

THE CHRISTIAN & THE CHURCH (19)

August 17, 2008.

Review.

“The Lord has chosen Zion.” (*Psa.132:13*). “The Lord loves the gates of Zion.” (*Psa.87:2*). Zion is Jerusalem. Zion is the alter ego for the temple, the place of God’s special presence in Israel. For godly Israelites the Lord’s house was more than brick and mortar. The Lord’s house symbolized His presence in the midst of His people and His love for His people. The Lord’s house could not be separated from the Lord or from His people.

In our last study we looked at the attitude of godly Israelites towards the temple, and by implication, towards the Lord and His people. We noted that godly Israelites did not speak disparagingly of Zion or of one another. They had no contempt for Zion or for one another. Zion was beautiful, glorious and the joy of the whole earth. The people were the majestic ones, the glorious ones in whom they took great delight. It was the great joy of godly Israelites to go up to

Jerusalem to worship the Lord. And they rejoiced when others exhorted them and encouraged them to go up to Jerusalem to worship the Lord. Godly Israelites loved Jerusalem, the habitation of the Lord. They prayed for the peace, security and prosperity of Jerusalem. And the pronounced blessing was, "May they prosper who love you." (*Psa.122:6b*).

One day the Israelites were conquered and taken into exile in Babylon. Jerusalem and the temple were totally destroyed. In Babylon the godly Israelites wept when they remembered Zion. They longed and thirsted for God like a deer dying of thirst. In their longing for God they were plunged into despair. But in the midst of weeping and despair they prayed for the restoration of Zion and the temple. The Lord would answer their prayers under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Loving The Church (continued).

Today we come to examine what the N.T. has to say about our attitude towards the church. And I want to begin by showing you the continuity that exists between

Zion in the O.T. and the church today. Please turn to **Heb.12:18-29**. (read).

This passage says quite a lot to us and we can spend all our time here. But that is not my purpose today. The author has set before us a contrast between two mountains : Mt. Sinai and Mt. Zion. The Old covenant was given to Israel at Mt. Sinai. The atmosphere at Mt. Sinai when the old covenant was established was very scary. It was scary to the point that even Moses said, "I am terrified and trembling."

But when we come to Mt. Zion and the establishing of the new covenant, what do we find? The atmosphere at Mt. Zion is festive. The impression of the unapproachability of God is eclipsed in our Lord Jesus, our great high priest. In **Heb.4:16** the writer exhorted the believers, "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

In **vss.22-23** the new covenant Mt. Zion is given various descriptions. Let us take note of a few of them. **Firstly**, the new covenant Mt. Zion is called "the city

of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.” In other words, the new covenant Mt. Zion is the dwelling place of God. *Secondly*, the new covenant Mt. Zion is “the general assembly”. The description, “the general assembly” is better translated “**the festal gathering**” or “*the joyful assembly*”. The word pictures celebration and excitement.

Thirdly, the new covenant Mt. Zion is the “church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven.” There are two points to be noted here : church and firstborn. The word “**firstborn**” is plural and is better translated as “firstborn ones”. Mt. Zion is the “church of the firstborn ones who are enrolled in heaven.” In *Heb.1:6* the writer described Jesus as “the firstborn”. In *Rom.8:29* Paul wrote, “For those whom He (**God**) foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He (**the Son**) would be the firstborn among many brethren.” We who are in Christ are the “many brethren”. We are the church of the firstborn ones. This “**firstborn**” description is rooted in *Exod.4:22* where the Lord said to Pharaoh, “Israel is My son, My firstborn.”

This brings us to the word “**church**”. In the O.T. the Israelites were described by the Hebrew word **qahal** which means “*assembly or congregation*”. In the Septuagint (**LXX**) the Greek word **ekklesia** was used to translated the Hebrew word **qahal**. The word **ekklesia** also means “*assembly or congregation.*”

The word **ekklesia** is commonly translated “**church**” in the N.T. Mt. Zion in the Old Testament was the **qahal** or **ekklesia** or the called out assembly or the church. Mt. Zion in the N.T. is the **ekklesia** or the called our assembly or the church. The “church of the firstborn ones” is a reference to all new covenant believers in our Lord Jesus Christ. The important point that must not be missed is this : Mt. Zion which was used to describe the godly Israelites in the O.T. is now used to describe the church in the N.T.

