THE GREATEST GLORY OF AN HOUSE FOR PUBLIC WORSHIP IS CHRIST'S PRESENCE

(Edited by R. Craig Woods)

Northampton's second meetinghouse had probably been showing its age for some time. While the exact appearance of this structure is not known, if it resembled other meetinghouses of its vintage and locale, it was probably nearly square in dimension, with a hip-style roof. This is the meetinghouse in which Solomon Stoddard had held sway for much of his tenure there, and now Edwards for nearly a decade since his arrival. The congregation had been debating about a site since 1733, and finally voted in November 1735 to build a new meetinghouse. According to Ebenezer Hunt, town hatmaker, it was to be 70' x 46,' probably twice as large as its predecessor, featuring a tall belltower. The sills were laid in the summer of 1736, and the frame, including a belfry, raised by September.

While the structure was in process, though, the congregation still had to make do with its old meetinghouse. But they had put things off a bit too long; frostheave and rot had taken their toll on the integrity of the frame. For during morning services on March 13, 1737, shortly after Edwards had named his text, with seeming prophetic ability, from Acts 13:41 (no. 427)--"Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish"--the joists of the upper gallery, full of people, came away from the supporting girts, and the gallery collapsed onto the equally full seats below. Miraculously, only a few individuals suffered minor injuries.¹

Meanwhile, work continued. The spire was raised in July 1737, and finish work went on through the remainder of the year. By Christmas, the meetinghouse was ready to be inaugurated. The discourse below was delivered by Edwards on that dedicatory sabbath. It was not until the next spring that the old meetinghouse was pulled down, its members repurposed for a town house.
The actual seating of the meetinghouse seems to have occurred on this sabbath, perhaps in a ceremony before the morning service. In late 1735, the precinct had formed a group that called itself the "Standing Committee on Seating" (hopefully the humorous title was intentional), which worked right through December; Edwards was not included in that group, and it infuriated him by deciding to break town tradition by giving the most prominent seats in the house, not to those who were most "useful" or most aged, but to those with the biggest estates.

Edwards does not touch upon the issue of seating here; that would come the following week, in *The Many Mansions* (no. 453), and thereafter. Here, just as the builders have sought to put the new frame on a sound material foundation, so the preacher sought to put his hearers, as a church, on a sound spiritual foundation. In one of only two extant sermons by Edwards on the book of Haggai, he chooses the passage wherein, in response to the pleas by the remnant of the Jews returned to Jerusalem from captivity, God assures them that their poverty will not prevent the new temple from being a place of glory and peace. We can only speculate on whether Edwards deliberately chose his text to reflect on Northampton's continual pleas of poverty while building one of the most impressive and ornate meetinghouses in the region.

From this, Edwards draws the doctrine that, however fine and fancy a new temple or meetinghouse may be, it is only Christ's presence in it that makes it truly beautiful. Christ's presence in a house of worship will endow it with spiritual glory, its "end" or purpose will be answered; Christ's presence will be a means of worshippers seeing beautiful and glorious sights in it; Christ's presence will be an honor to those who meet there; a "real excellency" will be conferred on them; the worship of God is rendered more beautiful; and the place itself is made more pleasant, because it resembles, and indeed is an "inlet" to, heaven.
Edwards' Application, preached in the afternoon service, is one extended Exhortation to seek the presence of Christ in this new house of worship. He first offers several "Motives" to prompt this search. First, the people of Northampton should consider the "pain and cost" of building—conjuring the many disputes, going back over years, that plagued this project—but that without Christ's blessing all will be in vain. Edwards pleads, "Don't let us content ourselves in having it to say, that that [is] the best meetinghouse in the county, or that there is none to be compared to it anywhere in this part of the country. What will all this avail us, without the presence of Christ in the house that we have built?"

Secondly, there was a glory in the old meetinghouse, though it is now "old and decayed," a glory that came from the many revivals that occurred there, and the great preaching that characterized them. In that former house, the people listened intently to the Word preached; "the words did not come as a ball thrown against a stone wall," Edwards picturesquely observes, "that immediately bounds back again, but manifestly came with impression, and took hold of the hearts of the hearers." Let it be so, he asks, in this new house as well.

Thirdly, if God gave great blessings and made his presence known in the former house, he also sent rebukes, especially when his people grew "unmindful," as they seem to be now, seated in their monument to their own pride. Edwards only has to mention the incident of the gallery falling to instance his meaning. He also adds, "And when we returned to that house again, God ordered it so that such a fear should possess many of the congregation, and so we were driven out again. And God would not suffer us to worship him there anymore." We don't know if the congregation cleared the wreckage as best they could and continued to use the old meetinghouse, or if they moved into the partially completed new structure—though Edwards told Colman in March that the new structure was "very unfinished." But here, he
seems to imply that the old meetinghouse was abandoned, in part because of "fear."

Finally, the "late instances of death" teaches God's people the vanity of seeking any other kind of glory but a spiritual one. Since the previous year, New England had been suffering from the "throat distemper," apparently diphtheria, though this may not have been all to which Edwards referred. Most graphically, he points to "one [who] now lies dead in the town, that the last sabbath was here in this house." The same fate may await any who now sit in the new edifice.

