

2 Chronicles 7:12-16

¹² Then the LORD appeared to Solomon by night, and said to him: "I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice. ¹³ When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people, ¹⁴ if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. ¹⁵ Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to prayer *made* in this place. ¹⁶ For now I have chosen and sanctified this house, that My name may be there forever; and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually.

This text from II Chronicles is about the building of the first temple. King David wanted to build this temple for God, but God would not allow him to do so because David had done so much bloodshed. Oddly enough David was probably not as much of a fighter as a poet. But he did what had to be done. And in this case his faithfulness disqualified him for the honor of building God's temple. That is odd. But that is how it was.

So Solomon built it according to the specs God gave him. Jack and Carla, how would you like it if God were your building inspector? That was the case here. So Solomon offered a prayer in dedication of the temple.

He prayed that God would hear from heaven, particularly when people needed forgiveness from sin.

He said this among other things.

2 Chronicles 6:19-21

¹⁹ Yet regard the prayer of Your servant and his supplication, O LORD my God, and listen to the cry and the prayer which Your servant is praying before You: ²⁰ that Your eyes may be open toward this temple day and night, toward the place where *You said You would* put Your name, that You may hear the prayer which Your servant prays toward this place. ²¹ And may You hear the supplications of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven Your dwelling place, and when You hear, forgive.

Solomon was very insightful. He did not pray and ask God to be very impressed with **all the wonderful things** that people would do at this temple. No. He knew **himself** and he knew **his countrymen** and he **knew God**. And he knew that what was needed in that temple more than anything else was a way for men to be made right with God. So that is how he prayed.

We are dedicating a new building this morning. We understand that **it is not a house for God**. God does not live in houses. Scripture tells us that **we who are believers** are the temple of God now. God lives in us. He dwells in us. But this building is **a tool**. It is a place where people can come and hear about God. And ultimately, we pray that it is a place where people **can come to come face to face with God through hearing what He has said, through calling out to Him in prayer, and through fellowshiping with His people**. This is a place that must represent the forgiveness of God to man. Our greatest need as humans is a relationship with God. And that is impossible without the forgiveness of sin. So this house, like the temple, must be a place that represents forgiveness to people.

Now after Solomon had prayed and done all the acts of dedication he sent the people home. That evening God spoke to Solomon. That is our text this morning.
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This must have been a rare lifetime experience for Solomon. It is not something he would quickly forget. The Lord appeared to Solomon.

God told Solomon that God had heard what Solomon asked and God was granting Solomon's request. This house was going to be where humans offer sacrifices for their sin, and God would accept those sacrifices and would cover the people's sin. But verse 13 is interesting. Look at what He says.

¹³ **When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people,**

Our world has a lot of social clubs. They are filled with good intentioned people providing very needed services to our society. And these members are very likely to **feel very good** about the services they provide.

Well, the church is not that kind of club. The church is a group of people formed around **the realization that comes** when a person has seen the worst of themselves. They have seen who they are and what they are capable of apart from the grace of God. They know what it is to sin. And they know what it is to long

for forgiveness. And it is Christ who they have come to for forgiveness. The temple back in Solomon's day and the church of today is not made up of good people. It is made up of God's people in all stages of moral states. It is made up of people who are addicted to forgiveness.

It is interesting that God does not say, "If" I shut up the heaven. He says "When". When Christians read this they aren't surprised. We know what we are like. We are **prone to wonder**, as the hymn says. We are like **straying sheep** like King David told us. We can be **like unfaithful wives** like the prophets and Jesus and the epistles describe us. Yes. Sin is going to be an issue and we know that God will move on our behalf to get our attention. He loves us enough to discipline us. He loves us enough to get our attention in some very painful ways.

So God's people are not even mildly surprised when God says, when I take you to the woodshed over your sin, this is going to be the place where people make that right.

Now God will not force us to remain in our misery. Look here.

¹⁴ if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

We see here **the right people** with **the right attitude** seeking **the right source** will get **the right result**.

So, who are the right people?

If My people who are called by My Name.

Those are the right people. But what does that mean? Who are the people called in God's name?

Peter was preaching and God used him to heal a lame man. The Jewish leaders put Peter and other disciples on trial for what he had done. That seems an odd thing to put someone on trial for, but that is what they did. In the trial this was Peter's defense.

Acts 4:10-12

¹⁰ let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. ¹¹ This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.' ¹²

Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Jesus also said

John 14:6

⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

When Solomon first heard the reference of people called by **My Name**, he would have thought of the true Israelites, people who truly worshipped Jehovah. **Now** since God has come in the flesh, we understand that **Christians are now God's people who are called by His name.**

Again, we have got to look at this correctly. There is nothing here about people who have **done very good things**. It isn't talking about people who **have reached some high moral standard**. It isn't talking about people who have **earned anything from God**. It has nothing to do with doing more good things than bad things. It is talking about people who for some unknown reason God has called to Himself. They are people who God has moved in their hearts to pursue Him. They are people who have understood that unless God moved in their behalf, they would not have a chance with Him. They stand condemned under the weight of their own sin. They know that what scripture says is true. The wages of sin is death.

