

The Temple - A Monument for Gods People

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[0 : 00] Let's turn back then to that chapter, page 433, 2 Chronicles chapter 6 and verse 36.

If they sin against you, that's God's people, if they sin against you, for there is no one who does not sin, and you are angry with them, and give them to an enemy, so that they are carried away captive to a land far or near.

Yet, if they turn their heart in the land to which they have been carried captive, and repent, and plead with you in the land of their captivity, saying, We have sinned and have acted perversely and wickedly.

If they repent with all their mind and with all their heart in the land of their captivity, to which they were carried captive, and pray towards their land, which you gave to their fathers, a city that you have chosen, and the house that I have built for your name, then hear from heaven your dwelling place, their prayer, and their pleas, and maintain their cause, and forgive your people who have sinned against you.

We've been going through the life of Solomon.

[1 : 33] And as you know, central to the life of Solomon is this great building. And we've seen something of its beauty, and its majesty, and its architecture, and its riches, and its worth.

And most of all, we've seen something of its significance, and its meaning. Not only does the temple look forward to the coming of Jesus Christ, but Solomon and the temple are meant to be understood as both of them together, representing what God was going to do one day in removing the sins of his people.

And that's the all-important truth of the scriptures, that God saves sinners. That's what the gospel is all about. That's what the good news means.

God saves sinners. Jesus came into the world to seek and to save those who were lost. Now you might be asking, what does all this have to do?

I can appreciate the beauty, the majesty, the complexity of the temple, but it's all so complex. What does all this have to do with my real life, the real world that I have to live in, and I'm going to have to go back to on a Monday morning?

[2 : 50] Or does this have anything to say whatsoever? Or is it not very far removed from where I'm at in the 21st century in today's world? Well, I hope that tonight, that as we read that passage in which the monument of the temple is combined with the reality of real life, I hope you'll see that here, as always, the Bible is entirely relevant to the way that God's people live their lives.

In the Bible, God comes to us and says, I know where you are. I know the difficulties that you're facing. I know the challenges of real life, what it means to live a Christian life.

And he doesn't just know from afar. Jesus Christ is still in our nature. He's in heaven today as God and man. He's been where we've been, and he knows from his own first-hand experience what it's like to live for God in a hostile and a sinful world.

And he was surrounded, although he himself was never guilty of his own actual sin, he was surrounded by people he knew who were failing and falling all the time.

And there he was, ready to have compassion on them and ready to draw them back into his own fellowship and into his own fold. And it's with that awareness that Solomon prays to the Lord.

[4 : 22] Here is the reality of what it meant to be God's people. And in the prayer, you'll probably have noticed, he paints several different pictures or scenarios of the kind of situation that God's people are often faced with.

This is reality now. His prayer is not just some kind of highfalutin, flowery-languaged prayer that has no bearing to reality whatsoever. He's placing before the Lord real-life situations, dangers, problems, disappointments, sinfulness, when they go astray.

All of these things God's people were likely to find themselves in. And he's saying, when that happens, Lord, please remember your people. They are your people. They've been chosen out from all the nations of the world.

They're your people. Please be with them and help them and strengthen them. And above all else, forgive them and accept them as your own. You might also be asking, what does all this have to do with the Lord's table?

We're reading this in one sense. At first reading, it might seem an obscure prayer that related only to the children of Israel and their future.

[5 : 38] You might say, well, is he not going to preach on something a little bit more suitable in preparation for the Lord's table? I hope that your mind will change very quickly because I think that this prayer is entirely suitable as preparation for the Lord's table.

You just have to bear with me. I hope that that will arise and come out as time goes on. So here are the scenarios that Solomon paints and I want to give them some titles.

Each of these scenarios, each of these possibilities and likelihoods is related to the temple. The temple runs all the way through each of these scenarios and I hope that by the end that we'll see why it is, why it was that the temple was such an important monument for the Lord's people and for their encouragement and for their restoration and for their help.

