

'The Tabernacle of God Is With Men'

by A.W. Tozer

The sermon emphasizes the importance of individual regeneration for a better society, where God and men dwell together in perfect harmony.

Scripture: Revelation 21:10

Topics: "The New Jerusalem", "Individual Regeneration"

Description

A.W. Tozer emphasizes the profound truth that the ultimate fulfillment of humanity lies in the presence of God, as depicted in Revelation 21:10. He contrasts the temporary nature of earthly society, marred by sin, with the eternal joy and perfection of the New Jerusalem, where God dwells with His people. Tozer highlights the importance of individual regeneration over social regeneration, asserting that true change in society begins with the transformation of the individual heart. He paints a vivid picture of a future where believers will appreciate one another in their perfected state, free from jealousy and sin, and engaged in joyful, creative work. Ultimately, Tozer calls for a deep reflection on our relationship with God and our readiness for the glorious society that awaits us.

Transcript

The Tabernacle of God Is with Men

Pastor and author A.W. Tozer

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In Revelations 21:10, the chapter which I have chosen to discuss this morning, is used so often at funerals, that it has about it something of the flavor of cut flowers. And one hesitates to preach on a Sunday morning on such a theme for the simple reason that it has been preempted by the funeral parlors. This is not a funeral sermon and neither is this a funeral chapter. This is a chapter way beyond all funerals where there are none. I want to read again verse 10. He carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain and showed me that great city, the whole Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God.

Let me begin by saying this, that one of the supreme glories of man is his many sidedness. He can be and do and love and be interested in many things. A man is not fatally formed to be one thing only, as the rock there that has been a rock from time in memorial and will be a rock till the heavens melt with fervent heat and the earth passes away. Or as the star that shines, a star it has been, the star it will be. The mountain

that pushes up into the sky has been a mountain since the last geological upheaval pushed it up there. In all these years it has worn a garment of forest on its back, but it has always been a mountain never anything else. It is just one thing, that man can be cause and effect. He can be servant or master. He can be doer and thinker. He can be poet and philosopher. He can be like the angels to walk with God or like the beast to walk the earth. Man is a many-faceted diamond to catch and reflect back the glory of the only God.

Now this versatility on the part of man has enabled him to enjoy both solitude and society. And every normal person loves both. Every normal human being loves these two extremes, solitude and society. Enter into thy closet said Jesus. There is solitude. Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, said the Apostle, there's society. And this was written, these words, of course to Christians, so that even the Christian is supposed to be able to enjoy, understand and appreciate both solitude and society.

And every normal person must have time to be alone. He must have time to get acquainted with himself and to get orientated to the universe in which he lives. He must have time in the quietness and the silence to send out his thoughts like flocks of obedient birds to explore and with bright eyes to look down upon all corners of the universe. He must get acquainted with God and himself and the loneliness of his own chamber. But also remember that reaction always follows action, as the moon must always wane after she waxes and the tide must always go out after it comes in. And so, mankind must have both solitude and society.

And after a time of loneliness and heart searching and communing with the Universal Being, he must seek again the face of his fellow man. God has meant it so to be. And that is the reason for social groups. Whether a social group should be two people keeping themselves company in some settler's cabin way back in the hills, or whether it should be the busy noisy activity of a great modern city, it is society. And God has meant that we should be together.

Now God has made us for each other. And we are, if we are normal, supposed to be together and understand and appreciate each other, but I realized what sin has done. You can talk twenty minutes, not five minutes about mankind till you come to this ugly hissing word we call sin; this disease of the heart that has ruined everything. And that is what has made us greedy and made us to hate and made us to lust for power; made us to be jealous and to envy each other and to covet each other's property. That has destroyed anything like peace in society. But in the final state of humanity, in the final state of perfection, minus all of the diseases of the mind and of the heart, we will dwell in perfect enjoyment of each other's company. And that will be the new Jerusalem, the Holy City, that descended out of heaven from God.

