

Temple

1 Kings 8

The Old Testament has been described (by B.B. Warfield, I believe) as “*a beautifully furnished but dimly lit room.*” Think of the symbols of the Old Testament – rich, ornate, valuable items like the Temple, the Ark of the Covenant – housed in the Most Holy Place – before which rested the golden lampstand, the bread of the presence, the table with incense.

[Temple Floor Plan Diagram]

Outside the temple was the altar for sacrifice, before the grand, gold-covered entrance to the Temple itself. The furnishings are remarkably beautiful but the room is dimly lit for the full meaning of these items remains mysterious until the LIGHT is turned on. *The light, of course, is JESUS.* The whole Bible points to Him and we see this beautifully presented in the details of the Temple.

1. To come near the Temple as a Gentile you had to come into the court of the Gentiles, beyond which you could advance no further. It was here that the Jewish moneychangers set up, provoking Jesus’ anger when he overturned their tables and rebuked them saying: “*My house will be a house of prayer for all nations.*” This was as close as Gentiles could come to the worship of the Lord and Jesus was angry that the Jews were preventing their approach.
2. To move beyond the Court of the Gentiles into the JEWS ONLY area you had to enter through a guarded gate in *a thick stone wall*. Archaeologists found a sign that hung on this wall 2,000 years ago saying: “Any Gentile who crosses this wall will have himself to blame for his death which follows.” In other words, there was a LITERAL WALL OF HOSTILITY dividing Jews from Gentiles. Ephesians 2 tells us that in His Body Jesus destroyed the dividing wall of hostility!
3. Within the Jewish area of the temple courts the worship of the Lord would regularly take place. Central to this worship was the offering of sacrifices every day, every month and during three major festivals every year. Of course animal sacrifices could only provide a temporary atonement for sin. But Jesus’ once for all sacrifice made a complete and eternal atonement between a holy God and a sinful people.
4. A large, ornate door atop many stairs opened into the Holy Place of the Temple – accessible only by the PRIESTS who every day placed a fresh loaf of bread before the Lord, trimmed the wicks and added oil to the lampstand. The bread symbolized how God provided physically for His people and the lampstand represented God’s spiritual guidance and provision for His people. Jesus’ body is our true bread – the true manna from heaven. Jesus is the light of the world – His Holy Spirit illumines our hearts as the lampstand illumined the holy place.
5. Within the Temple there was one final room – the inner sanctuary, or MOST HOLY PLACE – accessible only by the High Priest and only once each year on the Day of Atonement. This was separated from the Holy Place by a six inch thick *purple curtain* of rich, valuable (un-rippable) fabric. When Jesus’ breathed out those wonderful words, “It is finished” on the

cross, the curtain in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. Through His sacrificial death Jesus opened the way for us into the holy presence of God. We now have direct access through Jesus into the Most Holy Place!

Indeed, brothers and sisters, as those who have been united with Jesus by faith **we ARE the Temple of the Holy Spirit** – Ephesians 2 teaches that:

“We are being built together into a dwelling place for the Lord.” Ephesians 2:21

The Temple represented the presence and blessing of God. Just as the Ark of the Covenant went before the nation into battle and rested in the center of their camp, so the Temple was built in Jerusalem, their capital city, and was central to their cultural life.

And the Temple was not just symbolic of the presence of the Lord – it was the literal dwelling place of God on earth.

The Temple Represented the Presence and Blessing of God

“And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, *for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.*” 1 Kings 8:11

Solomon’s prayer of dedication, and God’s response, show us **four requirements** to experience the blessing of God. These four assume an already established relationship with the Lord. So these are four requirements for the BELIEVER to experience God’s presence and blessing.

- Chapter eight presents Solomon’s efforts to bring the ark of the covenant into the Temple. It was a grand procession involving more animal sacrifices than could be numbered. So the blessing of God first presumes ***the application of an appropriate sacrifice***. In Solomon’s day that required lots and lots of animals. For us today, there is only one appropriate sacrifice – the death of the Lord Jesus on the cross for us.
- Then the glory of the Lord filled the Temple where the ark of the covenant had come to rest. In the ark, verse 9 tells us, there was nothing except the two tablets of stone. ***The ten commandments represented the COVENANT*** God had made with Israel – to be their God and make them His people.

So a relationship between the Lord and the People of Israel was established already through the covenant and it was maintained through the regular application of many animal sacrifices, in accordance with God’s clearly articulated Law. Solomon was not establishing a relationship with the Lord, he was building on a relationship that already existed.

These four requirements to experience the presence and blessing of God are the same – they assume you already have a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ and His perfect sacrifice. By putting your faith in Jesus’ death and resurrection ***you have entered a covenant relationship with the God of heaven***. These four principles – which all relate to PRAYER - will help us regularly experience God’s presence and blessing.