Edwards closes with a set of "Directions" in order to instruct his auditors how to proceed, now that the meetinghouse is done. First, they should consider how and why they come to worship, that is, their reasons, desires, and most of all their attitude, which should not be "hasty" or "careless." Secondly, they must pay attention to how they behave themselves in worship. Here, if we can extrapolate from Edwards' portrayal of churchgoers in Northampton, we have a rather chaotic picture of the typical colonial New England service. He focuses on the "external behavior" of his congregants, bringing up things that must have bothered him for some time. He chastises them for "coming late to meeting in cold weather," to shorten the time that one had to sit in an unheated meetinghouse. Now that they have a new, more comfortable structure, "better defended from the injuries of the weather," such tardiness can no longer be rationalized. But there are other indecencies: sleeping during meeting; walking "to and fro" in order "to observe who comes in, how one and another appears, and how they are dressed"; "whispering and smiling" during worship; "making a stir and noise near the conclusion of a prayer, and so during the time of the pronouncing of the blessing," which signaled the end of the service, at which everyone wants to make a quick getaway; in a similar vein, as the service neared an end, women would dress themselves and prepare to go; and some even don't even wait till
the end of the service, but leave before the blessing. All of these, and more, Edwards claims, cast dishonor on God. Moving on, Edwards, perhaps referring to the town's long history of contention, especially about the new meetinghouse, counsels "love and peace." This includes how individuals carry themselves not only in God's house but in their own homes. And finally, the people should bring down Christ's presence on this new house by fervent prayer, "that we may see his power and glory in this sanctuary, as we have seen it."

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The manuscript is twenty-four duodecimo-sized leaves. Leaves 18-19 are made from a discarded prayer bid. Edwards' title heads the booklet, "After the finishing of the new meetinghouse, Decem. 25, 1737." While there are no repreaching notations in the sermon, emendations in slightly different handwriting and ink indicate that Edwards reworked this here and there before he delivered it.
THE GREATEST GLORY OF AN HOUSE FOR PUBLIC WORSHIP IS CHRIST'S PRESENCE
(After the finishing of the new meetinghouse, December 25, 1737)

Haggai 2:7-9.
And 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. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts. The glory of the latter house shall be greater than the glory of the former, saith the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts.

There were three of the prophets whose prophecies are inserted into the canon of Scripture that were raised up after the return of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity: viz., Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. Malachi is the last of them; Haggai and Zechariah were contemporary, and were raised up of God and sent to the Jews in the time of their building the second temple, after their return out of Babylon, to encourage 'em in that building. They labored under many great difficulties and discouragements in the building: they were few in number, for that was but a remnant that returned; and then they were poor: it could [not] be expected that a people just returned out of captivity should be any other than poor. And then they met with great opposition from their enemies, particularly from the people that the king of Assyria brought and settled in the land, in the room of the ten tribes whom Shalmaneser carried away, that were afterwards called the Samaritans. As soon as the Jews had raised up the altar and laid the foundation of the temple, these people set themselves to the utmost to hinder them. As you may see in the 4th chapter of Ezra, 4th and 5th verses: "Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building, and hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia." And we
have there an account in the following part of that chapter, how that when
they could not hinder 'em otherwise, they wrote letters to Artaxerxes king of
Persia, injuriously representing the people and their design, and procured a
prohibition of their further proceeding, upon which the work of the house
wholly ceased for a while. As you may see in the two last verses: "Now when
the copy of king Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum, and Shimshai the
scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem unto the
Jews, and made them to cease by force and power. Then ceased the work of the
house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the
reign of Darius king of Persia."

Upon this occasion it was that God raised up those two prophets, Haggai
and Zechariah, and sent 'em to encourage the people to go on with the
building, notwithstanding the prohibition of {the command of the king}, and
the opposition of the people of the land and all the discouragements they met
with. As in the 1st verse of the 5th chapter, "Then the prophets, Haggai the
prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in
Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them." And
those prophecies of theirs by which they encouraged the people to go with the
building, we have here written. Our text is part of the prophecy of Haggai
that he uttered on this occasion.

Haggai reproves 'em for being so soon discouraged from the work. They
were too distrustful of God, 1st chapter, 2nd verse.

In this chapter, the Prophet opposes the discouragement they were under
by reason of their poverty and the mean beginnings they had made. Those of
the people that were left among them, that had seen the glory of the first
temple, were much discouraged to see how inferior the house they were
building was like to be to it.

The Prophet, in the text, encourages the Jews in building the temple
two ways, viz.:
1. By removing the great objection they made against it, which was from their poverty: "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine." They were discouraged because they had not silver and gold wherewith to do the work as Solomon had. The first house was exceedingly adorned with silver and gold, but they were poor and not able thus to adorn this house.

Cyrus, the king of Persia that released 'em from their captivity, commanded his subjects to help them with silver and gold for the building of the temple; as you may see, Ezra 1:4. But Artaxerxes that was now king of Persia, instead of this, had forbidden the building instead. But by this expression in the 8th verse, God signifies to 'em that he don't need that they should be rich in order to their prosperity in what they were about; God can make 'em prosper without. God could accomplish what he promised 'em without the help of their silver and gold. The silver and gold were God's, and if he saw it was needed, he could find ways that enough of it should be forthcoming, let the decrees of the kings of Persia be what they would.

And it was needless for 'em to be much concerned about adorning the house with the silver and gold, for all the silver and gold in the world was his already. There were other ornaments of greater importance than those. As God elsewhere shows of how little importance offering beasts to God in sacrifice was in comparison of other things, because all the beasts of the forest were his already, "and the cattle on a thousand hills," Ps. 50:8-10.

2. God encourages 'em by a promise of making this house that they were building glorious. Of which may be observed two things: the thing promised, and the manner of accomplishing it.

