

THE  
PRESENCE OF CHRIST  
THE  
GLORY OF A CHURCH:

A  
DISCOURSE,

PREACHED NOVEMBER 6, 1808,

AT THE OPENING OF THE

FOURTH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, IN CEDAR-STREET,

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1808.

# A DISCOURSE, &c.

HAGGAI ii. 7. last clause.

—*And I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts.*

THE inspired author of our text, was one of the three prophets who lived and prophesied after the return of the Jews from their captivity in Babylon; and he, with his cotemporary Zachariah, and their successor Malachi, is ranked by the Jews among the members of the *great Synagogue*, which was constituted after their return to their own land. This is numbered by the ancient Jewish writers among their distinguished honours; but it was far exceeded by the honour which God himself put upon them, by employing them as prophets in his name; and it deserves our notice, that as the spirit of prophecy ceased in them, until it was revived in the immediate Forerunner of Christ; so few, if any, that had gone before them, spoke more clearly of the Messiah, and the kingdom he was to set up in the

world. In them the morning star of prophecy shone more bright, as the time of the rising of the Sun of Righteousness drew on.

The great scope and design of the prophecy, from whence we have taken our text, is to encourage these recovered captives to rebuild their temple, and set up the true worship of God among them in its ancient purity and glory. This great work had been begun about eighteen years before, by the command of Cyrus, king of Persia ; but had suffered repeated delays by the malice of their enemies, and their own sloth and discouragements. Among these discouragements, none was greater than the mean, the very inferior figure, that this new temple must make, when compared with that built by Solomon. That was not only most magnificent in its structure ; but contained the ark ; the Urim and Thummim ; the fire from heaven, that burnt continually on the altar ; the Shekinah, or divine glory that rested on the mercy seat, and the Spirit of prophecy. These the Jews esteemed the five glories of the first temple. But in all these respects, as well as the grandeur of the edifice, they knew this second temple must fall far beneath the first, as it really did.

The prophet, in the third verse of our context, ad-

mits the truth of the objection, so far as it respected its external magnificence, and even those five tokens of the divine presence in the first temple, just mentioned; but assures them, notwithstanding, that God would put a glory upon this second temple far superior to that which the first had ever shared, with all these advantages. “The glory of this latter house shall be greater than the former.” But wherein? they would be ready to ask, and with great propriety. To this the prophet answers in the verse from whence we have taken our text. “I will shake all nations, and the Desire of all nations shall come; and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts.” By “the Desire of all nations,” in these words, commentators with one voice agree to understand the great Messiah; nor can the character with propriety apply to any other. Jesus is deservedly so called, from his personal glories, and his mediatorial accomplishments: the passion of desire being here put for its object, by a figure common in scripture. This *desire of all nations shall come*, that is, shall *come* in the flesh; shall make his appearance in our world during this second temple. He shall *come*, that is, he shall *come* into this temple, and minister before God in it. He shall *come*; he who is the brightness of the Father’s glory, and the express image of his person, shall *come*, and negotiate the

treaty of reconciliation between God and sinners, in this very house, which I am now encouraging you to build. “ This is the glory, this personal and gracious presence of the Messiah, is the glory with which I will fill this house, saith the Lord of hosts.” And who does not see this to be a glory superior to all the magnificence of architecture, finished with all the pride of art? Yea, superior to all the glory of the ark; the Urin and Thummim; the fire from heaven; the Shekinah; the Spirit of prophecy; those tokens of the divine presence themselves in the first temple, as far superior to them, as the sun in his meridian splendour excels in glory the twinkling of some feeble stars. They were but a few scattered rays of Christ, the glorious Sun of righteousness.

But how exactly and even literally this prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, and how fully his Messiahship is vindicated thereby, are truths so obvious to every Christian, as scarce to need mentioning.

My brethren, it is necessary to observe here, that the ancient temple was a type, a symbol, of the church; and that as God dwelt in that by the visible token of his presence, which we have al-

ready mentioned ; so he *now* dwells in his church, by his gracious and spiritual presence. And inasmuch as no scripture is of private interpretation, and whatsoever was written of old, was written for our learning ; our text thus viewed, teaches us,

That the presence of Christ in his church, is its highest glory.

“ And I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts.”