I want to see first of all, from verse 22, that the temple was a reminder of the fellowship of God's people.

The temple was a monument to the fellowship, the harmony and the good relations that there ought to be before within God's people.

[6 : 55] Let's read it again. Verse 22, this is the first thing he prays for. Solomon prays for. If a man sins against his neighbor and is made to take an oath and comes and swears his oath before your altar in this house, then hear from heaven and act and judge your servants, repaying the guilty by bringing his conduct on his own head and vindicating the righteous by rewarding him according to his righteousness.

Now what Solomon is praying for, he's envisaging the kind of situation that all too easily arose within the community of Israel in which one person would fall out with another person, which there would be conflict between one person and another and likelihood was that one of them would be in the wrong.

And in such, there was a process and a procedure that God had set up through Moses, through the law, in which such a conflict could be judged. And judging everything was God himself.

Every judgment that took place in Israel had to be done in the context of the watchful eye of God.

They knew that God was near to them. He was their God, and he was making sure with concern that justice was done within the land.

But the overall issue here is the relationships that existed between God's people, which all too often became broken and conflict and argument and there would be fallouts between and very often with disastrous consequences when God's people decided to go astray and in times of their backsliding, when conflict arose, they could end up killing one another.

[8 : 31] That's how bad it got in the Old Testament. Now, how are we to understand this in the light of the New Testament? It's all very well talking about the kind of situation that might arise in the Old Testament, but that's the Old Testament, isn't it?

How are we to understand this prayer in the light of the New Testament? Well, God's people, first of all, in the New Testament are those who follow the Lord Jesus by faith.

And they too are brought into community, just as the Israel community where God's people who were chosen by him and they had his name, who were called, that's what God calls them in the next chapter, if my people who are called by my name and those who are called by his name in the New Testament are those who follow Jesus by faith, that we're not an ethnic community, we're not related to one another by blood, but we're related to one another by the Lord Jesus Christ.

So we've been brought into his family and into the community of faith, the community of faith. And yet, because we live in a fallen, broken world, it's all too likely, it's all too possible that there may be conflict amongst God's people.

And here is once again a reminder that such conflict, God's concern is that it be resolved. That we don't just allow that conflict. And the New Testament makes much about this.

[10 : 01] It makes much about when there is conflict, when there is disagreement amongst God's people, there will be. And all too often, there's nothing wrong with it. It's always going to happen that

there's going to be disagreement.

The question is, it's not whether there's disagreement, the question is how you manage such disagreement. And the other question is, what do you do? Either when the other person's in the wrong, are you ready to forgive that person?

Or if you're in the wrong, are you ready to apologize? And to repent before the Lord? These are the very issues that Solomon is bringing up here in the light of the New Testament.

They're given here in the light of the Old Testament and the way in which they judged these conflicts. But in the New Testament, the Lord makes very clear, and he puts it like this. And some of the most solemn words of the New Testament, if you forgive others their trespasses, says the Lord, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither, listen to this, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

[11 : 15] I think it's up to every single one of them to ask ourselves, these are amongst the most challenging, solemn words in the New Testament. If you do not forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will not forgive you.

I don't see any footnotes. I don't see any wee explanations. Ah, but. That's it. Forgiveness between the Lord's people is a fruit of the Spirit.

It's a sign of our having been born again. And if it's not there, it means we're not born again. And we need to repent. And we need to come to the Lord and make sure there is nothing.

You say, well, what's that got to do with communion? Everything. Everything has got to do with communion. Communion is about the communion and fellowship that there is between God's people. And that fellowship was something that Solomon was concerned about because he had the mind of God.

And this was a prayer that God placed in his heart for the Lord's people. The apostle tells us also to maintain the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace.

[12 : 26] That's a constant, continuous concern and something we pray for and something we ask of the Lord. And when something does occur and when God's people do, when there is a conflict between them, what Solomon's prayer is so relevant that we immediately take it to the Lord and ask him.

