



Conversation with God – Part 9
1 Kings 9:1-3
GCSP – 01/31/2009

I received a call from Max Van Gundy this morning. She wanted to go over some issues concerning JCCA and the schedule for the Community Center this coming year. At this point there are three requests for the use of this building on Saturday evenings: One in April, one in September, and one in December. I told her we would be happy to make the necessary accommodations in April, but if all continues to go well and the Lord blesses, we would be out of this building by the time the dates in September and December rolled around.

There are some very poignant aspects of the passage of Scripture we will study tonight. The passage deals with the prayer of Solomon and the Lord's response at the dedication of the Temple. We are on the verge of seeing a church building going up this spring and summer, and we will obviously have a dedication service at some point soon. The example we have before us in the passage we will take a look at in a moment has given me pause to think about what applies to us today.

God provided the land that the Temple was being built on. The construction of the Temple was in essence paid for by God as people and nations outside of Israel contributed massive amounts of building material and money for the project. Israel obviously had a part but the majority came from outside sources.

The Temple and the palace took about twenty years to complete and it appears that they waited eleven months after its completion before they brought the Ark of the Covenant in and held this dedication. They did this to coincide the timing with the Feast of Tabernacles and to also spend the proper amount of time to plan and prepare for this auspicious occasion.

The people of Israel were laying in store additional offerings, above their normal tithes and offerings, to present at the opening of the Temple. 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep were brought in among other offerings. They not only observed the seven day Feast of Tabernacles but they extended the feast for another seven days; the people were so thankful, joyful and excited, seven days wasn't enough to express all that their hearts contained.

The focus of this story that I want us to study tonight is the beginning of God's response to Solomon in a second visitation from the Lord when the celebration was complete.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **1 Kings**. I am going to read a lengthy passage so focus your minds and follow along as best you can.

1 Kings 8:22-9:3

Let's pray.

We will spend our time tonight primarily in **9:2-3**, but I thought it was important for you to get a sense of the whole scene in order to get the full magnitude of God's response.

If we were to go back to **1 Kings 3:3-14** we would see the first prayer and visitation of the Lord to Solomon; which happened in a dream. This visitation from the Lord was in essence the dedication of Solomon. God came and blessed the king with wisdom and understanding that no man has ever had or ever will have again. God also blessed Solomon with great wealth and honor such that no king in history would ever match. God also put a conditional blessing on the length of Solomon's days based on his obedience to Word of the Lord.

How important is it to have a visitation from the Lord, a word from God, at the beginning of a great work or ministry? Is anything more important? How do you proceed without such a visitation?

Far too many ministries and churches have closed their doors and failed miserably because of a lack of having a word from the Lord. Man may make a plan, and have a desire to do great things, but if there was no visitation from the Lord why is the work moving forward? What chance is there for this work to succeed apart from the Lord's leading and blessing?

God may indeed eventually bless a ministry started apart from His leading, but the road to that blessing will be littered with heartache and turmoil. And the blessing will come many years or even decades after the fact, if it comes at all. Why do men do this? Why do they allow their own minds to run loose and deceive themselves into thinking God will bless their efforts? Couldn't we truthfully say that all plans made apart from the Lord's leading have within them a desire to grab some, if not all, of the glory away from God upon completion? So what are the chances that God would bless that?

It is vitally important that we have a visitation from God before we embark upon anything. I can vividly remember the Lord paving the way for the beginning of Grace Church, I remember His leading when we started considering finding a plot of land to purchase, and I remember His leading when we began to discuss a building. Each time we in essence came to God on our knees with open hands and outstretched arms, representing that we had no resources on our own and were fully surrendered to and dependent upon Him if anything was going to be accomplished.

There were a few times we got in the way over the years, and it is a struggle to remain out of the way at times, but God's plans always prevail as we yield to Him. Since the purchase of the car, our church finances have been very tight. We have funds for the building project and funds for benevolence, but the general funds are lacking right now. The tendency in times like these is to totally clamp down on every expenditure and start figuring out how we can take care of this. This could be a time where we get in God's way, but thank the Lord at our meeting on Monday morning, the answer finally got around to just bringing the issue to the Lord in prayer; He has provided for this church at every turn and there is no reason for us to start fretting over His provision now.

Now, if this church and this building project were man's idea and we were doing everything according to our own plans and timetable, then we would have great reason to be worried. You can't purchase a vehicle, put up a building, and expect to be able to

pay for the added expenses that a building entails with this few church members and in this economy. Apart from a visitation from God the answer is, of course not.

