

Solomon's Prayer

1 Kings 8:1-10:29

Key Verse: 8:36

“...then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel. Teach them the right way to live, and send rain on the land you gave your people for an inheritance.”

As we studied in the previous lesson, Solomon built a magnificent temple with the best materials out of reverence for God, depending on the wisdom from God. Today's passage is Solomon's dedication of the temple. In this dedication he prayed like a high priest. His prayer reveals his awesome respect toward God, and his deep understanding of his people. It also reveals the role of the temple, the place where we can meet God. To meet God we must come in the right way with a right attitude. Many people go to church seeking benefits of some kind, or to enjoy fellowship with decent people. However, we must go to church to worship God, and we must worship in God's way. Let's learn how we can do so through Solomon's prayer.

I. The role of the temple (8:1-53)

Chapter 8 is mainly Solomon's prayer of dedication. Here we learn what is the role of the temple.

First, the temple is the place of God's word (8:1-9). Verses 1-9 show how Solomon brought the ark of the Lord into the temple he had built. In order to bring up the ark of the covenant, Solomon summoned into his presence at Jerusalem the elders of Israel, all the heads of the tribes and the chiefs of the Israelite families (1). Look at verses 3-4. "When all the elders of Israel had arrived, the priests took up the ark, and they brought up the ark of the Lord and the Tent of Meeting and all the sacred furnishings in it. The priests and Levites carried them up...." As they did, Solomon sacrificed so many sheep and cattle that they could not be recorded or counted (5). The priests brought the ark and put it in the inner sanctuary of the temple, the Most Holy Place, and put it beneath the wings of the cherubim (6) who spread their wings over the place of the ark. At the center of Israel's life was the temple. The focal point of the temple was the Most Holy Place. In the Most Holy Place was the ark of the covenant (8). Yet there was nothing in the ark except two stone tablets. This makes a great contrast with Fort Knox, where the U.S. gold reserve is kept. Many heavily armed guards protect this gold; gold is at the center. But in the temple, many kinds of gold furnishings were merely decorations for the ark, which contained the two stone tablets.

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Why were these two stone tablets so important? It was because the Ten Commandments were inscribed on them. The Ten Commandments were the Lord's covenant with his people, the Israelites. So we can say that the word of God was at the center of Israel's life. God works through his words. God said to Moses in Exodus 25:22, "There above the cover between the two cherubim that are above the ark of the testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites." The people could meet God and hear his word in the Lord's temple. So the temple is the place of God's word. If there are no words of God, the temple is nothing. The magnificent building does not mean anything without the words of God. The same is true of a church. If a church community loves the Lord and his word, then the Lord will bless that church and communicate with it. Without the word of God, a church is just a building, no matter how gorgeous. We must come to church in order to study the Bible, to listen to the words of God.

Second, the temple is the place of God's Presence (8:10-21). Look at verses 10-11. "When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled his temple." Where God's word is honored, there God himself will be present. However, this creates a problem for us: no one can stand before the Holy God. Solomon recognized that the Lord had wrapped himself in a dark cloud (12-13). It was to shield his holy presence from sinful men. The Lord God is holy, holy, holy--Almighty God the Creator. He is awesome and mysterious. No one can stand before him. If we look at the sun directly we will be blinded, because the light is too strong for our eyes. The Holy, Almighty God lives in unapproachable light (1Ti 6:16); if we see him as he is, we will die. When the Lord descended on Mt. Sinai, the Israelites trembled with fear and pleaded with the Lord not to speak to them directly (Ex 20:18,19). Moses said, "I am trembling with fear" (Heb 12:21). Yet God made a way to come to man through the temple. The temple was developed from the Tent of Meeting, the dwelling place of the living God when Israel was in the wilderness. The temple is the place where God is present. There they could meet God.

Solomon knew that the temple could not contain God. He confessed, "Will God really dwell on the earth? Even the highest heaven cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built" (27). God is so great, beyond heaven and earth. But the holy God was willing to dwell among the Israelites in the temple. Therefore, the temple must be used properly, according to God's instruction and intention. This temple did not last forever. When the Israelites worshiped idols and refused to repent, in spite of God's longsuffering patience and clear warnings, God gave them

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over to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon who destroyed the temple. Still, this temple foreshadowed the true temple which was to come. We learn in John 4 that the Jews claimed the place to worship was in Jerusalem. But Samaritans insisted that they could worship on Mount Gerizim, where Moses proclaimed the blessings. Jesus declared that the place is not important. But we must worship God in spirit and in truth (Jn 4:24). God is seeking such worshipers. Worship is not a matter of place, but of heart. However, some people misunderstand this. They think it means that they can worship in their own way. Some come to church casually, as though doing God a favor. Some stay home and worship through television. Yet God dwells in his church, where two or more are gathered in Jesus' name (Mt 18:20). Hebrews 10:25 says, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Our willingness to gather in reverent worship must not decrease as time goes by; it must increase continually until Jesus comes.