Too often we try to resolve our own conflicts, don't we? We try to take things on our own. We try to do things by ourselves. Take the law into our own hands. And so often, when something arises like this, the Lord is the last person to hear about it because we don't take it to him in the very first instance.

But here, Solomon is taking, he's taking it to the Lord and he's asking that the Lord will be a judge. Are we just as happy to leave things with the Lord and ask the Lord to be our judge?

If you believe someone else is in the wrong and if once we discover that you're in the wrong, straight away, straight away, resolve it. Repent and apologize.

That's the first thing. The temple was a monument to the fellowship of God's people because they were to pray towards the temple. The temple was a reminder. The second thing that this prayer brings out is that the temple meant the restoration of God's people.

[13 : 45] the restoration of God's people. Let's look at the other things that as Solomon continues his prayer. If your people, verse 24, if your people, Israel, are defeated before the enemy, but this wasn't just because they were weaker than their enemy, it was specifically because Israel had sinned against God.

Then, verse 26, when heaven is shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against God. Then, and then, the next one is 28, if there's famine in the land or if there's pestilence or blight or mildew or locust or caterpillar, if their enemies besieged them and this was again because they had sinned against God.

Now again, I'm trying to understand this in the light of the Old Testament, this was a warning that God gave his covenant people that if they went astray and if they did, if they failed to give God their undivided attention and devotion and began to wander off after the gods of their neighbors, began to get sucked into the world around them and failed to give what God himself demanded, the worship and the adoration that God alone demanded, then God was going to, as a result of their waywardness, he was going to send them famine, pestilence, caterpillar, he was going to give them into the hand of their enemies and so on and so forth, he was going to withhold water for their reign

and so on and so forth.

Now we're not talking here about when an odd, a person, any old person, sins against God. We're talking about God's covenant people, those who should know better, those who were, this prayer is confined to God's people and it reminds us again that God's people are not exempt from going astray.

Going astray. And it reminds us that God doesn't ignore when his people go astray. That God is concerned when his people fail to live as he wants them to live and when they allow things to creep into their hearts and their lives and they develop and adopt a lifestyle which is contrary to what they should, how they should live.

[16:10] We call it backsliding. The problem with backsliding is that we tend to envisage a particular scenario in our head of someone we know perhaps who has backslidden and we think, well that person's a backslider.

What we fail to remember is that we all backslide from time to time. Every single one of us knows what it means in some respect to backslide and to do things and to live and to allow thoughts to creep into our hearts and you do it without thinking.

You start pushing God out because our lives begin to get so cluttered up with other things. Things that distract us and take our attention and our devotion away from the Lord.

And before you know it we begin to say things and do things and think things that we didn't used to in our younger Christian days or even recently. We didn't used to and now we're changing we're getting cold and we don't want to pray as much.

We don't find the same pleasure in coming to church and we don't find the same pleasure in reading the Bible as we used to. Before you know it that's coupled with other things. Things that we feel ashamed about and we know that it's out of character for a Christian to do.

[17:22] That's what Solomon is warning about here in this prayer. And he's saying it's going to happen. It's going to happen. At some point in some circumstance you're going to backslide.

Now what happens when a person backslides? Well first of all this prayer once again it reminds us that a backsliding Christian does not exclude himself from the love of God.

God continues to love his backslidden people. That's why this prayer is there. If God wrote his people off whenever they went astray there will be no point in praying.

But this prayer is good news. It tells us first of all that when God sends those afflictions on his people the pestilence the caterpillar the blight the mildew it's because he loves his people.

It's because he cares for them. He wants them to wake up. He wants them to see the error of their ways and he wants them to get up like the prodigal son and come back to himself.

[18:25] He wants them to see that the reason they're suffering is because they've forsaken God for their own good. God always deals with his people for their own good.

That's what the writer to the Hebrews tells us when it talks about the discipline the way in which the Lord disciplines his sons like a father or a mother disciplines his sons for their good out of love.

And he says that no discipline seems pleasant at the time. It doesn't. There are some painful ways in which the Lord has brought his people back his children back to himself.