(1) The thing promised: viz., glory. Which is expressed two ways:

1. Absolutely: "I will fill this house with glory."

2. Comparatively: comparatively, as the degree of glory promised, compared with the glory of the former temple: "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts."
(2) How God would accomplish this promise, in two things:

1. In the coming of Christ, and his appearing in this second temple:
   "the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory." The same the prophet Malachi speaks of, ch. 3:1, "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts."

   This was accordingly fulfilled, for while this second temple was yet standing, Christ came {into it, and} often preached in this temple, as we have account in the Evangelists.

2. The glorious errand on which Christ should come into this temple, and the gracious work he would there accomplish: "and in this place will I give peace." Christ came that he might give peace on earth; make peace between God and men.

   The angels sung at his birth, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" [Luke 2:14]. "He is our peace," and this is the way in which God would make this second temple glorious, and more glorious than the former, without silver and gold.

DOCTRINE.

*The greatest glory of an house for public worship, is the presence of Christ in it.*

The first temple of Jerusalem that Solomon built was exceeding magnificent. It was doubtless by far the most costly and beautiful structure that ever was in the world. 'Tis supposed that no prince or monarch now on earth is rich enough to build such an house as that was. And we are told in the context, that this second temple that the text speaks of, was "as nothing" in comparison of it, v. 3. And when its foundation was laid, it
appeared in its groundwork to fail so much of coming up to the first temple in external glory, that those that had seen the first temple "wept with a loud voice" on that occasion, as Ezra 3:12-13. And yet in the text, God promises that "the glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former," because that Christ should be present in it. The meanest shelter with the presence of Christ in it, is more glorious than the most magnificent structure without.

God's people in times of persecution, have often been forced to meet in barns, and sometimes they had their place of meeting for the worship of God in deserts and mountains, and have had much of the presence of Christ with them there. When it was thus, their meeting places in barns, and under hovels and in deserts, have had a greater glory put upon them than many stately churches that are famed through the world for their magnificence.

The presence of Christ in an house of public worship that we speak of, is not that of the omnipresence of his divine nature, for Christ as God is everywhere present. "For in him we live, and move, and have our being" [Acts 17:28]. In this respect, Christ is present in every house and in every place. He is present so in heathen temples, where God is not worshipped at all.

But the presence of Christ that renders an house of public worship glorious, is his gracious presence. For such a presence as this is spoken of in the text: his being so present in a place, as to "give peace" in that place.

And that may be either as being present with his human or bodily presence, immediately speaking, acting and doing gracious works in a visible manner, as he was present in the second temple spoken of in the text. Or only by being present by the gracious operations of his Spirit, as he oftentimes manifests himself present in the assemblies of Christians in their houses of worship, since his ascension.
When Christ is thus present in a house of worship, it is the greatest glory of such an house, greater than the most beautiful and costly outward ornaments. And that, for the following Reasons:

First. This is a spiritual glory. A spiritual glory is far preferable to an external glory. The soul of man, which is his principal and most noble part, is a spirit. The body is but a lump of clay, and is that part of man by which he is allied to the brute animals; but the soul is that by which he is allied to the nature of angels. As the soul or spirit is that part of man that is more noble than the body or external part, so is that glory that is spiritual, more excellent than that which is external.

An external glory is the object only of the external senses, that we have in common to the beasts; but a spiritual glory is that which is the object of the understanding and more internal and noble faculties of the soul. And not only so, but 'tis visible only to a spiritual eye, i.e., to man's reason and understanding, enlightened by the Spirit of God. 'Tis a glory discovered only by a divine light shining into the heart.

A spiritual glory is a divine glory, for God is not a body, but a spirit. This is a glory that appears such in God’s eyes. External glory and ornaments, simply and in themselves considered, are nothing worth in God’s eyes; but spiritual ornaments are glorious in God’s sight, and this is the most excellent glory in the sight of angels and all good men.

Second. This, above all things, tends to the answering the ends of an house of public worship. The greatest excellency of a thing is its fitness and tendency to its proper end. Anything is truly said to be good or otherwise, as it answers or fails of its end. But 'tis by the presence of Christ in [an] house, above all other things, that an house of public worship answers the end of such a house.

The ends of an house of worship, are a people jointly giving public honor to God, I Kgs. 8:44, "the house that I have built for thy name"; and
their receiving spiritual blessings from God, Ex. 20:24, "in all places where I record my name, there will I come unto thee, and I will bless thee." But 'tis by the presence of Christ in such an house, that those ends can be answered. Unless Christ be present with a people in an house of public worship, God won't be honored, but greatly dishonored there; and without his presence, they will receive no spiritual blessings there.

That end of an house of public worship, is that there, a religious society may have communion with God in the duties of his worship. But a people can have no communion {with God} unless Christ be present there, for God will have no communion with fallen men but by Christ.

The end of an house {of public worship} is that God might dwell in the midst of a people. But if Christ ben't present there, this end can't be obtained: for they that are without Christ, are "without God in the world" [Eph. 2:12].

How much cost soever be laid out in house of public worship to beautify or adorn it, none of those ends will be obtained without the presence of Christ in it; all their cost and pains will be wholly lost.

So that this is the greatest glory of an house of worship, as it [is] its proper and most essential glory that is most essential to a thing, that is most necessary to obtain its end.

Third. 'Tis by this means above all others, that glorious and beautiful sights are to be seen in an house of public worship. By this means the glory and beauty of Jesus Christ, who is "the brightness of God's glory, and the express image of his person," is to be seen: for where Christ is present, there he manifests his glory. John 14:18, "I will come unto you"; together with [the] 21st verse, "I will manifest myself to him."

