

22 Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands to heaven. 23 He said, "O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and steadfast love for your servants who walk before you with all their heart, 24 the covenant that you kept for your servant my father David as you declared to him; you promised with your mouth and have this day fulfilled with your hand. 25 Therefore, O Lord, God of Israel, keep for your servant my father David that which you promised him, saying, "There shall never fail you a successor before me to sit on the throne of Israel, if only your children look to their way, to walk before me as you have walked before me." 26 Therefore, O God of Israel, let your word be confirmed, which you promised to your servant my father David. 27 "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built! 28 Regard your servant's prayer and his plea, O Lord my God, heeding the cry and the prayer that your servant prays to you today; 29 that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you said, "My name shall be there," that you may heed the prayer that your servant prays toward this place. 30 Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place; O hear in heaven your dwelling place; heed and forgive. 31 "If someone sins against a neighbor and is given an oath to swear, and comes and swears before your altar in this house, 32 then hear in heaven, and act, and judge your servants, condemning the guilty by bringing their conduct on their own head, and vindicating the righteous by rewarding them according to their righteousness. 33 "When your people Israel, having sinned against you, are defeated before an enemy but turn again to you, confess your name, pray and plead with you in this house, 34 then hear in heaven, forgive the sin of your people Israel, and bring them again to the land that you gave to their ancestors... 41 "Likewise when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a distant land because of your name 42 —for they shall hear of your great name, your mighty hand, and your outstretched arm— when a foreigner comes and prays toward this house, 43 then hear in heaven your dwelling place, and do according to all that the foreigner calls to you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and so that they may know that your name has been invoked on this house that I have built.

I mentioned the Ark of the Covenant to someone recently and they responded that the only thing they knew about it was from the movie Raiders of the Lost Ark...fair enough...who doesn't love Indiana Jones and his ruggedly handsome dedication to saving religious relics from the Nazis?

Hollywood aside, we know God commanded Moses to create the Ark as a symbol of God's presence for the Hebrew people. The Ark was meant to be the throne upon which God sat and it was to go where the Israelites went. Thus the reason that the Ark was captured when King David carried it into battle. As Jim alluded, at the beginning of this series, the Ark has been returned to Israel and David went out to meet it and intended to worship God as it was returned...so he danced...and danced hard...so much so that soon it seemed people weren't looking to the glory of God anymore, they were too busy watching David. Sometimes our worship, if we aren't careful, can get twisted that way – moving God from the center to the outskirts.

There was a church in England that was part of the early “contemporary music” churches. They had an outstanding house band that wrote beautiful praise songs and therefore were puzzled when a sense of spiritual apathy settled on the congregation. The pastor, in his wisdom, sensed that the focus of worship had shifted...the band was the new focus...and so the pastor said, no more. They stopped the music and began to worship with just their voices, their words, their prayers. Matt Redmon, one of the song writers, was so moved by what happened that he penned a new song... *When the music fades, all is stripped away, and I simply come / Longing just to bring something that's of worth that will bless your heart... / I'm coming back to the heart of worship, and it's all about You, Jesus.*

He wrote a prayer...a prayer that reminded them that if Jesus wasn't at the heart of what they were doing, they were missing the blessing...they were missing the point of worship...the heart of worship.

While David's heart was in glorifying God, his dancing was a distraction for some and it meant he got in the way. Now, time has passed. Solomon sits on the throne and it is once again time for the Ark of the Covenant, God's throne, to be moved...this time from its place in the city to the magnificent temple that Solomon had built. Solomon the King who, as we learned last week, had been given the blessing of asking God for anything and had chosen, not selfish desires like wealth and long life, but instead had asked for the wisdom needed to lead God's people. So, in his wisdom, Solomon doesn't dance...he doesn't distract...he doesn't pontificate with pretty speeches and declarations of how perfect he is...he just prays. He stands before the presence of God, and he lifts his hands and prays.

