

Calling upon God

SERMON

By

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TEXT: 1 Kings 8:22-53 (52-53)

PROP: We all need to consecrate ourselves anew to our Lord and Savior for his heritage must not be taken lightly or spoiled by sin.

1 Kings 8:22-53 (ESV)

22 Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the assembly of Israel and spread out his hands toward heaven, **23** and said, "O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you, in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and showing steadfast love to your servants who walk before you with all their heart, **24** who have kept with your servant David my father what you declared to him. You spoke with your mouth, and with your hand have fulfilled it this day. **25** Now therefore, O Lord, God of Israel, keep for your servant David my father what you have promised him, saying, '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 have walked before me.' **26** Now therefore, O God of Israel, let your word be confirmed, which you have spoken to your servant David my father.

27 "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built! **28** Yet have regard to the prayer of your servant and to his plea, O Lord my God, listening to the cry and to the prayer that your servant prays before you this day, **29** that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you have said, 'My name shall be there,' that you may listen to the prayer that your servant offers toward this place. **30** And listen to the plea of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. And listen in heaven your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive.

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). **52** Let your eyes be open to the plea of your servant and to the plea of your people Israel, giving ear to them whenever they call to you. **53** For you separated them from among all the peoples of the earth to be your heritage, as you declared through Moses your servant, when you brought our fathers out of Egypt, O Lord God ."

We have before us the prayer of Solomon on the occasion of the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem. I call your attention to it this morning because it is instructive in many ways. We read that, "*-- God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and breadth of mind like the sand on the seashore, so that Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt. -- He also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005. He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall. He spoke also of beasts, and of birds, and of reptiles, and of fish. And people of all nations came to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and from all the kings of the earth, who had heard of his wisdom. "* (1 Kings 4:29-34, ESV) His prayer is informed by his great wisdom and his knowledge of God, and we do well to study what he has to say. His wisdom was from God therefore his wisdom is of great importance to us today. Knowing that Israel was an ancient nation we tend to think that their behavior and God's relationship to them has little relevance to us. But we must remember that Israel was the church, just as Steven referred to Israel in the wilderness as the congregation (????s?? Acts 7:38). 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.

Another approach to Israel's relationship to us is to consider that Israel was a type of the church of God. Paul, for example, writes, "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. "* (Galatians 3:28-29, ESV) If the covenant promises were given to the physical heir of Abraham they would have been given to Ishmael for he was the first born but the blessings of the covenant of grace accrue only to those who are born of the Spirit. John tells us, "*He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."* (John 1:11-12, ESV) Abraham himself was given the right to be a child of God not because he was the physical descendant of a certain parent but because God was pleased to set his love on him. Therefore "*he believed Yahweh and he was counted it to him as righteousness.*" (Genesis 15:6) So it is with all who are in the church of God. We

may rightly, therefore, apply what is said of ancient Israel to the present people of God. We may rightly apply what Solomon says in his prayer to us today.

What then does Solomon say in his prayer? It is certainly comprehensive in that it contains all the elements of the prayer of our Lord. We see here adoration of God, confession of sin, thankfulness for God's mercies and the offering up of desires. Solomon uses language taken directly from the Bible. As we can see, there are many quotations from the law of God. Given his immense wisdom, Solomon was certainly capable of expressing his prayer in his own words and in his own way but he prefers the word of God. We often pray to God as if we were talking to a friend or to someone in our family. Our approach to God in worship often appears to discount his awesome majesty, and modern contemporary worship practice is reflected in the contemporary nature of many prayers. It is not that Solomon uses the flowery speech of an eloquent orator but he expresses himself like other writers of Scripture who spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

"Remember your word to your servant, in which you have made me hope." (Psalm 119:49, ESV) No language commends itself to our use as that of the Holy Spirit. *"How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!"* (Psalm 119:103, ESV) Surely when we use the very words of the Lord to express our prayers he is pleased hear and answer. But all prayer must come from believing hearts. Though the prayers of the ungodly may be taken directly from the Bible the heavens are as bronze and iron because they are voiced by those who do not believe unto salvation. Though worship liturgies may be the words of the Bible, they will be unacceptable if they are said by those who are unconverted.

Accordingly, I want to turn your attention this morning to the last petition of Solomon, *"Let your eyes be open to the plea of your servant and to the plea of your people Israel, giving ear to them whenever they call to you. For you separated them from among all the peoples of the earth to be your heritage, as you declared through Moses your servant, when you brought our fathers out of Egypt, O Lord God."* (1 Kings 8:52-53, ESV) Solomon bases his prayer on the fact that God had set his love on Israel and on no other and acted to deliver them from bondage in Egypt. Why should God refuse to hear his prayer given that God was well disposed toward Israel? Israel was God's elect. Isaiah writes, *"But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in exchange for you. Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you, I give men in return for you,*

peoples in exchange for your life." (Isaiah 43:1-4, ESV) If God so loves his church will he not also be open to their prayers? His church alone is holy to him for they alone have been separated as a heritage for God.