I want you to note now that the comparisons between Mt. Zion in the O.T. and Mt. Zion in the N.T. go much deeper. *Firstly*, in **Psa.132:13** we are told “the Lord has chosen Zion.” **Psa.87:2** says “The Lord loves the gates of Zion.” In **Deut.7:7-8** Moses said to the Israelites, “The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the

peoples, ... but because the Lord loved you....” In *Jer.31:3* the Lord said to the godly exiles who were mourning over the destruction of Zion, “I have loved you with an everlasting love.” The Lord promised that He would restore and rebuild them. He promised to turn their weeping into celebrations. He promised, “there will be a day when watchmen on the hills of Ephraim call out, “Arise, and let us go up to Zion, to the Lord our God”.” (*Jer.31:6*).

Turn to *Eph.1:3-8a*. (**read**). Before we look at some of the details in the passage before us let us note that God’s actions are rooted in the sovereignty of His will. *Vs.5* says God acted “according to the kind intention of His will.” (cf. *vs.11*). The question is : How did God work out His sovereign purpose? The answer is : He chose us in Christ; He predestined us through Christ. And the basis of His sovereign actions was His love. In love He chose us in Christ. In love He predestined us through Christ.

Vs.4 says, “He (**God**) chose us in Him (**Christ**) before the foundation of the world.” The expression “before the foundation of the world” points to

eternity. In eternity God did something. He chose us in Christ. The verb “**chose**” points to a definite choice. God’s choice of you in Christ for salvation was not a haphazard choice. God’s choice of you in Christ for salvation was not the drawing of a divine lottery. God’s choice of you was a deliberate definite choice. The verb “**chose**” is in the middle voice and emphasizes that God chose you in Christ for Himself. *1Pet.2:9* says, “you are a chosen race ... a people for God’s own possession.” God’s choices were individual choices. But the picture Paul unfolds for us in **Ephesians** is that God took the individuals He chose from among the Jews and Gentiles and constituted them into the one body of Christ, the church.

In *vs.5* we are told God “predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself.” The verb “**predestine**” or “**foreordain**” means “*to mark our beforehand*”. In the N.T. the verb “**predestine**” is used exclusively of God and serves to emphasize His sole initiative and authority in our salvation. (**O’Brien**). God’s designed purpose for predestining us is adoption. He adopted us as sons. He adopted us as His children. For Gentiles this signified entry into a

privileged position. The adoption as sons was one of the particular privileges that belonged to the Israelites. (**Rom.9:4**). Now, under the new covenant, this peculiar privilege belongs to all Jews and Gentiles who are in Christ.

O'Brien wrote, “Ephesians 1:5 *indicates that before time began God chose to adopt men and women into a personal and intimate relationship with Himself. Being adopted into his family as sons (and daughters) is an incredible privilege....*” One of the imageries of the church we find in Ephesians is “**God’s household**”. (**Eph.2:19**). In this household God is our Father (**vs.18**) and Jesus is the firstborn among many brethren. (**Rom.8:29**). **Heb.2:11** says He is not ashamed to call us “**brethren**”.

God’s choice of us in Christ is rooted in His love for us. In **1Thess.1:4** Paul wrote, “knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you.” In **2Thess.2:13** Paul wrote, “But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren, beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation....” “**God has chosen you from the beginning for**

salvation” points to God’s eternal choice of the Thessalonians for salvation. The basis of that choice was love. Note the word **“beloved”** in both verses. It is a Greek perfect participle that emphasizes the continuing unabated force of God’s perfect love for us which began in eternity and was the basis of His choice of us in Christ for salvation.

God’s predestination of us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ is rooted in His love for us. **Rom.8:29** reinforces this fact for us. Paul wrote, “For those whom He foreknew (**foreloved**), He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son.” **2Thess.2:16** says the Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father have loved us and given us eternal comfort.

