

In Memory

OF THE

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Those who knew David Steele will be interested in reading one of his sermons. One that he preached in the regular course of his ministrations and that he himself prepared for the press.

SERMON.

THE HOUSE OF GOD'S GLORY.

"I will glorify the house of my glory."—Is. lx., 7.

AMONG the writings of Old Testament Scripture, the prophecies of Isaiah occupy a prominent place. For sublimity and fervor they are unsurpassed, while their historic setting and poetic beauty justly entitle them to a place in the golden age of Hebrew literature. So much more clearly does Isaiah predict the Messiah and His work than any of the prophets, that he has been styled the evangelical prophet. Rapt in profound and holy thought, and ravished with visions of coming glory for the Church of Christ, with seraphic ardor this servant of God utters his messages of comfort and instruction in the ears of his countrymen. With prophetic eye he penetrates the future. In the horoscope of approaching events he beholds the aurora of human redemption by the rising of the Sun of Righteousness, with healing in His wings. Under the afflatus of the Spirit he perceives event succeeding event, providence linked with providence, until, in the fulness of time, the "mystery of Godliness is manifested, the rod comes forth from the stem of Jesse, a branch grows out of his root, and to the ever-blessed Shiloh there is the gathering of the people."

By imagery the most elegant, forcible and luxuriant, in this chapter the prophet describes the transition of the Church from the economy of types and shadows to the dispensation of substance and of light. Upon Zion a new and divine glory is seen to arise. On the one side the flocks and caravans of the

Orient are descried approaching. On the other side the commercial fleets of Western peoples are recognized as drawing near. External nature contributes to the Church's splendor. Even her enemies do her homage. Instead of being identified with one nation, she derives support and countenance from all. In one panoramic view the inspired seer takes in the rising interest, spreading glory, and ultimate destiny and triumph of the Church, and then personating her living Head, declares with energy and emphasis: "I will glorify the house of my glory," or *beauty*.

I. The house of God's glory demands attention.

Undoubtedly the object of divine favor presented to our notice in the text is the Church of God, in subordination to whose interests moves the moral and material universe. Frequently the associated people of God are set before us in Scripture under the metaphor of a house or building. "Whose house are we," says the Apostle, in his letter to the Hebrews, "if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end."

First. The Church is glorious in her origin. We are so constituted that we naturally desire to look into the origin of things. When we see a nation like the United States of America, with a population fast approaching 70,000,000 of human beings, with a civilization unprecedented for breadth and variety, with an enterprise and commerce which are world-wide, and with a system of government which is dazzling and attracting the millions of our race, from pole to pole, and from the Orient to Hesperides, we instinctively stop to inquire into the origin of this distinguished greatness. Curiosity prompts us to ask the names and nativity of those men who reared the fabric of government upon this western continent, and who by their genius and foresight paved the

way for making the wilderness glad and the desert to rejoice and blossom as the rose. And when we see the Church taking root in the earth, and extending her boughs far and wide over the habitable globe, we are insensibly led to investigate her origin, and to interrogate the past in regard to her amazing and rapid progress toward universality. In this, revelation, inspired revelation alone, is our guide. Here we learn that the origin of the Church is divine, and changing the figure, that her foundation was laid by a divine hand, and that her proportions were sketched in eternity. Yea, long before the foundations of the earth were laid, or the sons of God shouted for joy over a new-born world, or an omnipotent hand had marked the sites of suns, or tracked the paths of comets, or heaven's azure expanse had been flung like a canopy over our earth, the plan of this house of Jehovah was arranged, and all the appointments made for the Church's stay on earth, and her triumphant destiny in Heaven. The Church is the production of the manifold wisdom of God. Her price is infinite. To preserve this society in existence, and supply her with a succession of sanctified members, the Holy Spirit is poured out, Jesus lives and reigns, and the eternal Father sustains the framework of creation, as a theatre upon which through the Church may be displayed the glory of His perfections. Chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, loved with an everlasting love, bought with a price which baffles human computation, and saved with an everlasting salvation, this house is at once glorious with the hoariness of uncounted ages and the dew of perpetual youth.

