

Where's the glory?

▶▶▶ Dear Friend

“Pray with me to know Jesus!” the young man shouted with a pained expression. This man had been drawn to our outreach. He had spent time with us, observed us, tested us, watching how we would respond. Now he had finally admitted that he wanted what we had. But what did we have — this unimpressive group, falteringly trying to love those in the city we were in? He was attracted to something powerful and glorious among us.

Haggai prophesied 2,500 years ago that the glory of the rebuilt temple would be greater than Solomon's original. Five hundred years earlier, the Israelites obeyed God and built a tent or tabernacle — the tent in the wilderness where God would dwell — finished to the last detail. The tent was dedicated to God, and His glory came down. The presence and glory of God was so strong that the people could not enter the tent. About 500 years later, in obedience to God, the people built a temple — the “permanent” tabernacle. It too was finished to an exacting level of detail. It was dedicated to God, and His glory came down. Again, the presence and glory of God was so strong that the people could not enter. However, the Israelites disobeyed God: they were taken into exile and the temple destroyed. Seventy years after its destruction, the people once again obeyed God and rebuilt the temple. But this time it was different ... despite the rejoicing, despite rebuilding in obedience, God's glory did not manifest itself. Why not? Haggai prophesied that the glory of this temple would be greater than the former — so where was the glory?

Another 500 years later, something history-shaking took place. The Son of God came in flesh, lived, died and rose again among the Israelites. John 1:14 says that the Word was made flesh and dwelt — literally “pitched his tent” — among us. He was the presence and glory of God among us in a tent made of flesh. John says that he, and the people, saw the glory of the Son of God, full of grace and truth. God no longer wanted to reveal His glory through a building, but in flesh. If that's not wondrous enough, the New Testament reveals that now we are the temple, the living stones that God is fitting together for Him to dwell among. God's intention all along was to live not in buildings, but in His people — to live and reveal His glory in and among us. Christ in us the hope of glory! The glory of the latter temple truly will be greater than the former. This people-temple is the real thing!

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There's been much discussion in recent years about 'What is church?', 'How should we do church?', even, 'Is church necessary?' But the dream of God goes much farther than where or how often we meet, or what we do when we meet. It's about a body of people that God always wanted, among whom He could live, love and show His glory. It's more than a group of people getting together to see how they can help each other achieve more. It's about God being among us, and what happens when God's presence comes.

That man drawn to our outreach was actually deeply troubled. As we prayed and talked his story unfolded. Many years earlier he had prayed to demons and invited them into his life to give him power. Their influence destroyed his life: his relationships broke up, he lost his home and job. His life was a ruin. He tried everything and was at the point of giving up, when he saw this group of Christians, expressing love, doing things that were costly to themselves out of obedience to God. He was drawn to what they had. "Maybe this 'thing', this love, this presence they have could set me free," he thought. God met him powerfully when we prayed with him. Jesus set him free and he began the long, hard but joyful process of rebuilding his life. This took place in a city in England. That day, he became part of that body-temple where God is living.

Jesus, quoting Isaiah, said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me ..." — that is, God's presence is with me — "to preach good news to the poor, bind the broken-hearted ... release the captives". Isaiah continues: "... to provide for those who mourn ... give beauty for ashes". That's what happens when God is among us and we obey Him.

Often we hide in complexity, but the simple fact is that Jesus is with us and wants to show His glory. He is building us into a temple where He can dwell in all His glory. Let's be obedient. In what way? By building the temple. Build one another up, love one another in obedience to Christ, together love Jesus and love a broken, wounded and hurting world. When we simply love Christ, love others even when it costs us and give that love away to the needy, hurting and lonely around us surely He will be with us and show His glory.



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