They know that Jesus is the only way to get right with God. He is **the only way** because **only He was perfect**. Only Christ didn't deserve a penalty for sin because **He had no sin**. So only He was qualified to take upon Himself the full penalty of the sin that we have committed. God punished Him for our sin. There is nothing fair in that. We deserved the punishment and He took it. That is how grace and forgiveness are offered to us. We now can be seen in God's eyes **through the righteousness of Jesus Christ**. Our sin is no longer an insurmountable obstacle between us and God because Christ has paid the full penalty of our sin.

All that we need to do is to believe in Christ. We must fully place our confidence in His completed work on the cross and submit to His rightful Lordship of our lives. That is what believing is. We are believing in the person of Jesus Christ. If you have tried to get to God by some other method, let me give you some advice. Quit. It won't work. **Believing in Christ** is the only way for a human being to be right with their creator, to have peace with God. He promises forgiveness **to everyone who believes** and He always delivers on His promises. That is how you can know that you are a child of God's. That is how you can rest assured that you are one of His people called by His name. That is the very most important decision of your life. Every other decision comes in a far second.

You are surely going to die. And after death scripture says judgment will come. Believing in Christ is the only way you can make it unscathed through the judgment of God. God demands perfection. Only Christ can stand that test. And we, by faith, put on the righteousness of Christ. Please, if you are not sure that you have ever put your faith in Christ, do so today.

So back to our text.

¹⁴ if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

the **right people** with the **right attitude** seeking the **right source** will get the **right result**.

will humble themselves

Some people think that humility is thinking less of ourselves than what we warrant. Essentially we often think that humility involves **pretending** that we aren't very special. Well the truth is, humility is really **telling the honest truth about ourselves**, the truth that God sees when **He** looks at us.

If you are like me, we can sometimes focus on those things about ourselves that we like, that we are proud of. And if we spend long enough fixated on those things, we can get the impression that God is getting a good deal when He gets us. But that isn't the full picture.

How well do we stand the test when we look at everything we do, even when no one is looking? Then look at everything you say. And then run the transcript of everything that you thought. It doesn't take long at all to see that Isaiah was right. All of our righteousness really is like filthy rags. We are not, by nature, very impressive. Not when the whole truth is told.

So the right attitude toward God is to come clean. It is to tell the truth about ourselves, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. In our text God is disciplining the people for their sin. He is saying that He will stop the rain from coming in order to get their attention. At this point the right thing to do is to admit our sin. It is to agree with God. That is what confession of our sins really means.

Confession is agreeing with God that He is right about us.

That is the right attitude and that is always the right attitude. Remember the Pharisees who prayed and thanked God that they weren't sinful like the tax collector. But the tax collector called out to God in humility saying God, be merciful to me a sinner. And Jesus gave His evaluation. It was only the tax collector that was going to be heard by God. He saw himself from God's perspective and agreed with God. That is what we must do if we want to do real business with God.

This building needs to house a people who are addicted to the truth, even when the truth hurts us deeply and embarrasses us and humiliates us. We need the **proper diagnosis** if we are ever to get the **proper cure**. Until we know what is really wrong with us, we will not grow. We won't change. But the truth has the capacity to set us free. It has the capacity to truly change us into the people we long to be. This building needs to house people who love the truth, who love the lights being on all the time.

and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways
the **right people** with the **right attitude** seeking the **right source** will get the **right result**.

Here God tells Solomon that when the people of God are disciplined, they are to pray and seek God's face.

Between the age of 16 and 18 I had 5 car accidents. The first one was the worst. I wrecked my mom's new Mustang. I think it was 6 months old. I totaled it. The last thing in the world I wanted to do at that point was to look my dad in the face. I figured he would be angry with me. He had every reason to be. I was being reckless with his property. My mom assured me later that it was really her car. I was endangering those in the car with me. I had done a lot of things wrong. But I knew that I needed to face my dad and take what was coming to me. When I approached him I made no excuses. I had no defense. And I was surprised to find out that he was just glad that I was ok.

Sometimes we do not want to pray and seek God's face. Sometimes we are afraid of what we will find. He may be harsh. Sometimes we are just stubborn and we don't want to submit. Sometimes we just want to do things our own way and we aren't ready yet to do it God's way.

So we delay going to God. But when we finally do, we will always come to the same conclusion. Why didn't I do this sooner? Why did I waste all that time and effort resisting God and running from Him. That was just stupid.

I ran into an old friend at a high school reunion. She was really passionate about her relationship with the Lord. But she had a big lament. She said, with tears in her eyes, her great regret was that she had wasted so much time. She had abandoned her relationship with the Lord and looked for fulfillment elsewhere. Now that she is drinking from the fountain of God's goodness she can see with great clarity what foolishness it was to ever go anywhere else for what she needed. **This building** has to house people who are seeking God's face. We need to be going to the right source. We need to be calling out to God with our hearts and our voices. We need to be coming clean with who we really are. And when we do that our sin will be exposed. It has to be. The light of God's face is going to illuminate dark places. And we are going to need to do business with what we find. And it is not enough just to see it. We must foster the changes that God wants accomplished in us. We have got to obey Him and submit to Him and let go of anything that is holding us back from what He intends for us.

then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.
the **right people** with the **right attitude** seeking the **right source** will get the **right result**.

