

# “Solomon’s Prayer”

1 Kings 8:22-61

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## Introduction:

Over the next few weeks, I would like for us to focus our attention on the worship that we offer to God as a congregation, and if you will, please be turning with me to the Old Testament book of **1 Kings 8**. We know from the discussion Jesus had with the Samaritan woman in **John 4** that our worship is to be offered to God (according to **verse 24**), “*...in spirit and truth.*” In other words, we are to approach God with the right attitude and also in the correct manner—according to the truth of God’s word.

I would like to start this morning by looking together at the public prayers that we offer together as a congregation. Certainly prayer is a very important part of our worship. Several weeks ago, in fact, we had an entire service dedicated to prayer. Privately, we pray before meals, we pray with our families, we pray when we are alone. And yet the Bible also places a great emphasis on the prayers that we offer when we are assembled together as the family of God. We can think, for example, about the gathering of apostles after the ascension of Jesus—right before the church was established. The Bible says in **Acts 1:14**, “*These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.*” In the next chapter, we find that 3,000 people are baptized, and in **Acts 2:42**, we find that these new Christians, “*...were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*” In **Acts 4**, Peter and John are arrested and thrown in jail for preaching the gospel, and once they are released, they report back to the assembly of Christians, and the Bible says in **Acts 4:24**, “*And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord...*,” and then the Bible goes on to explain that the early Christians asked for courage that they would be able to speak the word of God with boldness.

A few chapters later, Peter is thrown in prison again, he is released by the angel in the middle of the night, and we find in **Acts 12:12** that Peter immediately, “*...went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.*”

And so we know that the early church regularly went to God in prayer as a congregation. Not only did they pray in private, but they also prayed publicly. This morning I would like for us to go back a little bit further, though, and I would like for us to notice that public prayer has some very deep roots in the Old Testament. In

fact, by the time the church is established, God's people had already been praying publicly for at least a thousand years!

In **1 Kings 8**, we find that King Solomon offers a public prayer at the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem. It is hard to overstate the importance of the event that we are about to consider. We know that God's people had been worshiping at the tabernacle (basically a tent) since it was constructed shortly after the giving of the Law in the wilderness. The tabernacle, therefore, had been in use for close to 500 years. They had moved it through the wilderness and eventually across the Jordan River. But now the time had come for a more permanent structure—what we now refer to as "Solomon's Temple." It had been planned for by King David, and King David had collected all of the building materials, but due to David's violence, the job was passed along to David's son, King Solomon.

**\*\*PPT\*\*** The temple itself was a rectangle—45 feet high, 100 feet long, and 30 feet wide. We will not go into all of the details about the extravagance of this building, but I will point out that the temple contained roughly 23 tons of gold. I don't know if we can really appreciate a figure of 23 tons. Yesterday I checked on the price of gold, and at this past Friday's price of \$923 an ounce, just the gold on Solomon's temple would have had a modern-day price tag of 15.6 billion US Dollars. It was a magnificent building. One thing that always strikes me as I read about the construction of the temple was that all of the materials were cut and chiseled off site, so that the construction would be virtually silent out of respect for God. The pieces were all perfectly measured, and they were simply dropped into place. I don't know about you, but most construction sites I have been on are pretty noisy. But the construction of Solomon's temple was almost completely silent. It took seven years to build.

As we come to **1 Kings 8**, **\*\*PPT\*\*** we find that the residents of Israel are all assembled around the new temple. The Ark of the Covenant is carried into the temple for the first time. The Bible says that sheep and oxen are sacrificed—more than could be numbered. Solomon blesses the people. He uses a special platform that had been designed especially for the occasion. The closest we have would be a presidential inauguration, and then we come to Solomon's prayer in **1 Kings 8:22-61**. As we look at this prayer, I would like for us to ask ourselves: What are the basic categories that Solomon includes in his prayer? And as we read, I hope we can pick up some very general ideas for the public prayers that we offer in the assembly today. If you will, please look with me at **1 Kings 8**, starting in **verse 22**. The Bible says...

***Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel and spread out his hands toward heaven. He said, "O LORD, the God of Israel, there is no God like You in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and showing lovingkindness to Your servants who walk before You with all their heart, who have kept with Your servant, my father David, that which You have promised him; indeed, You have spoken with Your mouth and have fulfilled it with Your hand as it***

***is this day. Now therefore, O LORD, the God of Israel, keep with Your servant David my father that which You have promised him, saying, 'You shall not lack a man to sit on the throne of Israel, if only your sons take heed to their way to walk before Me as you have walked.' Now therefore, O God of Israel, let Your word, I pray, be confirmed which You have spoken to Your servant, my father David. But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built! Yet have regard to the prayer of Your servant and to his supplication, O LORD my God, to listen to the cry and to the prayer which Your servant prays before You today; that Your eyes may be open toward this house night and day, toward the place of which You have said, 'My name shall be there,' to listen to the prayer which Your servant shall pray toward this place. Listen to the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place; hear in heaven Your dwelling place; hear and forgive. If a man sins against his neighbor and is made to take an oath, and he comes and takes an oath before Your altar in this house, then hear in heaven and act and judge Your servants, condemning the wicked by bringing his way on his own head and justifying the righteous by giving him according to his righteousness. When Your people Israel are defeated before an enemy, because they have sinned against You, if they turn to You again and confess Your name and pray and make supplication to You in this house, then hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of Your people Israel, and bring them back to the land which You gave to their fathers. When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain, because they have sinned against You, and they pray toward this place and confess Your name and turn from their sin when You afflict them, then hear in heaven and forgive the sin of Your servants and of Your people Israel, indeed, teach them the good way in which they should walk. And send rain on Your land, which You have given Your people for an inheritance. If there is famine in the land, if there is pestilence, if there is blight or mildew, locust or grasshopper, if their enemy besieges them in the land of their cities, whatever plague, whatever sickness there is, whatever prayer or supplication is made by any man or by all Your people Israel, each knowing the affliction of his own heart, and spreading his hands toward this house; then hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive and act and render to each according to all his ways, whose heart You know, for You alone know the hearts of all the sons of men, that they may fear You all the days that they live in the land which You have given to our fathers. Also concerning the foreigner who is not of Your people Israel, when he comes from a far country for Your name's sake (for they will hear of Your great name and Your mighty hand, and of Your outstretched***

***arm); when he comes and prays toward this house, hear in 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, to fear You, as do Your people Israel, and that they may know that this house which I have built is called by Your name. When Your people go out to battle against their enemy, by whatever way You shall send them, and they pray to the LORD toward the city which You have chosen and the house which I have built for Your name, then hear in heaven their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause. When they sin against You (for there is no man who does not sin) and You are angry with them and deliver them to an enemy, so that they take them away captive to the land of the enemy, far off or near; if they take thought in the land where they have been taken captive, and repent and make supplication to You in the land of those who have taken them captive, saying, 'We have sinned and have committed iniquity, we have acted wickedly'; if they return to You with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their enemies who have taken them captive, and pray to You toward their land which You have given to their fathers, the city which You have chosen, and the house which I have built for Your name; then hear their prayer and their supplication in heaven Your dwelling place, and maintain their cause, and forgive Your people who have sinned against You and all their transgressions which they have transgressed against You, and make them objects of compassion before those who have taken them captive, that they may have compassion on them (for they are Your people and Your inheritance which You have brought forth from Egypt, from the midst of the iron furnace), that Your eyes may be open to the supplication of Your servant and to the supplication of Your people Israel, to listen to them whenever they call to You. For You have separated them from all the peoples of the earth as Your inheritance, as You spoke through Moses Your servant, when You brought our fathers forth from Egypt, O Lord GOD."***

***When Solomon had finished praying this entire prayer and supplication to the LORD, he arose from before the altar of the LORD, from kneeling on his knees with his hands spread toward heaven. And he stood and blessed all the assembly of Israel with a loud voice, saying: "Blessed be the LORD, who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that He promised; not one word has failed of all His good promise, which He promised through Moses His servant. May the LORD our God be with us, as He was with our fathers; may He not leave us or forsake us, that He may incline our hearts to Himself, to walk in all His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His ordinances, which He commanded our fathers. And may these***

***words of mine, with which I have made supplication before the LORD, be near to the LORD our God day and night, that He may maintain the cause of His servant and the cause of His people Israel, as each day requires, so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God; there is no one else. Let your heart therefore be wholly devoted to the LORD our God, to walk in His statutes and to keep His commandments, as at this day."***

Again, as we look back over these verses, I would like for us to just briefly summarize some of the major things for which King Solomon prayed.