Now, in that society, we will appreciate each other. I realized that we do not appreciate each other as we might. In our time, the one who gets the appreciation is the noisy one or the aggressive one. And there are millions of rich spirits, rich spirits that might enrich your friendships, enrich your life, but they will not, because they're quiet, self-effacing persons that do not push themselves to the front, or they are handicapped by a face that is not attractive. They're handicapped by what we now call, a personality that is not winsome. Because they have not a face that wins us or a personality that draws us, we lose the richness of the fellowship of many a one that we might enjoy if we were wiser and bigger and greater than we are. But in that consummation, when the city of God descends, we will be able to appreciate each other.

I refer one more time to that biblical doctrine of the image of God in man. And I say this to you Sir, that apart from God Himself, the nearest thing to God is the human soul. The old writers tell us that the human soul is the nearest like God, and they're perfectly right and it is found in the Scriptures. God made man in His image. And if it were not for the blighting effect of sin, the human soul would catch and reflect the light of God as a diamond reflects the light of the sun. And we would know each other because we would see in each other, something of God. And because God is infinite and without limit, we could come to know each other better while the ages roll and never feel I am weary of Him. I'm bored with Him. I know Him. I've traveled over His mind.

When young Boswell said to the great Dr. Johnson, Doctor, I don't know whether we'll talk much more. We've traveled over each other's mind. He said, Sir, I may have traveled over yours, but I give you to understand, you have not yet traveled all over mine. He was sure of the vastness of his great mind. And I say that you may travel over me and get to know me and say, I'm weary of the fellow because I know him. But in that day when the limitations of the flesh are removed and the negative qualities in our personalities are removed and the minor notes are all taken out of the symphony of personality and we're all in the major and we all are melodic and beautiful; in that day we'll thank God for each other, because we will know God through each other. And we will find that we are simply prisms, simply lenses through which God shines.

God desires that He should shine through His universe, and He does shine through it. But He shines through it best of all in man. And it's only sin that has cracked the lens and distorted the image. It is only sin that has marred the vision and spoiled the picture. So that when we look at each other we don't see the potentialities that lie there. When our Lord looked at us, He saw not what we were, but He saw what we could become. And He took away the curse of being and gave us the glorious blessing of becoming. The greatest curse the world has is, it's to be, to be, always to be. He is what he is. But Jesus Christ said, no, he is not what he is, he is what he can become.

And so He gives us the power to become. It's the becoming, the ability to become. We know not what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, and shall see Him as He is. It's the ability to become, to grow, to change, to develop, to move out to the edges of the perfection of human personality that is the glory of the Christian life. That we are to become. Not what we are, but what we are to become is what matters.

Therefore, in that day when the Holy City descends, we will appreciate each other for what we are. And in that day, there will be no one jealous of any other. Jealousy is a great blight. But there will be no jealousy there. We will not subject each other nor want to subject each other. And no warlord will want to march on another land and subject another country. We will not suspect each other. We will not arrest each other, nor try each other nor execute each other. But we will have a society where none of these things will come. There will be no slums there. While the children of the slums forage through the alleys for what they might find, the children of the rich trample great things under their feet and are bored with all that money can buy. But that will all be gone in that day. When, as it is written, I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, 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. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. And there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying. Neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away.

Now, I ask you my listening friends, who dares rise to challenge the desirability of this. This is the desirable beyond all the dreams of avarice, and who that loves humanity. Who that loves the human race could dare challenge the desirability of that place where God and men dwell together, and where God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying nor any more pain. For these former things have passed away. Every lover of humanity will say a quiet and fervent "amen" to this dream of the future. And every social dreamer has sought it, everyone from the earliest man who dreamed of a perfect society down through the years, the Plato with his Republic, on down to Karl Marx, and Franklin Roosevelt and the latest politician, that sincerely and honestly wants to make a country a better country in which to live. They have all dreamed and all had their ideas all spoiled by selfishness and prejudice and cynicism, no doubt. But nevertheless, we give them the credit. They did and do want to make the world a better place in which to live.

And then the reformers and the groups who study sociology and want to make the world over in a better image. They want to do it by what they call social regeneration. But I noticed that the man who is in the Spirit on the Lord's Day did not refer to social regeneration. He said that it did not come from the regeneration of society. That this perfect future world comes down out of God from heaven, in place of its being the result of a slow process of social regeneration. It is the result of a process of individual regeneration.

