

God's House

By Brad Allison on 5/21/2006

Scripture Reference *2 Chronicles 6*

If you've spent any time reading through the books of 1 and 2 Chronicles, you have noticed that a great deal of attention is given to the temple conceived by David and built by his son, Solomon. In our passage for this morning, Solomon dedicates the temple with a long prayer. We didn't read the entire, lengthy prayer, but we read enough of it to know its basic structure. Solomon anticipates future needs within Israel, and he asks God to hear their prayers offered in this temple, or even just facing this temple when they are not able to be there. Seven times he uses the formula, "When this certain thing happens and your people pray to you in this place, please hear their prayer and grant their request." When a drought comes upon the land and your people pray to you here, send rain (v. 26-27). When they encounter famine, plague or siege and pray to you, then hear them and deliver them (v. 28-31). It's all about answered prayer and, according to Solomon's view, the pivotal role played by the temple in such answered prayer.

So I want us to look today at this topic of answered prayer, and what the temple teaches us about that. We believe that God still answers prayer. Do you remember the names John Allen Muhammad and Lee Malvo? Back in 2002, our nation's capital was being terrorized by random sniper killings from these two. A climate of fear had spread over the region. They were finally caught when a truck driver named Ron Lantz called 911 after spotting their car at a rest stop. Lantz and other truck drivers blocked the exits with their big rigs and waited on police to arrive. But you may not have heard about the prayer meeting that preceded that capture. One week before they were caught, Lantz and other truckers were discussing the shootings over their CBs. Columnist Terry Mattingly reported that "Finally, Lantz and several others told everybody to pull off the road. It was time for a prayer meeting. According to Lantz, at least fifty truckers and a slew of other drivers got together—a mere twenty miles from that Myersville rest area." God answers prayer.

Our family experienced this much closer to home. Many of you know how our daughter, Meredith, contracted a mysterious disease last fall. She continued to worsen through the fall and had to be withdrawn from school. Over Christmas and during the early days of January, she continued to worsen. One day, I was meeting with a couple of elders from our church, and I asked them if they would be willing to come and anoint her with oil and pray for her healing, as James 5 instructs us to do. They readily agreed, and we went to our house to do so. Meredith rallied almost immediately, but then worsened again. But then, just a short while after she worsened, we received word from her infectious disease doctor that she had tested positive for a rare bacterial disease known as brucellosis. Eventually, that led to a course of antibiotic treatment that has brought healing to her. God had answered prayer, just as he promises. So let's look at this topic of answered prayer and note three things about it.

I. The Place of Answered Prayer

Notice Solomon's view that this temple is the place where God will answer prayer. In all of Solomon's hypothetical scenarios about prayer, the prayer is offered in the temple, or when that is not possible, facing the temple. Verse 22 speaks of swearing "an oath before your altar in this house." Verse 24 anticipates a time when Israel will be defeated in battle because of their sin, but then they repent and "pray and plead with you *in this house*." Verse 34 imagines Israel's army on the battlefield far from the temple, in which case they are unable to come to the temple itself to pray. But then they are to pray "toward this city that you have chosen and the house that I have built for your name" (v. 34).

Solomon calls the temple “God’s house” because it is the place where God has chosen to live. So it makes sense that if you want to make a request of this God, you should go to his house to do so. One of the features of life in Uganda, where our family visited last summer and where our son serves as a missionary, is that at least one Ugandan will come to a missionary’s house almost every day. It is rare when the purpose is not to ask for something, usually monetary in nature. When they want something from you, they come to your house. Solomon has the same view: when we want something from God, we should go to his house.