The beauty and excellency of Christ, when it is discovered, is a glorious sight. Christ is the antitype of Solomon's temple, that was so exceeding costly and magnificent; and therefore his beauty is the antitype of
the beauty and magnificence of that temple. But the antitype exceeds the type, inasmuch as it is the substance, of which the type is only the shadow. And therefore, he that sees Christ’s beauty and excellency in an house of public worship, sees that which is far more glorious than all that glory of Solomon’s temple, though that was the most beautiful structure that ever was in the world. He that sees Christ’s excellency in an house of worship, sees that of which the glory of Solomon’s temple was but a dark shadow.

If Christ be present in a house {of public worship}, by this means the glory of God the Father is seen there: for where Christ is, there he reveals God’s glory. John 1:18, "The only begotten Son, that is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." Where Christ is graciously present, there the glory of God is to be seen in his face. But surely a sight of the glory of God, the Supreme Being, must be the most glorious sight that can be seen in an house {of public worship}; yea, the most glorious sight in the world.

The Psalmist greatly desired and longed to see such a sight as this in God’s house. Ps. 63:1-2, "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary."

When Christ is present in an house {of public worship}, then God’s goings are there to be seen, which is spoken of as a glorious and lovely sight to see in God’s house. Ps. 68:24, "They have seen thy goings, O God; even the goings of my God, my King, in his sanctuary." By this means, the glorious attributes of God are manifested in an house of worship: his power, his wisdom, his holiness and his grace.

By this means there are glorious works of God to be seen: works of God’s power and grace; works of his Holy Spirit that are more glorious than the works of men, a thousand times more glorious than the works of the most skillful artists in building. By this means, God’s people, "as living
stones," coming to Christ the precious foundation, "are built up a spiritual house" [I Pet. 2:5].

We read of glorious things that are spoken of the city of God, and the gates of Zion. Ps. 87:1-3, "His foundation is in the holy mountains. The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of thee, 0 city of God." These glorious things are glorious works of God’s power and grace in men’s hearts, as appears by what follows, by the following words, 5th verse: "of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her."

Such sights as these are more glorious sights to see in an house {of worship}, than the most curious art and costly ornaments in the building.

When God is pleased to shine forth in an house of {public worship}, this makes it beautiful indeed. Zion is called "the perfection of beauty," on this account. Ps. 50:2, "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, hath God shined." So Zion is said to be beautiful, and the joy of the whole earth, because the great King dwells there, and is seen and known there. Ps. 48:1-3, "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. God is known in her palaces for a refuge." The Psalmist loved God’s house, because it was the place where God’s honor dwelt. Ps. 26:8, "Lord, I have loved the habitation of thine house, and the place where thine honor dwells."

Fourth. The presence of Christ in an house of public worship is, above all things that pertain to such an house, to the honor of a people that meet in it. One thing that is very commonly aimed at in the beauty and magnificence of public buildings, and of houses of public worship in particular, is the honor of the people to whom they belong. The people that build such houses are oftentimes willing to lay out themselves, and be at considerable cost to make an house beautiful for their honor’s sake. But
there is nothing appertaining to houses of {public worship} that is so much to the honor of a people that build them, and have the use of them, as the presence of Christ in them. This is much more to their honor than in all the external glory of such houses, for hereby God puts honor upon them. Nothing can be more to the honor [of a people], than to have God dwelling amongst them.

How can we conceive of a greater honor put upon worms of dust, than for the great God—that has heaven for his throne, and the earth for his footstool—condescending to dwell with them. This is spoken of as an exceeding condescension of God, and honor to men. Is. 57:15, "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones"; Is. 66:1-2, "Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."

Solomon, though so great a prince, yet speaks of it with admiration, that God would put such honor upon men, as to dwell with them; and on him, as to dwell in an house that he had built, though the temple that he had built was so exceeding magnificent. I Kgs. 8:27, "But will God indeed dwell in the earth? behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?" This makes a people honorable in the eyes of all wise and understanding persons. It renders 'em honorable in the eyes of glorious angels. They delight to be present with the assemblies of God’s people in those houses of public worship where God is present, and there to attend on them as ministering spirits.
Fifth. To have Christ present in an house of public worship, confers not only a relative honor, but a real excellency on the people that meet and worship in it. The external ornaments of an house of worship are looked upon to be to the honor of those that build it and use it, and it is justly so looked upon if they don't go to an extreme in it, and other things among them in their conversations are proportionable and answerable. But those external ornaments of an house of worship, confer no real excellency on them that meet in it; they may come and sit in [a] fine house, with magnificent and beautiful works round about them, and be never the better for them.

There is no excellency transferred from the house to the persons in it. They may come to such an house, and go from it, thousands of times, and at last carry away as much abomination in their hearts as they brought at first. They'll remain still as hateful to God, and as much the children of the devil as ever. Bring a swine into a king's palace, and it will make no alteration on him; he'll be as filthy a swine as ever. But if there be the presence of Christ in an house {of public worship}, this tends to make those that worship in [it] really better, and to confer a real excellency, and will have this effect on some at least. This glory puts a glory upon the persons, a real glory and excellency; they "are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" [II Cor. 3:18].

Christ's presence will have influence to change the hearts and natures of those that meet in the house, to be like him; to make 'em partakers of the divine nature; and to build 'em up more and more in the divine likeness, and to fit them for the everlasting enjoyment of God.