For the past couple of weeks in Bible study we have been looking at the prayers of Jesus found in scripture. We've looked at the Lord's Prayer in Matthew and the beautiful prayer Jesus offered for his followers in the 17th chapter of John's gospel. As we have looked at those prayers a pattern has emerged in which we see Jesus always offers affirmation and praise to God and then follows with prayers that are not selfish but instead reflect a desire for others to find joy, protection, and holiness in their lives. Jesus is always, even in prayer, pointing us to notice the needs of others.

There is even a place in scripture, the 18th chapter of Luke, in which Jesus gives us an example of how NOT to pray. He tells of a story in which a Pharisee, observing people coming in and out of the temple, sees a Tax Collector come in. The Pharisee offers a prayer – Thank you God, that I am not like that man – a sinner. But Jesus allows us to eavesdrop on the prayer of the Tax Collector, “forgive me, a sinner.” The Pharisee's, a prayer of spiritual haughtiness and pride...the tax collector a prayer of humility and repentance.

Certainly, as the Psalmist points out, there are times when our prayers are deeply personal, when we call out to God in distress or repentance and there is nothing wrong with that, as was the case with the Tax Collector. But calling out to God to point out our pride or smug indulgence is never a good thing.

As we've seen in Bible Study, Jesus' prayers, and those of the psalmists, almost always point us outside of our own needs and turns our attention to the world around us. It is noteworthy then, that Solomon, in all his wisdom, would do the same. He begins, as Jesus teaches us, with acknowledgement of God's magnificence and glory...there is no god like you and no love like your love. So splendid is God's attention and love that Solomon expresses awe that God would even be mindful of us..."But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built!" Solomon prays...words of humility and submissiveness. It could have easily been a prayer of "Look what I've done for you, God! Look what I've given you, let you show you how much it cost...no one has given you what I've given you." But no. wise Solomon knows that anything he can do is so small in light of what God can do. There is no reason to brag here.

"Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place; O hear in heaven your dwelling place; heed and forgive." Solomon knows the temple will become the place where others come to pray and at this grand opening celebration, this is Solomon's dedication prayer – hear them, o God, when they come to pray...when they come seeking comfort...when they come seeking forgiveness.

Solomon prays that people will come here to understand and receive justice, they will come here to repent and to return to God when they have strayed. But then we notice that from God's splendor and Solomon's humility comes a prayer for God's blessing to be poured out beyond the walls.

41 "Likewise when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a distant land because of your name **42** —for they shall hear of your great name, your mighty hand, and your outstretched arm—when a foreigner comes and prays toward this house, **43** then hear in heaven your dwelling place, and do according to all that the foreigner calls to you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel...

What a beautiful prayer. Solomon understands that while God offers blessing to Israel, God's blessing is not limited to Israel. Others will seek God: foreigners...immigrants...outsiders...others...those people. God is their God as well and Solomon prays that God will give to them just as abundantly.

What makes this remarkable is that we too often see those outside our own belief circle as outsiders who are undeserving of blessing. We sometimes behave as if

God's blessings are limited and therefore, we must protect them, hoard them, disperse them only to the deserving. But Solomon's prayer is a big prayer to a big God, acknowledging that God's blessings are so abundant that there is room for everyone to participate and there is no need to reject those outside our circle when they want to draw close.

Like the prayers that Jesus teaches us, Solomon's prayer, although centered in the temple, is a reminder that it is what happens outside the temple that will draw others to God, "for they shall hear of your great name, your mighty hand, and your outstretched arm." Well, how will they hear until God's people are proclaiming, how will they know of the works of God's hand and the embrace of God's outstretched arms unless God's people are out there showing them what that looks like, what that feels like?

When worship in the temple...or the sanctuary...ends, we are sent out into the world as a sign of God's blessing and joy. We are sent out to be witnesses to those who are not yet willing to come before the Lord and worship so that they will come to know God and then will come to worship God.

We are sent out to live in such a way that others will want to follow us back in. Our worship doesn't end with our benediction...we simply carry it out into the street with us.

It is what Jesus was telling us when he said, "whenever you do this to the least of these, you do it to me...when you feed them, when you offer them the water of life, when you comfort them in their weariness and walk alongside them so they are less lonely, when you help them to cover the nakedness of their shame, and cloth them in the love of a savior...whenever you do this out there...it is worship of the God we celebrate in here.