And yet we've lived to thank the Lord for these painful experiences that he's brought about us. Now be careful here because this does not mean that all suffering is God's chastisement.

It isn't. And yet God does deal with us in a way in which we should begin to ask well maybe the Lord is telling me that there is something wrong in my life.

[19:33] And it ought to be a daily prayer of each one of us Lord search me and know me. That's Psalm 139 the last verse. Lord search me and know me and see if there be any wicked way with it.

You know the fear that I have? The fear that I have is not the sins that I know about it's the sins I might be committing I have no clue that I'm doing it. You know that's the way that we're so deceitful the problem with fallen human nature is we not only try and deceive others but we deceive we end up being deceived ourselves.

And so we need to ask the Lord daily Lord search me and know me and see if there is any sinful way within me and then lead me in the way everlasting.

And that ought to be our prayer not just at communion time but every single day. But especially when the Lord's death and what we do in memory of what the Lord has done for us it reminds us of the reason why the Lord gave us life on the cross.

Our sin my sin not just the sins in the past the sins that I committed before I was converted but the sins I continue to commit today and my daily wanderings the things that I do the appalling things that I allow to come into my mind and into my consciousness and that I entertain the things that bring shame upon us and the things that very often if other people are to find out about we know that we would never be able to stand in front of them again it's just as well they don't know isn't it? [21 : 15] but the Lord knows the Lord knows and you know if there are those of you tonight and I've said this before so often we're so easy I hear so many people criticizing Christians and it shouldn't happen this what Solomon is praying for here should not happen it's what James says the apostle James says brethren these things ought not to be and yet it's very often Christians find themselves in situations where they're doing stuff that ought not to be and it's easy for somebody on the outside somebody's not a Christian to say unless you're a Christian for you I'm better than that because I don't do what he's doing are you?

you may that may very well there's a sense in which that may very well be true you may live a more upright respectable decent life at the moment but two things first of all the question is not whether you're a more decent person than your Christian friend the question is this are your sins forgiven are you cleansed that's the question but the second thing is this don't think for a moment that the Lord doesn't know about your Christian friend's failures he does and he is working in that person to bring that person to a sense of what he's doing and he will one day restore him to himself now where does that leave you?

that's the question where does that leave you? and the people of Israel they were to suffer these things because God was dealing with them in love but they were to come as soon as they discovered the situation they were in they were to come and they were to pray to the Lord now the question is this how did they know that God was going to hear their prayer what guarantee was there that if someone was to wander away from the Lord and to backslide from him if they turned around and if they asked the Lord to forgive them what guarantee is there that God will hear that prayer you know logically the Lord might say to us well I've done so much for you why should I do more that's what the devil says he says what makes you think what right do you have to be continually asking the Lord for forgiveness don't you think it's about time you threw the line and gave up on yourself no because the

Bible is full for one thing is full of example after example of men and women great saints who failed and they fell and they were restored you think of Abraham even Abraham himself Isaac you think of Moses you think of David you think of Peter who denied the Lord you think that's just what comes off the top of my head there are more and more and more people in the scriptures the Bible tells us the story of men and women like ourselves who lived for God and who were ordinary people in fact James says that he was that Abraham and Elijah they were ordinary men who were full of failure that's what we are and they're an encouragement to us that when we fail in the Lord we come back but what else makes what else well I'll tell you what else because here to me is the crowning guarantee that God hears the prayer of his people they were to pray towards the temple why were they to pray towards the temple it reminds us a wee bit like the Muslims who pray towards Mecca is that what it's all about is it all about geography is it about does God hear the prayer as long as they're facing eastward or westward as the case would have been then is that the case or southward towards Jerusalem and he wouldn't hear them if they prayed in another direction and how were they to know anyway if they were in a place without a compass is that what it's all about does the

