

Dedicating a building to the work of the Lord!

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[0 : 00] And we're going to read together from 2 Chronicles and chapter 6. So 2 Chronicles is a passage about the dedication of a building, a temple.

! And of course, it was a very grand affair. I dare say more grand than this one, given the amount of gold and precious jewels and precious metals and stones that were used in the building.

But it seemed to me that it was significant on this day for us to dedicate this building to the continued glory of God. And this is not going to be our official opening.

We'll have an official opening at some point. But it gets us underway. But there's a part of this passage of Solomon's dedication and prayer in which Solomon gets the right perspective.

Sorry. The right perspective on... I don't know why that's happening. Gosh. Okay, we'll try.

[1 : 08] He gets the right perspective on the nature of buildings, their limitations, as well as the blessing that they bring. So I'm just going to read a short part of chapter 6.

I'm not reading the whole of chapter 6 and chapter 7, just a small part of it from verse 12. This is Solomon's prayer of dedication. Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in front of the whole assembly of Israel and spread out his hands.

Now he had made a bronze platform five cubits long, five cubits wide and three cubits high, and had placed it in the center of the outer court.

He stood on the platform and knelt down before the whole assembly of Israel and spread out his hands toward heaven. He said, Lord, the God of Israel, there is no one like you in heaven or on earth, you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way.

You have kept your promise to your servant David, my father. With your mouth you have promised and with your hand you have fulfilled it as it is today. Now, Lord, the God of Israel, keep for your servant David, my father, the promises you made to him when you said, You shall never fail to have a successor to sit before me on the throne of Israel if only your descendants are careful in all that they do to walk before me according to my law as you have done.

[2 : 41] And now, Lord, the God of Israel, let your word that you promised your servant David come true. But will God really dwell on earth with humans? The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain you.

How much less this temple I have built. Yet, Lord, my God, give attention to your servant's prayer and his plea for mercy. Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is praying in your presence.

May your eyes be opened toward this temple day and night, the place of which you said you would put your name there. May you hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place.

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.

Amen. And the Lord will bless to us the reading of this word. And it is that 18th verse that I wanted to draw attention to. But will God really dwell on earth with men?

[3 : 46] The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built. This gives us a very helpful perspective on buildings.

Buildings, we sometimes refer to them as the house of God. But of course, God cannot be constrained by buildings. If God chooses for his presence to dwell among us as we worship in this place, it becomes the house of God.

It becomes Bethel, the gateway to heaven. If God chooses to absence himself from us because of our sin and disobedience, then it is merely a building. Because the house of God, the people of God, and the church of God are made up of living stones being built into a spiritual house.

If you turn behind you, Simon and Orinda are sitting just in front of the verse that says that. It's the people that make the church. And God is not constrained by this place.

The people of God, who by faith in Jesus Christ belong to the family of God, are found all over this town and go to different churches. They make up the true church of Christ in Whitby.

[5 : 01] And we all sadly have seen churches come and go over the years, closed down for lack of congregation. You're sitting on seats that came from another church building that is no longer a place of worship.

We're grateful to God for the seats. They're wonderful. But actually, it's sad that a church building has had to close down. And that reminds us of the reality of the challenge we face in Whitby.

The challenge we face in Whitby is that the gospel of Christ may be heard so that men and women, boys and girls, might be saved and added to God's church. We happen to have a lot of our congregation who decided to go away this weekend.

I don't know what they were trying to tell us. It's great to think, actually, that we would have had to use upstairs today if they'd been here. That's great to think. But over the last week and a half, a few of us have been trying to dust down these benches around here.

And as I've been doing that and washing them down and so on, I've been praying that one day they will be filled with people who will come here to worship God. That is my vision.

[6 : 09] That is our vision. That this place may be full of people who know the Lord Jesus Christ and who long to know him more. They long for the presence of God among his people.

And Solomon was aware of this. God could not be restricted. God who is omnipresent. That means God who is everywhere, present at all times, who fills heaven and earth, cannot be restricted by a place of bricks and mortar.

God who is omnipotent. That is, he's all-powerful. He can do anything he wishes on heaven and on earth. And he can provide all our needs and is doing so according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

God cannot be constrained. God who is omniscient. God who knows all things. Who knows the end from the beginning. Who knows all about our lives and our individual journeys and our collective journey as a fellowship.

