

1 Kings 9:1-9

The LORD Appears to Solomon

9 When Solomon had finished building the temple of the LORD and the royal palace, and had achieved all he had desired to do, ² the LORD appeared to him a second time, as he had appeared to him at Gibeon. ³ The LORD said to him:

"I have heard the prayer and plea you have made before me; I have consecrated this temple, which you have built, by putting my Name there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there.

⁴ "As for you, if you walk before me faithfully with integrity of heart and uprightness, as David your father did, and do all I command and observe my decrees and laws, ⁵ I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father when I said, 'You shall never fail to have a successor on the throne of Israel.'

⁶ "But if you or your descendants turn away from me and do not observe the commands and decrees I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them, ⁷ then I will cut off Israel from the land I have given them and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name. Israel will then become a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples. ⁸ This temple will become a heap of rubble. All who pass by will be appalled and will scoff and say, 'Why has the LORD done such a thing to this land and to this temple?' ⁹ People will answer, 'Because they have forsaken the LORD their God, who brought their ancestors out of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, worshiping and serving them—that is why the LORD brought all this disaster on them.'"

1 Corinthians 10:11-13

¹¹ These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come. ¹² So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! ¹³ No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

Sermon “The Lord Appears to Solomon”

7-Nov-21

(Geoff Davidson)

Intro

I don't know how many of you have attended a dedication of a Church, a Presbyterian Church, as it is dedicated as a Place of Worship. I have, when we dedicated the previous Anglican Sunday School Hall in Tumut to be then known as St Andrews Presbyterian Church. In keeping with our Reformed traditions, it was a modest affair. Just prior to the appointed time for the service to commence, the doors were locked. The Moderator of Presbytery then knocked on the door. Once his bona fides were established, the Session Clerk allowed him entry. There were individual blessings of the main fittings – the pulpit, the lectern, the baptismal font, the Communion table and the organ. There was a Narration of Steps leading to this service, prayers, the singing of appropriate hymns & readings of the Word from the Old and New Testament. The sermon was in the form of a Charge to the Congregation. All done and dusted within the traditional service time of an hour or so. There certainly were no ritual sacrifices as Rev Paul told us about last week during the dedication of the Temple on Mt. Moriah in Jerusalem. The celebration in Tumut was the usual afternoon tea put on by the PWA ladies.

Context (1 Kings 9:1-2)

We were all home well in time for the evening meal. The service most certainly did not last for 2 weeks – 14 days. Seven days times two as was the dedication of the Temple.

So, you could imagine the elation, the euphoria, in the completion of this edifice and its dedication over an extended period of time.

And so, as the Temple was dedicated in Jerusalem, the successful end of a great work could well be the beginning of a great reaction. When the tension is slackened, the whole nature of the worker is relaxed, and the temptation to slothful self-indulgence is strong. God knows our frame, and mercifully times His manifestations to the moments of special need. So, when Solomon had finished his great task, 'the Lord appeared the second time, as He had appeared at Gibeon.' Gibeon was a town just north of Jerusalem, It's still there but is called Al-Jib. There had been no manifest token of approval during all the years of building the Temple, for none was needed; but now there was danger that the finished work might be followed by languor and indifference, and therefore once more God spoke words of stimulus, both promises and warnings.

God's Warning (1 Kings 9:3-9)

A solemn alternative is set before the king, both parts of which are fitted to rouse his energy and inspire him to faithful obedience. The same alternatives are presented to each of us. In 1 Kings 9:3-5 God promises blessed results from clinging to Him and keeping His statutes; in 1 Kings 9:6-9 He mercifully threatens the tragic issues of departure. In applying these to ourselves we must remember that outward prosperity was attached to a devout life more closely in Israel than it is now. But, though the form of the blessings dependent on doing God's will alters, the reality remains unaltered.

The promises to Solomon are preceded by the assurance that his prayer had been heard.

The answer corresponds beautifully to the petitions. God has 'put His name' in the Temple, as the descent of the Glory to rest between the cherubim visibly showed, and thus has fulfilled Solomon's petition; but the answer surpasses the prayer in that the presence of 'the Name' is promised 'for ever.' Similarly, in Psalm 132, the answer to the petition 'Arise Lord and come into your resting place' transcends the petition which it answers, and adds the same promise of perpetuity, 'This is My rest for ever.' Again, Solomon had prayed, 'that Your eyes may be open towards this house,' and God answers with the expanded promise that not His eyes only, but His heart shall be there perpetually.

He is 'able to do abundantly above all that we ask or think,' and He delights to surprise us with over-answers to our prayers. We cannot widen our desires so far but that His gifts will stretch beyond them on every side.

But the promise of perpetual dwelling in the Temple is conditional, as appears in the latter part of God's answer, though no condition is stated at first. The promises to Solomon individually are all contingent. The all-important 'if' at the beginning of verse 4 governs the whole. The divine eulogy on David, which introduces these promises, suggests how mercifully God regards the imperfect lives of His servants. That merciful interpretation of conduct is removed by a whole universe from relieving from the symptoms of sin. It affords no ground for our thinking little of our inconsistencies. David's crime was sternly rebuked and sorely punished, but still his life, in its main drift and outline, could be presented as a pattern, as being marked by integrity of heart and uprightness. Consider the word picture of the moon shining like a disc of silver, though its surface is pitted with extinct volcanoes.