By the aid of the Spirit of grace, we shall

I. Inquire *how* Jesus Christ is present in his church here upon earth.

II. Show you *how* this presence of Christ, is the glory of his church.

I. How is Jesus Christ now present in his church ?

We answer, not as he once was, in the second temple, of which the prophet more immediately speaks in our text, that is, in a bodily manner ; for in this sense “ the heavens have received him until the restitution of all things.” But he is notwithstanding

present with his church, and with every particular assembly of his people met together in his name to worship him, and the Father through him, in every age, and in every clime. This is his faithful promise:—“where two or three are gathered together in my name, *there am I in the midst of them.*” And this he is,

1. By *the administration of his word and ordinances*, that is, by the preaching of the word, and the administration of the gospel sacraments. Need we stay here to prove, that these are the institutions of Christ our Lord? We address a congregation of professed Christians, and may therefore doubtless take it for granted. But the ministers of the gospel, in the regular dispensation of them, act in the name of Christ, and by virtue of an authority derived from him. They bear his commission for this purpose—“Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, *I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.*” Here they have not only the authority of Christ; but are assured of his gracious presence with them, in the proper discharge of their high trust—“Lo, I am with you always, even to

the end of the world." Agreeably to this, faithful ministers are styled "*Workers together with Christ.*" While they are in the regular and faithful discharge of their office, they, in some sense, personate and represent their Lord Christ. Thus by the preaching of the word, they act under Christ as a *prophet*; for he teaches by his word. And this is the great business of preaching, to explain and confirm the important doctrines, which Christ as a prophet has taught us in his word.

In their prayers, they act under him as a *Priest*; in which character he intercedes for us before the throne of God. And by publicly explaining and inculcating the laws of Christ, as well as in the regular exercise of discipline, they act under him, and serve his interests as the great *King* and *Head* of his church. Thus are gospel ministers workers *together* with Christ; and thus is he present with his church, *in and by them*; or, rather, *in and by those divine institutions*, in which they minister to his church before him.

2. Jesus Christ is present with his church, by the *influences and operations of his Holy Spirit.* My brethren, Christ was the great promise of the Old Testament, and the Holy Spirit is the great

promise of the New. This was the inestimable blessing our Lord promised his disciples, on his departure from them; and who was to supply the want of his bodily presence with them. Thus, John xiv. 26.—“ But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you.” And of such importance is this blessing of the Spirit to his church, that our Lord repeats the promise respecting him again, in nearly the same words, John xv. 26. And he farther adds, John xvi. 7. “ Nevertheless, I tell you the truth, it is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.” He then proceeds in the next eight verses, more fully to explain the nature of his office, and the design of his mission into our world, which you will please to read at your leisure, and by which it appears they are of the most indispensable necessity to the comfort of his people, and the salvation of sinners.

Thus it is Christ is present with his ministers, by the influence of this his Spirit, *to assist, to animate, and enliven them in their great work.* He hereby enables them, at times, to lead the worship of his

people with ease, propriety, and a spirit of truly Christian devotion. He enables them to come even to his seat, to fill their mouths with arguments, and to order the cause of his people before him. At other times, he enables them so to enter into the evidences of divine truth, and so to relish its glory, as capacitates them for setting it before his people, with great clearness and affectionate solemnity. This is what St. Paul means by preaching “in demonstration of the Spirit and with power.”

At such times, Christ is ordinarily present by the operations of his Spirit *on the hearts of the hearers*; at least, many of them, in a greater or less degree. By these it is, as our Lord himself expresses it, “he convinces the world, of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment.” Hereby it is he opens to sinners their ruined state by nature; impresses their hearts with a proper sense of it; teaches them their need of a Saviour, and opens to them the suitability, sufficiency, and beauty of the method of salvation, through Jesus, the Redeemer: and all this by the instrumentality of his word. And thus it is, that the work of faith is wrought with power in their hearts. And thus it is, that the graces of God’s people are quickened, and called forth into more lively and vigorous exercise, by means of those views

which the Spirit of God gives them, of the nature and evidences of divine truth, the beauty of the divine character, the purity of his law, and the transcendent glories of a mediator Jesus.