Always remember friends, whenever you hear the word "social," or the word "society," you're hearing a trick word, a deceitful word. I've used it all morning here. But at the same time, it does not refer to anything in particular. It is a word that reaches out and rakes in a whole world of ideas. For there is no such thing as society, though we've talked about it and shall continue to. Actually, society is made up of a great many single individuals, so that I am society and you are society and the man next door and the boy that sells papers down there and the milkman and the mayor of the city and the President and his office boy that carries out his mail. That's society. It's the individual. But when we think of them together, we call it society. And we've built then in our mind or are likely to build in our mind a false concept. We are likely to think of society as an organism.

So, remember that it is a fallacy, a figment of the mind, a deceptive figment of the mind, that there is such a thing as social regeneration. No, my brother, there isn't any such thing. It cannot be done. There is such a thing as social rot. There is such a thing as social decay. There is such a thing as a group of people forming a city or a state or a nation, or even the population of the world rotting and falling apart. But the only regeneration known in the world is individual regeneration.

Society is not an organism. Society is a name given to a great number of individual organisms. And when Jesus Christ came to the world, He threw to the winds the idea of the regeneration of society. And he said, ye must be born again. Ye must be born again. Where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I in the midst. And He took the individual and He said, one soul is of more value than all the world. And he laid His emphasis upon the individual. Jesus Christ was an individualist and he taught individualism and He practiced it.

But He also taught that there was to be a society of the blessed. There was to be an assembly of the saints. There was to be the new Jerusalem, the spirits of just men made perfect. There were to be many mansions in the Father's house where these individually regenerated should come together and form that holy society. And the old man of God who wrote the celestial city, dared to say it, and his English translator dared to translate it and make him say this, I know not, oh, I know not what social joys are there. What

radiancy of glory. What joy beyond compare in that great day when the city, the holy city descends out of heaven from God.

John was a dreamer, and loved mankind. And there have been many who've loved mankind. I don't think we should be cynical about the politicians. The jokesters and the gangsters have laughed at the politician so long. But I still think there are good men who've dedicated themselves to making the world a better place in which to live. I still think so.

After I went home last night from attending Keswick, I was nervous and couldn't sleep, so I turned on the radio, and I heard a report from Washington. Somebody there was talking about the President. He was a lawyer, very close to the President. And he said this one thing-he didn't emphasize it-but he said this one thing to those newspaper men who were interviewing him. He said, there is one thing about the president, one thing that inspires all of Washington-one thing. And he said we're in danger of becoming starry-eyed in our attitude toward the man. And it's this, he is dedicated to the welfare of all people. Now, he didn't say he couldn't be mistaken. He didn't say that he was going to make a success of it. He didn't say that he couldn't even inadvertently lead us into a gutter. He didn't say that. But what he did say was that the heart of the great General is dedicated. He said, he's a dedicated man. He says, it goes like electricity through all of the spirits and the hearts of those that know him. He's dedicated to the good of his country.

Now, I'm not speaking that from a political standpoint at all. I believe there have been other dedicated men, many other dedicated men. Little, as I followed the politics of the man who preceded him, I believe that the high hope of the man who preceded him was that America might be free and a good land. I think he did foolish things. And I think he allowed himself to be the dupe of men. But he wasn't bad enough to appreciate how bad they were and they led him astray. But nevertheless, I still like to believe that he did have America at heart. And I believe a lot of these big, booming voice fellows that we laugh at, who come on the radio and use cliches until the cows come in, and next gong you hear it will be 3:15, but we laugh at them.

But ladies and gentlemen, I think a lot of them mean well. And they're good man and they want America to be free, but they go about it in the wrong way. They do the best they can. But it's all this political regeneration, social regeneration business, forgetting ladies and gentleman that the only way a society can be created fit to be the new Jerusalem is by individual regeneration. And there will not be a soul, not one member of that heavenly population that will not have some way, somewhere, somehow undergone the mysterious and mystical experience of the new birth. And it will be said of him as Paul said of the new man, old things have passed away and all things have become new. And now we find the same thing said of the New Jerusalem, these old things have passed away and lo, I make all things new.