Second. The magnitude of this house imparts glory to it. The foundation of this house was laid in eternity, when the Son of God was set apart to mediatorial work. The first stone laid upon this foundation, we may suppose, was

Abel, the martyred son of our first parents. From that period until the present, the building has been going forward. Patriarchs and prophets, apostles and evangelists, martyrs and confessors have been added to it. Europe, Asia, Africa and America, and the islands of the sea have been contributing spiritual materials to swell the proportions and multiply the adornments of this magnificent structure. Millions of living stones, in the persons of sanctified men and women, have been laid upon this building. It enlarges with age. Almost sixty centuries look down upon this house. The civilizations of every generation and of every country have been controlled for the glory of this building. Philosophy and poetry, science and discovery have been subordinated to the interests of this noble fabric. Gigantic talents, sparkling genius, and audacious enterprise have been employed in adding to the beauty of this house. Kings and queens, princes and nobles, presidents and governors, statesmen and warriors have been voluntarily and involuntarily contributing their quota to increase the influence and magnify the glory of this illustrious edifice.

The temple built upon Moriah was large. Its beauty was great. Its builder was Solomon. Its materials were gathered from far and from near. They were hewn in the quarries of Lebanon. Among its echoing rocks the hammer's heavy stroke rung out, as it gave to unshapen blocks beauty and form. Over waves that rolled their billowy swell between the shores of Tyre and Judah's hills of green, these materials were borne. The work went on through days and months and years. Beneath the summer's laughing sun and winter's frozen tears, in majesty sublime and noiseless pomp, the building rose. But Solomon's temple sinks into insignificance in comparison with the building of the text. Its magnitude

is in proportion to the greatness of its Author, and its ever-increasing dimensions correspond with the object for which it exists, and with the sublimity of its destiny.

Third. The immense cost of this house renders it glorious.

Buildings are objects of admiration on account of their cost. Who can gaze upon the cathedral of St. Peter at Rome, or of St. Paul in London, and think of their immense cost without a feeling of admiration. These structures cost the wealth of generations. Every column and cornice, every dome and doorway in these vast buildings cost what, at this distant day from their construction, can scarcely be computed.

But by what standard of computation shall the cost of the Church of God be measured? How many lives have been sacrificed in her erection! How many parents have freely yielded up their lives in their effort to help forward the construction of this magnificent house! How many children have been given up to duty, to labor, and to sacrifice, that this blessed and glorious house might be advanced! How many ministers of Christ have been consumed in body and in soul, that this edifice might reach its consummation! In the rearing of this edifice difficulties have been encountered which no human tongue can describe. Persecutions have been endured, whose very mention makes one's blood run cold. The god of this world has opposed the progress of this building at every point. He has instigated his emissaries to breathe out slaughter and death against all who would help forward this house. In the carrying forward of this structure tears have been shed, calumnies have been endured, reproaches have been borne, and deaths have been met, whose severity God alone can compute, and the full record of which shall only be known when Jehovah makes

inquisition for blood. But vast as is the sum that has been expended in rearing this house in the form of the lives and sufferings of godly men and women, this is as nothing when compared with the shedding of Christ's blood. "Since thou wast precious in my sight thou hast been honorable, and I have loved thee, therefore will I give men for thee and people for thy life." "Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it." Who can describe this death?

The foundation of this building was laid in blood. The materials have been cemented by blood. Every living stone has been purchased by blood-shedding. The freedom of nations has been purchased at the expense of life. Blood and suffering were the price of American Independence. In 1861 four millions of human beings were slaves under the American government. Their freedom was demanded. The nation refused. Jehovah procured their freedom at the cost of \$2,500,000,000, and almost a million of precious human lives. But what was this compared with the cost of the Church? Millions of human lives could not ransom this covenant society. Angels could not interpose to save and to erect a house made up of living and sanctified men and women. Gabriel himself could not have purchased the Church. Nothing but the blood of Him who is the fellow of the eternal God could avail to deliver from destruction the materials of which this building is composed. Oh! amazing act of generosity, of noble interference, of high and unutterable love. The Son of God is set up as a victim. The sword of divine justice receives a commission to slay, and the only begotten Son of God is doomed to an ignominious death. "Him," says the Apostle, "being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and with wicked hands have crucified and slain."