We may note, too, the pregnant description in outline of the elements of a devout life, as here enjoined on Solomon. The first requisite is to walk before God; that is, to nourish a continual consciousness of His presence, and to regulate all actions and thoughts under the thrilling and purifying sense of being 'ever in the great Taskmaster's eye.' Only we are not to think of Him as only a Taskmaster, but as a loving Friend and Helper. A child is happy in its little work or play when it knows that its father is looking on with sympathy. The sense of God's eye being on us should 'make a sunshine in a shady place,' should lighten labour and sweeten care. It is at the root of practical obedience, as its place in this sequence shows; for there follows it, in verse 4, 'integrity of heart and uprightness,' on which again follow obedience to all God's commandments.

First must come the clear recognition of God's relation to us. That recognition will influence our relation to Him, bending hearts to love and wills to submit, and the whole inward being to cleave to Him. Then, and only then, will issue in the life the streams of practical obedience. It is vain to seek to produce righteous deeds unless our hearts are right, and it is as vain to labour at making our hearts right unless thoughts of what God is to us have purified them. Morality is rooted in religion. On the other hand, no knowledge of the truth about God is worth anything unless it touches the hidden man of the heart, and then passes outward to mould conduct. 'Faith without works is dead.'

Correct theology and glowing emotions lack their consummation if they do not impel to holy and God-pleasing living.

The reward promised in verse 5 is for Solomon alone. His throne is to be 'established for ever.' The duration intended by that expression is therefore not absolutely unlimited, but equivalent to 'during thy lifetime.' Solomon could only affect himself by his obedience.

The continuance of the kingdom after him depended on his successors. His possession of the throne during his life was the beginning of the fulfilment of the promise to David referred to in verse 5, but it was only the beginning, and, like all God's promises, it was contingent on obedience.

We receive no outward kingdom if we are servants of God; but, in deepest truth, the righteous man is a king, 'lord of himself, though not of lands.' All creatures serve the soul that serves God, and all Christ's brethren share in His royalty.

The second part of this divine utterance is addressed to the whole nation, as is marked by the 'you' in verse 4, and it lays down for succeeding generations the conditions on which the new Temple, that stood glittering in the bright Eastern sunshine, should retain its pristine beauty. While the address to Solomon incited to obedience by painting its blessed consequences, that to the nation reaches the same end by the opposite path of darkly portraying the ruin that would be caused by departure from God. God draws by holding out a hand full of good things, and He no less lovingly drives by stretching out a hand armed with lightnings.

A plain declaration of the evils that dog disobedience is as loving as a bright vision of the good that attends on submission. The sternest threatening of Scripture is spoken that they may never need to be executed. There is no more foolish misconception of Christianity than that which calls it harsh because it reveals that 'the wages of sin is death.' Note that the threatening comes second, not first. God's heart is averse to smite. To lavish blessing is His delight, and judgment is 'His work, His strange work,' forced on Him by sin.

The special sin against which Israel was warned was that to which it was especially prone and tempted by its circumstances. When all the nations 'worshipped stocks and stones,' it was hard to 'keep thy faith so pure' as to have no share in the universal bewitchment. So, the whole history of the people is one of lapses into idolatry and of chastisements leading to temporary amendment, until the long, sharp lesson of the Captivity eradicated the disposition to be as the nations around. No doubt, idolatry in its crudest forms is outgrown now in Western lands, but sense still craves material embodiment of the unseen, and still feels the pressure of the material and palpable. Hence the earthward direction of so many lives. People who suffer from asthma often breathe more easily in the slums of a city than in pure mountain air, and sense-bound men find difficulty in respiration on the heights of a religion which minimises the appeal to sense.

The penalty attached to departure from God was the loss of the land. Israel kept it on a tenure like that of some of English nobility in past times, who held their estates on condition of doing some service to the sovereign. Of course, that connection between

servicing God and national prosperity involved continual supernatural intervention and cannot be applied entirely to national prosperity now; but it still remains true that moral and religious corruption saps the foundations of a people's well-being, and, when carried far enough, destroys a people's existence. The solemn threat of becoming 'a proverb and a byword' among all peoples is quoted, apparently from Deuteronomy 28:37, and has been only too terribly fulfilled for weary centuries.

The promise in verse 3, that God's eyes and heart should be perpetually on the Temple, has now the condition attached that Israel should cleave to the Lord. Otherwise, it will be cast out of His sight, and be a mark for scorn and wonder. The vivid representation of a dialogue between passers-by is quoted from Deuteronomy 29:24-26, where it is spoken in reference to the nation.

It carries the solemn thought that God's name is made known among the heathen by the punishment of His unfaithful people, not less really, and sometimes more strikingly, than by the blessings bestowed on the obedient. If we will not magnify Him by joyous service, by rewarding which, with good He can magnify Himself, He will magnify Himself on us by retribution, the more severe as our blessings have been the greater.

The lightning-scathed tree, standing white in the forest, witnesses to the power of the flash, as its leafy sisters in their green beauty proclaim the energy of the sunshine. Israel has, perhaps, been a more convincing witness for God, in its homeless centuries, than ever it was when at rest in the good land. 'If God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee.'

The successful end of a great work is often the beginning of a great reaction. When the tension is slackened, the whole nature of the worker is relaxed, and the temptation to slothful self-indulgence is strong. God knows our frame, and mercifully times His manifestations to the moments of special need. So, when Solomon had finished his great task, 'the Lord appeared the second time, as He had appeared at Gibeon.' There had been no manifest token of approval during all the years of building the Temple, for none was needed; but now there was danger that the finished work might be followed by languor and indifference, and therefore once more God spoke words of stimulus, both promises and warnings.

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God's way out for us (1 Corinthians 10:11-13)

And so, we come to our New Testament reading from 1 Corinthians where Paul is confirming/reinforcing why these warnings are in the Bible but even if we are tempted, that temptation is not just for us alone but that it is common to all mankind. We can

take heart though, that God will provide a way out for us, even if we are tested but, but not beyond our means to endure.

Amen