

# Rev. 21:3. God's Tabernacle on Earth

by Horatius Bonar

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*The sermon explores the significance of God's tabernacle being with men, as described in Revelation 21:3, and how this event is made possible through the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 78:60, Isaiah 65:17, Matthew 5:8, John 1:14, John 14:23, Romans 8:21, 1 Thessalonians 4:16, Hebrews 12:14, 2 Peter 3:13, Revelation 21:3

**Topics:** "God's Presence", "Restoration of Creation"

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## Description

Horatius Bonar emphasizes the profound significance of God's promise to dwell among humanity, as proclaimed in Revelation 21:3. He highlights the joy of heavenly beings at this announcement, reflecting on the immense sacrifice God made through Christ to restore the relationship between Himself and mankind. Bonar discusses the desirability of this event, God's unwavering purpose to dwell with men, and the process through which this will be accomplished, centering on the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. He urges believers to prepare for this glorious future and challenges sinners to consider their place in this promise. Ultimately, Bonar calls for a heartfelt response to Christ's invitation to dwell within us now, as a foretaste of the eternal communion to come.

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## Transcript

"And 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."--Revelation 21:3.

The voice that uttered these words is said to have been a great one, indicating their importance, and God's desire that we should listen to the announcement. It is not surely without a meaning that a great voice should be thought needful to speak the words, and that a special note of its greatness should be left upon record for us.

We are not told who utter it. It came 'out of heaven'--that is all we know. It was not the inhabitants of earth looking round and wondering at something which had thus taken place in the midst of them; it was the inhabitants of heaven looking down from the upper glory, and rejoicing in what had at length, after so many ages and so many hindrances, been accomplished upon earth. It reminds us of the joy in heaven over one sinner that repents, though the occasion is one of far greater magnitude and wider compass.

Yet it does not seem in this place to be the voice of God Himself, but the voice of the angel multitudes that fill the heaven of heavens, and stand before His throne. That the tabernacle of God should be pitched in heaven, and among themselves, was nothing new--but that it should be pitched upon earth, and among the sons of men, this calls forth admiration and gladness. 'Behold! the tabernacle of God is with men!'

Frequently in the course of these visions does John hear 'voices,' which, like explanatory words, come in to cast light upon the symbols, and to tell us the impression which the scenes are making, not merely upon John, but upon other beings, both in earth and heaven. Sometimes it is the voice of a 'mighty angel' (ch. 5:2); sometimes the voice of 'many angels' (verse 2); sometimes the voice of the elders and living creatures (ib.); sometimes it is the voice of 'many people' (ch. 19:1); of a 'great multitude' on earth (verse 6); sometimes it is a great voice 'out of the temple' (ch. 26:17); sometimes it is a voice from the 'altar' (ch. 9:13); sometimes from the 'throne' (ch. 26:17); sometimes it is a voice 'in heaven' (ch. 11:15, and 12:10); sometimes it is a voice from or 'out of heaven,'--which two last expressions come with fuller meaning when contrasted with that other passage, 'there was silence in heaven' (ch. 8:1). This great voice from heaven is heard making such announcements as these--'Come up here' (ch. 11:12); 'the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ.'

It is this voice which is as the voice of many waters and of a great thunder; which is as the voice of harpers harping with their harps, who sing new songs before the throne, which none could learn but the hundred and forty and four thousand who were redeemed from the earth (ch. 14:1-4). It is this voice out of heaven which, in our text, proclaims, 'Behold! the tabernacle of God is with men!' Perhaps it is the same with the 'shout' (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Taking up this announcement as containing something of unspeakable interest and importance to us, we consider the great event which it proclaims, not indeed as yet accomplished, but most assuredly to be so in God's wise time; so that just as eighteen hundred years ago the cry was heard from earth, 'It is finished,' so the second great cry shall be heard from heaven, 'It is done.' 'Behold! the tabernacle of God is with men!' 'Behold! I make all things new!'

As to the TIME when this great phenomenon comes to pass, I do not say much. It is, of course, after Christ has come the second time; yet not perhaps immediately, at least to its full extent. For while the millennial age of peace and glory may be truly called the tabernacling of God with men, the new heavens and the new earth--it is still imperfect, being but the first and preparatory stage of the more glorious, and perfect, and eternal consummation which is to follow, and to which specially our text refers.

Keeping this in mind, we consider--

The desirableness of this event.

God's declared purpose of this event.

The manner or process by which God brings it about.

