

GOD'S HOUSE AS A HOUSE OF PRAYER

2 Chronicles 6-7

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. As the Lord has been at work in our church over the last season, he has been calling us into a focused season of *building the house*. This is not only because of the particular story that the Lord has written for this spiritual family, but also a call in light of where we are within the broader cultural and spiritual moment in our world.
- B. One of the specific ways we are seeking to understand, strengthen, give language to, and establish what God has put before us is by preaching through the books of Chronicles. These books were written to exiles from among God's people who had returned from captivity charged with the task of repairing the house of the Lord that had been destroyed (see 1 Chr 9.1-2).
- C. These books are uniquely designed to inspire the people of God looking at the "ruins" around them to take up their place and work in partnership with God's purposes in the work of his kingdom.
- D. In these two chapters we are given two powerful realities that will serve and orient our labors as we desire to respond to the Lord's calling for our church.
 - 1. God's *purpose* for his house — a house of prayer (2 Chr 6)
 - 2. God's *pattern* for renewal (2 Chr 7)

II. GOD'S PURPOSE FOR HIS HOUSE: A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL NATIONS (2 CHR 6)

- A. Last week (2 Chr 2-5), we looked at what the building of the Temple showed about the purpose of God for all of creation: *that God is building a house where he can dwell with his people forever*.
- B. We saw that in the New Testament, Christ has reoriented the Temple (the house of God) around himself and his work. Through him, we can see that each of the previous houses (tabernacle and temple) served as a picture of the eternal and perfect reality that he inaugurates in the new covenant.
- C. Jesus alone opens the new and living way — through his own flesh — into the presence of God in the true heavenly temple. Now, with access into God's own presence, we can dwell with God in his house.

¹Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, ²a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man.

¹⁹Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by the new and living way that he has opened for us, that is, through his flesh, ²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. (Heb 10.19-23)

- D. This also means that the people of God *are now* and *are being built* into the temple of God.

¹⁸So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²²In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit (Eph 2.19-22)

- E. Solomon's prayer gives us further insight into the purpose for God's house. If he is building a house where he can dwell with his people, we see that there is a reason for this. Said differently, we could say that Solomon's prayer gives a picture of what it means to dwell in God's house — namely, that we can commune with him in the place of prayer.
- F. Solomon begins his prayer by ascending a bronze platform (an altar, as a 'living sacrifice'), knees before the God in heaven, and spreads out his hands before the Lord to pray. In this majestic prayer, Solomon makes his petition to the Lord about the nature of his house:

1. *God's transcendence and imminence*: Solomon acknowledges a foundational paradox in God's relationship with the world. God is holy, and he dwells above the highest heavens (he is transcendent). Yet, he asks the Lord that his house would be the place of his rest/dwelling — understanding the Lord's desire to be near his people (immanence).

¹⁸But will God indeed dwell with man on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, how much less this house that I have built! ¹⁹Yet have regard to the prayer of your servant... ⁴¹now arise, O Lord God, and go to your resting place, you and the ark of your might. (2 Chr 6.18-19, 41)

¹⁵For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy; "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit" (Isa 57.15)

2. *God's attentiveness to his people*: Solomon asks repeatedly that the Lord will hear the prayers of his people and let his eyes be attentive toward them. This demonstrates the awareness that the house (Temple) serves *for* something. It cannot be the fullness of God's house but is a unique place where he turns with an attentive gaze toward his people.

¹⁹have 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, ²⁰that your eyes may be open day and night toward this house, the place where you have promised to set your name, that you may listen to the prayer that your servant offers toward this place. (2 Chr 6.19-20)

3. *That the house would be a place of forgiveness*: One of the specific themes of Solomon's prayer is that the house would be a place where the people of God received his forgiveness and mercy. This highlights both the nature of mankind (all have sinned and fall short) and the gracious character and mercy of the Lord.

³⁶If they sin against you — for there is no one who does not sin — and you are angry with them... ³⁷yet 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 captivity... ³⁸if they repent with all their heart and with all their soul... ³⁹then hear from heaven your dwelling place their prayer and their pleas, and maintain their cause and forgive your people who have sinned against you. (2 Chr 6.36-39)

4. *That the house would be for all nations*: Solomon understands the universal scope of God's desire in the world. Even in his prayer he points to a greater day when God would open the doors of salvation to any and all who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus.

³²Likewise, when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel... when he comes and prays toward this house, ³³hear from 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 (2 Chr 6.32-33)

- G. The prophet Isaiah demonstrated that one of the foundational identities of God's people would be a *house of prayer* in all the nations of the earth.

