

Calling upon God II

By

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TEXT: 1 Kings 8:22-53

PROP: We must continue to come before Yahweh the living and true God in prayer that he would forgive our sin and teach us the good way in which we are to walk.

1 Kings 8:31-51 (ESV)

31 "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, **32** then hear in heaven and act and judge your servants, condemning the guilty by bringing his conduct on his own head, and vindicating the righteous by rewarding him according to his righteousness.

33 "When your people Israel are defeated before the enemy because they have sinned against you, and if they turn again to you and acknowledge your name and pray and plead with you in this house, **34** then hear in heaven and forgive the sin of your people Israel and bring them again to the land that you gave to their fathers.

35 "When heaven is shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against you, if they pray toward this place and acknowledge your name and turn from their sin, when you afflict them, **36** then hear in heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel, when you teach them the good way in which they should walk, and grant rain upon your land, which you have given to your people as an inheritance.

37 "If there is famine in the land, if there is pestilence or blight or mildew or locust or caterpillar, if their enemy besieges them in the land at their gates, whatever plague, whatever sickness there is, **38** whatever prayer, whatever plea is made by any man or by all your people Israel, each knowing the affliction of his own heart and stretching out his hands toward this house, **39** then hear in heaven your dwelling place and forgive and act and render to each whose heart you know, according to all his ways (for you, you only, know the hearts of all the children of mankind), **40** that they may fear you all the days that they live in the land that you gave to our fathers.

41 "Likewise, when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a far country for your name's sake **42** (for they shall hear of your great name and your mighty hand, and of your outstretched arm), when he comes and prays toward this house, **43** hear in heaven your dwelling place and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to you, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do

your people Israel, and that they may know that this house that I have built is called by your name.

44 "If your people go out to battle against their enemy, by whatever way you shall send them, and they pray to the Lord toward the city that you have chosen and the house that I have built for your name, **45** then hear in heaven their prayer and their plea, and maintain their cause.

46 "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 the land of the enemy, far off or near, **47** 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 captors, saying, 'We have sinned and have acted perversely and wickedly,' **48** if they repent with all their mind and with all their heart in the land of their enemies, who carried them captive, and pray to you toward their land, which you gave to their fathers, the city that you have chosen, and the house that I have built for your name, **49** then hear in heaven your dwelling place their prayer and their plea, and maintain their cause **50** and forgive your people who have sinned against you, and all their transgressions that they have committed against you, and grant them compassion in the sight of those who carried them captive, that they may have compassion on them **51** (for they are your people, and your heritage, which you brought out of Egypt, from the midst of the iron furnace).

The prayer of Solomon commends itself for our consideration because it is informed by great wisdom and knowledge of God. Solomon's wisdom was from God therefore it is of great importance to us today. Furthermore Israel's God is our God. We live under the terms of the same covenant that Israel lived under. Yahweh established himself as the God of the patriarchs and their children after them just as he establishes himself as our God and the God of our children after us.

In addition, Israel was a type of the church of God. That is to say, we see in ancient Israel all that accrues to the church today. God's relationship to Israel is continued to us today. Though the covenant of grace is administered differently in our day its substance has not changed. God continues to establish himself as our God and the God of our children just as he did for Israel. God is pleased to call his elect from all nations and tribes and tongues and they are his heritage just as Israel was said to be. God was pleased to separate a people for himself all through history and to grant them the saving benefits of the cross of Christ. What a blessing this is, to be the chosen of God, and given to the Lord Jesus, to have one's name written in the Lamb's book of life. What a great blessing it is to be known by God unto salvation, to be set apart unto God, to be unified with the Lord Jesus. *"You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."* (Amos 3:2, ESV), he says to his chosen people. As Israel was

loved by God so is the church of Christ. His elect people are blessed with his unfathomable love. What an honor! What a privilege! Yet how often we care little for the love of God. How often we sin against him. God disciplines his heritage for their sins as a father disciplines his sons for their own good.

The discipline of our loving Father is to the end that we become productive sons. We are not our own for we belong to Jesus. We are bought with a price. Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit whom we have from God therefore we are to glorify God in our body and he disciplines us to that end. We, whom God has so honored by setting apart as his heritage, are to love him and serve him with all our heart and soul and might. But all of us fall far short of the service we must return to God. We know the precepts of God, what he expects of us, but in reality we continue to sin against him. In his prayer Solomon recognizes this reality of life. Knowing his own heart and recalling the sinful behavior of Israel throughout the history of their existence, he calls upon God to forgive the sins of his people.