Lord's forgiveness depend on my orientation of course it doesn't what was the importance then why was the temple so important the temple was important because as I've said before of what took place there it was the place where sin was atoned for by sacrifice that was the reason why God was God commanded the temple to be built as a place where his people could be reconciled to himself but not just any old way there was only one way and there is only one way to be reconciled to God and that is by sacrifice and that's one more indication of how the temple looked forward to the one great sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ verse in chapter 7 this was the crowning moment when Solomon after praying committed and dedicated the temple once and for all to the Lord what happened how did God answer his prayer chapter 7 verse 1 is the crowning definitive moment in which the fire of God comes down and and Kings doesn't tell you this that's why we're reading [26 : 48] Chronicles tonight Kings doesn't tell you this but the fire of God consumed the sacrifice that's the key the fire of God came down to consume the sacrifice and the reason I know tonight

that my sins are forgiven and I can be absolutely sure that I'm right with God even even when I fail and fall and when I when I do things and say things and live in such a way from time to time I bring shame to the Lord not that I want to make that an excuse in any way because it makes me miserable when I do that but the reason I know that I can come back to the Lord today with confidence is because at Calvary the fire of God consumed the Lord Jesus Christ and you need faith to see that you need faith to see in

Christ what was obvious to the people of Israel what else did my God my God why have you forsaken me what else did that mean except other than as he laid down his life God was turning his face away from his own son who had become the sin bearer and had become guilty of our sin but in so doing had accepted and consumed and received the sacrifice that Jesus offered up to God as our saviour and as our lord and as our guarantor I know tonight that my sins are forgiven not because I feel always that they're forgiven but because of what Jesus has done for sinners like myself then and I see the time is going past as usual the third thing I wanted to say about the temple was that it was to be a witness for God in the world verse 32 likewise when a foreigner who is not of your people

Israel comes from a far country for the sake of your great name and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm and you know what is said in Kings is a brackets where this where they where in verse 51 in 1st Kings chapter 8 the same prayer and it's missed out in Chronicles for they are your it is not 51 it's somewhere else in any case what it says is for the yes it's verse 42 for they shall hear the world will hear of your great name and your mighty hand and of your outstretched arms see there was no way that either Solomon or this great structure this great building that he had built was going to be kept a secret there's no way Israel was a trading nation and it had acquired its wealth from other countries like Hiram king of Tyre and gold the gold that Solomon acquired from Ophir some people say that Ophir might have been as far as India but it's mostly it's assumed that Ophir was like it was just in the east coast of Africa in any case all of these goods were acquired and of course the news would spread of the growing glory and splendor and honor of Solomon that's why in chapter 10 of

Kings the queen of Sheba has to come and see this for herself because his reputation was such a fantastic one she had to see it for herself and when she came she exclaimed that the half had not been told her she was breathtaking she couldn't speak when she saw the glory and the splendor of Solomon and she knew within herself that it was God who had placed him in this position so what that was what that's an indicator of is that one day through the Lord Jesus Christ that nations people who had no thought of God who never knew anything about God would come to discover the living and true God and what he had done through Jesus Christ it's what we call in the New Testament the gospel age the time when the good news of the gospel and it's the church's duty our work is to bear witness to the gospel this is what Solomon was doing you know it's a huge responsibility bearing witness to the gospel it's a huge responsibility just as it was in Solomon's time and it's far far easier for us to just hide our light under a bed and to keep our faith secret far easier than to make it public the problem is that even though it's easier God wants us to make it public because he wants other people to see in your life what he has done for you and part of that witness that's what we call it our witness the public display of what God has done for that doesn't mean always getting up on a soapbox in Cromwell Street it might mean that but it doesn't for most of us it certainly doesn't but it does mean that other people who know us can see what God has done and the difference that there is between our lives and their lives and the quality of our life the peace of God that we have in the Lord

