

# The King's Highway

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### Christmas — Without Christ

by Rev. J. H. Jowett, D.D.

"There was no room for them in the inn" (Luke 2:7)

No room"! The Lord was crowded out! And I suggest that this incident at the birth of our Saviour is symbolic of the tragedy of the whole of His life, and of the continued tragedy of our relationship to Him today. He has been excluded from the central place. He has been hustled into the outer courts. No room has been offered Him in the inn. He has been crowded out!

And I further suggest that the only place in which He can make His home today is the inn of the soul, the secret rooms of the personal life. We sometimes sing, in one of the most tender and gracious of our hymns, "O make our hearts Thy dwelling place," and that is just what the Lord is willing and waiting to do. "O make our hearts Thine inn!" But when He moves toward us, He finds the inn already thronged. There is no room for Him, and He is relegated to the cold and grudging shelter on the outside of our lives. He is crowded out!

#### INSTEAD OF A ROOM

Now what do we offer the Lord in the place of a room in the inn? We build Him stately material temples. We expend boundless treasure in their erection. Art joins hands with architecture, and the structure becomes a poem. Lily-work crowns the majestic pillar. Subdued light, and exquisite line, and tender colour, add their riches to the finished pile. And the soul cries out: "Here is a house for Thee, O Man of Nazareth, Lord of glory! Here is the home I have built for Thee." And if the soul would only listen, there comes back the pained response, "Where is the place of My rest? saith the Lord"; "The most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands"; "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit." The Lord of glory seeks the warm inn of the soul, and we offer Him a manger of stone.

Or in place of the home which He seeks we build Him an edifice of stately ritual. We spend infinite pains in designing dainty and picturesque ceremonials. We devise reverent and dignified movements. We invent and elaborate an impressive symbolism. We engage the ministry of noble music for the expression of our praise, and we swing the fragrant censer for the expression of our prayer.

Or perhaps we discard the colour and the glow. We banish everything that is elaborate and ornate. We use no flowers, either in reality or in symbol. We reduce our ritualism to a simple posture. Our music is rendered without pride or ostentation. Everything is plain, prosaic, and unadorned. We have a ritual without glitter, and we have movements without romance.

But whether our ceremony be one or the other, whether it be laden with Roman Catholic profusion or lean with Quaker simplicity, whether it be bewitchingly poetic or bald and severe, the soul virtually says to the Lord: "Here is a ritualistic house I have built for Thee,



O Christ! Take up Thine abode in the dwelling which I have provided." And if the soul would only listen, it would hear the Lord's reply, "My son, give Me thine heart." He seeks the inn of the soul; we offer Him a ritualistic manger.

Or once again we build Him the massive house of a stately creed. The building is solid and comprehensive. All its parts are firm and well defined, and they are mortised with passionate zeal and devotion. We are proud of its constitution. The creed is all the more beautiful because it is now so venerable and hoary. The weather stains of centuries only add to its significance and glory. There it stands venerable, majestic, apparently indestructible. "Here is a creedal home for Thee, O Lord! I am jealous for the honour of Thy house. I will contend earnestly for every stone in the holy fabric! Here is a home for Thee, O King!"

And if the soul would reverently and quietly listen, this would be the response she would hear, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" That is what the Lord is seeking. He seeks not my creedal statements but my personal faith. He solicits not my creed but my person, not my words but my heart. And so do we offer Him all these substitutes in the place of the dwelling He seeks. And if these are all we have to offer, "The Son of man hath not where to lay His head." We offer Him the hospitality of a big outer creed, but "there is no room in the inn."

#### THE HOUSE CHRIST WANTS

Let us now look even more closely at the kind of entertainment which the Lord desires, and let me quote for our guidance the word of the Apostle Paul: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God?" This is the house

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