

No Other Message

Bible Reading:

1 Kings 8: 22-30, 41-43

Galatians 1: 1-10

Luke 7: 1-10

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Opening Reading: **1 Kings 8:22-30, 41-43 p.312 (Old Testament)**

What a huge day this was for King Solomon.
It's opening day at the Temple.
Dedication service.

If you've ever bought a new house, or been part of a new development project at work, try and recall the anticipation, the thrill, the excitement of watching the hole being dug, the structure being erected, and furniture moving in. Perhaps you can remember building Ottawa Christian School's facility, or the first construction or any of the renovations of the facility here at Calvin.

And then - the time to move in.
All the thinking and planning and preparing - now it comes to completion!

Remember the excitement to walk in for the first time?
Everything you've dreamed about - here it is!

For Solomon this was far more than probably most of us could imagine.
As he stood before the altar he was experiencing what would be the peak moment of his life.

1 Chronicles 22 records that **THIS** was what his kingship was to be all about. David had made extensive preparations for building the temple. He had captured and secured Jerusalem as the Israelite capital. He had built a palace for himself. Capstone to all that was to be the temple - the house for God, the earthly reflection of the Holy One's heavenly power and splendour.

And then a divine oracle pulls David up short.
He is NOT to build the temple.

That will be the job for the man of peace, the man of shalom, *Shelomo*, the one we refer to in English as Solomon.

Incidentally, do you know the difference between the books of *Chronicles* and *Kings*? While the book of *Kings* records the history of Israel & Judah, with all their pitfalls and dark spots, *Chronicles* focuses particularly on the kingship of David and his son Solomon. Many of the dark chapters aren't mentioned. It focuses on God's choosing work, and on the Messianic echoes that are present in David's kingship. Some writers also see strong, deliberate echoes between the accounts of Moses and the succession of Joshua in the early, Deuteronomic times and the *Chronicle* account of David and the succession of Solomon.

Well, the prayer which Solomon prays in the temple on opening day is recorded both in the dark, sin-stained secular history presented by 1 Kings, and the spiritually-focused messianic history of 2 Chronicles. Which leads me to conclude that this prayer -
no matter what slant you take on Solomon's life -
this prayer is central to what Solomon is about.

God has made provision.

In His divine mercy He has appointed the son of peace to build this place.

It will be the place that reflects His person;
showing the Lord to the world.

That's why Solomon's prayer begins with an exclamation of praise, declaring the greatness of God and his covenant-keeping steadfast love.

That great God put Solomon on the throne.

That great God directed Solomon's efforts towards building this temple.

That great God holds the future.

Solomon sees it. Knows it. And so puts it as first order of business in his prayer.

Solomon wants that covenant-keeping love and greatness of God to fill the temple, as it is to fill his kingship and as it is to fill the nation.

He wants this to be real,
to be central for all the people.

And so, Lord - hear the king's prayer, hear the people when they come to this house to pray.

And not only the people here - but those others, those on the outside, those not yet part of the great saving, electing work of God. V.41-43 – when the foreigner comes

as they **will** come

when the foreigner comes

Lord, hear them.

Lord, answer them.

Lord, make yourself known and real to them.

your covenant-keeping, steadfast and great love.

For Solomon, here at the peak of his kingship

For Israel as they engage their life as a nation.

For foreigners who come

Most important is the presence of the Lord among them.

hearing them

responding to them.

Lord - more than a national monument, more than a religious rallying point, more than a place of royal pride:

Lord, let this place be all about you.

Lord, come and fill it.

So Solomon prays.

It's a deep, rich, passionate and very godly prayer.

A critical prayer, as I said, because it's recorded in all its wording, both here in 1 Kings 8, and in 2 Chronicles 6.

Without the Lord the temple means nothing.

Solomon's kingship means nothing.

Israel's nationhood means nothing.

Now fast-forward with me to the New Testament.
Witness what Paul writes to the church in Galatia -

Galatians 1:1-10 p.187 (New Testament)

Notice how unrelenting Paul is.

There is one thing, and there is **only** one thing, that stands at the centre of what he is about, what he works and longs for.

That is the gospel of Jesus.

The message of Jesus

Salvation at the cross of Jesus.