In verses 15-21 Solomon repeatedly refers to the "Name" of the Lord. God put his "Name" on the temple. God identified himself with the people of Israel. God's presence carries a responsibility. They should always remember to honor God's "Name," and never misuse the Name of the Lord their God. God's presence is a tremendous blessing to his people. At the same time, God's people have a solemn responsibility to honor God's Name.

Third, the temple is the place of prayer (8:22-30). Solomon began to pray. Look at verses 22-23. "Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in front of the whole assembly of Israel, spread out his hands toward heaven and said: 'O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on the earth below....'" Solomon knew that God is the God of his chosen people and the only true God. All other so-called gods are nothing but manmade things. But the God of Israel is the true God, for he is the Creator of heaven and earth. He is also the faithful God who keeps his promises (23b-24). Based on God's faithfulness, Solomon prayed that God might keep his promises to David (25-26). In verses 27-30, the word "hear" is repeated five times. Solomon pleaded with the Lord to hear the prayer of his people when they prayed toward the temple (28-30). Fundamentally, the temple is a place of prayer. Sometimes we have problems that are too big to solve. We experience anguish that seems to be beyond comfort. However, God Almighty is God who hears the prayer of his children. The temple is a place to bring all our prayers and requests to God and to ask his help and mercy. God who hears brings comfort and healing to our souls.

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Fourth, the temple is the place of forgiveness (8:31-53). Verses 31-53 contain seven prayer topics of Solomon: For when a man wrongs his neighbor (31-32); when Israel has been defeated by enemies (33-34); when there is no rain (35-36); when disaster comes (37-40); for foreigners (41-43); when Israel goes to war against enemies (44-45); when the Israelites become captives to their enemies (46-53). As we observe Solomon's prayer, we find that it addresses many aspects of human life specifically and concretely.

Solomon's first prayer topic, regarding when a man wrongs his neighbor, deals with relationship problems. How often do we suffer from relationship problems between husband and wife? How often do we agonize over relationship problems with our children, with our close friends, and with coworkers at our jobs? We suffer much due to broken relationships. Sometimes there is no human solution. Yet when we come to the Lord in prayer, he brings justice and peace to our relationships.

Solomon's second prayer topic, regarding defeat by enemies, is for restoration through confession of sins. Through prayer, the Lord would forgive them and bring them back to the promised land. Our life is a battle--battle after battle. Most people are defeated many times. Once in a while they win, but mostly they are defeated. People think that they are defeated because of misfortune, or the unfavorable situation, or wicked people. Then they develop bitter roots which poison their souls. However, we must realize that defeat comes because of sin. When we humbly confess our sins before God, then the Lord forgives us, and restores us, and gives us victory.

Solomon's third prayer topic regards having no rain. Let's read verses 35-36. "When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because your people have sinned against you, and when they pray toward this place and confess your name and turn from their sins because you have afflicted them, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel. Teach them the right way to live, and send rain on the land you gave your people for an inheritance." When there was no rain, it caused famine. People were thirsty and hungry; they suffered daily in their practical lives. It was easy to think it was just an unfortunate event. But it was not. It was due to their sin. It was God's call to repent and to learn from him the right way to live. The problems we face in America right now, especially the economic crisis, is God's call to us to repent and come back to him. This problem will not be solved by mere politics; it is a sin problem, due to our materialism, selfishness, and ignorance of God. Though the Lord has a clear hope for us to be a blessing to the world, young people wander without vision or life

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direction. We need to know God's way for us. The Lord is speaking to us through this crisis to get our attention and turn us to the right way. When we come to God with repentant hearts, confessing our sins, and listening to his words, God will have mercy and send showers of blessing upon us.

Solomon's fourth prayer topic is about disaster. When we confront disaster it is easy to doubt God's love and to become bitter. But if we humbly accept that we suffer because of our sins and ask for God's help, he forgives. Solomon's fifth prayer topic, regarding foreigners, shows that God is not only the God of the Israelites, but the God of all people on earth. The sixth prayer topic, regarding when the Israelites go to war against their enemies, can be applied to when a man goes out to fight in the battles of life. We need strength and fighting spirit in our battles of life. When we praise the Lord, the Lord hears and gives us victory. The seventh prayer topic is about becoming prisoners of war. We are weak and vulnerable to temptation. Sometimes we become captives of sin and trapped by Satan. At that time we need God's mercy. When we confess our sins, merciful God forgives us.

Solomon's prayer reveals his deep understanding of man. Verse 46 says, "there is no one who does not sin." Solomon knew that there is no one righteous. Man is totally depraved. Man is so weak that he easily sins. All people are sinners before God. In that sense, all people are the same. Sometimes we see people who seem to be beautiful and talented and rich and famous and smart and we think they lack nothing. But they are sinners, nothing but sinners. Every man needs to come to God for forgiveness. We are all sinners. We must see man based on God's truth.