God has chosen to locate himself in this place, and if you want to come to him, this is where you do so. How do we apply this to ourselves in this area of prayer? Solomon’s temple was destroyed over 2500 years ago, and the grand temple that Herod built to replace it was destroyed in 70 A.D. That was the last Jewish temple to stand in Jerusalem. So how do we understand this today? The New Testament makes it clear that Jesus is the new temple. Do you remember when Jesus was asked for a sign by the Jews after he cleansed the temple? He said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). John then clarifies that Jesus “was speaking about the temple of his body” (v. 21). Here’s how we apply this to ourselves. God still chooses to answer only those prayers offered in the temple, and Jesus is that temple. Answered prayer isn’t a matter of working yourself into some emotional attitude. It’s not a matter of learning some prayer language or getting yourself into the proper posture. It’s a matter of coming to God through Jesus, the new temple. That is what God teaches. We’re going to look during our third point at exactly what it means to pray in Jesus’ name, which is the New Testament way of saying the same thing Solomon says here.

II. The Types of Answered Prayer

Solomon anticipates seven different types of prayer requests that we are to bring before God. We won’t have time to look at all seven of them, but let’s look at just a few. Notice his first request. “If a man sins against his neighbor and is made to take an oath and comes and swears his oath before your altar in his house, then hear from heaven and act and judge your servants, repaying the guilty by bringing his conduct on his own head” (v. 22-23). He’s speaking there about a group of laws relating to matters of justice. For example, suppose someone borrows your plow one day, and then a thief steals it while it’s in his possession. The borrower claims to have done nothing wrong; he was simply the victim of someone’s thievery. But how do you know that he didn’t sell it to someone and simply claim that it was stolen? That’s the situation envisioned by several sections of the Old Testament, including this one. The man who borrowed the plow was supposed to come to the temple and swear an oath before the presence of God. He would say, in effect, “May God curse me if what I am saying is not true. I took normal precautions to protect the plow, and it was stolen without my knowledge. I swear by God’s holy Name that this is the truth.” Solomon prays here and asks God to put some teeth into that oath by bringing the curse if the man is swearing falsely, and to reward the one who swears truthfully.

How does that apply to us? Solomon is speaking about matters of justice, and that is an issue for us as well. Prayer is God’s way of dealing with injustice. There are times when the right answer to injustice is to seek the justice offered by civil government. But many times, the civil government is just not able to provide such justice. Suppose you’re an employee who is being treated unfairly by your boss, and there is nothing you can do about it. He is stealing your work and using it to his own advantage. You could quit the job, but you don’t have another one and you need the paycheck. In short, you’re stuck. What can you do? You can pray to the God who brings justice and wait on him to do so. I believe that is the only way to avoid seeking vengeance on your own. Believing that God will bring justice in his time and in his way will empower you to forsake taking vengeance.

Not only is prayer God's way of dealing with injustice, but it is also God's way of dealing with insecurity and danger. Notice the variety of disasters Solomon imagines in verse 28: famine, pestilence, blight, mildew, locust, caterpillar, attacks from enemies, plague and sickness. Solomon's answer to all of these was to pray. Note that his response to these things wasn't to flee to a safer place. One of my Old Testament professors in seminary, Ray Dillard, has pointed out that "Israel's unique geographical location on the solid land bridge between the continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa and the large amount of commerce through the area would have made the land subject to the easy spread of outbreaks and epidemics from the surrounding regions" (p. 49-50). In other words, they lived in a dangerous place. Has it ever occurred to you that we too live in a dangerous place and time? Iran may be getting nuclear weapons, the dire possibilities of bird flu are heard frequently, or global warming or other environmental disasters may fundamentally change our lives. Solomon teaches that the proper response to these things is to pray, and our God will hear from heaven and rescue his people.

One other type of answered prayer, one which is unique among these seven types, is the prayer of the foreigner. Solomon asks that when foreigners come to this temple and pray to God, that he would hear them as well. This is evangelistic prayer. God says here that such prayers have an evangelistic effect. He asks God to "do according to all for which the foreigner calls to you, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you" (v. 33). I believe we can apply it to ourselves by praying in Jesus' name for the requests of unbelievers we know. For example, our church recently asked its neighbors and the families from God's House Kindergarten if there were things in their lives we could pray for. One woman asked us to pray for her father, who was suffering from cancer. We got a reply from her this week in which she reported that after his most recent scan he is cancer-free. She was praising God for this gift. I don't know if this lady knows the Lord or not, but she was praising God for answered prayer, and those who are not yet believers can do that too.