He's not ready to give one inch, or turn off course 1 degree from that message.
And he's extremely disappointed, upset with the Galatian Church, that they were willing so quickly and freely to compromise that core.

For Solomon, his prayer began with a focus on the Lord's covenant-keeping, steadfast love (1 Kings 8:23).

Paul has experienced the ultimate expression of love from that covenant-keeping God in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus dragged Paul from hell to heaven; from hate to love; from persecution of Christians to being one of the most passionate among them.

At the cross of Christ Paul found forgiveness for all the murders he had committed, the threats he had breathed, the offenses committed against Christ himself.

Jesus is the One in whom there is a covenant love-bond between the Lord and His people.

Jesus is the One through whom the prayers of the people come to the throne of the Father.

Jesus is the New Temple.

That is why Jesus said in John 2:20, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

He was talking about his body.

All the splendour of the Old Testament Temple, the altar, the outer court, the inner holy space, the oil, the priests in their roles, the magnificent beauty and pageantry of it all – everything pointed, in one way or another, to Jesus.

As Solomon recognized and publically proclaimed in prayer the Temple to be the place of connection between God and His people, Paul proclaims publically the Temple of Jesus to be the place of connection between God and His people.

No matter what anyone else claimed.

In fact - damn all those other claims.... literally.

Let them be accursed.

There isn't one inch of wavering with Paul.

No Jesus - no apostleship, no church, no nothing.
His life, his mission, his church plants – all focused on and revolving around the good news of the Cross of Jesus.

Which, as you think about it -
well, can you hear an echo from the gospels?

Think Matthew 16, Jesus and his disciples travelling in the region of Caesarea Philippi. “*Who am I*”, Jesus asks?

You are the Messiah, the son of the Living God, declares Simon.
Remember Jesus’ reply?

Look at it with me -

Matthew 16:13-20 p.18 (NT)

Peter - *Petros* in Greek.

It means “*rock*.”

Not that Simon himself was such a rock.

Actually, the Bible shows him to be a rather impulsive, quick-mouthed, not terribly secure sort of fellow. No rock. Rather weak, really.

But the confession that this weak fellow makes.

ah - what a solid confession that is!!

Jesus as Messiah - and on that rock-solid confession the Church can be built and will be built.

Nothing - not even the powers of hell themselves, will be able to topple what is built on that confession.

The confession of Jesus becomes a foundation on which a New Testament temple is built -

- the spiritual house, says 1 Peter 2:4&5, that is made with living stones, the stones of believers who confess and hang on to Jesus –

who stretch their hands toward Heaven in Solomon-like fashion, in submission to the Lord.

The cornerstone in Zion has been laid by the covenant-keeping, eternal loving God. His name is Jesus.

“Whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame.” [1 Pe 2:6]

Keep the focus on that.

Praying it will remain so for all God’s people. Jesus at the centre.

Praying, with Solomon, that as people who are not now among the community, as those people continue to come in,

that they would experience the same thing -

the eternal live, and covenant-faithful of the Living God,

which comes to us in the Temple

in the Temple of Jesus.

Understand this, though.

It is **SO** easy to wander from that focus.
Solomon wandered.

Here is the wisest man who ever lived.
He is in a priestly role, praying at the altar.
And yet.....

.....not too many years later he becomes consumed with political intrigue, and picks up the custom of surrounding nations, marrying princesses of neighboring royalty. That's how you built connections in those days.

With the princesses came the idols and the altars.
When Solomon walked away from the altar of the Lord, and got wrapped up in other pursuits, his kingship began to unravel.

Or Peter.

Go back to Matthew 16.

Does anything leap out at you from that chapter with the famous words of confession about Jesus?

Anything shocking there?

Notice the verses immediately following the confession account -

- Jesus talks about the cross, his suffering and death.

And Peter gets pulled off task.

Brothers and sisters, the rock, the foundation, of our life as a Church is found in "Peter-ing", in the strong confession that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the Living God (Mt 16:13-20).

On that the Lord builds.

And yet how quickly making the good confession can "Peter out." Peter rebukes the Lord in v.22. Gets totally, as the politicians would say, off message. And, instead of a rock-solid foundation for the church, the great Peter-rock now is a stumbling block.

Jesus makes a declaration then to Peter and all the other followers.