Solomon's prayer reveals his deep understanding of God. Solomon believed that God is forgiving, as well as just. God is faithful and just and forgives and purifies those who confess their sins. God is love. God is merciful. God is compassionate. When we confess our sins, God accepts us.

Although Solomon was a king, he prayed like a high priest. He had a compassionate heart toward sinners. He understood a sinner's suffering. So he desired every man to come to God and be forgiven. Solomon did not judge men or cut them off. He understood them, and tried to help them come to God for forgiveness and healing. He was a shepherd who lead people to salvation in God. Since he understood man deeply, and he also knew who God is, he could offer intercessory prayer like a high priest. Solomon foreshadows our Lord Jesus Christ, our great high priest. Jesus is fully man and fully God. He truly understands us and intercedes in prayer constantly before the throne of God (Ro 8:32; Heb 4:15).

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Thank you, Jesus. We, too, must pray like this. We should not pray just for our own problems or family, but for people around the world who need God's help.

II. Solomon blessed Israel and dedicated the temple (54-66).

In verses 54-55 we can see Solomon's change in position. When he prayed before the Lord he knelt down and prayed with his hands spread out toward heaven. When he began to bless the people of Israel, he stood up and spoke in a loud voice. In verse 56 he praised the Lord who is very faithful and who kept all of his promises. He prayed that God might be with them always and that his words would be near the Lord as a constant intercession. The point is that all the people of the earth may know that the Lord is God and there is no other, through his answering their prayers. Solomon encouraged them to commit to God and obey his commands always (61).

Then the king and all Israel with him offered sacrifices before the Lord. In this way, they dedicated the temple of the Lord. They observed the festival for fourteen days (65). The Israelites blessed the king and then went home, joyful and glad in heart for all the good things the Lord had done for his servant David and his people Israel.

III. God blessed Solomon (9:1-10:29)

First, God answered Solomon's prayer (9:1-9). When Solomon had finished building the temple of the Lord and the royal palace, and had achieved all he had desired to do, the Lord appeared to him a second time, as he had appeared to him at Gibeon (1-2). In verse 3 the Lord said to him, "I have heard the prayer and plea you have made before me; I have consecrated this temple, which you have built, by putting my Name there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there." God answered Solomon's prayer with great blessing. At the same time, God gave him a warning in verses 4-7. He taught them that to serve him and obey his command was more important than building the temple. If the Israelites did not obey the Lord, the temple would be useless and disappear. The visible temple is not absolute. But the word of God is absolute. To obey God's word is absolutely important. So worship should be focused on the words of God rather than on the building. True worship is to live in obedience to God's word (Ro 12:1-2).

Second, Solomon's wisdom and splendor (9:10-10:29). 9:10-28 shows how Solomon built his royal palace and all other towns. He did many things. 10:1-13 describe the Queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon; she was amazed at his wisdom and

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wealth. 10:14-29 show that Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth.

In today's passage, we mainly learned the role of the temple. The temple is the place of God's word. The temple is the place of God's presence. The temple is the place of prayer. The temple is the place of forgiveness. The temple is open to all people on earth. The temple is the place where man can meet God, hear his voice, and worship him.

However, Solomon's temple, glorious as it was, is merely a shadow of the true temple, Jesus Christ. In John 2:19 Jesus said, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." When he said this, Jesus was referring to his body. Jesus is God in the flesh. Where Jesus is, there God is with us. To dwell among sinful men, Jesus had to offer a sacrifice. When Solomon's temple was dedicated, so many animals were sacrificed, because God had told the Israelites that blood makes atonement for sin (Heb 17:11). However, animal blood cannot really atone for human sin. God accepted their animal sacrifice, looking forward to the perfect sacrifice, Jesus Christ. God presented Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood (Ro 3:25). Jesus offered himself once, for all, to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself (Heb 9:26). Jesus' blood brings complete forgiveness and eternal salvation.

When Jesus died on the cross for our sins, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. God demonstrated that Jesus' death for our sins opened the way to come to him. In this way Jesus became our true and everlasting temple. We can have confidence to come to God through Jesus. Hebrews 10:19-20 say, "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened to us through the curtain, that is his body...." Jesus is the way to God. We can come to God through Jesus anyplace and at any time when we come by faith. Hebrew 4:16 says, "Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may find mercy and grace to help us in our time of need." The real problem of our nation right now is a spiritual problem. God can solve this problem with his power and forgiving love. God can use our problems, national and personal, to lead us in a right way to fulfill his will and purpose to be a blessing to the world.

Let's come to Jesus who is our true and everlasting temple, so that we may find mercy and grace in time of our need.