"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 in heaven and act and judge your servants, condemning the guilty by bringing his conduct on his own head, and vindicating the righteous by rewarding him according to his righteousness." (1 Kings 8:31-32, ESV)

We must remember that Solomon prays for Israel. Both the man who sins and his neighbor claim to be Christians. They both stand before the altar of God in his house. Yet there are often disagreements, misunderstandings, misrepresentations, and misjudgments among God's people. And not all who stand within the church belong to Christ so judgment needs to be rendered, guilt determined and righteousness rewarded. Therefore Solomon enters his plea to God to hear and act and judge his servants when they sin and reward them when they have been obedient. Perhaps you are unfairly accused of sin or your reputation has damaged by gossip but God hears the prayers of his people and he will not forget you. Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him for he will surely defend you.

"When your people Israel are defeated before the enemy because they have sinned against you, and 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 and bring them again to the land that you gave to their fathers." (1 Kings 8:33-34, ESV) The church of Christ is at war with a powerful enemy and our great enemy the devil often overwhelms is. He attacks our weak places, our poorly defended places and causes division. He would break apart and weaken the church in anyway he can and we often suffer defeat. It is a foregone conclusion that the church will suffer defeat before

the enemy, because we all do, in fact, sin against God. But we are his heritage and because the Spirit of God is working sanctification in us we who belong to Christ will repent and turn away from our sin. Go to God and pray and confess your sin and call upon him for mercy and because you are his, he will hear you and forgive your sins.

"When heaven is shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against you, if they pray toward this place and acknowledge your name and turn from their sin, when you afflict them, then hear in heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel, when you teach them the good way in which they should walk, and grant rain upon your land, which you have given to your people as an inheritance." (1 Kings 8:35-36, ESV)

Famine is always a fearful calamity for any nation to endure but especially so for Israel for without a bountiful harvest many of their feasts would be dismal affairs indeed. But at times we also experience the lack of heavenly rain and we suffer spiritual drought. And spiritual lassitude and drought is often brought about by our own sin and lack of faithful stewardship of the means of grace. Do any of you suffer from this terrible malady? Have you lost fellowship with God? Even those of us who live very close to the Lord may experience discouragement and God may appear to be far from us. We pray for help but it does not immediately come. God may clothe the lilies of the field and send rain to nourish them but they cannot pray as we have been taught to do. At such times we must realize that our only recourse is to seek the face of the Lord. He is our only help and strength. Will we find help from gods that do not exist? Can we expect to be heard by the god of the prophets of Baal who was suggested by Elijah to be musing, or relieving himself, or away on a journey, or asleep? Not at all! We must continue to come before Yahweh the living and true God with the prayer of Solomon, that he would forgive our sin and teach us the good way in which we are to walk. We may come to God knowing that he will answer in his own time and in his own way for we are his heritage and he has set his love on us.

"If there is famine in the land, if there is pestilence or blight or mildew or locust or caterpillar, if their enemy besieges them in the land at their gates, whatever plague, whatever sickness there is, whatever prayer, whatever plea is made by any man or by all your people Israel, each knowing the affliction of his own heart and stretching out his hands toward this house, then hear in heaven your dwelling place and forgive and act and render to each whose heart you know, according to all his ways (for you, you only, know the hearts of all the children of mankind), that they may fear you all the days that they live in the land that you gave to our fathers." (1 Kings 8:37-40, ESV)

Has God taken us to his woodshed to discipline us for our sin? But what son is there whom his father does not discipline? Many of us have had to learn the meaning of

Paul's words but how thankful we should be that we have not had to deal with the rest of the apostle's words, "*If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.*" (Hebrews 12:8, ESV) We may not be experiencing pestilence, blight, mildew, locust or caterpillar as was common in Israel's day but our businesses may suffer as most are in our blighted economy. We may be faithful to the Lord and careful stewards of his mercies but God's hand of judgment is felt by all of us as he brings judgment upon the evil society in which we live. At such times we must say with the poet,

***"Gently, gently lay thy rod
On my sinful head O God;
Stay thy wrath, in mercy stay,
Lest I sink beneath its sway."***

Knowing the affliction of our own heart we stretch out our hands to our Lord Jesus who stands in our midst and we ask our God to forgive our sins and act and render to us according to his steadfast love. God knows that we are his therefore we pray for his compassion. We know full well that we deserve nothing and our only plea is this, we belong to our Lord Jesus Christ and we base our cry for help in the blood of his cross. Can we not as his heritage, dressed in the righteousness of Christ, be bold to come before the throne of grace to plead for his mercy? Yes we can and must for our God is Yahweh. He alone is our help and our strength.