Sixth. This only will render the worship of God that is attended in such houses, to be beautiful and excellent. The fine structure and furnishings of an house won't make the worship that is performed there anything the better. God may be very unacceptably worshipped in a fine house; the house may be beautiful, and the worship may be abominable to God.
But the presence of Christ {in a house of worship}, will render the worship beautiful. We read of worshipping God "in the beauty of holiness," Ps. 29:2 and 96:9; but 'tis only the presence of Christ with the worshippers that will cause this, for without Christ we "can do nothing," John 15:5. But his gracious presence will dispose and enable the worshippers to offer a spiritual and holy worship to God in the exercises of faith and love, and hope and humility, and reverence and every lovely grace. For all these graces are from Christ. John 1:16, "of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace." And the presence of Christ will render the worship of a people acceptable to God, for none of the worship or sacrifices of a people are acceptable to God any other way, than through this Mediator. Neither our persons nor services can be accepted, but for his sake.

Seventh. The presence of Christ in a house {of public worship} will, above all other things, make such an house a pleasant place to those that meet in it. The outward comeliness and conveniency of an house may in some respect make an house pleasant to meet in, but the gracious presence of Christ in his house will make it a thousand times more pleasant. This makes God’s house a mere garden of delights; it gives such a sweetness as tends to make the soul look with contempt on all outward glory. This made the house of God such a delightful place to the Psalmist, which he is often expressing. Ps. 84:1-4, "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King, and my God. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee"; [vv.] 10-11, "For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. For the Lord God is a sun and
shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."

*Eighth.* This, above all things, makes an house {of public worship} resemble heaven. All that man can do at externally adorning, will give but a poor shadow of heaven in comparison of the presence [of Christ], for the glory of heaven is the presence of Christ in it. Christ is as it were the light in the sun of the heavenly Jerusalem, Rev. 21:23.

The presence of God in heaven, is the greatest and most essential glory of heaven, without which heaven would not be heaven.

When Christ is present in an house [of worship], there is something of heaven in it; there is something of the very glory of heaven itself in some foretaste of it. For then is present the King of heaven, and the Lord of the angels of heaven. And this will make the worship of the assembly some resemblance of the worship of the heavenly assembly, and they will experience those things that are the foretastes of the joys and pleasure of heaven. And surely a house of public worship can't have a greater glory, than to have a resemblance of heaven that is the paradise of God, the palace of the King, of God and his presence-chamber, that was built not with hands, or by the skill and art of earthly builders, but by God himself.

*Ninth.* To have the presence of Christ in {an house of worship}, above all other things, tends to make an house {of worship} not only a resemblance of heaven, but an inlet into heaven. An house of God, when it is so indeed, is an inlet into heaven; it becomes a place through which, and by means of which, men enter into heaven, as a gate is that through which men enter into a city. Gen. 28:17, "This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." But 'tis the presence of Christ only that renders an house of worship so, for 'tis by Christ only that any can go to heaven. He is the way to the Father, John 14:6. Without this, an house of worship, instead of being a gate of heaven, will be an inlet into the lowest part of hell. For
those go deepest in hell that go to [those] houses, from houses of God’s worship.

APPLICATION.

The Use that I would make of this Doctrine may be [of] Exhortation. Hence, let us of this town be exhorted earnestly to seek that we may have the presence of Christ with us in this house that is lately built amongst us. Don't let us rest in that, that we have a convenient and comely house, and that the house is so and so adorned, as if we had therein attained our end. Don't let us content ourselves in having it to say, that that [is] the best meetinghouse in the county, or that there is none to be compared to it anywhere in this part of the country. What will all this avail us, without the presence of Christ in the house that we have built? If we aim at nothing else but this, those things will do us more hurt than good, and will serve only to nourish our pride, instead of making of us better and happier. Let us not be content with external glory in this house, but let us seek a spiritual and divine glory in it. Let us seek that glory whereby the ends of an house of public worship may be answered: the end of jointly worshipping God and giving glory to his name; and that we may be a holy society, that may from time to time enjoy communion with God in the way of his ordinances in his house; and that we may receive a spiritual blessing from God, that the work of conversion may be carried on amongst us, so that our souls, and the souls of our children, mayn't go from a comely and externally adorned house of worship, down to the pit of eternal misery, the great sink of the filthiness of the creation. Let us not be content with what is to be seen of the outward adornings of this house. Let us seek that we may behold in this house more glorious sights than those; that here we may behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; that we may see the goings of God our King in his sanctuary. Don't [let] us pride ourselves in that, that we excel our
neighbors in the comeliness of our meetinghouse. Let us seek that which will be more to our honor than this, viz., that we may have "the high and lofty One, that inhabits eternity," who "dwells in the high and holy place," dwelling with us.

Let us not content ourselves with such things in the house of God as can't make us better, or whence no excellency can be derived in our hearts, any more than a swine or a viper can be made excellent by being set in a king's palace. But let us seek that glory of an house that don't so much consist in the ornaments of the walls and seats of the house, as in the inward and spiritual ornaments of our souls that may be inherent in us, whereby not our house only, but we ourselves may become beautiful and commendable with a true and divine beauty, and that which makes our worship that is here attended, excellent, being performed in the beauty of holiness. Let us seek that presence of Christ here, which will make a hovel or a stable a pleasanter place a thousand times, than a palace without it; and which will make the Psalmist's language our own, when he cries out, "How amiable are thy tabernacles O Lord of hosts"; and which make this house, above all other things, resemble heaven, and will make it a gate of heaven and an inlet to us in God's house above, that house which is "not made with hands."

