

Zion City Of Our God

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Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities: thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down; not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be removed, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken (Isaiah 33:20).

By Zion I understand the real Church of Christ, and, in the strictest sense, the whole body elect, chosen, and secured in Christ before the foundation of the world; 'For the Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest forever; here will I dwell; for I have desired it' (Psalm 132:13, 14). So that Zion is the spiritual property, the glorious church, and the eternal residence of Jehovah. Here the Lord not only declares but subscribes His name, and maintains all the honours of His glorious nature; and to this blessed Zion every real believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is brought by the power of the Holy Ghost; as it is written, 'But ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel'. From this statement we learn that Zion is the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, the glorious vision of peace, where God lives and dwells as the God of peace, and that it consists of an innumerable company of angels; and if by angels the glorious angelic host above is intended, they are an innumerable company indeed; for 'the chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels' (Psalm 68:17); and the mountain was full of them for the protection of Elisha (2 Kings 6:17). Yet there is a sense in which they cannot fully enter into the glories of the redeemed family of God, for the Lord Jesus Christ did not take their nature into union with His personal Godhead; 'For verily he took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham' (Hebrews 2:16). The glory of redemption by the blood of the God-Man they cannot experience. This divine mystery contains in it things that the angels desire to look into (1 Peter 1:11, 12); so that, as the poet says,

If sinless innocence be theirs

Redemption all is ours.

There is a glorious measure of the glory of God in the person, blood, and

obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ which no creatures but redeemed sinners can enter into, and they can only enter into it as the Holy Ghost reveals it unto them; 'But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:9-11). (See also the verses which follow the above). If by angels, angels in office are intended, viz., God's messengers, or ministers of the Spirit and of the glorious gospel of the blessed God, raised up, qualified, and sent forth by the Lord, to 'preach the unsearchable riches of Christ' (Ephesians 3:7, 8), then it takes in all that ever have been, that are now, or ever will be thus employed by the Lord; and though the true ministers of the Spirit appear but few in number at any one time compared with the rest, the whole collected together, as treasured up in the mind, purpose, and covenant of God's grace, are a great company, and they are a branch of the city of the living God. This blessed Zion contains the general assembly and church of the first-born; and if by the first-born, we are here to understand the Lord Jesus Christ, for He is so-called (Colossians 1:15,18), then the whole family of God, chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, are intended; a people given unto Christ and made His care and charge (John 17:6, to the end of the chapter); for the blessed elect of God, chosen in Christ, redeemed by Christ, and, in God's own time, quickened by the power of the Spirit and made alive to Christ, having a vital life in Him, are the true church of Christ, and if Christ be meant by the first-born, then that blessed church is the church of the first-born, and shall forever live in and with Him as His own spiritual property and delight. Of this blessed Church of the first born it is said, 'Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish' (Ephesians 5:25-27). Bless the precious name of our adorable Redeemer, He will take care of His church, and present to Himself a glorious church, come what will; for thus sayeth the Lord; 'All that the Father giveth me shall come to me, and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out' (John 6:37; see also John 10:27-29). So that the whole elect of God appear to be intended, both those that are already gone to glory, and those that are now on their way there, and likewise those who are yet unborn – all sealed up and secured in the covenant, love, and heart of the Lord the lamb, as figured forth in Peter's vision (Acts 10:10-16). If by the general assembly and church of the first-born we are to understand all those who are, by the invincible power of God the Holy Ghost, quickened and made alive to God, and 'born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:13; 3:5), still the same characters are intended, for all that are chosen in Christ shall, in the Lord's own time, experienced this divine change, and none but such ever will, nor can it be accomplished but by the exceeding greatness of God's mighty power (Ephesians 1:19; 2:10).