Here is the right result.

Some people treat God as if God exists to make people grovel. They seem to think that God derives pleasure from robbing people of pleasure. He is a cosmic killjoy. You can tell if you tend in that direction because you will do your best to avoid God. After all, if God is like that, why in the world would you want to associate with Him.

Some people treat God as if God exists to make them continually happy. It is as if God is the cosmic kindly grandfather that is a pushover for whatever the grandkids want. They treat God as if He is only there to serve their needs and desires. So they go to God when they want something, and He better deliver on their requests or they will throw a fit.

But the true God revealed in scripture isn't on that continuum of robbing people of pleasure or continually granting them pleasure. What God is doing with the lives of His people is **preparing them for the eternity that He has planned for them.** And we simply don't naturally fit in there. So this training process can be pretty severe at times. But it is never without a purpose. And that purpose is actually going to include our greatest pleasure.

I Cor 2:9 Says But as it is written:

“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,

Nor have entered into the heart of man

The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”

You see, that is the kind of God we have. That is how he really is. But we live in a training barracks for eternity. Scripture tells us over and over again that this world is not our home. It isn't designed for our comfort. It is designed for our training. It's not a great place to rest, but it is a very good place to work.

But what is the end game? What is to make us think that the prices that we are asked to pay are worth while? Will God really make good on His promises? After all, we are really idiots if we are paying a price to live for Christ now if this life is all there is.

Well, this world is not all there is.

Here is the reward.

Rev 21:1 Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. 2 Then I, John,[fn] saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God. 4 And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”

Here is the world we have longed for. Here is the utopia that could never be maintained on planet earth in our current state. Here is the place we could never appreciate if we didn't first know what tears and death and sorrow and pain were like.

This is the God we are calling out to. We are never the victims of God. Those who truly believe in Christ are the adopted children of a King that has **a reality to welcome us to** that will be worth every price we are forced to pay here. He is our God.

That is the end game. That is the end result that allows us to keep everything else in perspective.

Now in our text we see God's response to His people calling out to Him in confession and repentance of their sin.

then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

Do you see that God is not doing this for no purpose. He always has a loving purpose for His children. He is telling these people that when the discipline he will instill has its proper effect, then He will respond by doing that which He desired for His people all along. Restoration. The example that He gives us is regarding **this life**. He even pours out His blessing here when we submit to His will.

God does not drive His people to this state in order to make them grovel. He prepares them to learn the lesson they need to learn. He is preparing them step by step for life in Eternity with Him.

So we see that when His people finally get the point and respond appropriately to His discipline, God comes through with that that our hearts crave for most. We get forgiveness. Our relationship with God is restored. We again have the intimate communion with Him that His gifts were intended to provide. God is not slow to respond to His children. He continually moves in their behalf. But he must lovingly prepare us **to desire His gifts** at the same time He is **lovingly bestowing those gifts upon us**. And we are just like kids who would prefer candy to supper. We are like sheep that really don't know where to go to find the good grass and the drinkable water. So our lessons sometime come hard.

In our text God is going to heal their land. Carla and I have just finished a book where the author says that this promise holds true for any land where God's people live. He claims that if **we who know Christ and are committed to Him** would humble ourselves and seek God for God alone and would pray and call out to God for Him to glorify Himself in our land, and if we would confess our sins and put them behind us, He too would heal our land. He would cause changes to all the things we keep trying to change but can't. We keep looking to the hand of man to get what only the hand of God can provide. This movement of God's people is called a revival. And it could still happen if God so moves.

But even if that does not happen here, we know that we can experience the intimacy with God that we so desire. We can have our sins forgiven. And we will certainly one day be in a land that is better than we could have ever imagined. This building must house people who really believe this truth in the core of who they are. We must exhibit a hope that cannot be denied. It is a hope that can face any hardship because the price is never greater than the expected reward. If your life looks like just one cosmic disappointment, if you can't see the point, if your mind is worn out trying to find a bright side, the problem is that your focus is too close. You are trusting this life to provide what it is not designed to provide. It will not fulfill you. It will not satisfy you. In fact, it seems to me that much of the time it will frustrate you. And it seems to be that way on purpose. What are weeds for anyway?

We must be people who call out to God to be the source of all that our soul so wants. We need to be thirsty people for the water that only God can give. When we become **thirsty for that which God gives**, we will find that **what God gives finally quenches our thirst**. When He becomes **the center of our focus** we will begin to make sense of this life, we will see it with the right perspective. And we will find that we can have hope and peace, even when our circumstances seem to require the exact opposite.

As we are dedicating our building to God's work today, it will mean nothing if we are not continually rededicating our lives to the Glory of God. And that, after all, is what church is all about.