**I. As we look back at the opening section, we find first of all that Solomon asked that God would LISTEN TO THE PRAYERS OF HIS PEOPLE (verses 22-30). **\*\*PPT\*\*****

Throughout the passage, Solomon uses the word **"hear"** a total of 14 times. Solomon is begging, therefore, that God would listen to the prayers of His people. Solomon points out that the temple was to be a place of prayer. Certainly other things would happen in the temple. There would be sacrifices, there would be incense, there would be offerings of bread, and grain, and wine, there would be ceremonial washings. But Solomon indicates here that the temple was dedicated primarily to the act of prayer. That was the purpose of this building!

I think we start to understand a little bit better, then, the situation in **Mark 12**. You might remember that the moneychangers had taken over the outer courtyard of the temple. The Bible says that in response to this, Jesus, **"...entered the temple and began to drive out those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves; and He would not permit anyone to carry merchandise through the temple. And He began to teach and say to them, 'Is it not written, "MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL THE NATIONS"? But you have made it a ROBBERS' DEN.'** The chief priests and the scribes heard this, and began seeking how to destroy Him; for they were afraid of Him, for the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching." And so Jesus also had the correct understanding that the temple was primarily a place of prayer.

Solomon goes even further. You might have noticed in **verses 29-30** that the prayers were not only to be offered in the temple itself, but Solomon asked that God would also hear the prayers that were directed **"toward"** the temple. Even away from Jerusalem, even in foreign lands, the Israelites were to pray toward the temple, and Solomon was asking that those prayers would also be heard in heaven.

Today, of course, we no longer pray towards a certain place, but we are familiar with the practice. Those who practice Islam, for example, are in the custom of praying towards the city of Mecca. I have been in a lot of chapels in my life, and I have found more and more that chapels in various hospitals and airports will have an

arrow somewhere on the floor, pointing to Mecca in Saudi Arabia. I can't remember if there are any arrows in any of our hospitals here in Madison, but I have a feeling that it will become more and more common as hospitals are remodeled and as Islam continues to gain in popularity here in the United States.

Well, the Jews had a similar practice. Wherever they were in the world, they would pray in the direction of Jerusalem. You might remember the prophet Daniel and what happened in **Daniel 6**. Several commissioners tricked the king into signing a law making prayer to God illegal. In **Daniel 6:10**, though, the Bible says, ***"Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously."*** And so hundreds of miles away from home, Daniel continued praying toward the temple in Jerusalem.

The temple, therefore, was referred to by King Solomon as the ***"house of God."*** But even on the day it was completed, King Solomon admits that God cannot be contained in a building. Here is this building made with 23 tons of gold, but Solomon downplays the building itself and emphasizes the importance of prayer. He asked that God would listen to the prayers of His people.

Here we are 3,000 years later, and God still listens to the prayers of His people! What a blessing it is to go to God together as a congregation and to bring our concerns to God in prayer!

## **II. As we continue looking at Solomon's prayer, we also find Solomon making a request that GOD WOULD FORGIVE HIS PEOPLE. **\*\*PPT\*\*****

As I understand it, the Hebrew word for ***"plea"*** or ***"favor"*** is found seven times in Solomon's prayer—more than any other prayer in the entire Bible. Solomon was begging God for forgiveness on behalf of the nation. But we notice right away that Solomon was not asking God to lower His standards. Solomon was not asking that God would look the other way or simply ignore sinful behavior. But please notice with me that Solomon was asking that God's forgiveness would be conditional. The word ***"forgive"*** is repeated five times, and each time it is preceded by some form of repentance—some form of action on behalf of the people. In order to be forgiven, the people had to turn toward God and pray, they had to confess God's name, they had to turn from their sin, they had to turn back to God, they had to change their behavior.

On such a positive occasion, King Solomon talks about foreign armies, and captivity, and famine. He speaks of punishment for sin. He talks about neighbors having disputes. And in all of this, Solomon begs God to forgive His people. Prayer is designed for sinful people who are willing to turn away from sin. Prayer is designed for people who struggle with sin, and anger, and lust, and doubt. We learn from this public prayer in the Old Testament that prayer is designed for people like all of us here this morning—imperfect people looking for forgiveness.