How is it that the Holy Ghost said the same thing about the New Jerusalem that He had said about the converted man. Because the New Jerusalem will be the city of the converted man. This new Jerusalem will be filled with those who can say while they're on earth, all old things have passed away and all things have become new. And now they are able to say, lo, He makes all things new and the former things have passed away.

Now, John sees a descending, and it is a strange thing that he sees descending here. It is not only a city, but it is a bride. Not only a bride, but it is a temple. And now in the order of time, it takes its place above the earth. And this is the city seen by men of faith all down these years. Abraham saw that city. He knew that it had foundations. Manhattan, they say is built upon the great rock, the island of Manhattan that juts

down the Hudson and East River to the battery, is a solid rock. And when the great skyscrapers are built on that island, they are built down solidly on rock. But they still have no foundation. One H-bomb could level that great city to its foundations. But the city of God that descends out of heaven is a city that has foundations. Abraham saw it. And David in his prophetic dreams saw a city that was made glad by the streams in the south. And Paul saw it and the martyrs saw it. This is the city that descends out of heaven from God.

My brethren, I thought I wanted to give you this this morning because we're living in a terrible, earthly earth, the terrible worldly world, the terrible, mundane society we live in. And it's getting worse all the time. Materialism has taken over. And that which is spiritual and beautiful and transcendent is being all sullied over. And we walk among the rubble of the world.

I want you Christians to know that this is only temporary. I want you to know that you walk only in the world's rubble for a little while. I want you to know that you stand and see cities fall only for a little while. There is a city descending soon that has foundations that can never be destroyed. And it says here, that it shines in reflected light, for it has no need of the sun nor of the moon, having the glory of God which delight in it. So, the light of the Holy City will be the light of God.

I think it is tomorrow. Is it not or would it be today that they're celebrating Edison giving us the electric light. Now, I think that's a good thing to do. I think that we ought to. I believe that our children ought to know that there lived a quiet, uneducated, but very brilliant man once who decided that, as Uncle Josh used to say that by putting a hairpin in a bottle and putting electric current through it, you could light up your house and that's what Edison did. They're going to recognize that. I think they started it already. It's going to be electric light week or electric light day or something. All well and good my brother, but all the lights that are in the world, all the lights are artificially produced, or they come down from the sun above. But God says that that city will have no need of the sun nor of the moon, no kind of modern lighting, but the Lamb is the light thereof. And that city shines in the light of God. And that city will satisfy all of man's nature.

You see, the trouble with you is, now you think the trouble with you is you're too small. But the trouble with you is, you're too big. The trouble with us all is that God made us in His image and we are too big to be satisfied with this little world that sin has given us. Augustine said it in classical language when he said, O God, Thou has made us for Thyself and our hearts are dissatisfied till they find rest in Thee. And that has been echoed and re-echoed and written into hymns down the years. And it's true, that's your trouble. You're bored with life. You are bored because you're too big for what sin has given you. God has made you too great. You are potentially too mighty. You're a soul made in the image of God. Your spirit, which came down from the bosom of the Father, is too big for that which sin has offered you, too big.

And so, we're bored with life. Men commit suicide, not because they're little, but because they are big in a little world. Because God made them to enjoy all the vast expanses of His heaven, and they've been forced, through sin, to be satisfied with paying their taxes and running their lawn mower and driving their car and keeping their wife happy and keeping their kids out of jail and keeping their job and paying their debts and getting old. And they're sick of it, sick of it. Their bodies are breaking down under them and their tabernacles are too small for the Spirit that dwells within it.