I. The DESIRABLENESS of this state of things. Many things show us this--

(1) The interest which the inhabitants of heaven take in it, as seen in the words before us. Though not of the race of man, nor dwellers on earth--they rejoice in the holy blessedness which has now taken possession of earth. They do not envy our race, nor are they jealous of our earth as having obtained an honor which once belonged exclusively to themselves and to heaven. There is no bitterness of selfish

rivalry, no uneasiness felt at the prospect of having their 'monopoly of glory' thrown down, and the prerogative of being the metropolis of the universe shared with a planet like ours--so inferior in size, and once the seat of most hateful evil. They can do nothing but rejoice in seeing earth become the dwelling-place of Jehovah--in beholding the tabernacle of God now pitched among the children of men.

(2) The pains and costs which God has been at to bring about this issue. He has grudged nothing; He has not spared His only-begotten Son--so infinitely desirable does He reckon this result. Surely that must have a large space in His eye and heart, for the accomplishment of which He was willing to make such a sacrifice! Surely the ultimate glory must be precious in His estimation, when, in order to bring it about, He can submit to allow such developments of evil, such an overflow of sin, such a reign of Satan for so many thousand years--instead of at once setting fire to the guilty world, and burning it into a second hell.

(3) The work of Christ, through which it has been brought about. Not without the sacrificial work of Christ could this end have been attained. As it would have been unrighteous in God to pardon a sinner without this work, so would it have been no less so without this to restore and re-glorify the sinner's world. The leper's habitation, no less than the leper himself, requires the sacrifice, and the blood, and the cleansing water. In the restoration of earth, and its re-inhabitation by God--Christ sees of the travail of His soul.

(4) The desire with which prophets and righteous men have desired this event. The times of the restitution of all things have been spoken of by all the holy prophets, since the world began. All prophecy is full of this coming glory. Holy men spoke of it, prayed for it, waited for it, saw it afar off, and were glad. Surely that which their pens so largely wrote of, and their hearts so earnestly longed for--must be infinitely desirable.

(5) The change which it will produce on earth. Over all its face, sin has spread itself, like the over flowings of some dark river of hell. Evil has prevailed--Satan has reigned--a rebellious hatred of Jehovah has showed itself--pain and sorrow have poisoned it in every part--disease and death compass it about. It is a blighted, withered, ruined, woe-stricken world! It is so as seen by our eyes--how much more when seen by angels' eyes! How much more still when seen by the eyes of God! How infinitely desirable that all this evil should be undone--this curse up torn--this death exchanged for life--this sorrow turned into joy! And what a difference it will make when such shall actually be the state of things on earth! Sin shall no longer defile--death shall no longer destroy--sorrow shall no longer overshadow. God shall no longer be banished from His own creation.

Who, when reading such prophetic descriptions as the following, can fail to realize the desirableness of the glorious change? 'There shall be no more curse; but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him!' 'There shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God gives them light, and they shall reign forever and ever!' 'There shall never enter into it anything that defiles!' '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!'

If, then, that change be so infinitely desirable--if the event described in our text be so inconceivably glorious--how needful that those who are expected to share it, should meanwhile walk worthy of it! The prospect of such a glory should be as transforming as it is comforting, as sanctifying as it is gladdening. If this be our hope, what kind of people we ought to be, in all holy conversation and godliness! Is it so with us?

II. The declared PURPOSE of God as to this glorious event. God having His tabernacle (or dwelling) with men.

One of the earliest statements is an intimation of God's purpose respecting this. Paradise was meant not merely as man's abode--but as God's abode with man. The great original purpose of God to have His dwelling with men, continued to be presented to man in type and prophecy form that day forward, to show that it had only been postponed, not abandoned--postponed in order to be carried out more fully and more gloriously than it could have been before. Especially was this the case in Israel's history, from the time that the tabernacle was erected in the wilderness to the day when the temple and city were laid in ruins by the hand of the aliens. The name of the tabernacle was 'Jehovah's Tent'--the tent in which He took up His abode, and round which He gathered the tents of Israel--'the tent which He placed among men' (Psalm 78:60). The whole story of Israel is the exhibition of God's desire to dwell with men--and man's refusal to allow God to dwell with Him.

The statement in the Gospel of John regarding the Son of God is another declaration of this same purpose--'The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us;' literally--tabernacled or pitched His tent among us. And, in our Lord's words, we have more than once the intimation of the same thing, or rather of a twofold purpose--that God should dwell with man, and that man should dwell with God; as in that remarkable answer to one of His disciples, 'If any man loves me, he will keep my words--and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him' (John 14:23). And it is this which is the complete fulfillment of Christ's name Immanuel, 'God with us.'