⁶And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants... ⁷these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." (Isa 56.6-7)

- H. Solomon demonstrates that at the center of God's people is a posture of penitent submission to his ways in offering to him worship and prayer. It is through these offerings and sacrifices that the Lord will release his favor and his purposes among his people and throughout the earth.

III. GOD'S PATTERN OF RENEWAL (2 CHR 7)

- A. After finishing the house and offering the prayer to the Lord, the Lord responds to Solomon and the people. First, he does this by sending fire from heaven to consume the offerings and sacrifices — filling the house with such glory that the priests cannot enter the house. This elicits a reverent, awe-filled response of worship from the people.

¹As soon as Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. ²And the priests could not enter the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord filled the Lord's house. ³When all the people of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory of the Lord on the temple, they bowed down with their faces to the ground on the pavement and worshiped and gave thanks to the Lord, saying, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever." (2 Chr 7.1-3)

- B. In the new covenant, the Lord fills his house with the fire of his Spirit at Pentecost and continues to fill his people in response to their prayers.

¹When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³And divided tongues of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. (Acts 2.1-3)

³And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. (Acts 4.31)

- C. Then, after a week of sacrifices and feasting before the Lord, the Lord appears to Solomon again and confirms to him that he has heard his prayer and will set his eyes and heart upon the house in order that his people might meet with him there. In this passage, the Lord sets out the pattern for renewal that will be seen throughout the remainder of Chronicles.

¹²I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a house of sacrifice. ¹³When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, ¹⁴if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land. ¹⁵Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place. ¹⁶For now I have chosen and consecrated this house that my name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will be there for all time. (2 Chr 7.12-16)

- D. *Crisis of decline*: the Lord tells Solomon that the situation (the need) for renewal will be experienced when there is a season of crisis that is experienced. It is clear from the covenant blessings/curses of the Old Testament that these actions from the Lord (no rain, locust, pestilence, etc.) are chastisements for their disobedience (see Deut 28).

- E. Paul outlines the reality of God's wrath being expressed upon a society as being handed over to greater embracing of sin. As a culture exchanges its worship, the expressions of sin become more disordered and ultimately more tolerated and embraced.

¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him... ²⁴Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies... ²⁶For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions... ²⁸And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not be done... ³²Though they know God's righteous decree... they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them (Rom 1.18-32)

F. *If my people*: the Lord lays out a conditional statement for his people in such times of crisis.

1. *Humble themselves*: God's people are to take up a posture of debasing their own pride and submitting to the Lord and his ways in self-denying loyal trust. We humble ourselves by renouncing our own ways of seeing, evaluating, and pursuing our own gain and set our hearts to fully submit to Christ's sovereign lordship over us.

⁴You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. ⁵Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"? ⁶But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." ⁷Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. (Jas 4.4-7)

2. *Pray*: prayer essentially is faith-filled agreement with God's character (worship) and God's promises (petition, intercession). In this context it includes emptying ourselves of any pursuit to establish or save ourselves and calling upon God alone to deliver and save. We do this in faith, knowing that God desires to answer the prayers of his people.

¹⁸Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you... ¹⁹He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry. As soon as he hears it, he answers you. (Isa 30.18-19)

⁷And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? ⁸I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. (Luke 18.7-8)

3. *Seek*: throughout Chronicles the concept of seeking the Lord is tied to (1) understanding his ways and commandments; and (2) seeking to orient our whole lives toward him in obedience.

¹³But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Phil 3.13-14)

4. *Turn*: God calls his people to turn from their wicked ways. To turn away from that which is wicked is the essence of repentance. It is a posture of forsaking what God calls evil ("not good") and running toward him.

¹⁷Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. (Matt 4.17)

⁹Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good (Rom 12.9)

G. *I will hear and heal*: God promises that if his people turn to him in this way that he will hear from heaven and act on their behalf. He will pour out his gracious power to heal them and heal their land.

H. Peter promises that God will send seasons of refreshing in response to the repentance of his people.

¹⁹Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, ²⁰that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus (Acts 3.19-20)

- I. We desire to see God's purposes permeate our lives, our families, our church, our workplaces, our neighborhoods, and our city. We must acknowledge that in times of cultural and societal crisis, the answer is not first to work to renew the systems and structures "outside". God has given a pattern for his people to repent, return, and call upon his name — who knows if he will relent and leave a blessing behind.
- J. God establishes more of his kingdom purposes when his people live in agreement with him. This includes worship, prayer, repentance, and lives ordered around his commandments.
- K. There is an invitation to press into the Lord (regardless of cost) with a *spirit of repentance* (turning away from the world to the Lord) and a *spirit of pursuit* (seeking the Lord while he may be found).