[32 : 49] Jesus Christ is a peace which others can see and part of that witness is our attachment to the people of God and our sitting at the Lord's table let me ask you this question when you don't and I know this is a sensitive issue but when you don't sit at the Lord's table what message does that give because other people can see you what message does that give is it a true message don't you feel don't you feel that sense of awkwardness if you're not sitting at the Lord's table and you know you're a follower of the Lord Jesus don't you feel there's something within you that wants to stand up and say by the way I should be there well why aren't you there why not is it because you're afraid I've heard people saying this is it because you're afraid of exactly what I was just talking about of going astray and you fear that if you're a member and you go astray then you'll bring shame to the honour and to the name of

Jesus and you're afraid to do that I'm glad you're afraid to do that but what's that going to do with whether you sit at the Lord's table or not if you go astray as a Christian you're bringing dishonour on the Lord's name anyway and besides the same applies to me believe me tonight I could just as easily as you bring shame upon the name of the Lord and if everyone were to think the way you're thinking none of us would sit at the table and where would our witness then be who then would be able to bear witness to what Jesus has done for us you see Solomon took great risks in building his temple it was a risky business and sadly he did fail later on in his life

I have no explanation other than his failure was an incredible warning to me and to all the rest of us of what can happen even in older age even when a person has been following for years and years and years but it's a warning for me to be watchful and to be vigilant and to make sure that I keep coming back to the Lord and I keep on asking the Lord to keep me and to guard me and to protect me and to accompany me through the day it's not because you can't blame the Lord for our failures it's because we choose to fail the Lord is faithful to his word and to his promises and will accompany his people and give them the strength and the grace that they need but the other reason that some people are afraid to sit at the table and I think I can I say this with all sympathy I'm not trying to get to anyone it's because if you're a follower of the Lord I want you to we want you to be part because we actually know that you're a follower of Jesus and it's just this dislocation that there is between what you are on the inside and what you part of what you are on the outside now make it good make it right do what the Lord is commanding you to do do this in remembrance of me and you leave the rest to him you live each day as Lord and you don't think too far ahead as to what might happen in the future do what the Lord is asking you to do today and nail your colors to the mast the temple was a monument to the grace of God to the fellowship of

God's people to the restoration of God's people and to the witness of God's people the Lord's table is a monument to these three things the fellowship the restoration and the witness of God's people I was going to say also the time has gone it was a preparation where God's people could draw strength as they face the difficulties of living in a hostile world verse 34 let me just two minutes if your people go out to battle against their enemies by whatever way you shall send them they pray to you towards the city that you have chosen and the house that I built then hear from heaven their prayer and their plea and maintain their cause perhaps we're all aware at least we should be of the huge difficulty there is in living the

[38 : 10] Christian life in a hostile world in a world that's indifferent that's uninterested in a world in which we're so easily sucked into different things things that are displeasing to God and dishonoring to God and a world in which we're struggling we seem to be struggling all the time you know there's nothing wrong with struggling that's the life that's the evidence in which we live for the Lord we struggle against the forces and the influences which surround us the temple was to be a monument to how God strengthens his people and you know the Lord's Supper is the same it's a strengthening not that the actions themselves and eating and drinking are in themselves but it is what they represent it is a reminder that the same Lord who loved us and forgave our sins by giving himself on the cross is also the

Lord who has promised us lo I am with you always even to the end of the world and what greater strength is there whatever we have to face in this life what greater strength is there than that to have the company and the strength of the Lord Jesus Christ Christ the same river that provides forgiveness provides the strength which we need day by day and you can draw strength by coming and by drinking and by doing what God has commanded by turning yourself inwardly and outwardly just like the people of Israel turn themselves towards the temple so we turn ourselves with all our heart and outwardly to the place where the

Lord himself calls us some of you have turned already inwardly to that place why not turn now outwardly and come let's pray our Father in heaven we give thanks once again for the way in which we are able to come and have access to your throne in which we're able to hear your word and pray that you will give us to receive it with readiness and eagerness and hunger and Lord we pray that each one of us might be struck with a sense of awe tonight as we face our responsibilities each one whatever they are we ask oh Lord that you will meet us where we are and bless us in Jesus name amen