God then has all along been telling us not merely that He has a heaven of which He desires to make us partakers--His own blessed heaven, the paradise that was never lost--but that He means to make a second heaven of this very earth of ours; and out of that paradise, that Eden, that earth, which was lost and marred by man, to bring a more blessed and incorruptible paradise, in which He will pitch His tent, and where He will make His dwelling with the sons of men. As in the person of Christ we see these two things--man taken up to God, and God coming down to man--so as indissolubly to combine in one perfect being all that is excellent in the Creator and in the creature; so in the universe of God the same two-fold perfection is to be exhibited--man taken up to dwell with God in God's holy heaven above, and God coming down to dwell with man in man's holy earth below.

And are not these two things brought before us in these words of Christ spoken to the Laodicean Church--'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man will hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me?' I with him as well as he with me! And is not this the filling up of all blessedness, the consummation of all glory? Without it would not something have been a wanting both in earth and heaven--both to God and man?

From the beginning then, God has announced this as His purpose. Age after age has He set this before us--in type and prophecy. All that has taken place on earth has been bearing upon this, and helping it forward. God means yet to dwell with men! This is the Bible message to us. God means to dwell with men. This is His eternal purpose; and had it not been so, would He not long since have abandoned such an earth as ours--and either made it pass into nothing or turned it into hell?

Nor have there been any intimations of God's design ultimately to abandon earth, after He has accomplished His certain ends. He has nowhere said that after having spared it, and made use of it for a certain time, and for certain ends, He will leave it to desolation, or reduce it to nothing. On the contrary, all

that He has said and done hitherto indicate His intention to restore it, to glorify it, and to fit it for being His abode. God has, beyond mistake, declared His purpose as to the destiny of earth--and that purpose shall stand.

The BARRIERS in the way of its accomplishment are vast and many. The whole power of the fallen creature, both men and devils, is arrayed against it. Sin and righteousness alike oppose it--the former blighting it, and the latter forbidding the removal of the blight. Death and life alike oppose it--the former destroying it, the latter refusing to come and restore the desolation. The evil, too, has increased so great, and has been of so long standing; the curse has had its full and protracted sway, so as to eat into the very core of everything good and beautiful; the poison has had time so thoroughly to infuse itself into the constitution of creation, that its life's blood seems poisoned, and the taint of corruption become ineradicable; the weight of guilt which is upon it, calling for eternal judgment, seems so tremendous specially the guilt of crucifying the Lord of glory; the authority of Satan over it seems so complete and so irrevocably established--that the hindrances in the way of creation's restitution seem all but insurmountable! Yet the eternal purpose shall stand. Not a jot of it shall fail--even that pertaining to the smallest atom of this moldering earth. All shall come to pass. Eternal Sovereignty has decreed it. Infinite Wisdom has planned it. Omnipotence will bring it to pass.

III. The means, or PROCESS, by which God is bringing all this about.

This whole process, from first to last, centers in His Son. As the Christ of God, He is the accomplisher of the Father's purpose; and through Him God has been all along ripening that purpose, removing the hindrances, and hastening on its full revelation.

1. The first actual step was the INCARNATION. When 'the Word was made flesh,' the first link was formed which was to secure creation from sinking into utter ruin--to fasten it to Godhead--and in the end to raise it up to a brighter glory and excellence than that form which it had fallen! The Son of God took bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh; and as our bodies are part of the dust of the ground, out of which they were formed, so He, in taking to Himself a true body, took into His person the materials of creation--the dust of our very earth--thus linking creation to Himself by an indissoluble tie--and fastening earth to heaven. He took not upon Him the nature of angels, but He took on Him the seed of Abraham; and while this identified Him with our race, it no less identified Him with that earth which was given us as our special home and dwelling-place and kingdom. By thus taking a body made out of the substance of earth, He joined Himself in perpetual affinity with man and his world--and that which God has thus joined together, who shall put asunder?