Give me leave to remark here, that the Holy Spirit, in all those influences which he sheds on his ministers and people, in all his operations upon them, from time to time, acts *as the Spirit of Christ*. Therefore he tells his disciples, in the forecited John xvi. when speaking of the Spirit—“ He shall glorify me ; for *he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you*. All things that the Father hath are mine ; therefore, said I, *that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you*.” And agreeably to this, he is styled “ the Spirit of Christ,” Rom. viii. 9. and “ the Spirit of God’s Son,” Gal. iv. 6.

From all which it appears, that the influences and operations of the Spirit on the ministers and people of Christ, are a *real and proper evidence* of the presence of Christ himself with them. Thus is Christ present with his Church. But it is time we should proceed to

II. Show you *how* this presence of Christ, is the glory of his church.

By glory here, we are to understand honour and dignity. Thus, when God promises, “I will fill this house with glory,” the meaning is, “I will confer the highest honour upon it.” The inquiry before us then is, *wherein* this presence of Christ is the honour and glory of his church.

1. In that *God hereby exhibits to all intelligent worlds the glory of his divine character, IN AND BY THE CHURCH.* Christ, you hear, is present with his church by and in his word; but the brightest display that God has made of himself, his perfections, and moral character, is in his word—true, much of God’s name may be read in the wonders of creation and providence. The unnumbered worlds that compose the universe of creatures, with all their various ranks of inhabitants, “down from infinite to thee, from thee to nothing,” contain and exhibit amazing displays of the divine perfections. But in the sacred scriptures, “*We all with open face behold, AS IN A GLASS, THE GLORY of the Lord,* and are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” The church is the mirror, in and from which the divine glory is reflected on all intelligent beings, with a lustre truly godlike. There is not an angel in heaven, but what learns more of God here, than in all

the volumes of nature. So the Apostle teaches us, Eph. iii. 10.—“Unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, is made known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.” Hence, we find those bright intelligences busily employed in searching into these wonders of redeeming love and grace. Thus they are represented, 1 Pet. i. 12.—“Which things the angels desire to look into;” or, as the emphatical original has it, “which things the angels desire *stooping down to look into;*” the posture of the most attentive curiosity, the most prying search. But surely that must be a bright display of the divine character, which thus engages the attention and employs the search of angels themselves. Nor can they fully comprehend the object of their search: as they penetrate, new wonders rise to view, and new still, till they are held the prisoners of amaze, and obliged to cry out with their fellow servant Paul, O! the depths!

When God therefore blesses any particular branch of his church, or any assembly of his people, with the judicious and faithful preaching of his word; in proportion to the clearness, and the conformity of this preaching to the sacred scriptures, may that house be said to be filled with the glory of the Lord. The glory of divine truth; the glory

that redounds to God, from a proper exhibition of all those various attributes which are concerned in planning, in executing, in revealing, in applying, and in finishing, the glorious scheme of our redemption through Jesus Christ. And may this house be ever thus filled with the glory of the Lord!

2. In that God hereby *owns his church and people*, AS HIS COVENANT PEOPLE. Christ, you have heard, is present with his church, in and by the gospel sacraments, baptism, and the Lord's supper. But these are the seals of God's covenant love; the language of them is, that of Heb. viii. 10.—“ I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people.” But what honour, what glory can be equal to this? The most high God hereby makes himself over to his people, by covenant engagement and promise, to be their God; that is, to be all that to them that a God *is*, or *can be*, with all the perfections of his nature, to creatures of their character; and that for all the purposes of their consummate holiness and happiness.

They, on the other hand, make themselves over to God, by like covenant engagement and promise, to that God who is the fountain of honour. The language of their conduct in these sacred rites, and the

language of every upright heart among them, is, “ We will be to him a people ;” that is, in the ways of the strictest holiness.

Thus God and his people mutually covenant and engage with each other, and seal their covenant engagements in the most solemn manner in the gospel sacraments.

But surely this is a distinguished honour. It is an honour for us to be the Lord's, in any sense ; but to be *so* the Lord's, that Jehovah himself, with all the perfections of his nature, should be ours, is the highest dignity that can be conferred upon us. When any branch of his church, then, or any particular assembly of his people, is blessed with these pledges of God's covenant love, these visible tokens of his gracious presence, *in their simplicity and efficacy*, the glory of the Lord may be said to fill that place. And may this house be ever thus filled with the glory of the Lord !