Fourth. The Church is glorious in her ordinances. Prominent among these are the preaching of the Gospel, the administration of the sacraments, prayer and praise. Man is in possession of both a body and soul. In condescension to man's nature and characteristics God addresses him as a sentient being. Hence the institution of ordinances, through means of which the creature holds converse with the Creator, and unworthy and dependent beings are enabled to maintain fellowship with the skies.

These ordinances are the wells of salvation to which thirsting souls approach and draw water with joy. These are the "galleries" in which the people of God lay hold of Christ, and refuse to let Him go until He bless them. These are the "lattices" through which Christ shows Himself, and His people are ravished with a sight of His excellences. These are the golden pipes through which the precious oil of grace is emptied into the believing soul, and gladness and refreshment are the result. These are the ladders touching earth and heaven by which the Christian rises higher in the divine life. When kept free from human invention these contribute to the beauty of the Church, constitute impressive elements of her ancestral heraldry, and throw around her a garland of fairness and fragrance, in keeping with her high origin and destiny.

II. The promise, "I will glorify the house of my glory." The promises of God are exceeding great and precious. They are sometimes absolute and sometimes conditional. They may be said to constitute the Christian's *magna charta* of liberty, the title deeds of his heavenly estate. A large share of these is made to the Church in her organized and corporate capacity. The length and breadth, depth and height, of the promise in the text, we are unable fully to com-

prehend. It embraces everything in the eternal covenant, that transaction which sheds its light from eternity upon all the generations of time.

First. This promise is fulfilled in God's taking up His spiritual, special and gracious residence in the Church.

There is no part of space from which God is excluded. "Am I a God at hand, saith Jehovah, and not a God afar off?" "Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord." The Psalmist asks, "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy presence?" Where, it may be asked, is God not to be found? If we should journey to the most dismal spot of our globe, to a spot, if such is in existence, where animal and vegetable life seems to be extinct, even in this place we could recognize the hand of God, in the eternal snows which cover it, and in the waves which beat upon its sombrous and solitary shores. If we should retire to the wilderness, where the mark of human footstep has never been found, even here we can trace the hand of God in everything that lives; in the waving grass, the towering oak, and in the beauteous flower which has been born to bloom unseen, and waste its sweetness on the desert air.

If we lift our eyes to the heavens, and contemplate the splendid luminaries that stud the ethereal vault, if we mark their number and their magnitude, their revolution, their order and their changes, can we say that any other power than the arm of omnipotence sustains and keeps them from falling into inextricable confusion? The hand of God is seen in the king of day which climbs the eastern sky, and decks the earth with orient pearl. In wind and wave, in cloud and sunshine, the hand of God is present. Indeed the universe is a magnificent temple, in which He, whom the Heaven of heavens cannot contain, manifests Himself to

His intelligent creation. But while the world is His footstool, the Church is His throne. The son of Jesse sings, "Why do ye leap, ye high hills?—this is the hill which God desireth to dwell in; yea, the Lord will dwell in it forever." "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." Among ancient Israel, the Lord dwelt in the Shechinah. But when the Lord of glory bowed His head on Calvary, and the veil of the temple was rent in twain, then the divine presence was transferred to the New Testament Church, and from henceforth there was to be the fulfillment of the promise, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." And Ezekiel's vision of the sanctuary was to have a verification wide as the world, "The name of the city from that day shall be, *Jehovah Shammah*. The Lord is there." In this glorious house Jehovah works His wonders, transforming the souls of His saints with His spirit, ravishing His people by amazing discoveries of His love, and regaling their spiritual natures with draughts and prelibations from the throne above.