Motive 1. Let it be considered how much pains and cost have been expended in the building this house. It has been a costly, and also a troublesome piece of work. Persons, when they have been at a great deal of trouble and difficulty and cost about an affair, are wont to be the more loath to be frustrated; they are the more loath to fail of the end or good aimed at in it. But all the trouble and cost that you have been at in building this house, will be in vain, if we han't the presence of Christ in [it]. Indeed, those that have had a good end in what they have expended will be rewarded, but unless Christ dwells with us in this house, the end of an house of worship can't be obtained, any more than the end of a dwelling house
can be obtained, if it be only built and made convenient and comely, and never anybody dwells in it. As all the pains and cost is thrown away that is laid out on building an house for men if never man dwells in it, so is the pains and cost that is laid out in building an house of God, if God don't dwell in it.

If this town had laid out so much money in some affair that is merely temporal, as in subduing some common field or some such thing, in hopes of some temporal profit or emolument to accrue to 'em afterwards, it would be a very great disappointment to 'em wholly to miss of all this expected profit or benefit, and so to lose all their money. And surely you should be much more loath to miss of that spiritual profit and benefit, which is all that an house of public worship is built for, after you have been at so much cost in building one. And therefore, that you may not thus lose your money, it behooves us all earnestly to seek that we may have the presence of Christ with us here.

[Mot.] 2. Let us consider what a glory we have seen in the former house. God has been pleased to make that house glorious, and as the expression is in the text, to fill it with glory. In that house Christ was pleased to grant his own presence, however unworthy we were of it, and especially at a time that was so lately, is fresh in the memories in the most of [us] here present (though we seem to have too much forgotten it).

In that house Christ gave glorious tokens of his presence, and there were seen God's power and glory in his temple.

The remembrance of the glory that we there saw, should make us earnest with God, that he would fill this house with the same glory. We have more to stir us up to desire this, than other people that never have received such a mercy. God has given us to see, by a remarkable instance of it before our eyes, how excellent and desirable his presence in [an] house is. We have had a taste of the sweetness of it, and therefore have more [to] excite our
appetites to it than others have had. Let us consider and remember what an excellent glory that was, that the former house was filled with; how far exceeding all external glory; what beautiful and lovely sights were then to be seen there.

We have seen better sights in the former house, though old and decayed, than we see in this with all its ornaments, by all the cost that has been laid out upon it. We have seen God worshipped there, in some measure, in the beauty of holiness: the congregation in general manifestly giving diligent attention to the public prayers and the preaching of the Word; and it was manifest by the face of the congregation, that the hearts were engaged in the business of God’s house.

The congregation were not cold and dead, and God was not worshipped in a lazy, slighty manner. Persons did not then appear as if they little regarded what they were about. And God’s Word was not preached to a company that appeared many of ‘em sleeping, and others gazing about the meeting and appearing as if they took no notice of what was said, nor cared anything about it. But the words of the preacher as they came from his mouth, were eagerly drunk in by the hearers all around. And the words did not come as a ball thrown against a stone wall, that immediately bounds back again, but manifestly came with impression, and took hold of the hearts of the hearers. And the congregation was from time to time seen in tears; the great things of God’s Word, that are of such vast importance, had then some effect and some regard was shown to ‘em. And when God’s praises were then sung in that house, it was manifest by what appeared and could not be hid, that God was praised with unusual elevation of heart and voice, and many were manifestly greatly affected, time after time, in God’s praises. This part of divine worship was sweet, not only to the ear, but to the heart. And multitudes, to my knowledge, were abundant in expressing the sweet sense of divine things they had upon their hearts during the performance of this part of divine worship.
The hearts of many were then carried towards heaven in this part of worship, and the congregation then, as they sat and sung God's praises, was indeed a little emblem of that glorious assembly above, that ceases not day nor night, telling praises and hallelujahs to God.

We see no such sights as these as yet in this house, though we see an house that far exceeds that in external comeliness and beauty; and as we turn our eyes round, may see many external ornaments which were not in the former house. But though that house was nothing to be compared with this for external comeliness, yet we here see nothing comparable to what we saw there, when God was there so wonderfully present with us.

Many of you that are here present have, I doubt not, seen the glory of God in that house. You had sweet views and discoveries of the beauty of one divine perfection and another, and the excellency and comeliness of the only begotten Son of God. And there was without doubt far more of these things discovered there, than there are here.

Let us consider how great a glory this was in that house, how excellent were the discoveries of God's power and glory there; how lovely were his footsteps. How are these outward adornings but as dirt and dung in comparison of those things. The outward comeliness of this house may make in some respects a pleasant house, but how much more pleasant was that house made, when we could there find Christ in it. How sweet a place was God's house to resort unto. There was in it to be found a fountain of pleasures for us to drink at. And what an honor was put upon us, by far exceeding any honor that we can have by the outward comeliness of this house that we now meet in.

Let us not forget this glory that we have seen in the former house, and let the remembrance of it stir us up earnestly to seek the same here; and if it may be, that the glory of this latter house may be greater than of the former, and that God would in this place also give peace.
We, [who] have seen so much spiritual glory in a house of worship, shall be above all people inexcusable, if we at last rest in an outward glory. And the same may be said to us, as the Apostle said to the Galatians, Gal. 3:3, "Having begun in the Spirit, are you now made perfect in the flesh?" Having begun in that which is spiritual, do you at last lay up with, and rest in an external glory?

[Mot.] 3. Let us remember and consider what a rebuke God gave us in the former house, when we declined and came to neglect the spiritual glory of his house. Though we had enjoyed so much of the presence of Christ in that house, yet before we left it, we seemed to be grown in a great measure unmindful of what we had seen. We were become comparatively dull and lifeless in the public worship. There was a great and remarkable alteration on that account.