3. The presence of Christ is the glory of his church, in that he hereby *manifests his SPECIAL LOVE to his church and people*. He hereby takes up his habitation with them ; and, as an evidence of this his special love, confers on them his Spirit, with

all his influences and graces, which are the choicest blessings of his purchase. But what greater honour can be conferred upon a soul, or a church, than to be made the habitation of God, through the Spirit! They hereby become the temples of the living God: so they are expressly called, 2 Cor. vi. 16.—“ For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” Yea, more, if more can be, God hereby himself owns them as his children; for the indwelling of the Spirit is one of the special privileges of adoption. “ Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son unto your hearts, crying Abba, Father.” When God therefore confers his Spirit on any church or people, he thereby fulfils that gracious promise—“ I will be a Father unto you; and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”

Thus does Christ by his presence, put those marks of his special love on his church, than which you will readily acknowledge, it cannot share a greater glory. And may this house be ever thus filled with the glory of the Lord!

4. The Lord Jesus hereby puts the *glory of DIVINE HOLINESS upon his church and people.* The very office of his Spirit, by which he is present with them, is that of a sanctifier; hence, he is call-

ed, by way of eminence, “the *Spirit of holiness.*” And that divine temper which is formed in his people, by his saving operations on them, is called a being “*born of the Spirit;*” and elsewhere, the *sanctification of the Spirit*, because effected by his agency. The moral depravity of their nature is hereby removed, and they changed into the divine image, “from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” But what an honour is it to be like God! Hereby the people of God become “partakers of the divine nature,” as the apostle Peter strongly expresses it. They are sharers of that very temper, which is the glory of Jehovah himself; we mean his holiness. No honour can surpass this.

May the worshippers in this house be ever distinguished by this glory of the Lord!

5. The church, thus blessed, becomes the *birth place of souls*—a nursery for heaven. Its members not only partake in a measure of the temper of heaven, and at times of the joys of heaven in this life; but the humble followers of Jesus, shall be assuredly transplanted, at last, from the church militant to the church triumphant, and be made partakers of all the glories of perfect holiness and consummate happiness, in the vision and fruition of God, as their complete portion; and that throughout an unwasting immortality. Thus they shall be made “heirs of God, and *joint heirs* with Jesus Christ.”

And may this glory of the Lord also fill this house. And do thou be pleased to add thy Amen to it, in all these respects, Lord God of hosts !

1. This subject teaches us the nature and design of the gospel ministry. It is to negotiate a treaty of reconciliation between God and sinners. The ministers of Jesus, as you have heard, act in all their ministrations, in the name of Christ, and by virtue of an authority derived from him. They are his under officers, engaged in the same benevolent design with him who is "our peace." Hence our Lord tells his first ministers, when sending them forth, and all his faithful ministers in every age through them—"He that receiveth you, receiveth me; and he that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me:" and "He that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me." The reception given to his ministers, our Lord esteems given to himself; and the contempt cast on them, *in their office-character*, and the overtures of peace they make in his name, terminates ultimately on the throne of God himself. They are his ambassadors, so called by an apostle—"Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." How sacred then their character! how important their messages! It is at your peril, O sinners! if you dare to slight these messages. You must answer for the

treatment you give them, at the bar of God. There you and I must meet—Solemn thought!

2. How important the influences; how necessary the operations of the Spirit of grace, to render the gospel ministry successful. Hence it is, that all the efficacy of the word and ordinances of God, is derived.—“ I (saith the apostle) have planted, and Apollos watered, but *God* gave the increase.” But you are carefully to remark here, that the business of the Holy Spirit, as appears from what has been said, is not to reveal any new truths not already taught in the oracles of God; but to render these truths effectual for saving purposes, to the souls of men. He is the great Sanctifier of the human heart; but it is by the instrumentality of the truth, as contained in the word of God, that he effects and promotes this divine change. Hence, our Lord prays, “ Sanctify them through thy truth;” and the more effectually to determine and ascertain the nature of this truth, he adds, “ thy word is truth.”