We can experience God’s blessing through:

1. God-Glorifying Prayer

“Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel... There is no God like you, in heaven above or on earth beneath... Then hear in heaven your dwelling place... **that they may fear you** all the days that they live in the land that you gave to our fathers.” 1 Kings 8:15,22,39-40

The whole reason for building a temple was for the sake of the NAME of the Lord. **It was all about God’s reputation, glory, honor and status.** This is why it was on David’s heart to build a Temple – knowing that God is the most glorious of all gods yet the ark of the covenant was still resting in a tent.

Even the idea of a temple for the Creator God of Israel blew Solomon’s mind:

1. God-Glorifying Prayer

“But will God indeed dwell on earth? Behold, the heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built?” 2 Kings 8:27

God is the ruler over all things. He cannot be housed in any building. The entire cosmos He created with a word of command. The creation of the stars – the 100s of billions of stars in our galaxy alone are mentioned in Genesis one with the casual reference – “and He also made the stars.” If the vast universe cannot contain the LORD how could a single building in Jerusalem? And yet, that is the point! **The God who made the world and everything in it has chosen to dwell among His people!** Why? Not because THEY are so amazing, but because His grace and love are so amazing! It’s all about HIM – not about us!

Now, we all could have guessed this point. The first step toward experiencing God’s blessing is to **make our prayers and our lives about HIM and not about US.** We must adopt a posture of humility – for those who exalt themselves will be humbled while those who humble themselves before the Lord will be exalted. We would all acknowledge that philosophically. But do we regularly apply this in our prayer lives?

When you pray, do you start with a sincere concern for the GLORY OF GOD? Do you begin your regular prayer times with praise and thanksgiving? We certainly ought to! But so often **we rush right into our demands like terrorists calling the negotiator.** “Now, listen up! We need nice weather, a safe, positive day for the kids; good attitudes; good grades; good friends; healthy family members and some miraculous weight loss would be great since I don’t plan to eat well today but I want to keep seeing progress on my new year’s goals.”

Hopefully we start out with “Thanks for this day” or something like that, but do we take much time in our prayers to worship? Do we really direct our minds toward the GLORY OF GOD and the honor of His Name?

John Piper says believers most often use **prayer as an INTERCOM**, paging the Lord to provide more comforts for us as we sit on our couches. How often are your prayers like Lady Mary ringing a bell at Downton Abbey while she powders her nose in the mirror? Instead of presenting ourselves before the Lord as HIS SERVANTS who want, above all, to glorify HIS NAME, **we call on Him to SERVE US for the sake of our comforts and desires.**

Prayers like this one are in the Bible to **re-orient us to how we SHOULD pray.** Don Carson, one of my New Testament professors, wrote a wonderful book called **Praying with Paul.** He draws out the key things Paul prayed for and contrasts that with what we tend to pray for. For example, we

tend to pray mostly PHYSICAL prayers – for health, healing and physical (even monetary) blessing. Paul always prays **SPIRITUAL prayers** – for wisdom, faith, love, holiness and God’s power to be used for God’s purposes.

Listen to how Paul prays for the church in Thessalonica:

1. God Glorifying Prayer

“We always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling... *so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him*, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.” 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

Look at that central prayer request: that Jesus’ name may be glorified in YOU and that you may be glorified in HIM. Oh brothers and sisters, may we pray like THIS! May this be our primary desire – to glorify Jesus in our lives that we might be glorified IN HIM.

So often we reverse that and what we really want is for Jesus to glorify US – we want God to make everything about us – our desires, our plans, our happiness, our reputation. I’ll make this personal – that is so often what I want. **I’m a professional at making life ALL ABOUT ME.** It’s only natural then that my prayers would also tend to revolve around ME. So I have to discipline myself to focus instead on the glory of God – using prayers like the prayers of Paul to guide me into God-glorifying prayer rather than self-focused, intercom-style praying.

Solomon’s prayer is very God-focused. That is the first principle to experience God’s blessing – God-glorifying prayer. Second, faith-filled prayer.

2. Faith-Filled Prayer

“Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who with his hand *has fulfilled what he promised with his mouth to David my father...*” 1 Kings 8:15

We start by orienting our prayer toward God and His glory, away from ourselves and our own desires. Basically, we pray – “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be YOUR name. YOUR Kingdom come. YOUR will be done...” Then we shift from praise into thanksgiving – we acknowledge the faithfulness of our covenant-keeping God.

Here Solomon recognizes the promise God made to David, his father. It was not for David to build a house for the Lord but the LORD promised to build a house for David. We saw this meant a family, a temple and a kingdom – all of which were gloriously fulfilled in Jesus. But initially they were fulfilled in Solomon. Look at verse 20:

2. Faith-Filled Prayer

“Now the LORD has fulfilled his promise that he made. For I have risen in the place of David my father, and sit on the throne of Israel, as the LORD promised, and I have built the house for the name of the LORD.” 2 Samuel 8:20

God’s covenant promises to David were the basis for Solomon’s confident prayer.