And God seemed to manifest how displeasing it was to him, by a very awful and terrible rebuke in the time of public worship, in the falling of a considerable part of the house, whereby many lives were eminently exposed, and many were grievously wounded, and our worship was broke off in the midst, and we were sent away with terrified and affrighted hearts.6

And so we were as it were driven out of that house--where God had manifested so much of [his] glory and mercy to us--for our backsliding, and our ungratefully forgetting those things that we had there seen. And when we returned to that house again, God ordered it so that such a fear should possess many of the congregation, and so we were driven out again. And God would not suffer us to worship him there any more.

Now this should doubtless be a warning to us, not to neglect the presence of Christ in his house; not to worship God in an heedless and regardless, cold, hypocritical manner, but that we should earnestly seek such a spiritual glory in God's house as we have had heretofore. Otherwise we may still expect rebukes. And however some may be ready to say, that the house we now meet in is so strong[ly] built, that we are out' of danger of being
rebuked in that manner again; yet let it be considered that [when] God sees cause to rebuke, he won’t want ways to do it in as awful a manner as he pleases. He can do it in a much more awful manner than he then did. Then, wonderful, sparing mercy was mingled with the frowns of God. But there are innumerable ways that God rebukes without mercy. If we neglect God’s presence, and don’t seek a return [of] a blessing that we have had, we have reason to fear that worse things will happen to us.

[Mot.] 4. Let it be considered how God is at this day [warning us of] the vanity of any other glory but a spiritual glory, in the late instances of death.  

There is nothing that brings such a stain on an all external glory, as death. And in this glass we may see the vanity of all that is external, and the importance of what is spiritual. In this we may see the infinite importance of the presence of Christ amongst us. When it is a dying time with a people, then [only] the presence of Christ will avail ‘em, and nothing else.

God has of late, in repeated instances, taken persons away from God’s house here, and from all the things of this world of late. The instances of death have returned as often as weeks. Every time we have come to the house of God, it has been with a new warning of this nature, to improve on sabbaths and to seek the presence of Christ with us in his house. We are remarkably shown by those instances, how uncertain it is; how long we shall be afterward to come to God’s house, and whether ever we shall come again. How little a while ago did we see all those persons that have lately died, here sitting with us in this house. And of how little avail in such cases is anything else in God’s house, but Christ’s presence there.

Here is one now lies dead in the town, ⁹ that the last sabbath was here in this house. And there was no more prospects of approaching death to him, than there is now to any of us. It is as uncertain with any of us, whether we
shall ever come to this house another sabbath, as it was to him the last sabbath. Therefore, surely it behooves [us] to seek the presence of Christ in God’s house, while we are suffered to meet [in] it. If we have this, it will be of infinite avail to us when the time comes that we must meet in it no more.

I will conclude with some Directions, how we should seek the presence of Christ with us in this house.

1. Let us from time to time diligently observe ourselves with respect to our views in coming to this house. When we are about to go to God’s house, we should consider what we do, and what we go there for. We should consider what we should go there for, and examine ourselves what our aims are; and not time after time come inconsiderately into God’s house, and rashly rush into his presence. Agreeable to that advice, Eccles. 5:1-2, "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God."

It is a great thing to come into the presence of God in his house, in the solemn duties of his worship. If we were to come into the presence of a king, if we should come in a careless manner, as giving no heed to ourselves how we prepared ourselves to come or behaved ourselves there, it would be looked upon very indecent and would be very offensive. How much more offensive may it be thus to come before God.

If we from time to time come together here in such a manner, this is not the way to have the presence of Christ with us here. We should see to it that we don't come for mere form and custom’s sake. We should consider the great and important ends for which Christ has appointed the duties of his public worship.
If these be our aim in coming, that will be to come together in his name. And if we so do, we know that according to his promise, that will be the way to have his presence, Matt. 18:20.

2. If we would have the presence {of Christ among us}, we must take heed how we behave ourselves there, not sitting or standing there in a careless or heedless manner, but as considering where we are, and what we are about; whose presence we are in; whose worship we are attending; whose word we hear; of what weight and importance to us the things are that we are concerned in, and the account we have to give of them.

(1) [We should give heed to] our internal behavior. If we would have the presence {of Christ with us}, we must earnestly seek Christ in his house. We must so attend on all the ordinances and duties of God’s house, as therein diligently to seek Christ. We should so attend on the public prayers as earnestly to seek Christ in it. And so we should attend on the Word preached, as still to be seeking Christ in his Word. And so we should seek Christ in the duty of singing praises, and we should diligently seek Christ at his table in the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper.

(2) We should give heed to our external behavior in God’s house. There are several things that are indecent and dishonorable to a Christian worshipping assembly, that I am sorry it can be said, that there are in any measure found amongst us; and that I would earnestly exhort that they may be avoided, as we desire to have the presence {of Christ} in this house {of public worship}.

One is coming late to meeting in cold weather. This does greatly disturb the worship of the assembly; it keeps a continual noise and stir in the assembly during great part of the time of worship. All know that this is indecent, and certainly the decency of the worship of a whole Christian assembly is of some importance, and of more importance than our being a little longer by a fireside.
This fault will now be more inexcusable than ever. One end why we have built a new house, is that we might have a more comfortable house, and be better defended from the injuries of the weather. And we now have such an house, and therefore still to make the weather an excuse for coming late to meeting, must show that a great indifference to the worship of God and want of love to God’s house, is at bottom.

Another thing I would instruct may be avoided, is sleeping at meeting. Persons had better be out of the meetinghouse, than be there asleep: for certainly they don't worship God or honor him in their sleep any more for being in the meeting, nor do they receive any more good. And then they bring a positive dishonor on the worship of God, by the indecency and uncomeliness of the sight.