And like the popular song, This Old House, the thing has gone to pieces and the door has come off the hinges and the windows are broken. And it's an old wreck of the thing. And man is too big for that which he's forced to live in. That's what's the matter with this, ladies and gentlemen. That's why they're always

trying to explore some new place or that's why they're wanting to go to the moon. That's why we're wanting to travel faster than sound. That is why somebody's always trying some fool thing. That's why a Charlie Lindbergh would jump in an old egg beater and fly the ocean, the first man over. And that is why Byrd will go down to Antarctica and that is why Amundson would go to the North Pole. And that's why men try to do the impossible. That's why we explore the secrets of the universe and dig up the atom bomb. Because men are too big for this little world. Sin has given them a little narrow, prescribed world-your world, Mama.

Isn't it a little world after all, get the kids off in the morning, go back and do the dishes and then run the vacuum and be ready for the invasion at noon when they come in to eat. And then do the dishes, and maybe five minutes you rest and then get ready for supper when they're back in the old man's back. And if you have anything to do at night, you go tired to do it and come in weary.

A little world sin has put us in, a little world. Here we are with minds as great as the stars in the heavens above. And with little, tired, weary sick bodies want to lie down half the time and refuse to get up like a stubborn donkey. That's what's the matter with us. That's why we're explorers and poets and artists and dreamers and inventors. That's why those who haven't allowed their minds to run in those directions are so sick and bored with life, they wish they were dead.

But the society that God is sending down from above, that great City of God will fully satisfy a man's full nature. There'll be so many things you won't find there. All that happy golden's day without a cloud and without a sundown. You can travel over all the wide regions above and you'll never find a wrinkle in anybody's face or gray hair in anybody's head. You'll never hear anybody say, I'm discontented. You'll never hear a criticism. You'll never hear a peevish man. You'll never see an unkind face. You'll never hear a growl out of any throat. You'll never hear a scream from any throat, nor will there be a tear fall down any cheek.

Yet somebody says, now, wait a minute here, Mr. Tozer, that's the old-fashioned idea of heaven. We're kind of glorified butterflies hanging up there waving our wings gently in the zephyrs that flow down from the celestial mountains. I wouldn't want to live like that, you say I want something to challenge me. I want something to have to work for, something to do. Well, I can set your right there. I can tell you that all that God's going to take out of the New Jerusalem, out of that redeemed society, are the bad things. The tears, I say, the wrinkles, the old age, the arthritis, the heart failure, the men who shoot policemen and hide. The boys who stab other boys in gang warfare. The wicked people and bad people will be saved in that day from two things I think that are equally hard to bear-the wickedness of the wicked and the dullness of the good. We'll be saved from both in that day, ladies and gentlemen. And you can travel all over heaven's wide expanses, and you will not find any of that.

But listen now I say, I promised that we would not be without something to do. For God is the great worker. He is the Creator. He is creative. And all He does is creative, constantly creative. God did not create the heavens and the earth and all the universe and then put period and say it's done, finale. But He's always creating, always. And God has made us in His image. And God is the great worker without limit and we are the little workers with limit, but up to our limits, and we haven't found them yet. We will be workers too. When God put Adam and Eve in the garden, He didn't put them in there to sit and look at each other and hold hands. He said they were to take care of the garden. Do you remember that? They were given something to do. Some people believe that work is a result of the curse. No. The idea is abroad that the man who works is a boot and that work is only for fools. But God made us to work.

You know the anthropologists say that when God made man with his four fingers here and his thumb opposing those four fingers so he could get a hold of a tool, He guaranteed he'd conquer the world. God made you and me like that, you see. Just look at your hands sometime. You have in all the machinery you have around your house, all the gadgets up from the hair curler to the television set, you haven't got all put together one gadget that can remotely compare in intricacy, beauty of performance and versatility with that right hand of yours. Look at that hand sometime. Don't do it now, it would look funny. But sometime when you have a little time alone, look at that hand of yours, that amazing hand of yours. God didn't give you that hand to hang on to some chandelier in the New Jerusalem. God means that you are to go to work up there. But it'll be a tireless work. It will not be a work of boredom.

You know why we're bored, don't you? We're bored because sin has made us restless. We're bored because sin has made us dissatisfied. We're bored again because we're too big for our environment. We're bored because we're made to walk with God and we insist on walking with a swine. We're bored and tired of the gutter when God has made us to walk without sound, the holy streets of the New Jerusalem. Boredom will never visit us there. But it will be work without boredom, work without fatigue-happy joyous work.