A declaration that calls us to:

- < Deny ourselves
- < Take up our cross
- < and Follow Jesus.

It is a call to live a cruciformed life.

A life that is cross-shaped.

A life imprinted by the cross.

We worship week after week here in this facility as a family of faith.

Is it cruciformed worship?

in other words:

shaped by the cross

imprinted by the cross

cruci-formed living.

What about the other activities in which we engage?

Here's a question to which I don't have a quick answer, but want to plop it on the table for you to deliberate on together -

- if suddenly the message of Jesus were pulled away, how much would the rest of our congregation's life and programming change?

How big a hole would it leave?

How big a hole?

If we think about it, and begin to find places where the answer would be, "*oh, not much*" is that acceptable?

What do you think?

I suggest to you that if we lower our hands from praying that God would reveal Himself in His Christ-Temple,

if we turn away from prayers towards Him who IS the Temple

if Jesus becomes anything less than our consuming passion here at Calvin

knowing Him

and making Him known

You remember - the stuff written on the bottom of our bulletin cover -

If we get distracted by anything else

Friends, I predict a slow but steady unraveling and eventual collapse of this community.

Our life, our purpose, our future is tied directly in our passion for, hunger for, Him who is the Temple.

So let me ask it again - do we live a cruciformed life in this congregation?

Think about it.

Talk about it together.

It's a question I need to ask of myself as a pastor.

Do I live a cruciformed life?

Does the cross of Jesus shape me?

Is the person of Jesus evident in, and reflected through me?

If it isn't, then I'm off task.

Then my ministry will become unravelled.

And, instead of being part of the foundation, I become a stumbling block.

Instead of being part of Christ's solution for the world, I become part of the problem.

Where does Jesus, and the cross, fit in my life?

One of the strangest sights I've seen in a long while was about a year and a half ago. Was at an inter-denominational prayer gathering. Close to me was someone I knew - evangelical Christian. Had been at Wheaton College for a while. I mean - that's card-carrying, charter member central for evangelical Christianity.

As we moved from a time of prayer I noticed her cover herself with the sign of the cross. We've all seen that countless times from Catholics. This was a Wheaton college grad.

I tried not to stare.

But I had to ask. Couldn't resist.

Hey - I **was** polite..... I think. "*What's with the good luck charm thing?*"

Know what she said?

"Because a symbol gets mis-used by some people doesn't mean it has no value. It's not a good luck charm. It's the cross. It's painting, invisibly, with my hand, the place that I want this cross to have in my life. Right over my heart. Connecting my head to my heart, and my hands to my heart and my head. I want to be shaped by the cross."

Now, I'm not suggesting that you all go out and imitate her.

That's not the point.

What **IS** the point is her passionate desire to be cruciformed.

The outward thing was just a mild reflection of what is, for this sister, a raging fire of passion within her.

"I want to be shaped by the cross."

This sister stands shoulder to shoulder with Paul - not budging one inch on Jesus. She doesn't want to see her passion Peter-out. She wants it to remain rock-solid.

And there she is an inspiration to me.

It's easy, strange though it may sound, to become distracted as a pastor.

Easy to become an institutional executive, rather than a man of the cross.

And I need, again and again, to come to the altar with Solomon and spread my hands to heaven.

Fulton Sheen writes, "*The pastor who has not kept near the fires of the temple can strike no spark from the pulpit.*" ["The Priest Is Not His Own" 1963].

Ditto for elders and deacons.

Ditto for all believers.

There is this growing wave of liberal opinion in our nation that it is not acceptable to be exclusive. To say, *No way but the Cross way* is seen as intolerant, even bigoted. You used to hear such statements on rare occasions.

Now they come regularly, and people nod in vigorous affirmation.

In the face of that we need to be ever so vigilant that we do not lose the core of our identity as Christians here at Calvin CRC.

Ultimately, brothers and sisters, it can be no other way.

From the moment the doors first open, no other message.

Jesus makes this church facility and the community who gathers within her, a temple.

Where God resides.
Where heaven and earth connect.
Where life is found.

And so, whatever else the future may bring, let there be no other message but the Temple of Jesus, with a cross at the centre, and believers gathered round, hands and hearts lifted up in prayer and life-submission.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.