Another thing is going to and fro about the meeting, either in the parts of the house or the persons in it, to observe who comes in, how one and another appears, and how they are dressed. This has a very indecent appearance, and shows a heart not engaged in God’s service, and casts a slight of the holy things of God’s house.

Another thing is an indecent whispering and smiling in the meetinghouse. This I have sometimes observed amongst some that make a high profession of religion, though it be especially unbecoming them: for surely we ought to dry nigh to God "with reverence and godly fear," and with solemnity of spirit, and not with smiles and light cries, Heb. 12:28. Holiness becomes God’s house, Ps. 93:5.

Another thing is people's making a stir and noise near the conclusion of a prayer, and so during the time of the pronouncing the blessing. This is a very needless thing, and an indecent thing. It looks as though they were in haste to have the worship over, and were glad it was drawing to a conclusion. And their moving and stirring, certainly looks as if they were not then attending. If they were in an attentive posture, they would not be inclined
to move much. And then the noise tends to hinder those from hearing, that are at a distance.

Another thing is women's dressing themselves and preparing to go out of the house in foul weather before meeting is done, and even in prayer time. How indecent would it be if you was making an address to a king, {to see others preparing to leave}. It has an appearance as if persons wholly neglected, and throw by, that part of divine worship.

Another thing is going out of the house before the blessing is pronounced. If it be a proper thing that a blessing should be pronounced, then certainly 'tis proper that the congregation should attend it, and that in a solemn manner. 'Tis part of the worship of God, and therefore ought not to [be] thrown behind our backs.

And hastily starting away and passing out, immediately after the blessing is pronounced, is also indecent. {It} looks as if the public worship was a weariness.

And I have thought that I have sometimes observed in our farm people, even in long days in summertime, too much of a readiness and eagerness to get away before meeting is done, when it seemed to me there could be no need of it, unless they were weary of the worship.

These things, all of them, are such as I suppose one and all must acknowledge to be indecent. Therefore, let us avoid 'em for the future. Let us have things answerable one to another. We have a comely house. Let us also have a comely assembly, and comely worship, and this will be the way to have Christ's presence with us in his house.

3. If we would have the presence {of Christ with us}, let us live in love and peace. The Apostle teaches us, that this is the way for a people to [have] the presence of God with them, II Cor. 13:11.

If we don't live in peace, we can't be a comely assembly or society. A society rent with divisions and contentions is a disagreeable, unlovely
society. No wise or well-disposed man would love to be amongst a quarrelsome or contentious society: and how then can we expect that Christ should delight to be in such a society?

4. If we would have the presence of Christ in God’s house, we must take heed how we carry ourselves in our own houses.

God sees us there.

To live in a wicked manner, sinful practicing under our own roofs all the week, we can’t expect that that holy God that has seen us, will delight to be amongst us on sabbath days in his house, however well we may seem externally to carry ourselves then.

Let us see to our behavior on week days {to live in Christ's presence} in our families; [and] towards family relatives {to carry ourselves well}.

They that carry themselves well in their own houses, are like to be most acceptable in the house of God.

5. And lastly, let us earnestly beg the presence of Christ with us in this house by prayer. Join prayer with those things. Look to him as sensible of our need of his presence, [and aware of] our unworthiness of it. Pray that he would be present by his Spirit, {and that he would} pour out his Spirit on us in his house.

Christ has given encouragement to us, to pray for no blessing so much as the Holy Spirit, though that be the greatest of all blessings. See Luke 11:11-13, "If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"

Let this encourage and stir up us earnestly and incessantly to look to him, that he would bestow this blessing on us here in his house, and that we may see his power and glory in his sanctuary, as we have seen it.
Notes

1 JE's account of the incident, from a letter to Benjamin Colman, was printed in the Boston Gazette for Mar. 28-Apr. 4, 1737, pp. 2-3.
2 See Eph. 2:14.
3 End of preaching unit. At the start of the Application section, JE writes the text and "doc." followed by an outline of the nine Reasons covered in the doctrinal section, which have been omitted.
4 See, for example, II Cor. 5:1 and Heb. 9:11.
5 Conjectural reading; "lay up" connotes pausing, or taking a temporary hiatus from activity.
6 On Mar. 13, 1737, as the congregation was assembled for morning worship and JE had just begun his sermon, the gallery of the old meetinghouse collapsed. JE's letter to Benjamin Colman describing the event was excerpted in the Boston Gazette for Mar. 28-Apr. 4, 1737 (WJE 16:64-66).
7 This part of the sermon is made from a discarded prayer bid, which reads:

Noah pixley and his wife Do desire yt Thanks be returnd To god In This Congregation for ye preservation of his Life when it was Exposed t gratily Exposd by ye fall of a Tree upon him and likewise That They desire prayers yt god wold heel him of his Broken Boones and yt he may be restord To perfit soundness againe his father w and mother wright desire yt same

Noah Pixley was born in 1706, in Westfield, Mass., and married Abigail Wright (b. 1707), the daughter of Joseph Jr. and Ruth Hannum Wright of Northampton, in 1730. The couple settled in the Second Precinct of Northampton (later Southampton) in 1736, where Noah was killed by Indians in August 1748. Ironically, their youngest son, Noah Jr., probably born in the early 1740s, was killed by a falling tree in 1800.
8 Since 1736, much of New England had been subject to an epidemic, possibly diphtheria.
9 This individual is not further identified.
10 Conjectural reading.