III. The Ground of Answered Prayer

It is clear in this passage that the temple, referred to by Solomon as God's house, is essential for answered prayer. Why is it that the temple is so essential? Was it just an arbitrary choice, something like a national flag which serves to center a nation around a unifying symbol? No, the primary purpose of the temple is to teach us how God proposes to handle our biggest problem—sin. The temple is simply a permanent form of the tabernacle. The book of Hebrews is clear in teaching that the temple and tabernacle point to Jesus as the one who takes away our sin. The tabernacle is a copy of heaven, and the activity of the tabernacle shows how God proposes to bring sinners like you and me into heaven—through the blood of a sacrifice.

Let me say this differently. Solomon teaches here that the ground of answered is the temple and what happens there. The New Testament teaches us the same thing when it says that we need to pray in Jesus' name. Jesus said, "Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (John 14:13). What does it mean to pray in Jesus' name? I think we all understand that it means more than simply adding the words "in Jesus' name, Amen" to the end of our prayers. These are not some magic words we can add to insure answered prayer. To pray in Jesus' name means two things. First, it means that we agree with God that our biggest problem is our sin. Did you notice in Solomon's prayer that sin is the central problem? In all but two of the seven requests he brings, the main problem is sin. "When heaven is shut up and there is no rain *because they have sinned against you*" (v. 26), then he asks that God would hear and forgive. "If they sin against you—for there is no one who does not sin" (v. 36), then hear and forgive. Our main problem is not sickness or financial need or people disappointing us, but the fact that we are guilty of mutiny against the

God of the universe. But the temple points forward to the permanent solution of that problem in Jesus. He has been sacrificed as our substitute. So to pray in Jesus' name is to come to him with our repentances. Notice how Solomon focuses on that in his last petition. "If they repent with all their heart," he says, "then hear... and forgive" (v. 38-39). Sin is the only thing that can bring permanent harm to us, and Jesus has taken care of that problem. So the temple teaches that repentance is to be a central part of our prayer. Repentance is our friend. If we believe that, then our prayers will have a dominant note of joy. Listen to the way Solomon ends his prayer. "Let your priests, O Lord God, be clothed with salvation, and let your saints rejoice in your goodness" (v. 41).

Second, to pray in Jesus' name means that we come to God by Jesus' authority and for Jesus' sake. Bob Muhlig told me several months ago that when he served in the Marine Corp, he was once given authority to act in the name of the General under whom he served. He was authorized to sign orders for that general and send them out under the General's name. These orders were to be regarded just as if they had come from the General himself. But there was also the implicit understanding that he was to act in accordance with the General's wishes. It would have been an abuse of his authority to order \$10,000 to be deposited into his personal bank account and to sign the General's name to this order. When we pray in Jesus' name, it means the same thing. We come by Jesus' authority and we make requests for Jesus' sake. God himself has told us to do so, and that should bolster our faith. It means that we have every confidence that God will hear our prayers just as much as he hears the prayers of Jesus.

CONCLUSION:

Guideposts magazine once had a story about Sandy and her husband, Joe, who were sailing in the Gulf of Mexico when they were caught in an unexpected storm and blown far off course into the open sea. They drifted in their incapacitated boat for two days in the hot sun. Their water supply was getting low and they knew that their lives were in danger. They had been praying for a rescue, but none came. On the third day, when things seemed hopeless, Joe gave up and lay down in the bottom of the boat, resigning himself to the death he felt was certain. At about that time, Sandy looked at their dog that had been on the boat with them the whole time. As the dog looked up at her with total trust, she was encouraged to look to God with that kind of trust. She prayed again, "Oh Lord, as my dog trusts me as his master, so I put my total trust in you. You are our only hope. Please deliver us." Shortly after that, she looked up and saw in the distance what looked like a cross coming toward them. It turned out to be the masthead of a large yacht coming straight for them. As they were hoisted on deck of the yacht, the owner explained that he had put the yacht on automatic pilot, and inexplicably, it was now some ten miles off course.

God knows how to rescue his people. He will do so as we come to him in prayer. So, may God teach us to pray!