That God knows the end from the beginning. He knows what we are and what we will become. As a fellowship prays his name. And that God who is omnibenevolent.

[7 : 21] He loves everyone. He wants to have mercy on all who will repent and believe the gospel. He is a God who is not constrained in his expressions of mercy to unbelieving people here in Whitby.

And so we have great hope as we take up this ministry, this responsibility indeed of being a church on a high street. With people passing by.

Lonely people, needy people, sad people, desperate people. Who come in to this place. We want them to experience the omnibenevolent grace of God.

His love, his acceptance, his readiness to receive them. And to become part of our family. God does not come to dwell in buildings unless his people seek him.

But we seek him with all our hearts. We ask for his felt presence among us. And we pray that God will be here with us as we seek to worship and serve him.

[8 : 25] And if you read round the prayer that we prayed, you'll notice that before all of this happens in chapter 5, as the people gather to worship and the musicians gather and Solomon gears himself up for his speech to the people.

There's a great outpouring of praise from chapter 5 verses 11 onwards. And twice in this passage, Psalm 136 is quoted which says, He is good, his love endures forever.

God is good. That is our testimony as a fellowship. God is good. We have experienced and continue to experience, and indeed in this past week have experienced, the amazing goodness of God.

God is good all of the time. And his blessing is upon his people. And when they prayed that, it says that the temple of the Lord was filled with the cloud and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the temple of God.

And that's a wonderful thing. Not dust, Ken. Clouds. We had dust. But we need clouds. We need the felt presence of God.

[9 : 39] We need his tangible presence among us. John Henry Newman said, I sought to hear the voice of God and climb the topmost steeple. But God declared, Go down again.

I dwell among the people. God still dwells among the people. Our God is an incarnational God. He revealed himself to us in our Lord Jesus Christ, who is Emmanuel God with us.

And we at Whitby Christian Fellowship believe that God is with us all of the time, every day, as we seek his presence. And who knows what that God, who dwells among his people, could do if his people take him seriously and seek his presence and his companionship every day.

There is nothing in the world that measures up to the simple pleasure of experiencing the presence of God. Nothing in the world. That is why we are so committed to doing what we can to make the gospel known.

Because above everything else that we can enjoy in this beautiful world that God has created, nothing is better than his presence. And so just as Solomon and the people of Israel experienced the presence of God to such an extent that they couldn't even go into the place because it was so awesome.

[10 : 57] So we pray for the awesome presence of God again here in this church. that God's felt presence will be among us. That when the unbeliever comes into this place, they will be able to say, as they did at Corinth, surely God is among you of a truth.

And people will be drawn by the felt presence of Almighty God. God is real to us, you see. He is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. And I want us to learn something about God in the time that we have together.

The first thing we can learn about God from Solomon's prayer is that God keeps his promises so you can trust him. God keeps his promises so you can trust him.

It took seven years to build this temple. Solomon built it because his father couldn't. His father wanted to, David, but God said, no, you've got blood on your hands.

It's not for you to do this. Your son will build it. And it took seven years and a great amount of effort and cost. But finally it was done. And Solomon saw that as a fulfillment of the promises of God that were made to David.

[12 : 11] Do you know that in the Bible there are around about 7,000 promises of God? God sees and is aware of everything you go through.

God cares about everything you go through. God grieves when you hurt. God loves you unconditionally. God will never leave you or forsake you if you trust in him.

They are all promises of God. God keeps his promises and you can trust him. Not one of the good promises of God will ever fail when his people trust in him.

That is why Solomon twice said, he is good and his love endures forever. That is a proclamation of certainty.

And that is a proclamation of certainty even when it doesn't appear to be the case. As so often in our lives when tragedy strikes or difficulties occur, it doesn't seem to be the case.

[13 : 18] But God keeps his promises and even through the pain and through the hurt, he comes through and he conforms us into the likeness of his son, Jesus Christ.

Underlying the building of the temple was the person of God, the God who is good and that is why it was built. And God surrounded the temple with his presence.

And he did so to say this to the people of Israel. The temple does not belong to you. It belongs to me. You are permitted to enter only as I commit it.