Why did the Lord choose Israel? **Deut.7:7-8** says because He loved Israel. Why did He love Israel? The answer is : because He loved Israel. Why did the Lord choose us? Because He loved us. Why did He loved us? Because it was the kind intention or good pleasure of His will to love us. (**Eph.1:5**). Because it was the kind intention or good pleasure of His purpose to love us. (**Eph.1:9**). The Lord

loves us with an everlasting love. He loves us as individuals. And He loves us together as the church, the body of Christ. Note the clear plural emphases : we are “brethren beloved by the Lord.” *2Thess.2:16* says, “our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father ... has loved us....” In *Jn.16:27* Jesus told His disciples, “the Father Himself loves you....” *Eph.5:2* says “Christ ... loved you” (plural). *Eph.5:25* says, “Christ ... loved the church.” The Lord has chosen the N.T. Zion. The Lord loves the N.T. Zion. The Lord Himself loves you.

Secondly, in the O.T. we saw that Mt. Zion is the habitation of God. *Psa.132:13-14*, “For the Lord has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His habitation. This is My resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it.” In the N.T. we see that Mt. Zion is the city of the living God or the habitation of God. (*Heb.12:22*). In *1Cor.3:16* Paul told the Corinthian church that they are the “temple of God” or the sanctuary of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in them. In *2Cor.6:16* Paul wrote, “For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, “I will dwell in them and walk among them”.”

This dwelling of God among His people is not limited to their time on earth. It is eternal. In eternity the church is the New Jerusalem. With the appearance of the New Jerusalem we read these words in *Rev.21:3*, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them.”

Thirdly, Mt. Zion in the O.T. is glorious, beautiful, the perfection of beauty. (*Psa.87:3; 48:2; 50:2*). *Eph.5:27* says Christ will “present to Himself the church in all her glory.” The word “**glory**” also means “**distinguished**” and “**splendid**”. In *Rev.21:2* the new Jerusalem is described as an adorned bride. In *vs.11* she is described as “having the glory of God.”

The question is : Why should you love the church, be a part of the church and become actively involved in the church? The first answer is : because God loves the church. God’s love for the church is eternal. God’s love for the church is revealed in His eternal choice in Christ. God’s love for the church is revealed in

His eternal predestination of those chosen to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself.

God's love for the church is revealed in giving His Son to die in order to redeem all those chosen to be a part of the church. **Rom.5:8** says, "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." **1Jn.4:10** says, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

God's love for the church is revealed in the fact that the church is His most prized possession upon this earth. That the church is God's possession is made clear in the following verses : in **Acts 20:28** the church is described as "the church of God" or "**God's church**". The expressions "the church of God", "*the churches of God*" and "the church of the living God" appear **12** times in the N.T. (**Acts 20:28; 1Cor.1:2; 10:32; 11:16, 22; 15:9; 2Cor.1:1; Gal.1:13; 1Thess.2:14; 2Thess.1:4; 1Tim.3:5, 15.**) In **1Pet.5:2** Peter used the expression, "the flock of God." In **1Pet.2:9** the church is described as "a

people for God's own possession." In *1Cor.6:20* we read, "For you have been bought with a price."

Let us consider now the price God paid to acquire this possession of the church.

The price is the death of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. God's Son is His beloved Son. (*Matt.3:17; 17:5*). God's Son is "His only begotten Son". (*Jn.3:16*).

The Greek word translated "**only begotten**" conveys to us a variety of ideas.

The Lord Jesus is the Father's one and only Son. He is the Father's one of a kind Son. There is no other like Him. He is the Father's best loved Son, His only dearest Son. When God gave His Son to die on our behalf He gave His all and His best.

Turn to *1Pet.1:18-19*. (**read**). When God redeemed His people, He did not redeem them "with perishable things like silver or gold." Silver and gold were two of the best and most highly treasured metals. But they were also perishable and useless for redeeming sinners. The only thing that could redeem sinners was

the “precious blood ... of Christ.” The value of Christ’s precious blood is set in contrast to the value of silver and gold.

In ***Matt.16:26*** Jesus made it clear that the total wealth of this entire world was not enough to redeem the soul of one man. Jesus said, “What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (cf. ***Psa.49:7-9***). The only thing that has the requisite value to redeem one soul is the blood of Christ. The question arises : how much then would it take to redeem the souls of all God’s chosen people? The answer is the same : the only thing that had the requisite value to redeem the souls of all God’s chosen people is the blood of Christ. One man wrote, *“The cost of Calvary is beyond all human computation; the value of the shed blood of Jesus is beyond all our comprehension.”* (**John Phillips**).

