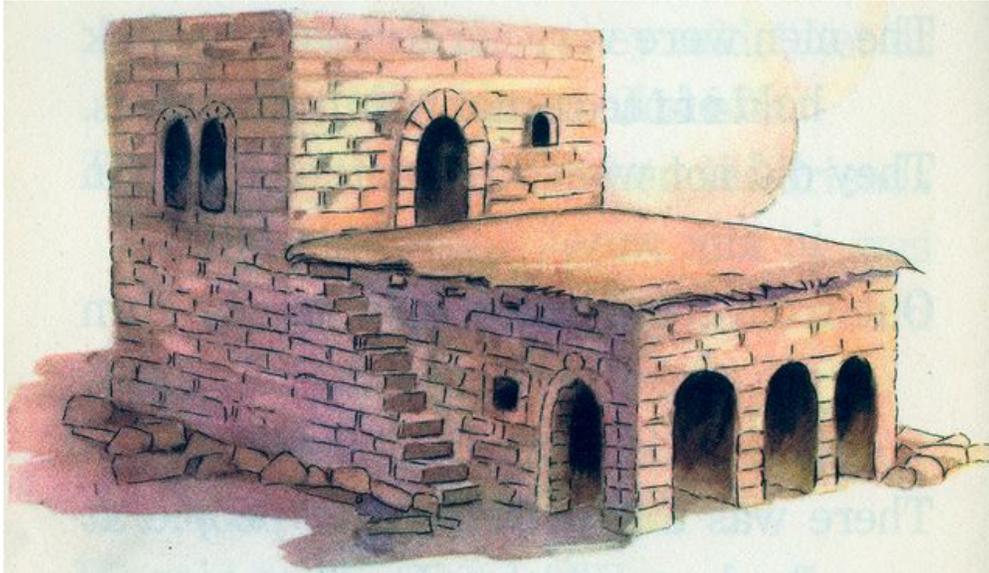


The Housetops



There is a verse from Isaiah which has great significance for me [Isaiah 22:1]:
"What aileth thee now, that thou art wholly gone up to thou housetops?"

In the East, all the houses have flat roofs. This is where people go to sleep at night, where they pray (because they want to get as close to God as they can) and where they go to watch any parades or see important people going by.

Housetops are like public property in a way, because there is a way to go up from the garden. The custom is that others may go on the house tops to look down at the street without asking the permission of the house owner.

Also, the family will sleep on the roof during most seasons, and there may be a little room built to hold the bedding. This is also used as a prophet's chamber. In II Kings 4:10 we read of the Shunamite woman who made a little chamber on the wall for Elisha to stay in when he passed that way. He could go up there and not disturb the rest of the family.

You remember the story about the man sick of the palsy, whose companions let him down through the roof so he could see Jesus and be healed by him. Mark 2:4 says, "And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay."

People read this Scripture and think that these people broke something to get through the roof, but it is not so. This place in the roof is made so that it can be taken apart and then placed back together again for people to go from the roof-top down into the house. "Broken up" in this case is like when someone says that they are going to

knock down a tent or some other equipment which comes apart and then is put back together.

The houses are so close together in the villages that you can walk from one housetop to another. In times of danger, the people can get out of the village by running a cross the house tops without even coming down. That is why Jesus said, about the Day of Judgment, "Let him which is on the house top not come down to take any thing out of his house." He does not need to come down at all; he can flee across the roof tops.

Announcements and news pass from one house to another by way of the housetops. The families will come out at night and make their beds and talk back and forth from one roof to another until going to sleep. One woman says to the next one, "Say, did you hear that Bishop Pillai is going to preach here tomorrow?" And that lady then tells it to the next house, so that in a short time the whole town knows it. Who needs radio and newspaper advertising when you can proclaim something from the rooftops?

Jesus told the disciples [Matthew 10:27], "What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops."

The Eastern people also pray on the housetops. They remove their shoes when they pray, you know, so that praying at noon time on the roof with bare feet can be a real test of piety! They take off their shoes because any place where they call on God becomes holy ground.

We read about the Apostle Peter doing this in Acts 10:9; "On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour." (The sixth hour is noon).

If there is any crisis, any disease or threat, the ruler of the town calls all the people out onto the housetops and then calls on God to deliver them. If Easterners were in New Knoxville, and heard about a plague in Lima, they would all go up on the housetops to pray that God would let the plague pass by and not harm them.

There are no divisions among the people when this happens. The crippled, the old and the sick are all carried up on the roof also; not one soul is left behind so that God can see that the town has "wholly" gone up to the housetops! The people do not say, "Oh, well, Mayor Jones is a Methodist and we are Episcopalians, so we cannot pray with him!"

How well I remember that in India when Gandhi called for prayer, hundreds of thousands of people turned out. There was no building any where which was large enough to hold the people. They had to meet at the sea shore to pray because Gandhi called them to "wholly" come out to prayer.

This country needs to "wholly" go up to the housetops, that is, to pray together with one accord and one purpose for God to deliver us from the dangers and threats

which are around us. This is no time to worry about denominational or creedal differences. Let us turn to God for deliverance. God bless you.

Bishop K.C. Pillai, D.D.