I could overwhelm you with my presence. But I invite you into my presence. And you may come as suppliants and worshippers of me.

And this is what we believe about this place. It doesn't belong to us. It is part of a legacy that has been passed down to us from the people of Whitby, but ultimately from the hand of Almighty God.

[14 : 24] And we are permitted to use it and to glorify God and worship God here as he permits it. He invites us into his presence.

And he promises us that if we remain faithful to him, he will be faithful to us. If we seek him, he will be found by us because he keeps his promises. You can trust him.

And isn't it good to know that you can keep his promises? Think of Marilyn, who I mentioned, walking around saying Jesus loves you on a t-shirt. Marilyn serving coffee.

And the others who bravely went out from this fellowship and told others about the Lord Jesus Christ and faced the mockery and the ridicule. They did so because they knew that God loves the

world so much that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

So they would endure the mockery and the laughter to declare that wonderful message so that people might be saved. And they believed that God keeps his promises.

[15 : 33] And we are here today because Marilyn prayed among others. And she reminded us God will do what he says.

If you are a believer today, you know that you have eternal life through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And that is a certainty that you can rest your hope upon because God keeps his promises. If you are not a believer today, you can take that passage, put your name in it and say this, God loves me so much that if I will believe and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, I will be saved.

My sins will be forgiven and I will go to heaven when I die. But not only when you die, you will be able to have a companionship with God every day.

He will be your friend and brother because he keeps his promises. The second thing we learn from this passage is that God loves us to pray and we can tell him anything.

[16 : 35] You see, Solomon, when he dedicated this temple to the Lord, began to pray and his prayer was a very lengthy prayer. But because he remembered that God keeps his promises, he was then able to pray the promises of God and continue to ask God for more.

And that's the great thing. We are all Oliver Twist-like in this faith of ours. We always come to God for more. And God doesn't mind us asking for more.

God keeps his promises. Prayer, you see, is the opportunity to tell God what we need. We can tell him anything we want. And when Solomon was praying to the God of Israel, he was asking God to be merciful to the people because he knew the people would sin.

He actually says in the prayer, there's no one who does not sin. So he's saying, I'm the leader of people that are going to mess up from time to time. They're going to mess up really, really big sometimes.

But Lord, when they mess up, let them come back to this temple. And when they pray for forgiveness, please forgive them. And he asked God to act against injustice so that when the nations oppressed the people and when evil took place and the people were in trouble because of that evil oppression and injustice, he asked God to intervene and to right the wrongs and to side on behalf of his people.

[18 : 01] He also asked God that people would bring all of their needs and problems before him in prayer. That they would come and make their pleas to him.

And when they did, God would forgive them. And when they were suffering, that God would heal their hearts. He also prayed that the people of the world would come from all over the nations to encounter the presence of God in their midst.

And he prayed prophetically that when the nation of Israel would be sent away from their land because they broke the terms of the covenant, that God would restore the people of Israel to their land.

These were just some of his prayers. Big prayers. Prayers that believed God was able to do immeasurably more than anything we ask or imagine.

And that same prayer hearing and prayer answering God is our God available for us today. You are before me today with all kinds of needs.

[19 : 03] Needs of healing. Needs of intervention. Needs of blessing. Needs of provision of money or material substance. Whatever your needs are, God is able to meet your needs according to his riches in Christ Jesus.

And this God hears and answers prayer. And even when we mess up, for there is no one who does not sin, he is still available to us as we ask for his mercy and his forgiveness.

God loves us to pray. And we can tell him anything. We are a people who believe in the mercy and forgiveness of God.

We are not a people who believe that we are better than anyone else. We are a people who have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And we are a people who need the Lord Jesus Christ for our salvation.

We pray that you will never find among us a snifty self-righteousness that looks down upon others. But what you will find among us are a people who know that there but for the grace of God go I.

[20 : 21] And this is a place that welcomes sinners. This is a place that encourages others, regardless of what they've done, regardless of their bad record or their bad heart, to believe that in Jesus they can begin again.

Because in Jesus I began again. And so did many here. And our God is great in mercy. There is nothing to hide from a God who hears prayers and loves to hear them.