Herein lies the reason why the church is God’s most prized possession on the earth. God purchased the church with the precious blood of His own Son. (***Acts 20:28***). This, however, is not the full picture. The salvation God gave to us freely

in Christ to save us is described as “so great salvation.” (*Heb.2:3*). In *Eph.3:8* it is described as “the unfathomable riches of Christ.” The word “**unfathomable**” describes that which cannot be tracked down or fully searched out. In other words, the value of the riches of our salvation in Christ cannot be fully searched out and thus cannot be fully known.

As an aside, this is why the sober warning is given in *Heb.2:3*, “how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?” The verb “**neglect**” means “*to be unconcerned about; to be indifferent to; to lose interest in; to find it too difficult to put oneself out for something.*” The value of your soul is such the only thing that could purchase your salvation is the precious blood of Christ. The value of this salvation is such you could never purchase it. If you owned all the wealth in this world, you still would not have enough to purchase your own salvation. The psalmist said the redemption of a soul is costly and you should cease trying to redeem it yourself. (cf. *Psa.49:7-9*).

Only God in Christ could redeem the soul of man. And the only way you could acquire this salvation of your soul's redemption is to receive it as a gracious free gift from God's hand. **Rom.6:23** says, "the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." "**Free**" means you cannot buy it. "**Free**" means you cannot work for it. "Free" means you cannot give something in exchange for it. The unfathomable riches of this salvation are being offered to you freely in Christ. If you neglect this salvation, if you find it too bothersome, too difficult to reach out and receive this so great salvation, how can you expect to escape the eternal wrath of God that is coming upon you? You will never escape!!

The infinite greatness of God's love for you as a sinner and for the church says you must love the church. The preciousness of the church to God says you must love the church. The apostle John wrote, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." (**1Jn.4:11**). **Jn.3:16** says, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son." Note the word "**so**" in both verses. In both verses "**so**" is placed in the emphatic position. The word "**so**" emphasizes the manner, degree, and extent of God's love. **Lenski**

translated “so” as “to such an astounding degree”. We can paraphrase both verses as follows, “Beloved, if in such a manner and to such a degree God loved us;” “In this manner and to such a degree did God love the world.”

Note the verb “we ought”. The word “we” is emphatic and clearly marks that “ought” that is resting upon you as Christians. The verb “ought” is not an external compulsion but the inner constraint of conscious obligation. It means God’s infinite love for you has placed in you something you have to do. It means God’s infinite love for you has placed in you a moral obligation that you must fulfill. It means that God’s infinite love for you has placed in you a debt and it is a debt you must pay. The tense of the verb means that loving one another and the church is something you will be doing for the rest of your life. It means that loving one another and the church is a moral obligation you will be fulfilling for the rest of your life. It means that loving one another and the church is a debt you will be paying for the rest of your life.

How would you respond if you discover that someone has left you **100** million dollars? No one will have to command your response. No one will have to outline for you how to respond. Your response will come from within you gushing out like a like rushing overflowing stream. Your response will be filled with gratitude, thanksgiving and honor for the one who left you this astounding gift. From that day onwards nothing will be too hard for you to do for this person. If he would accept it, you would devote your life to serving him.

The verb “**ought**” is not a command. It has not placed upon you an external compulsion. It has placed in you the inner constraint of conscious obligation. How ought you to respond to God when you discover the infinite greatness of His love for you? How ought you to respond to God when you discover the incomprehensible price He paid for your salvation? How ought you to respond to God when you discover that your so great salvation is “the unfathomable riches of Christ”? How ought you to respond to God when you discover that your redemption through the blood of Christ is the riches of God’s mercy and the riches of God’s grace which He lavished on you? (*Eph.1:7-8; 2:4*). Note the verb

“lavished”. It speaks of an extravagant bestowal, an overabundance. How ought you to respond to God when you discover that the church is His most prized possession on this earth, a church that you are a part of?