2. Faith-Filled Prayer

“You have kept with your servant David what you declared to him... Now therefore, O LORD... keep for your servant David my father what you promised him... let your word be confirmed which you have spoken.” 2 Samuel 8:24,26

We can pray with the greatest confidence when we are praying based on the PROMISES of God, for God ALWAYS keeps His promises. He is the Faithful One. Our FAITH is based entirely on His faithfulness!

Here is another reason we should use Biblical prayers in our daily prayers – because then we KNOW we are praying according to God’s will and in line with His promises.

- For example, God has promised **to make us HOLY** – to sanctify us through and through. So when we ask God to make us holy we have HIS Promise to give us confidence that HE WILL DO IT!
- God has promised **to give us the fruit of the Spirit** – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness and so on. When we pray for those character qualities – the virtues of Christ – to be more realized in us – we can pray with confidence that He will grow those characteristics in our hearts and lives.
- Jesus promised “you will be my witness in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” So when we pray for opportunities to share the gospel we can be confident that God will bring us opportunities – because He has promised to use us for that reason.

We have printed up 1,000 POSTCARDS that say **OpenTheBible.org**. We used the street banners for a few weeks to let folks in the community know that we like the Bible here. But we wanted to make it personal – equipping all of us at Oakwood to hand out these little business cards as a way of pointing people to the Bible with the clear encouragement to OPEN IT! When the cards first came in I threw a handful in my car and as I was running errands kept some in my pocket. I had to pick up a shipment at a warehouse in Brandon so when I went in to chat with the lady in the office I had a couple ready.

She was friendly and helpful in getting my shipment ready. So before I left I said, “Hey, check out this website – it’s super helpful showing how the whole Bible is one story and it all points to Jesus.” She seemed interested so I went on, “It’s from a great Scottish preacher named Colin Smith – you may hear him on Moody Radio in the afternoons at 2:30. You should check it out!” She thanked me for the recommendation and then said she had lost her husband just a couple of years ago and had been thinking about getting back into church.

Naturally, I encouraged her in that regard – and since she was open to the conversation I jotted down our church website on the back of the card. I’ve handed out a few other cards since then and the conversations haven’t been as involved. But let’s use those cards - they’re at the Information Center – to be witnesses for the Lord. PRAY on your own and in your small group for opportunities – and I GUARANTEE the LORD will bring you opportunities. He has PROMISED to use us as His witnesses. So we can pray with confidence for things like that.

We experience God’s blessing when we pray for the glory of God, based on the promises of God, and third, when we pray with all of our hearts.

3. Whole-hearted Prayer

“Whatever prayer, whatever plea, by any man or by all your people, *each knowing the affliction of his own heart*, and stretching out his hand toward this house, then hear in heaven...” 2 Kings 8:38

This is a wonderful verse. Notice first of all that it doesn't matter HOW MANY people pray, HOW OFTEN they pray or from WHAT NATION – **what matters is THE HEART of the one praying**. So often we think of prayer as MAGIC – we think we have to get the words right, the number of people up to a good high number, and the number of minutes high enough. Hear this – prayer is NOT MAGIC.

Jesus confronted the Pharisees for treating *prayer as a public performance* – as if the more words and the more people who heard them, the better. No, Jesus said, it's better if NO ONE hears your words except your Father who sees what you do in secret. Because God knows your heart. If you're praying to impress people with your religious words – and if some people happen to be impressed, then that's the full extent of your reward. But if you're praying because your heart breaks for the things that break God's heart – NOW you're heading the right direction.

What burdens your heart? **What is the AFFLICTION of your heart?** I was out in front of Planned Parenthood last night leading a prayer vigil – not because I went seeking that opportunity – but because a pastor friend of mine told me the organizer couldn't find a protestant pastor willing to lead a prayer. I said I'd be glad to because I have two primary convictions about abortion: 1) we can pray against it with 100% confidence that we know God's will on the issue and 2) we should pray for young women in distress – not in judgment upon them but that the kindness of God would lead them to repentance. So we stood in front of Planned Parenthood and prayed for the unborn in our city and for young women who had a serious decision to make. We prayed FOR the women and FOR the babies not against the women or in judgment upon them.

- ***Abortion should afflict our hearts***. It is the holocaust of our generation. Americans have slaughtered more babies than Hitler and Stalin's death camps combined. The holocaust in Europe has been exceeded tenfold by the holocaust of abortion.
- ***Slavery should afflict our hearts*** – upwards of 40 million people – many of them CHILDREN – are bought and sold for the global sex industry. Tampa is the number 3 or 4 city in the United States consuming that product.
- ***Poverty should afflict our hearts*** – yes, we will always have the poor among us, but that doesn't mean we should ignore them.
- ***Unreached people groups should afflict our hearts*** – the fact that hundreds of millions of people have NEVER heard the gospel of Jesus Christ – and thousands upon thousands of them die every day and descend into an eternity of suffering – that should crush us and bring us to our knees in prayer.

