

*The Glory of the Lord's House is not Gold and Silver, but mercy and forgiveness through the Lord's Anointed, Jesus Christ.*

2 Chronicles 6:17–20, 24–42

Dear Redeemed of the Lord,

Though this sermon text is long, it is well worth hearing. These are the heartfelt words which King Solomon prayed at dedication of the first Temple, a house in which the Lord God could grace His presence. The house was a wonder of the ancient world, made of white marble and covered almost entirely with gold on the inside. This was a house where the people Israel might approach God's mercy seat, and receive the good things which the Father wanted to give His dear children. And those good things were not the gold and silver of the house, but the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. These greater gifts could only come through the face of the Lord's Anointed, Jesus Christ, even as Solomon declared.

God had granted Solomon a profound gift of wisdom unlike any man who had ever come before, or who would follow afterward. In greatness, He would be exceeded only by Jesus (Mat. 12:42). His wisdom is evident here in this prayer. Solomon was not praying because the people had committed some specific sin, and yet his prayer is penitential. This is how we all must approach our Father in heaven, only through the Lord's Anointed, only by the mercy that He had promised unto David, and to all our fathers.

Here was a man of the greatest knowledge and wisdom, whom God had richly blessed. His riches were without compare, far beyond all the kings that came before him, yet He appears before God as a sinner, and as a king of a sinful people. That great temple, more glorious than any other temple ever built, was to be a house, not for men to come boasting in their strength or riches, but to confess their sins, and receive the forgiveness which God had promised them through Christ. Imagine that. All that glory was for no other purpose than to declare God's mercy to men.

None of our temples, be they our humble house churches, on up through the mega-churches that meet in multi-million dollar facilities, can hope to exceed the majesty of Solomon's temple, yet today so many churches think that we are beyond the need to confess our sins. Worship must be more grand and glorious than that. Penitence, with all its sackcloth and ashes has its place, but when we come together in the Lord's house, we should be letting our hair down, being ourselves, praising God's name, and having an uplifting spiritual experience. Truly? Can our worship, with whatever pomp or music we might put to it, ever hope to exceed the glory that Solomon's temple show just by sitting there? And yet for Solomon there was no worship without the forgiveness of sins. Today this has been called, "Liturgical worship", but in truth, it is the true worship that God desires, for He does not delight in sacrifices and burnt offerings, or even in the ecstatic hymns of praise that we might offer. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit and a contrite heart.

And so, over and over again, Solomon repeats the theme. When the people sin, and you rebuke them, O Lord, so that they

come to their senses and remember the Lord who delivered them, let them come to this temple, and when they make their confession, forgive them their sins. There is no sugar coating here. No vain wishful thinking, that everything will just be grand, and life will be good. Sin is the whole reason this temple was built, for above all else, God's people need forgiveness. The need for salvation was the driving force in every pillar, in all its decorations, in every ritual and sacrifice which was performed on its altars, in every prayer which the people offered therein. If the people were holy and undefiled, then what need would they have of a temple, or of sacrifices? Wouldn't they just walk with God as Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden? But Eden was lost. The fall was a fact, and the reality of the fall into sin was with men every day. It is foolish to ignore it, to pretend that God's children are not fallen, and doomed in their sin if they are not redeemed.

So indeed when Solomon closes this prayer, He closes it with this plea: "O Lord God, turn not away the face of Thine Anointed: remember the mercies of David Thy servant." Those are the key words of the entire prayer, the summary and substance of all that went before. O Lord God, you have promised to send your Anointed. It is He who causes you to be a gracious God, to be merciful. Do not turn His face away. Do not keep Him from us. For if we do not have the Anointed of the Lord, then we all must perish, and none could be forgiven. The Anointed One is Christ, for that is what the name Christ literally means. It is only by the mercies of Christ that we can come before our Father in Heaven. On His account, and His alone, God hears our prayers and answers them. In Him alone is the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. He brings to us all the good things of heaven. Even when God chastens His people, He does so for the sake of His Anointed. Take away from the Church the blessings of Christ, and you will be *incapable* of giving *any* glory to God at all. Without Him all praise is meaningless.

But how does Christ bring to us the blessings of heaven, which are the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation? He does so by His suffering and death. Therefore, let us bring this full circle, and ask the question: What do you get in today's worship if you strip away repentance and the forgiveness of sins? You strip away Christ. The Anointed of the Lord is not there. All such praise is meaningless. It is delighting in good things that cannot last, in friends we will ultimately lose, and a life that will be forfeit in the grave.

So it was with the rich man and poor Lazarus. In the rich man's life, who lived extravagantly, there was nothing to be found of forgiveness, for there was nothing to be found of repentance. He lived, blissfully unaware of the suffering around him. He enjoyed all his good things, delighted in the wines and meats which filled his table. He surrounded himself with friends and women and anything else that he might desire. He had everything, but he had nothing. Outside his gates, was Lazarus, a man who had nothing. He had neither riches, nor health in which to glory. Not even the dogs would leave him in his misery. He could only beg for the bread which would let him live one more day, for he could not work, so poor was his health. Soon Lazarus died, and so did the rich man. With the rich man's death, extravagant living and

every good thing which he had come to an end. But for Lazarus, all the evil things which happened in his body were replaced with the good things of heaven. The rich man's glory ended forever, but Lazarus' glory endured forever. Therefore, even in his misery, Lazarus had more reason to glory than the rich man with all his wealth. The troubles he endured were a blessing in the end, for they kept him humble and penitent.