The key here is that we must be willing to turn ourselves back toward God. In **Psalm 66:18**, Solomon's father David said, **"If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear."** Later on, Solomon himself would make a similar statement in **Proverbs 28:9**, **"He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, even his prayer is an abomination."** And so Solomon takes it to the next level—if we ignore God's law, our prayers will actually be offensive to God. Most of us have cell phones, and we know how irritating it is to be talking with someone and we get cut off. We look at the phone and it says, "Signal faded—call lost." Our prayers are like that when we stubbornly hold on to some sin in our lives, "Signal faded—call lost." Solomon, therefore, is extremely clear: He wants God to forgive His people, but Solomon understands that our hearts must be willing to change.

Over in the New Testament, we must also turn away from sin. In **1 John 1:7**, the Bible says that, **"...if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin."** Think for a moment about how good it feels to come in from mowing the yard in the summer to take a shower and put on some clean clothes—how refreshing that is! God can give that same sense of relief when a Christian sins and turns away from that sin, confessing it to God in prayer. We do not justify our sins. We do not explain away our sins. We do not blame somebody else for what we have done. But we admit to transgressing God's law, we recommit to pressing on, and God cleanses us from that sin. As Paul puts it in **Romans 6:14**, once we obey the gospel, **"...sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace."** We have been **"freed from sin"** and have **"become slaves of righteousness"** (**Romans 6:18**).

**III. As we come near the end of our lesson on public prayer, I'd like for us to focus in on one little part of this prayer that looks ahead to the future, as Solomon makes a special request that God would HEAR THE FOREIGNERS. **\*\*PPT\*\*****

This very special request is found in **verses 41-43**. It is interesting that this request comes from Solomon, because we remember that King Solomon's great-grandmother was an interesting foreign woman by the name of Ruth. Ruth was a Moabite—not an Israelite. And so King Solomon was asking God to remember those who were not Jews and to listen to their prayers.

We may be tempted to overlook it, but God has always loved foreigners. In the Law of Moses, the Israelites were specifically commanded not to mistreat the foreigners, because the Israelites had been foreigners themselves in the land of Egypt. Over and over again in the Law of Moses, the Israelites were told to uphold justice for the foreigners. They were told to leave food in the fields for the foreigners, and so on.

God had a special relationship with the people of Israel, but God also loves people of all nations, and He listens to the prayers of anyone who fears God. Under the New Covenant, many things have changed, but one thing that has remained the same is God's love for all people. As brother Jerry Jenkins said when he spoke here several

years ago, "You have never looked into the eyes of anyone who does not matter to God." That is a very true statement! As we find in **1 Timothy 2:4**, God, "***...desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.***"

In the New Testament, we remember how Cornelius prayed to God, and God answered that prayer by sending Peter to preach the gospel. In the same way, God is still concerned about people outside the Lord's church who may be searching for the truth.

### **Conclusion & Invitation:**

This morning we have looked together at one of the most significant public prayers ever recorded for us in the Bible. As we start looking at the acts of worship, certainly prayer is a very important aspect of what we do when we come together as a congregation. And in many ways, Solomon's prayer has some important lessons for the prayers that we offer even today.

- We have learned from Solomon's prayer that in spite of God being so incredibly powerful, He is still willing to listen to His people. This was true 3,000 years ago, and it continues to be true even today. We need to appreciate the blessing of being able to approach God as a congregation.
- We have learned that in spite of our weaknesses, God is still willing to listen to His people. When we sin, those of us as Christians have the ability to turn away from those sins as we ask God for forgiveness. We need to praise God for hearing our appeals for forgiveness.
- And finally, we have learned that God has always had a special place in His heart for those on the outside.

In fact, God loves the world so much that He gave His only begotten Son as a sacrifice for sin. We accept that sacrifice by turning away from sin and allowing ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins. At that point, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, and we are added to the family of God. If you have any questions, we would be glad to study the Scriptures with you. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now you can let us know by coming to the front as we sing the next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: [church@fourlakescoc.org](mailto:church@fourlakescoc.org)