

"Holy Places"

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Some of the towns in India are said to be very holy, especially those on the banks of the River Ganges. The water of the Ganges is thought to be so holy that it makes the towns on it holy. Some of them are made more holy than others because many parts of the river are considered more holy than other parts. Among these are Allababad, Jugarnaut, Muthra, Hurdwar, and Benares the most sacred of all.

Benares is said to have been built by the God Siva out of gold and precious stones, but on account of the sins of the people who lived there it was finally turned into stone and thatch. "The Hindus think Benares is 80,000 steps nearer heaven than any other place, and that those who died there will go straight to Siva's heaven, the best of all."

There are 2,000 temples in Benares a large number of sacred wells and pools, and 500,000 idols! There is also the Monkey Temple, the temple full of sacred cows, and the Well of Knowledge of which we learned last week. Many are the pilgrims that go there from all parts of India hoping to obtain purity and wholeness by coming in contact with such a holy place. But holiness is not obtained in that way, nor from such things, so they go home as unsatisfied and as unholy as when they came. Their gods have no power, there sacred waters are no more holy than any other waters.

What makes a place sacred? What makes a thing holy? Look in your Bible and you will see.

In the third chapter of Exodus we are told of a wise and good man named Moses, a shepherd, who was taking care of the flock of Jethro his father-in-law. One day as he was leading the sheep to the backside of the desert, and came near to a mountain called Horeb, he suddenly stopped, for he saw something very wonderful. Off to one side was a bush on fire, and it burned and burned, but did not burn up!

"And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I. And He said, Draw not nigh hither; put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. Moreover He said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God." [Exod. 3:3-6]

Ah, it was the glory of the living God that wrapped a bush in flames; it was the presence of the King of kings that caused Moses to hide his face; it was the holiness of Him who alone is holy that caused that barren wilderness to become holy ground. Before the Lord appeared there it was not holy, and after the Lord left there it was not holy; it was His presence that made it holy.

Once more the Lord appeared in this same wilderness on Mount Sinai, when He came with all His angels and spoke the ten commandments with His own voice. And the mountain became so holy that the children of Israel did not dare to go near it. "And Mount Sinai was altogether

on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly." [Exod. 19:18]

Wherever the Lord is, there is a holy place, as we see it again in the fifth chapter of Joshua: "And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand; and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto Him, What saith my Lord unto His servant? And the captain of the Lord's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so." [Joshua 5:13-15]

Again we read of the holy mount where Jesus appeared in His glory and the voice of God said, "This is My beloved Son, Hear ye Him." [Matt. 17:5]

The apartment of the temple in which the Lord appeared above the mercy seat was the Most Holy Place, because God appeared there. But as soon as He stopped visiting the temple it was no longer holy.

We see, therefore, that it is not where God has been or where He is going to be that is holy, but it is where God is. No place is holy because Jesus was once there, but if it is holy at all it must be because He is there now, a living Saviour.

Not only in the wilderness does the Lord have a holy sanctuary. He says that wherever two or three are gathered together in His name, there is He in the midst of them. [Matt. 18:20] Then if He is there, is it not holy? Should not we, like Moses, be very careful how we act in His presence, that we grieve Him not away and bring not a curse upon ourselves? He says, "Ye shall keep my Sabbaths, and reverence My sanctuary; I am the Lord." [Lev. 19:30] Why?

He does not say because I am a Lord, and you should respect Me as you do earthly kings and lords; no, you should reverence Him for He says, "I am the Lord,"—the Holy One. "For who in the heaven can be compared unto the Lord? who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the Lord? God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him." [Psa. 89:6, 7]

It is very sad to see even children noisy and impolite and disrespectful in church and Sabbath-school, for it shows that they do not realize that they are in a holy place on account of the presence of the Holy One who is King of kings and Lord of lords, and the Creator of the heavens and the earth. They are not showing disrespect to their teacher merely, but to the God of heaven.

We read that the Bible, God's Word, is holy. Then since no place can become holy unless Jesus is there, who must be in God's word? Yes, Jesus Himself lives in it by His Holy Spirit.

Since Jesus dwells in the words of God, since Jesus is the Word of God, you see it is easy to let Him into our hearts. It can be done just by letting God's word into our hearts. If we read it, and believe it, and accept it as God's word to us, and love it, and take it as our rule, it will bring Jesus, the Holy One, into our hearts.

Since Jesus makes holy every place that He enters, our hearts will be holy as soon as Jesus comes in. No wickedness and insecurity can stay where Jesus is. It flees before Him even as it did when He entered the temple at Jerusalem and found the priests and rulers buying and selling cattle. And that is just what Jesus has bought for us. He has bought us with a price, even the precious blood of Christ, that our bodies may be holy temples where He may dwell.

So you see you do not need to go on long pilgrimages, as the Indians do, to find holiness. He, the Word, the Holy One, is nigh thee, waiting to be invited to make of you a holy temple unto Himself. Will you let Him in? And remember that it is not enough to let Him in. You must let Him stay in, if you would have your heart continue to be holy.