Second. This promise will be fulfilled by Jehovah enlarging and beautifying His Church. Oh! what tongue can describe the vastness and glory of the Church, when the whole earth shall be filled with the glory of God. The Roman Empire was glorious in its vast extent. It stretched itself from the Atlantic to the Euphrates, and from the Danube to the great desert. Its army amounted to five hundred thousand men. Its population numbered one hundred and twenty millions of souls, and its revenue amounted to about \$100,000,000. Nearly all languages, all climes and all colors and classes of human kind were incorporated in this colossal empire. But

Rome was not universal; and its extent was the source of its inherent weakness. Upon the British dominion of the present day the sun never sets. The German Empire of to-day is threatening to swallow all the diminutive principalities of modern Europe. The American Republic is doubling and almost trebling its influence and its population in every quarter of a century. What wealth, what enterprise, and what intellect, those stupendous national fabrics represent! But the Church of promise, and by consequence the Church of the future, shall cast them every one into the shade. "The mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains." The stone cut out without hands shall become a great mountain and fill the whole earth. Oh! what shall the Church be when the wealth of the world shall be laid upon her altars, and when all the dynasties of the nations shall subordinate their thrones and their income to her service. The path of the Church is onward. The day approaches when the watchword shall not be, England for the Saxon, Germany for the Teuton, and America for the American, but it shall be Europe, Asia, Africa, America, Australia, and the islands of the sea for the Church of God, and the world and the fulness thereof for Jesus Christ.

Already the darkness is rolling from a thousand lands. The Gospel like a zone of light is girdling the earth. The God of this world is summoning his hosts to the conflict, but the Church of God has nothing to fear. Her triumph over all evil is secured, and in the horoscope of the coming century are seen the victory and the universality of the house of Jehovah's glory. Nor shall her beauty be less than her glorious extent. Sin has marred her excellence. Division has tarnished her external splendor. But unity as well as

universality is her destiny and her goal. Nor is the day far distant when, from the watch towers of our globe, "the exultant chorus shall ring out—'One Lord.' " "And the sacramental host of God's elect, scattered all over the face of this lower creation, shall spring to their feet, and seizing the harp of millennial joy shall join in the universal chorus, 'One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all.'" The ploughman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth the seed, and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt.

Third. This house shall be fully glorified in Heaven. This after all is the consummation of the Church's glory. "The ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." Earth is too circumscribed for the dimensions of this house. Heaven is the ultimate home of the Church. This is the glory that excelleth. The turmoils and persecutions of time have covered the Church with scars. The storms of sin and opposition to truth have detracted from her beauty. But her life is hid with Christ in God. The house of God on earth shall have an eternal home beyond the stars. Her top shall penetrate the Heaven of heavens. The last stone shall be laid upon this glorious house, with shoutings of Grace, grace unto it. How her pillars are giving way by reason of death. Her standard-bearers are cut down, and she is often clothed with the habiliments of mourning. With sorrow in our hearts, we ask: "Our fathers, where are they?" The answer comes:

They the holy ones and weakly,
 Who the cross of suffering bore,
 Folded their pale hands so meekly,
 And will speak with us no more.

They are hidden in the tomb. But death shall not always triumph. The Head of this glorious house lives, and because He lives, His people shall live also. Mortality shall be swallowed up of life. In soul and in body the members of this glorious house shall become the recipients of eternal honors. A house not made with hands, nor hoary with the years of time, where there shall be neither sins nor sorrows, births nor burials, marriages nor mournings—a house of which Jesus is the head, and angels its guards; whose walls are salvation and whose gates are praise; such shall be the house and the everlasting dwelling place of all who have lived and labored for the glory of God's house on earth.

CONCLUSION.

1. This glorious house rests on the Rock of Ages as its foundation. All other foundations are sinking sand. Thousands have built upon this foundation and it has never failed, so much as one. This house never grows old. Its consecrated youth keeps it ever young and fresh, and full of beauteous life.

2. Are those who read and those who hear living stones in this temple of mercy? To be a citizen of a free country is deemed an honor. To belong to some ancient dynasty, or house of royalty, or noble blood is reckoned desirable. But to be a member of this house, of this family named after God in Heaven and on earth, is more ennobling, illustrious and enduring than to enjoy the most flashing worldly honor that ever challenged human ambition.