"If your people go out to battle against their enemy, by whatever way you shall send them, and they pray to the Lord toward the city that you have chosen and the house that I have built for your name, then hear in heaven their prayer and their plea, and maintain their cause." (1 Kings 8:44-45, ESV)

Our life in Christ involves us with constant warfare. The old man remains in us and we constantly struggle with sin. Then, too, we struggle against "... *the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*" (Ephesians 6:12, ESV) Like Solomon we plead with God. Are we not your chosen people? Is this not your gospel? Is not Jesus your beloved Son? Is this not your cause? If we belong to you, hear our prayer and deliver us. Strengthen us and help us. God will indeed hear from heaven and maintain our cause.

"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 the land of the enemy, far off 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 captors, 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 enemies, who carried them captive, and pray to you toward their land, which you gave to their fathers, the city that you have chosen, and the house that I have built for your name, then hear in heaven your dwelling place their prayer and their plea, and maintain their cause and forgive your people who have sinned against you, and all their transgressions that they have committed against you, and grant them compassion in the sight of those who carried them captive, that they may have compassion on them (for they are your people, and your heritage, which you brought out of Egypt, from the midst of the iron furnace)." (1 Kings 8:46-51, ESV)

Solomon prayed for those who were taken into captivity for their sins. Neither Judah nor Israel had yet been captured by their enemies and taken to Babylon or Assyria but Solomon sees that this will come to pass because the sins of God's people have been very great and they will continue to disobey their God and rebel against him. We are no different in our day. Look at the history of God's church. When have we not fallen into sin? When have we not turned away from the word of God? When have we not been tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes? However we may sin against God, if he has set his love upon us we will never lose our son-ship. If we repent with all our mind and all our heart God will hear from heaven when we cry out to him and forgive our sin and have compassion on us for we are his heritage.

Even the prodigal after wasting his inheritance in reckless living said, "Father I have sinned against heaven and before you." His father felt compassion for him and ran and embraced him and kissed him. Though he was not worthy to be called a son his father put a ring on his hand and his best robe and shoes on his feet and fed him with the fattened calf and celebrated his return. Brethren, we do not lose our son-ship when we sin against our heavenly Father. Come back to God and be delivered from captivity. God always hears the prayers of his people for they are his heritage which he separated from all the peoples of the earth for his own possession.

**When the weary, seeking rest,
To thy goodness flee;
When the heavy-laden cast
All their load on thee;
When the troubled, seeking peace,
On thy Name shall call;
When the sinner, seeking life,
At thy feet shall fall:
Hear then in love, O Lord, the cry
In heav'n, thy dwelling place on high.**

Thus we have heard Solomon's prayer for Israel, the church, the bride of Christ, the chosen people of God. They are blessed and honored by God beyond their ability to understand it. But you say, what of those who do not belong to the Israel of God. What of those who are strangers to grace? Solomon prays, "*Likewise, when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a far country for your name's sake (for they shall hear of your great name and your mighty hand, and of your outstretched arm), when he comes and prays toward this house, hear in heaven your dwelling place and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to you, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and that they may know that this house that I have built is called by your name.*" (1 Kings 8:41-43, ESV) This is a prayer for strangers to the covenant of promise; strangers to saving grace. Jesus said, "*I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.*" (John 6:51, ESV) And again, "*For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*" (Romans 10:13, ESV) Come to Christ for salvation, Pray to him for grace. Confess with your mouth that Jesus is the Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead and you will be saved. God hears the prayer of faith.

"The Lord our God be with us, as he was with our fathers. May he not leave us or forsake us, that he may incline our hearts to him, to walk in all his ways and to keep his commandments, his statutes, and his rules, which he commanded our fathers." (1 Kings 8:57-58, ESV) Amen.