

## God Sanctifies His Temple

II Chronicles 7:12-22, Trinity Sunday XVI

September 27, 2009

Beloved of the Lord.....How do I know if I am going to the right church? How can anyone know if one church or the other is the right church? The simplest answer to these questions is the Word of God. God's Word then, or better, God through His Word will answer these questions. When it comes to determining which visible church is right and which wrong, we are speaking of "the marks of the church." The outward marks are the outward and visible signs that the Invisible Church is present. While the True Church is indeed invisible, known only to God, it can nevertheless be recognized by outward signs, outward marks, namely "the pure doctrine of the Gospel, and the administration of the Sacraments in accordance with the Gospel of Christ" (*Triglot*, p. 227).

What does this mean? It means that when we are searching for the right church, we should look for that church or congregation which is faithfully teaching from its pulpit the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ, and rightly administering the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion in agreement with the same Gospel. The Bible says, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." Thus when it comes to a church building such as Solomon's Temple in our lesson today, let us remember it is what is taught and preached in that building that matters, not the building itself. For God "dwelleth not in temples made with hands", but "your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which ye have of God and ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price."

### I. God tests us so that we turn to Him in prayer.

Solomon had just completed the building of the Temple and the Ark of the Covenant had been placed therein. The Levites then sacrificed countless sheep and oxen and Solomon prayed a prayer of dedication. "Now when Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifice." God's glory so filled the house that the priests could not enter due to the blinding brightness. The people then worshipped and praised the Lord saying, "For He is good; for His mercy endureth forever." After this a great feast was enjoyed for seven days then Solomon dismissed the congregation and everyone went home "glad and merry in heart for the goodness that the Lord had showed."

That night the Lord visibly appeared to Solomon, not in a dream but visibly before his eyes. As Christ in the Old Testament appeared to Adam and Eve, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and David, so He now appeared to Solomon. The Lord said, "If I shut up heaven that there

be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence.....If my people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." Note all of these are conditional statements. IF God sends hardship, IF God's people pray, IF they humble themselves, IF they seek His face, IF they turn from wickedness, THEN He will hear from heaven. These words are meant for God's people alone. God's people alone know how to pray - in Jesus' name, through Christ. "For *there is* one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all." But those who seek and implore God's mercy thinking their goodness merits God's hearing, such will not be heard and their prayer is an abomination to God. Jesus said, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." Believers alone approach the mercy seat of Christ knowing His face is shining upon them and is gracious unto them.

Believers alone also know how to humble themselves, or better God has taught our heart to be sorry for our sins. Psalm 138 says, "Though the LORD be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off." Likewise Psalm 51, "The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit." What you sacrifice to God dear Christian is not so important in comparison to how you approach Him. Are you sorry in your heart for your sins? Are you ashamed of what you've done or proud and impenitent? Repentance is a hard thing which only God can teach and because of the flesh there is always pride in the most broken of hearts. Nevertheless we shouldn't make repentance more complicated than it is. Are you sorry for your sins against God? Do you desire Jesus forgive you of your sins? I have often struggled with repentance in that I have wondered, Am I sorry enough? Have I truly repented? But then, what man of flesh and blood could be sorry enough? Who would ever dare to say their repentance was perfect? While we can never repent enough or be sorry enough for our sins which only merit death and damnation, thanks be to God it is not the level of our sorrow which justifies us or earns forgiveness, but it is Christ. "This man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God." It is His holy blood which declares me and all sinners righteous! It is His sacrifice which makes me whole. In this, in Him, I, we find perfect healing. Through Christ our prayers are heard in heaven, our wounds healed, and we are a people called by His name. "For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." He came, He lived, He obeyed, He suffered, He died, He rose again - all for my justification:

before I repented, before I was even born. Isn't it the same for you? Didn't He give you the Gift, me the gift, before we knew the meaning of the words "I'm sorry" or "God be merciful to me, a sinner." In Him then I, we, you are perfectly justified. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Shall then we receive good at the hand of the Lord and not evil? If God sends us evil, isn't it only for our good? Through the course of life we can expect to be chastened and tested by Him who loves us. When afflicted we learn better how to trust His mercy. If He gives us famine, if He chastens us with pestilence or disease, it is only so that we grow. As steel is tempered and strengthened only after the fire, so God uses the furnace of affliction ONLY to make us stronger. If He has given you a burden dear Christian, it is only so you will give it back to Him in prayer. Hence Psalm 55 says, "Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." Yes, when the old man is in the driver's seat we murmur and complain about our heavy burden. But when the new man takes over faith rises to the surface and these burdens are made light. In prayer we give our burdens back to the Lord and in faith they become light as a feather. Do not forget dear Christian you are the apple of His eye. Whatever cross He gives you, Jesus is not going to watch you carry that cross from a distance, but He is there with you, beside you, underneath your cross helping you every step of the way. How heavy then can that burden be which He makes light? "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory." The cross leads to glory.

II. God alone has sanctified and chosen this House. In verse sixteen the Lord now says, "For now have I chosen and sanctified this house, that my name may be there forever; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually." In the physical sense, Solomon's Temple was chosen to be the sanctuary, the house of God's holy name. Had the Israelites remained faithful to God, that Temple would probably still be there today, but it was destroyed "because they forsook the Lord God of their fathers...and laid hold on other gods." But the real beauty of verse sixteen is found in its spiritual sense. Solomon's Temple of the Old Testament was a type of the True Invisible Church, Mt. Zion, that communion of saints. For it is God's saints who are chosen and sanctified. It is the True Church which is His chosen and beloved hence the Lord says, "mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually." He cannot take His eyes off or separate His heart from His redeemed whom He loves.

Thus it is the Lord alone who sanctifies and makes holy the True Church which is called by His name. In the

holy name of Christ unholy sinners are declared holy. Since He has called us by the Gospel and enlightened us with His gifts, each believer then becomes a lively stone of that Spiritual Temple, His Church. "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." Thus in the Scriptures when we see the beautiful description of Zion with all her colors and precious stones, or the Bride who is adorned in a spotless and white wedding dress, this is none other than God speaking about His well beloved, that communion of saints which includes you the believer. His eyes look with favor continually upon you. His heart is continually in your favor. You are a part of His body, His Bride. He gave His life for you, so that you would not die but live forever with Him. Jesus said, "whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."

When God then sanctifies this House, it means He has made His Church holy. If your faith is in Him then it mean He has set you aside, He has made you holy, set apart, by His holy body, by His holy blood. You are a part of Him by faith, as He is a part of you. Your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost. You see then it is not a building which makes a church, but it is God the Holy Spirit who makes and creates His Church by the preaching of the Gospel. His Spirit "calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies, the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps is with Jesus Christ in the one true faith." The Gospel Word is not only the mortar which holds believers together, but it is His Gospel which gives life to these living stones. Jesus said, "where two or three are gathered together, there am I in the midst of them." "Fear not little flock."

In closing, this is why we are not to turn away from Him or despise His commandments or go and serve other gods as the Israelites did. If we forsake Him, He also will forsake us and pluck us out of the land of the living. But we should not resent this warning from God but be thankful. It is good warning meant to keep our flesh in check. "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." If you are worried about your strength to persevere in the faith, understand God will give you the strength to persevere through His Word and Sacraments. Dear Christian let us then be faithful and persevere, for His mercies are new every morning, and His compassions fail not. The Lord is good to all and His tender mercies are over all His works. "O give thanks unto the Lord for He is good, for His mercies endure forever." Amen.

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