It is often the case that God afflicts his people, so that they might remember His mercies, and repent of their sins. God afflicted Israel often, giving them over to foreign invaders. These were mercies, because God would not have Christ die for these people in vain. He desired to heal them, to take away their stony and stubborn hearts, and to give them a heart of flesh that seeks His mercy. Often the Lord afflicts the penitent also, as He did Lazarus and the apostle Paul, so that they might not forget His grace. Such afflictions are a blessing, and not a curse.

This then, is our prayer, that by whatever means, the Lord might preserve us in the faith of Christ, so that we believe His Word, repent of our sins, and remain in His mercy. For this reason we come together in our humble temple, week after week, because it is here, in the place that God has hallowed with His name and His presence, that He wishes us to repent of our sins and receive Christ Jesus. He would turn the face of His Anointed toward us, and pour out His mercy ever fresh and new, and when the time comes that our time here is over, we too would be carried into paradise, to dwell forever with the Lord. Would we really like God to leave us in our ease, enjoying the good things of this world, and then consign us to hell forever? God forbid! He sent us the prophets and the apostles to show us Christ Jesus, the Man in whom God has forgiven the sins of the world.

Solomon, in his wisdom, knew the end that would come upon the people if they died in their sins. Therefore, Solomon pleaded in life, that the Lord would forgive. In death it is too late. Let the rich man bear witness to this! He would not lift up his eyes unto heaven, from whence comes all help, until he was tormented in hell, when it was too late. When in torments, the rich man pleaded with Abraham to send Lazarus back from the dead, to warn his brethren who were likewise headed for hell. The Lord does not work in such a manner. He does not send an endless stream of miracles to turn men from their wickedness. He does not make His Church a place of constant signs and wonders. He sends Moses and the Prophets, which are the Law and the Gospel.

But what if God were to make an exception, and send a great and mighty sign? What if, for example, He sent One to earth, and caused Him to die, and rise again from the dead. Surely then, men would believe, wouldn't they? History records the answer: No, they will not. They did not believe when the Lord Jesus, God's own Son, rose from the dead. And they did not believe that sign, because they had rejected the Word of the Lord. Even the glory of Solomon's temple, which reminded the people of God's holiness and grandeur finally ceased to impress them. Even Solomon himself, despite his great knowledge, turned away from the Lord later in life, and followed after other gods. The chief priests, the scribes, and the Pharisees of the Jews are a wit-

ness to the nature of all men: No amount of evidence, no glory, no ecstatic vision, can overcome unbelief.

And so likewise, no temple of gold, no music, no hymns of praise, or any other wonderful thing, can give comfort to poor sinners if God is not there, offering them Christ Jesus. No form of worship can every be a substitute for the Word of Christ. Without the Lord's Anointed, all the grandeur of life, even a life filled with worship and praise of God, is empty and meaningless. Would that we would rather be afflicted as Lazarus, than lose Christ!

This week, while per chance listening to the BBC, I heard an interview with an English man who is pastor of a Christian church in Iraq. This church does not have the protection of the American forces. It is in the red zone of Bagdad. He has been kidnapped at various times, witnessed torture, been tortured himself. On some occasions he would go to his church building and find dead bodies hanging from the light posts around the building. Over 80 members of his church had died at the hands of Islamic terrorists. Though they had a regular building, their services were held at odd times, because of the dangers involved. He would arrive, and pass on word to one of his assistant pastors, who was an Iraqi, and he would send word to the members by word of mouth. Within a half hour, the church would be full, as many as could come. He had over a thousand members under his care, even in such precarious circumstances. He was asked by the reporter how he managed to give the members of his congregation any hope. His answer was simple. At the end of every service, he told them, "You do not know if you will live until the next Sunday, and I do not know if I will live until the next Sunday, but I can tell you that when we die, we will be like Jesus, for we will see Him as He is." He gave them the only hope that any of us have in this world, that when we die, we too shall be carried into Abraham's bosom, where we shall see Jesus, in all His divine glory, and we shall delight in that vision, and not be afraid, for we shall be like Him, perfectly holy and righteous, for Jesus has made us so.

God is gracious. He has given us voice to praise Him and glorify His name. Such praise is wonderful when it proceeds from a heart that is filled with the hope of Jesus Christ, and the knowledge that God is merciful, no matter what may happen to us in this life. Today, we have a house of prayer, a temple made with human hands, consecrated to the name of our Lord. Let it continue to be a place where we come, confessing our sins, seeking the forgiveness of our God. Therefore in this, the house of the Lord, we implore the Lord of hosts to look upon the face of His Anointed One, Jesus Christ, and for His sake, remember His tender mercies, and forgive us all our sins. God grant it. Amen.