But this is not man's plan; this is God's plan. And what God ordains, God sustains and maintains. If it is God's plan then another Great Depression would not stop the plan from being completed. If it is God's plan the finances will always be in place to take care of every need. If it is God's plan He will place it upon the hearts of His people to do everything that is necessary to accomplish what is on His heart.

So it is a vital and important blessing to have a visitation from the Lord at the beginning of a great work. But it is just as vital and important to have a second visitation at the completion of that work; and it may even be more vitally important. In our humanness there can be a natural letdown and a dangerous relaxing of the guard, so to speak. We see this vividly in the life of Elijah after he defeated the 450 prophets of Baal and in the next breath see him running away from one woman and desiring for his life to be over.

We desperately need those second and third and fourth visitations from the Lord to remain on course, and to have new direction and purpose for the continued work ahead.

v. 2-3a

The place to pray is clearly before the Lord. And while that may seem obvious I believe far too often we are not before the Lord when we pray.

The gospels are full of references of the Pharisees going to the Temple to pray. The Temple was a very appropriate place to go to pray. In Solomon's prayer he repeatedly requested that the Lord honor the prayers of those who came to or turned to the Temple to pray. So obviously coming before the Lord is more than just a physical place. Even in the most holy of places the Pharisees did not come before the Lord when they prayed.

When we gather in this building or when we are gathered at the new church building later this year, it does not guarantee that we will be before God when we pray. A church doesn't bring you before God any more than the Temple brought the Pharisees before God. If you are ever privileged enough to visit the Holy Land and had opportunity to pray at the very place where Jesus' cross was placed, or if you were able to kneel in the Garden of Gethsemane at the very spot where Jesus wrestled with God in prayer, or if you could find the location of the house where tongues of fire descended upon the 120 disciples on the Day of Pentecost and pray there, it would not necessarily mean you were praying before God.

Sometimes the nearer you are to church the farther you could be from God. Some view church as a crutch. Some see attending church as fulfilling their obligation to God. You could be in the very center of a prayer meeting or have joined hands with us this evening and not be before God. Do not misinterpret what I am saying, Scripture is abundantly clear that you need to be gathering together with the church; there is no out or exception to the commands of scripture in that regard, but being in church does not necessarily put you in the proper place of posture to be before God when you pray.

Psalm 62:8, says, "**Pour out your heart before Him.**" It doesn't tell us to find the right geographic location or the proper time or even the proper posture, it just tells us to make sure we are before Him when we pour out our hearts.

Solomon's prayer was before God and it was in the midst of a great multitude of people. Solomon's posture was on his knees with hands held high. I am almost angry that I was raised in a church that discouraged me from lifting my hands to the Lord in worship and prayer. I don't want my lifting of hands to be a show or to be because other people are doing so but I hate the fact that I am on occasion not raising my hands because of what I perceive others might think of me. It grieves me that there is some sort of stigma of being too Charismatic or too Pentecostal or too whatever, simply due to raising your hands in worship and surrender to the Lord. When a police officer tells a criminal to raise his hands in the air isn't it a sign of surrender? How much more are we to surrender to God?

This was Solomon's example of being before God in his prayer. But don't miss the point that Solomon was not attempting to impress the people. The Bible doesn't say Solomon prayed before the people, but before the altar and before God in the presence of the people. Once the prayer began, Solomon was talking to God one-on-one. Solomon was before the Lord and the people were to follow his example. We need to understand the importance of being seen by God when praying in the presence of others. Public prayer is important and commended but it still must be a prayer before God and not before men.

Public prayer can be difficult at times. Many, myself included, drift off into preaching instead of praying when we are in a public setting. Some try to impress others when praying in public. The throne of grace is no place for an exhibition of your abilities and eloquence; it's not a place to reveal the depth of your biblical knowledge or brag on how spiritual you are. Public prayer is not the place for confronting someone else's sin. Our public prayer should follow the example of the Psalmist who says, "**O Lord, open my lips, that my mouth may declare Your praise**" (**Psalm 51:15**).

Even though Solomon's example of praying before the Lord is in public, it is probably easier for most of us to come before the Lord in private; although even then it is so very easy to miss it.

Perhaps you are familiar with this scene: Your mouth is repeating spiritual words and your mind and heart is wandering. Your prayers are almost on auto-pilot as you work your way through the checklist of people and things you feel you should be praying about, but your thoughts are on other things. You might as well just be honest about and say, "Lord, just remember the things I prayed about on the few occasions when I was truly before you." Because when our hearts and minds are not focused on the Lord and truly engaged in the issues we are bringing to Him, we are praying before the wall in front of us and not before the Lord.