What afflicts your heart? Let that burden move you to PRAY.

The main thing that should break our hearts is **SIN**.

3. Whole-hearted Prayer

“If they turn their heart in the land to which they have been carried captive, and repent and plead with you... *if they repent with all their heart and with all their soul*... then hear in heaven...” 2 Kings 8:47-48

If we do not turn from our sins WHOLEHEARTEDLY God will not hear our prayers. David writes in Psalm 68, ***"If I had cherished sin in my heart you would not have heard my prayer."*** Solomon knew this truth in PRINCIPLE – but sadly, not long after praying this prayer, he began to compromise his convictions by accumulating lots of gold. Before long he would accumulate lots of horses and chariots for his army and with that, lots of wives in making alliances with foreign nations. And as he made more and more compromises his heart drifted farther and farther from the Lord.

You can almost read Ecclesiastes as Solomon's prayer of repentance. Almost. But not quite. Sadly, it seems to me that Solomon was at his wisest early in his reign and he became increasingly foolish and blinded by his own sinful desires. Though he predicted God's restoration if the people would repent with all of their heart and soul – I don't think he ever did that himself. How terribly sad. The wisest man of all time became a fool. He let sin and idolatry corrupt his heart and darken his mind.

Listen to the ominous warning at the end of this section:

3. Whole-hearted Prayer

"If you turn aside from following me... but go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land that I have given them." 2 Kings 9:6-7

All of us can be led astray into idolatry – usually not with little statues we worship but with good things we turn into God things or sins we let grow into addictive strongholds. That is how to throw away the blessing of God. That is the path to what Paul called ***"being disqualified for the prize."*** I'm not saying you lose your salvation – only God can know the heart on whether a person was every truly saved. I'm saying a true believer can lose his reward – can become so caught up in sin and idolatry to be utterly useless to the Lord.

And that leads us to the fourth principle. Our God-glorifying, Faith-filled, whole-hearted prayer should also be Obedience-oriented. Here is the contrast in that closing section to sin and idolatry:

4. Obedience-oriented Prayer

"If you will walk before me... with integrity of heart and uprightness, **doing according to all that I have commanded**... then I will establish your royal throne..." 2 Kings 9:4

True prayer leads to ACTION. It leads to OBEDIENCE. Don't kid yourself that you are a PRAYING person if you are not a DOING person. When you talk with the Lord He tells you things. He sends you on missions. He leads you on adventures. He connects you with people who need some encouragement. He convicts you of sin – as John pointed out so well last week.

Notice the key word associated with God's blessing: IF you will walk before me with integrity of heart.

4. Obedience-oriented Prayer

"You shall not lack a man to sit before me on the throne of Israel **if only** your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk before me as you [David] have walked before me." 2 Kings 8:26

The proof of true faith is OBEDIENCE. Sadly, over time Solomon proved his unbelief through his disobedience. God warned future kings of Israel to avoid three dangers: accumulating lots of gold, lots of horses and lots of wives. Solomon quickly collected all three. As foretold, these became a snare to his heart.

So let's close today by listening to Solomon's words and not following his example:

"If they turn again to you and acknowledge your name and pray and plead with you in this house, then hear in heaven and forgive the sin of your people Israel." 2 Kings 8:33

We can access the blessing of God through prayer that is God-glorifying, faith-filled, whole-hearted and obedience-oriented. That is what the temple represented – the presence and blessing of the Lord.

The Temple represented the presence and blessing of God. How tragic that Solomon's glorious temple was demolished and burned because of Israel's disobedience. How sad that the rebuilt temple in Jesus' day was torn down in AD 70 by the Romans in response to a Jewish rebellion. Since then the Jews have been unable to rebuild the temple, right up to the present day.

But the truth is that ***WE are the temple of the LORD right now.*** You and I are living stones in this temple!

"In Christ the whole structure, being joined together, grows into *a holy temple in the Lord.* In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit." Ephesians 2:21-22

Jesus is the light that illumines the furnishings of the Old Testament. The temple pointed ahead to the arrival of Jesus. Solomon got it right when he asked the question, "Will God indeed dwell on the earth?" (v. 27). It was an incredible miracle when the glory of God filled the temple. But it was an even more amazing miracle when the glory of God filled Mary's womb and the Son of God was born as a human baby. That was how God indeed did come to dwell on the earth.

And now that same glory of God dwells in our hearts – for we are the temple of the Lord. We are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit as those who have been united with Christ.

Let's pray!