Moreover, we can see this separation all through the history of mankind. The promise of redemption proceeded through Seth not Cain, through Shem not Ham or Japheth. It proceeded through Isaac, not Ishmael, and through Jacob not Esau. Thus the separation of God's people is very obvious. But it goes far beyond the visible and obvious physical separation in antiquity. Paul writes, *"For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."* (Romans 8:29-30, ESV) Long before he created time, space and mass, when the term "before" had no meaning, God determined those who would constitute his church. All that came to pass in the domain of time God had ordained according to his eternal decree. He chose his church for which his beloved Son died. Before he created his people he predestined them for adoption through Jesus Christ. Before he created them he determined that Christ should be crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. All of this for the benefit of those God separated to himself as a heritage. Spurgeon wrote, "Oh, 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, that book in which the Lamb's name stands first, and is followed by the names of all whom he hath redeemed with his precious blood. Oh, bliss eternal and boundless to know by assurance of faith that you belong to those who are set apart unto God, and are one with Jesus."

All those that God chose from before the foundation of the world he effectually calls from the domain of darkness and transfers to the kingdom of his beloved Son. All the rest remain in darkness with ears that cannot hear the voice of God in the gospel and eyes that cannot see the majesty of the Almighty. God's people are drawn by bands of love which the ungodly cannot feel and they are enabled to come to Christ for grace while everyone else resists. Jesus said, *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."* (John 10:27, ESV) But to others he said, *"--I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock."* (John 10:25-26, ESV) Again we see God's separation of his people from all the families of the earth. People who were formerly his bitter enemies, God changes. New men are made from old. Radically changed, God's heritage come to him willingly and become faithful subjects of their King. God's people are caused to be born again to a living hope. He separates them from all the world around them and works sanctification in them. They become less and less conformed to the passions of their former ignorance, and more and more holy in all their conduct. They become sojourners and exiles such that they are in the world but not of it.

"The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein," (Psalm 24:1, ESV) Yet out of all world he has known only his elect unto salvation. And if you are known by God you are blessed beyond your ability to conceive of it. "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage!" (Psalm 33:12, ESV) This nation is Israel! It is the church! And God has chosen his people as his heritage. A man who takes his inheritance expects to use it for his own purposes and so it is with God. All that we are capable of producing belongs to God. He expects to make use of all our gifts and abilities; all our strength and might. God expects his heritage to love him and serve him. He calls us vessels for honored use and makes known the riches of his glory for us. He calls us **His people**" and **those who receive mercy.**" We were ransomed from our futile ways by the precious blood of Christ therefore it is our spiritual worship to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.

Because his people are his heritage, God makes his dwelling place among them. Speaking of the church, we read, "*For the Lord has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his dwelling place: "This is my resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it."*" (Psalm 132:13-14, ESV) What a blessing it is for God to dwell with his people. He stands in the midst of his church.

**Glorious things of thee are spoken,
Zion, city of our God!
He whose word cannot be broken,
Formed thee for his own abode:
On the Rock of Ages founded
What can shake thy sure repose?
With salvation's walls surrounded,
Thou may'st smile at all thy foes.**

Yahweh takes delight in his heritage. "*The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.*" (Zephaniah 3:17, ESV) What a marvelous blessing it is for our God to rejoice over us and what honor he bestows on us by delighting in us. What is more, he will never give up that in which he takes delight. Nothing will ever separate us from the love of God, neither life nor death nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come no height nor depth nor anything else in all creation. Do you really understand what an honor it is to belong to Jesus, to be his heritage? What a great honor it is to receive the Nobel award or to walk on the Moon, but what of our relation to Christ? All too often we are ashamed of Jesus and think little of belonging to him. We tend to be afraid to be branded as a slave of Christ but this must not be! We profess to

be born again into the family of God but are we really seeking to glorify him and enjoy him as the main object of our life? We all have other goals in life but they must be secondary to living for God. Can we really say with Paul, "*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*" (Philippians 1:21, ESV) We all need to consecrate ourselves anew to our Lord and Savior for his heritage must not be taken lightly or spoiled by sin. There is no happiness like that of living for the glory of Christ and rejoicing in the honor he bestows on us by separating us out from all others to be his own heritage. May the eyes of God be open to our prayers and his ears to us when we call upon him. And as his heritage may each one of us consecrate all that we are and have to his glory.