2. HIS LIFE ON EARTH was the second step towards the end in view. His living here for thirty-three years was the declaration of His desire and purpose to make earth the seat of His dwelling place. But in His life we see more than this. We see him taking possession of creation; we see Him doing battle with its oppressors; we see Him casting out Satan, healing diseases, overcoming death. We see Him hushing the winds, calming the sea, exercising dominion over its inhabitants, creating bread for the multitudes, walking upon the deep, and giving others power to do the same. In all this we see not merely power and love, but we see the visible and material pledges of the deliverance of creation from the bondage of corruption. He who did these things has, by doing them, pledged Himself to do more, more--to do all that earth requires. He who did these things in the day of His humiliation and weakness--and before His great work upon the cross was accomplished, will surely do exceeding abundantly more than all these, in the day of glory and power, now that He has finished His work, and put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

3. His DEATH was the next step. For it is through death, that life is to come--both to man and to his earth. Only the death of Him who has identified Himself with us and with our world can remove the guilt under which earth was groaning, can secure the revocation of the sentence, can obtain forgiveness for earth, as well as for man, its dweller. He was earth's Sin-bearer as well as man's. He took upon Him the curse of earth as well as man; and the thorns which formed His crown showed how truly He was bearing the curse upon creation, which Adam's sin had caused. As the bearer of man's guilt, He was nailed to the cross; as the bearer of earth's curse, He was crowned with thorns. Earth has now been sprinkled with His blood; and that blood cleanses from all sin.

4. His BURIAL was the next step. Death had taken up its abode upon earth, and every sepulcher on its surface was one of his strongholds. Until death then be overcome in his very fortress--until he be dispossessed out of his dwelling--there can be no hope for earth. Mortality would still reign. But Christ went down and fought the lion in his den! From his lair He drove him out; and in demonstration of His victory He compelled him to let go a company of saints, who, when He rose, rose with Him as a pledge of His final victory over death, and of the expulsion from earth of the last enemy which had hitherto devastated it. By death the Prince of life overcame death; and in His burial He was pursuing the routed foe, and compelling him to deliver up his prey. Thus did He commence the expulsion from earth, of that mortality and corruption which had defaced it so sadly.

5. His RESURRECTION was the next step. Wresting His own body from the dominion of death, He showed how before long He is to wrest, not only the bodies of His saints--but the whole creation, from the bondage of corruption. If He on whom sin was laid, and who on account of that load went down to the grave, thus threw off mortality, and shook Himself free from its fetters, bringing life and immortality to light, how certainly may we conclude that He is able to do the same thing for that creation which was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of Him who had subjected the same in hope! Christ's resurrection not only proclaimed Him to be the Son of God with power--but also the Prince of the kings of the earth!

6. His ASCENSION into heaven was the next step. When He ascended, He not only led captivity captive, but He carried up into heaven His own body as the representative of earth. That body is now at the Father's right hand, the pledge of earth's security and final glory. An ascended Christ is earth's great pledge of restitution, and another step of the process towards the accomplishment of the purpose of God. That portion of earth which, in His body, He has carried up into heaven, proclaims to the inhabitants of heaven His interest in earth, and to the inhabitants of earth the certainty of His purpose respecting earth's final restitution. And for what is this ascended Savior interceding? Not only for His Church, but for earth itself. 'Ask of me, and I will give you the uttermost ends of the earth for Your possession.' He pleads for earth--earth, where He was born, and lived, and died; earth, whose air He breathed, whose plains and hills He walked, and whose soil He watered with His blood; earth, out of whose dust His body is composed, and the future bodies of His risen saints. Nor shall these intercessions be long in vain. Soon shall they be all answered, and the cry be heard, 'Behold! the tabernacle of God is with men!'

1. SAINT, are you making ready for that day? Are you walking worthy of an heir of that glory? Are you remembering that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit? Are you at one with Father and with Son in your desire for that restitution of all things? Do you not only long to depart and to be with Christ, but do you also long for the arrival of Christ here, and for God's making His tabernacle with the children of men?

2. SINNER, what are your thoughts of that day? What hopes have you of sharing its blessedness? At present, none! None! What have you to do with it? What has an unforgiven soul to do with a forgiven and delivered creation? What has an unrenewed sinner to do with a glorified world--a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness? From that world all sin is swept away; and can you hope to dwell in it? Nothing that defiles shall enter; and do you expect to enter it?

Yet Christ says, 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock--if any man hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in unto him, and will sup with him, and he with me.' Let the Son of God enter now; His entrance now will be the pledge of your entrance into the new Jerusalem. Admit this Christ whom you have long shut out. Admit Him at once. He will come in, and dwell in you and with you; and that will be the pledge of the eternal indwelling, the eternal fellowship, the eternal blessedness, when the tabernacle of God shall be with men!

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