priesthood” she degenerated into a nation of slaves and bondservants. Her people were taken captive at the hands of the world, the flesh, and the Devil - and her joy departed.

And so the Babylonians came to the children of Israel in their captivity, and said unto them, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion.”

Perhaps many of them consented. The Church, likewise, has been too willing to accommodate the world in this manner, and to partake of her false joy. But the godly remnant in Israel refused to do so, because they knew they had nothing to sing about. “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down. yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion...” How could they rejoice as they contemplated the desolation of their beautiful temple and city? “How shall we sing the LORD’s song in a strange land?” was their reply. (See Ps. 137).

We ought to have been mourning and howling for the desolations wrought in the Church, instead of trying to generate a false joy in our midst. And yet this continues unto this very hour: the world is invited to come and hear “one of the songs of Zion.” You may read in the advertisements in the “church” section of the newspapers about good orchestras...lively singing...so-and-so will play the sleighbells, or anything else that might produce a tune. Why not? they would argue. Get the sinners out to “church” and then preach the Gospel to them. But “How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?” Far better that the Church should mourn and howl before God, and her priests be clothed in sackcloth and sit in ashes.

Israel did not have one percent of the glory that the Church had in the beginning, and yet her people expressed far more sorrow and repentance in their desolation than we have in ours. “The elders of the daughter of Zion sit upon the ground, and keep silence: they have cast up dust upon their heads; they have girded themselves with sackcloth: the virgins of Jerusalem hang down their heads to the ground. Mine eyes do fail with tears, my bowels are troubled, my liver is poured upon the earth, for the destruction of the daughter of my people; because the children and the sucklings swoon in the streets of the city. They say to their mothers, Where is corn and wine?” (Lam. 2:10-12).

Where is corn and wine? Where is purity of thought and conduct? Where is holiness of life, and separation from the world and its charms? Where is victory over sinful habits, freedom from covetousness, from lying and falsehood, from malice and bitterness? Where is the desire to pray and seek God? To intercede on behalf of others? To deliver those who are held captive by Satan, and set the oppressed free? Where is the mind of Christ, the life that is hid with Christ in God? Where is corn and wine?

But Babylon has been good to us; so good, in fact, that we are one with them, participating in her pleasures, her politics, her wars, her earthly programs, her strife, and her religious systems. Consequently, as it was with Israel, so it is with the Church; as the cry goes forth in this hour for separation from the world and its

systems, there is dismay. God says, “Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues” (Rev. 18:4). Babylon means “Confusion.” It speaks of this whole world-system, political as well as religious. But we have been utterly deceived by her veneer and her charm, not realizing that “her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities” (Rev. 18:5). In her there is no good thing. Satan is “prince of the power of the air,” and “god of this world,” - and the whole world-system is anti-God and anti-Christ. Her doom is sealed. “Babylon the Great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit ...” (Rev. 18:2). “The abundance of her delicacies” have deceived all nations, including the majority of God’s people. “She hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously,” and all nations of the earth have “committed fornication and lived deliciously with her” (Rev. 18:9). Has the Church of Jesus Christ not followed hand in hand with the course of this world for centuries, befriended her in all her devilish programs, and lived as her captive slaves? “Ye adulterers and adulteresses,” says the apostle James, “Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?” (Jas. 4:4).

But what else could we do? We were captives in a strange land, with no power to deliver ourselves. However, the cry goes forth, “Escape from Babylon ...” Let the Church arise from the dust and shake herself, and return unto her land and Temple, even Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.” And God will abundantly pardon, and give grace to re-establish the praise, the worship, in the Temple of the once-glorious Church.

THE LORD TURNETH OUR CAPTIVITY

With the turning of the captivity of the Church, joy is once again being restored, even the joy of the Holy Ghost. Songs of Zion can be heard once again in the congregation of the saints, and the Choir of Praise has been restored to the Church. Singing in the Spirit is one sure evidence that Zion’s captivity is coming to an end. Says Paul, “Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Col. 3:16). Surely it is significant that Psalm 126 has now been restored by the Spirit, music included:

“When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion,
We were like them that dream.
Then was our mouth filled with laughter,
And our tongue with singing:
Then said they among the heathen,
The LORD hath done great things for them.
The LORD hath done great things for us;
Whereof we are glad.

Turn again our captivity, O LORD,
As the streams in the south.
They that SOW in tears shall reap in joy.
He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed,
Shall doubtless come again,
Shall doubtless come again,
Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing,
Bringing his sheaves with him.”

This, then, is a time for rejoicing. “Be ye glad and rejoice forever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying” (Isa. 65:18,19). A faithful remnant is returning from the captivity to raise again the walls of Jerusalem and restore the gates of Zion. And God is in the midst of her to bless and to impart the joy of the Holy Ghost.