All too often we pray in our own presence and not in the Lord's presence. Pouring your heart out into your own heart doesn't do much good. It is neither an emptying of yourself nor is it a filling of God. It only stirs up stuff that should be left settled. Pouring out your heart and soul should be followed by the Lord then filling your heart and soul,

but that will not be accomplished if the pouring is not happening before the Lord. If your requests are not before the Lord it is like taking your grocery list with you to the top of Kenosha Pass; you aren't going to come home with groceries.

The main point of prayers and supplications is not to pray in the presence of others or in your own presence but to present your prayers in the presence of the Lord.

This means that our prayers must be directed to God. That sounds so simple and obvious doesn't it? But our prayers are far too often like the little boy with a bow and arrow set who starts shooting his quiver of arrows in any and all directions. Our prayers should be the arrow on the string and that string drawn, but waiting, waiting, waiting until our eyes are fixed on the target before letting it fly. We must wait until we can clearly see the center of the mark. Why let go of the string if there is no target in view? Why would a pilot in battle empty his arsenal before he acquires the target?

David says in **Psalm 5:3**, "**In the morning I will direct my prayer to unto Thee, and will look up**" (KJV).

We must realize the presence of God just as we realize the presence of a close friend in the same room with us. If you speak to God as one you cannot feel with your hands but can feel with all your heart and all that is within you, knowing that He hears you and will reward your seeking, this is praying in God's presence. This is praying to the living God! This is praying to the One who willing and able to supply all of your need! This praying before the Lord!

I don't know what your goal is when you pray, but the primary goal should be what we read again in **verse 3**: "**The Lord said to him, 'I have heard your prayer and your supplication.'**"

As we studied last week, part of our duty in intercessory prayer is to pray on behalf of those that God does not hear. At times that means we will be praying on behalf of other Christian brothers and sisters in this regard. If they are not before the Lord and if they are not truly in the Lord's presence they are not heard. We err if we think all prayers are heard. There will be times, as we have already studied, when a prayer is heard but remains unanswered for the time being, but that is completely different from the prayer that is not heard.

Pharisees are not heard. Today's Pharisees are the religious people of this world who do not have a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ; meaning unbelievers. Today's Pharisees are also people who may indeed be genuinely saved but who have never developed a close walk with the Lord. They just go through the motions of attending church, giving a portion of their income, and keeping up appearances. They are still hanging onto control instead of surrendering their all to the Lord. They are more comfortable with tradition and ceremony instead of dancing before the Lord like King David. They prefer keeping the Holy Spirit at a distance. I trust you get the picture. Pharisees are not heard.

At times, there is a little Pharisee in all of us. When someone isn't fitting into our view of what a Christian looks like and acts like in the church service, the Pharisee in us is

making an appearance. When people do things you don't like and it bothers you, the Pharisee in you is coming out. We have to suppress the Pharisee within us if we want our prayers to be heard.

And why pray if you aren't going to be heard? If you take the time to go through the Psalms you will find that the majority of the time the petition is for the Lord to hear the cries more so than the Lord giving an answer. We should obviously expect answers as we have studied on more than one occasion in this series, but the point is that we serve such a mighty God that knowing the prayer is in His hands is enough. Knowing that God has your petition is enough to remove the fear and lift the soul. You can be content by simply coming into His presence and leaving your petitions and supplications at His feet.

What joy and peace would resonate through your soul if every time you came before the Lord you heard the voice of God say, "**I have heard your prayer and your supplication**"? The sad fact is, many Christians don't have that joy and peace. They are either not coming before the Lord as they should or they have been deceived into believing that God only answers prayer once in a while, or when the prayer is offered up in the proper way, at the proper time, with the proper words, etc. They missed the command to come boldly before the throne of grace, having complete confidence in the God who sits on the mercy seat.

v. 3b

After being heard we must have a desire to be answered, don't we? The rest of **verse 3**, and on through **verse 9** shows us that God had answered Solomon. We must understand what we have already studied that the prayers offered up in accordance with God's Word are always answered; and we must know that even Jesus prayed, "**Not My will but Yours be done**", but if your goal in prayer doesn't include receiving an answer, then again, why are you bothering to pray in the first place?

Beloved, this is pretty basic and simple stuff, but I believe it is grossly overlooked and taken for granted. When you pray, come before the Lord, not before men or before yourself. When you pray make sure your prayers are directed to the Lord. When you pray, be certain that you are in the Lord's presence so that your prayers are heard. And finally, expect an answer.

God says to Solomon in answer to his prayer, "**I have consecrated this house which you have built by putting My name there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually.**"

As the building goes up across the highway this summer, is there anything we could ask for better than that?

Let us all study the example of Solomon and pray toward that end.

Let's pray.