3. We hence learn wherein the glory of a church consists.—Not in external pomp and grandeur, much less in pageantry and show; but in the presence of Christ, the glorious Head of the church, with his word and ordinances. True, there is a regard to be had to decency. This is to appear in those buildings we erect for the celebration of divine service. Hence God reproveth the people of Is-

rael, by the prophet, in our context, for dwelling in ceiled houses of their own, while the house of God lay waste. To dwell in splendid houses ourselves, while the house of God is mean and indecent, argues such a superior regard for ourselves, to that which we have for God, his service, and his honour, as is beneath the dignity of the Christian character. And this decency appears in this church, in which, blessed be God, we are this day assembled to worship him.

Again—This decency ought to appear in all the several appendages of our worship; such as our apparel, our behaviour in the house of God, and the like. But these, though proper to be attended to in their place, are no part of our glory as a church. This consists in purity of doctrine, of worship, and of discipline; in the presence of Christ, with these, by the influences of his Spirit; and in that holiness of heart and purity of life, in the members of the church, which are the genuine effects of these operations. This is that glory with which you are to study to adorn this house, which we this day dedicate to God, as sacred to his service, through the mediation of his exalted son Jesus.

And to engage you in a proper manner to this, take the few following directions:—

1. Be careful in the choice of the men who are

to minister to you in the name of the Lord, whenever it shall be necessary, in the course of providence, to make such choice. See that they be men of wisdom and learning; firmly attached to the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, and well read in systematic and practical divinity. See that they be men of piety, prudence, and zeal. These are the men that will make their ministry their business; these are the men who will be able to discharge it with reputation to themselves, and with honour to your church; and the men whom you may hope and expect, in an ordinary way, that Jesus, the great Head of his church, will own and bless: for these are the men whom he has promised to be with, in those gracious words—"Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world."

2. Be much in prayer to God for your ministers. They are men of like passions, and, alas! of like corruptions with yourselves; and therefore have need, not only of much of the sanctifying influences of the Spirit of grace, for their own personal holiness; but of much of his divine aid, for the proper and successful discharge of their ministry. You have already heard, that on this Spirit of grace alone depend all the efficacy of our ministrations, and all the success of our labours; but he is ordinarily communicated in answer to prayer. In this way, the meanest believer in Christ becomes a "helper together" with the ministers of Jesus, in the great

work of their ministry ; so St. Paul tells us, 2 Cor. i. 11.—“ You also helping together by prayer for us.” Therefore, we find, this great Apostle of the Gentiles, in almost all his epistles, carefully asking the prayers of his Christian friends : and if HE needed them, with all his exalted genius, his great learning, and his inspiration from God, how much more do WE, his weak uninspired successors, need them ? And it deserves your attention, that the more we share of divine influences, in answer to your prayers, the more spiritual comfort and advantage may you hope to reap by our ministrations. So that the more you serve us, in this essential particular, you do hereby in a very effectual manner contribute to the furtherance of your own peace and gospel purity, as well as the common interests of our divine Immanuel.

3. Make conscience of attending on the public institutions of God’s house. Your duty and your interest both conspire to invite you to this. It is your duty—It is matter of express command, Heb. x. 25.—“ Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is.” Again, consider your primary business at the house of God. It is *to pay acts of social and public homage to the great Jehovah*. Herein the worship of the sanctuary bears the nearest affinity to the business and employments of heaven, of any service we can perform here on earth ; for the worship of heaven is

public and social worship. Now none surely will dispute, but that it is our duty to pay acts of public and social homage to the most high God ; to undertake to prove this, would be an affront to your understandings, and your profession as Christians. Hence, then, you see, that the very nature of your primary business at the house of God, and your employment when there, prove, that it is your duty to make conscience of attending upon them.

Again—It is your interest. This appears from the nature and design of the gospel ministry, as already explained. It is a treaty of reconciliation between God and sinners, and as such is owned and blessed of God ; for “ faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” As ever therefore sinners would wish to be reconciled to God—to escape eternal misery, and be prepared for unwasting blessedness—and as ever the people of God would wish to enjoy the comforts, the consolations of the religion of Jesus, as they pass through life—as they would wish to grow into a meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light, after a life of usefulness upon earth—We most affectionately beseech both the one and the other, to be steady, uniform, and conscientious, in their attendance upon the house of God. Amen.