These are all written in heaven, 'in the book of life of the lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8) and the rest will, some way or other, live and die in the worship of antichrist, for 'there are many antichrists (1 John 2:18). The Pope is not the only antichrist in the world, for every doctrine and every branch of worship which is contrary to the Lord Jesus Christ, is antichristian. The real spiritual worshippers of God are those who are born of God, and who worship Him in spirit and in truth; and all such are of the blessed number whose names are written in heaven. Sometimes, when the joys of the child of God appear to run high, he, like the seventy disciples, is ready to triumph because the devils are subject to him; but, poor soul, a thousand to one but by and by he will fear, in his feelings, that he is subject to the devil, and all his joy on this ground will leave him to sink in dismay; yet still his name stands securely written in heaven; there has no change taken place there. Though the enemy of souls may greatly annoy and distress the people of God, he cannot destroy them; for their 'life is hid with Christ in God'. Therefore, saith the Lord, 'Behold I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding, in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven' (Luke 10:19, 20). So that their names being written in heaven is a much surer foundation for joy than the devils being subject to them; for most assuredly they shall all at last overcome by the blood of the Lamb. Satan may and does bring a thousand accusations against them, and there are sad times when conscience cannot deny the charge; but by a vital faith in the blood of the Lamb, they shall overcome; for thus it is written; 'and I heard a voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ; for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death' (Revelation 12:10, 11). Well, these characters in union to Jesus the mediator, and to God the judge of all in Him, whether they are now the spirits of just men made perfect in glory, or whether they are still in this vale of tears, or yet on unborn, – all being chosen in Christ, and being written in heaven, are God's blessed Mount Zion. And if, as some say, the term Mount Zion signifies a sepulchre, it may in this respect set forth what God's people are in and of themselves, a vile, detestable mass of filth, sin, and corruption, brought in very deed, at one time or another, feelingly to cry, 'My wounds stink and are corrupt, because of my foolishness' (Psalm 38:5). Ungodly men may and do awfully sin against the holy, just, and good God, but none except a real spiritual Zionite feelingly sickens at, loathes, and detests his stinking foolishness, abhorring himself because of it, and truly uniting with Job; 'Wherefore, I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes (Job 42:6). It is one thing for a man to own that he is a vile sinner, but it is another thing for a man to feel real shame before God on account of his vileness and feelingly to loathe himself and detest the very root from which all sinful actions spring. There are professors even of doctrinal truth who will talk much about their corruptions, and, in fact, they have little else to talk about,

and they often speak of it as though it was a sweet morsel, or a matter of little or no importance; but this is not the case with real believers in the Lord Jesus Christ; for though they frequently feel the dreadful springings up and workings of corrupt nature, it is their burden and their grief, and they groan under it and heartily detest it, and in real spiritual feeling cry, My loins are filled with a loathsome disease; and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and sore broken; I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart. Lord all my desire is before thee, and my groaning is not hid from thee (Psalm 38:7-9). Yet, they cannot ground their hope of eternal happiness upon their loathing of, or groaning under their vileness. No, there is no solid ground for hope or rest to the weary soul short of Christ crucified.

Does Zion signify a monument? What a monument of rich, discriminating grace the Church of God is! Here all the honours of Jehovah, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, meet and shine, and matchless grace engraves upon it the name of God (Revelation 3:12). The church is raised up by the eternal, electing love of God the Father, the eternal and redeeming love of God the Son, and the eternal, quickening, enlightening, convincing, teaching, anointing, sealing, and witness-bearing love of God the Holy Spirit, to show forth the praises of God, as a living monument of the wonders God has done, is now doing, and will still do. This is God's glorious Zion, and He will glorify it (Isaiah 60:7). As she stands in union to Christ her living Head, life, and glory, immortally complete in Him, she is the masterpiece of God's workmanship and declarative glory; and 'out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined' (Psalm 50:2). Notwithstanding all the wretchedness that the church, while here below, feels and fears, and in deep humility confesses, yet such are the glorious mysteries of God's grace, that as she stands in Christ, chosen in Him, redeemed by Him, and washed from all her sins in His precious blood, clothed in His righteousness, quickened and created anew in Christ Jesus by the Holy Ghost, and saved by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost (Revelation 1:5; Ephesians 2:1-10; Titus 3:5), made comely and beautiful in the comeliness which the Lord puts upon her, she stands free from charge (Romans 8:33-35), and shall at last be presented before the throne of God a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing. This glorious church is built, by the Three-One God, out of some of the worst materials under the sun, to be the glorious dwelling place of the Lord, raised up by infinite wisdom, love, power, and grace, a glorious monument of discriminating mercy, to show forth the praises of God for ever and ever. This is God's holy hill, or, as it reads in the margin, the hill of His holiness, and here Christ lives and reigns (Psalm 2:6). Here 'the lord shall reign for ever, even thy God, O Zion, unto all generations. Praise ye the Lord (Psalm 146:10).

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