Will your response be spontaneous, coming forth from within you like a gushing, rushing, overflowing stream? Will your response be filled with praise, glory, honor, adoration, and thanksgiving to God? Will you respond like the psalmist in *Psa.118:1-4*? The psalmist declared (and I am using a modern adaptation here), “Oh give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; For His lovingkindness is everlasting. Oh, let the church say with me, ‘His lovingkindness is everlasting.’ Oh let all the leaders say with me, ‘His lovingkindness is everlasting.’ Oh let those who fear the Lord say with me, ‘His lovingkindness is everlasting’.” Take note that the psalmist is celebrating. He is conducting himself in a manner that says he truly belongs to the festal assembly.

Most of evangelical Christianity today lacks zeal, desire, passion, fire. It lacks the manifestation of the festal character God has given to it. When you look at

Christians you see a people who are always ready to hide their Christianity. You see a spirituality that is mediocre or less, that is dry, dull, joy-less and filled with boring routines. You see a spirituality operating on the level of sheer duty, a duty void of consistency, a duty not motivated by a joyful hunger for God. In our day Christian zeal for God and the things of God can be compared to run-down batteries always in need of a jump-start.

The obvious question is : Why? Most evangelical Christians in our day do not know that the spiritual wealth they have received from God is worth far more than **100** million dollars. They have no knowledge, understanding nor experience of God's infinite love for them. They have no knowledge, understanding nor experience of God's unfathomable riches for them in Christ, of God's rich mercies and rich grace lavished on them. They have not taken the time to seek out and prayerfully meditate upon this knowledge, understanding and experience. I say prayerfully because you need to pray that the Holy Spirit would open your eyes to see and understand how wonderful God's love is. (cf. *Psa.119:18*). You need the Holy Spirit to give you the wisdom from above to understand the greatness of

God's love. (*Jas.1:5; 3:17*). They have not taken the time to prayerfully comprehend the length and breadth and height and depth of God's love for them in Christ. They have time for so many things but they do not have the time to seek, meditate and pray until they begin to comprehend. They do not have the time to stay on their knees until the light of God shines through.

Rom.5:5 says "the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." Here is something that is true of every Christian. Note the verb "**poured out**". It means our hearts have been flooded to overflowing with God's love. The perfect tense of the verb means our hearts are in a continuous state of being flooded to overflowing with God's love. This is the reality. Sadly, we do not know the experiential reality of this fact. We are living in a house that is flooded with God's love. We are walking in that flood day by day and yet we are oblivious to that reality of that flood in us. Yet we are experiencing the wetness of that flood flowing over us. Oh My Brethren, our riches in Christ are so great they cannot be fully tracked down. If you are living in spiritual poverty, the question is, "**Why?**".

I beg you on the behalf of Christ to take the time to earnestly seek God so that you may come to know in an experiential way the reality of the greatness of God's infinite love for you in Christ. I assure you, when this happens your life will be revolutionized. Your love and zeal for God will overflow. Your love and zeal for His church will overflow. Your desire for God and all that pertains to God will overflow. You will testify with Paul, "The love of Christ controls me." (cf. *2Cor.5:14*). Your Christianity will no longer be like a run down battery needed jump-start every day. Your Christianity will become festal.

Your love for God will be renewed. Your love for God will mean that you will love all that God loves. God loves His Son. You will love God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. God loves the church. You will love the church. The church will become the thing you prize most in this world. God loves sinners and desires to see them come to repentance and be saved. You will love sinners and desire to see them come to repentance and see them saved.

Christianity does not stop with knowing Christ in conversion. Christianity is a life-long never-ending journey if coming to know Christ. Moses' prayer to God was, "I pray you, if I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways that I may know You." (*Exod.33:13*). As a Christian you have found favor with God. David's prayer was, "Make me know Your ways, O Lord, Teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; for You I wait all the day." (*Psa.25:4-5*). This God is the God of your salvation.

Paul's prayer was, "that I may know Him." (*Phil.3:10*). Paul's prayer was based on the fact that he was clothed in the righteousness of Christ. (*vs.9*). As a Christian you are clothed in the righteousness of Christ. God said the great failure of the generation of Israelites He rescued from Egypt was, "they do not know My ways." (*Psa.95:10*). They died in the wilderness and was buried with that sad epitaph, "they do not know My ways." Do not let this be the story of your Christian life.