You can tell him anything. And lastly, God calls us into relationships so you can be in his family. You see, Israel prayed and Solomon prayed the way he did because the people were in community. They were a covenant people. And the terms of the covenant were laid down by God. And they were very difficult terms, indeed impossible terms to meet, because they required absolute obedience and perfection.

So the people were going to mess up because, as Solomon said, there is no one who does not sin. Yet that was the terms of the covenant. There was always that possibility that the people would go too far and God would reject them.

[21 : 41] So does that mean there was no hope? Well, not at all, because there's a lovely verse in this passage at the end of this passage, in 2 Chronicles 7 and verse 14.

And it says this, What a verse.

What a verse. What a verse. What a verse. It is an invitation to us. No matter how bad we've been, no matter how wicked we have been, no matter how sinful, no matter how many regrets we have, if we will turn to God in prayer, if we will seek his face, if we will tell him what we've done, he will hear from heaven and will forgive our sin and heal our land.

There is always a way back to God from the dark paths of sin. God loves us.

God hears us. God wants us to come into relationship with himself. The cross is the place where we turn to come back into fellowship with God.

[23 : 08] If you confess your sins, says John, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. And just in case there is anyone who doesn't believe they have sinned, John says, if we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

But he says, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense, Jesus Christ, the righteous one.

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world. So there is hope.

There is a way back to God through the dark paths of sin. There's a door that is open that you may go in. On Calvary's cross is where you begin when you come as a sinner to Jesus.

I don't know if you've ever prayed that prayer. That prayer that says, Lord, I'm a sinner. Forgive me my sin.

[24 : 23] Cleanse me in the blood of Jesus. Accept me just as I am because of his atoning death upon the cross. If you've never prayed that prayer, I invite you to pray it now in a moment when we stop to pray and in your heart to ask the Lord Jesus to be your Savior.

I invite you to do that. That's between you and God. If you make that confession of faith today, then we would be delighted if you told us about it, but it's entirely between you and God.

You need the grace of God and the Spirit of God to help you to pray that prayer honestly from your heart. But we encourage you to do that.

But it isn't just about those, you see, who are newly converted. It is also a message to all of us. The cross is a place where we begin again.

We are dedicating a building to the glory of God, but it's much more important to rededicate our lives to the glory of God. If we have moved away from companionship with the Lord, if other things are more important to us than our relationship to God, if other commitments are greater and more important to us than our commitment to the kingdom of God, then it is time for us at this opportune moment to invite the Lord to forgive us again, to have mercy upon us, and to renew our zeal and energy to serve him.

[26 : 07] We have a great opportunity before us as a community of Whitby Christian Fellowship. God will take dedicated people who will humble themselves and pray and turn from their wicked ways and seek his face, and then he will hear from heaven, will forgive our sin, and heal our land.

And if you look at the state of our nation, you look at laws that are being passed, you look at the increasing move to secularism, and the impatience that people have to the gospel and to absolute

truths.

Our land desperately needs healing. And let us seek him now for that healing today. We dedicate ourselves and this place to the glory of God.

We dedicate ourselves by repentance and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and we pray for restoration, revival, and repentance that God will heal our land.

Amen. Let us pray. Lord God Almighty, we come to you in and through the name and in the merits of the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[27 : 41] We come to you, Lord, because we have no one else to turn to. You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God.

We ask you, Lord, to have mercy upon our nation. Have mercy, we pray, upon the Queen and the Royal House upon our government and upon the people.

We have been through a dreadful pandemic, so many lives lost. Lord, may we not only heed the lessons of the scientists and the politicians to look after ourselves better, but may we heed the words of Almighty God that as a nation and as a people we may learn that righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is the reproach of all peoples.

And may we as a nation, from government officials down, may we turn once again to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray for ourselves as a fellowship of believers that where we have strayed and erred and have not been as committed as we ought to have been.

[29 : 04] Help us, O Lord, to rededicate ourselves here and now to the glory of God and to the building of the kingdom of God here in Wigby.

Have mercy, we pray, upon this town and district. Pour out your spirit again and may this place be like a city set on a hill that cannot be hidden, a place of salvation and blessing.

And for those who do not know you, we pray, Lord, that today they may come to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, that as people who are very aware of our sin and falling short of the glory of God, we may turn to you, Lord Jesus, for salvation.

Thank you that in the precious blood of Christ we are saved. Thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.