I do not know what God will have us doing. Maybe He'll have you doing the thing you can do. Some of you can sew like anything. I don't know. Back in the Old Testament, God picked out a man and let him do the sewing. I don't know why He didn't choose a woman, but he picked a man named Bezalel. He filled him with the Holy Ghost and said-get busy. He gave him some great big sheets of cloth and said, here, embroider these. He did it. He did a beautiful job of it. It hung for centuries in the front of the Holy Place. God always wants workers. Our Lord was a worker says the hymn. And we're all to be workers.

So don't imagine for a second that heaven is to be a place where you'll have nothing to do. Heaven is a place where you can rest. Well, you say, how can you make those two equate? How can they agree with each other? You work and you're not tired, you rest. But Jesus, Jesus now works without tiring and rests always while He works. So, the saints of God will work.

What was it that Kipling said? I haven't quoted it for years and if I break down, why, don't look at me. I warned you. When Earth's last picture is painted and the tubes are twisted and dried, When the oldest colours have faded, and the youngest critic has died, We shall rest, and faith, we shall need it - lie down for an aeon or two, Till the Master of All Good Workmen Shall put us to work anew. And I just thought of that till just on the spot here. And he tells us about how we will sit in a golden chair and splash in the ten-league canvas with brushes of comet's hair. I don't know whether angels have hair or not. But he thought they have. And he thought it was a nice way to do, get an angel and get a brush made of angel's hair and instead of making a little canvas like Mr. Chase, no bigger ever than the top of his piano. Why a ten-league canvas and they'll sit there and work? Oh yes, I believe Kipling had it right.

Heaven is not going to be a haven for lazy bums. Heaven is going to be a place where men are released from tensions, released from inhibitions, released from prohibitions from the outside, released from sin and made in the image of God, and go to work like the young gods they are. For he said you are gods. He didn't mean you're God. He meant you're a little image of mine, and born to do the kind of work I do, creative work. So, the New Jerusalem will not be a haven for the lazy. It will be an opportunity for all the imaginative and the industrious and the busy, who like God, must find expression.

Ah, in the beauty of it all, how can I go on? The beauty of it all, not the beauty of a carefully done-up woman's face. Not the beauty of a carefully-padded form. Not the beauty of the primrose that smiles in the sunshine, but the great, strong beauty of eternity in God and all that City of Gold with its beauty.

Now I ask you, the tabernacle of God is with men. I think that this is the consummation. Beyond this, nothing can be. This is the consummation. I mean, there can be nothing higher. There can be infinite developments in all directions. But they can be nothing higher. The tabernacle of God is with men. Way back there in the beginning, God made man to live with Him. Sin came and God divorced man like an unfaithful wife from His presence. But through the miracle of redemption, through the cross of Jesus Christ, man is reborn back to his ancient place and raised above that yet. And the tabernacle of God will be with men. And the God who once walked and talked with Adam in the garden in the cool of the day in sweet fellowship divine, will be present and will be the Light.

One little thing and I close. There was no tabernacle there. Why was there no temple? Why was there no synagogue or church? Why was there no meeting place where worshipers might get together? Because all of that new City of God was a temple. And God Himself was the temple. And like a great expanse of beautiful arches, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost surrounded and settled down upon and mingled with all that carefree, happy, busy, joyous throng. So, you didn't have to wait for an hour in which to pray. All hours are prayer hours there. You don't have to wait to go to a special place to pray. All is a temple. And God and the Lamb are the temples thereof. And there are no artificial lights to go out in the night. But the Lamb is the light thereof.

I think we can seriously consider whether we're headed in that direction or not. Seriously consider this morning whether we have by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony, overcome and escaped from the loop of sin or whether we're still bound by it, cursed with the curse, to be destroyed in the destruction. Or whether we are through grace made children of God and lifted and raised so that when the great city descends from God as the Lamb, or the bride adorned for her Husband, you and I can be part and parcel of that great society of the ransomed.

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