2 Chronicles 7:11 - 16 God speaks to Solomon 2: God says 'Seek my face'
(31.07.11pm)

There are great men of history who're remembered for what they built, lasting reminders and monuments to how great or inventive they were.

So we remember Stephenson for his Rocket steam engine; Isenbard Kingdom Brunel for his bridges; Eiffel for his Tower; Sir Christopher Wren for St Paul's Cathedral; and Sydney for his Opera House! We remember Solomon for his Temple, built as a permanent place to meet with God in Jerusalem.

Solomon became King of Israel about 1000 years before Christ was born, and this morning we looked at an encounter he had with God just after he'd become **king**, before he built the temple.

This evening we're going to read about a **second** time God appeared to Solomon, this time **after** he built the temple. We find it recorded in 2 Chronicles chapter 7. [Page 442 of church Bibles] We're going to read up to verse 16, and I want us to focus **particularly** on verses 11-16.

Firstly, God's presence is central to our lives:
Solomon has become king, you'll remember, after his father – King David. Something David had wanted to do for God, but which God planned for **Solomon** to do, was to build a Temple. And we read about this in chapters 2 – 6. It must have been a great building, all of Israel seemed well pleased with it, and at the beginning of chapter 7, we find that **God** is pleased too, we read in verse 1, *'When Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices and the glory of the Lord filled the temple,'* showing that God was pleased with their dedication and their sacrifices, and that he was pleased for the temple to be the place where people could meet him and worship him.

And so after the dedication of the temple, verse 10 tells us that *'On the 23rd day of the 7th month,* [Solomon] *sent the people to their homes, joyful and glad in heart for the good things the Lord had done for David and Solomon and for his people Israel.'*

So there are 6 whole chapters given over to the temple – its building, furnishings and dedication to God. And they go into a lot of detail, a **sixth** of the whole book of 2 Chronicles. So this temple is a very important place. Solomon wants it at the centre of his **reign**, at the centre of his **city**, at the centre of **his** life and the lives of his people.

The temple in Old Testament times was the place where the people of Israel met with God, offered sacrifices to him and worshipped him. And throughout the history of God's people we see that when they have God at the very **centre** of their lives, they prosper. God needs to be, **has** to be at the centre of our lives. We prosper, that means we live the lives we were created for, when we live in relationship with God, when he is pleased to live with us.

So many people's lives go wrong because God is not at the centre, when he only plays a supporting role with us as the main character. **We** want all the spotlight. **We** want all the esteem. Human nature says, 'I am what I am because of what **I** have achieved. I don't **need** God to be in control.' The Bible calls that **foolishness**. To live without God as Lord in my life is **foolishness**. Why? Because if you reject God in **this** life, you will be rejected by God in **eternity**.

It's **foolishness** because people like this are enjoying this world's pleasures which will only last a short time. **God** wants you to live a life of heavenly riches **forever**. Paul praises God in his letter to the Ephesian church. He says, *'Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with **every** spiritual blessing in Christ.'* Ephesians 1:3. Isn't it **foolishness** to reject every spiritual blessing in heaven for a bit of pleasure **now**? **I** think so. The **Bible** says so. I hope you agree.

Ask the prodigal son of Luke 15: he asked for his inheritance early, spent it enjoying everything the world could give; but the money ran out, his friends ran off, and his life ran down the drain; ask **him** where the better place was – he came to his senses, the Bible says, he knew he had to be with his **father**. And we need our **heavenly** Father at the centre of our lives – anything else is utter **foolishness**. We play a very dangerous game, if we push God to one side, a **very** dangerous game with **eternal** consequences. Think about it. Think **seriously** about it.

So the centrality of the temple, and therefore the presence of God was **vital** to God's people. That's why so much space is given here to its building and dedication.

What about in the New Testament? What about the temple in Jesus' time? What about now?

Jesus goes into the temple area, he's angry at what's happening there; people are selling animals and exchanging money, and Jesus drives them out saying, *'How dare you turn my Father's house into a market?!'* Instead of a house of prayer, they'd turned it into a den of robbers.

When the Jews ask him for a miraculous sign to show his authority to **do** this, he said, *'Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days.'*

The explanation of this is that Jesus was talking about his **body**. Jesus **himself** is the new temple. **Jesus** is where we meet God. **Jesus** is where we find reconciliation with God. God has to be **central** in our lives through a vital relationship with Jesus his son, who died and rose again three days later. We meet God through **Jesus**, the one who loved us and gave himself for us. The temple of the Old Testament is a symbol of the One through whom God will bring **salvation** in the New Testament, Jesus.

So the centrality of **Jesus**, and through him the presence of God is **vital** to God's people. Vital to you and me. That's why so much space is given in the Bible to our need to be right with God. It's **vital**.

But as I said earlier, I want us to concentrate on verses 11-16, where we read of how God appeared to Solomon one night. So **secondly** this evening, **what do we learn from these verses about God?**

In verse 12 we read, *'the Lord appeared to him* [Solomon] *at night and said:'* We have to see that **whatever** is done for God's glory and to fulfil his purposes is initiated by God **himself**. God takes the initiative. Everything that is good and is for **our** good, starts with God himself.

We don't work it up, we don't do something good for God which takes him by surprise; he **initiates** every good work. God planned for **Solomon** to build the temple, not David; we saw this morning that God gave Solomon a heart which was right with God and wanted to do God's will, which caused him to ask for wisdom and not riches; God provided all Solomon needed to build the temple; the Lord appeared to Solomon at night. God takes the initiative.

We can love God, but only because he loved us **first**. We **can** speak to God, but only because he spoke to us first. God says 'Come'; we say 'I come' in response. Solomon dedicates the temple to God, but as we read in verse 13 this is **only** because God has chosen this place **already** for himself. God took the initiative, God chose Solomon and God chose this place, the temple. Solomon was dedicating this temple, but only because as we read in verse 16 God says, *'I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my Name may be there for ever.'*

Why are you here this evening? You may say, 'Well I want to hear God's word explained.' Perhaps you may say, 'I like singing those songs – it makes me feel good and right with God.' Or you may say, 'I really like being with God's people – they really show love, they're so nice.' You might **even** say, 'Because I was told I've **got** to come.'!

Let me tell you, whatever reason **you** thought you're here for, the **real** reason you're here is because God has taken the initiative. God has **drawn** you here this evening. God has **spoken** to you in one way or another. **God** wants you here and so he's made sure you're here. It's not by chance. Nobody forced you to come. God has taken the first step, he's **chosen** for you to be here. God says it's for your **good** that you're here. **He's** taken the initiative. Do you recognise that?

God speaks. The Lord appeared to Solomon that night and said these things to him. God spoke to people in Old Testament times, appearing to them physically at times and with audible words. Of course in those days they didn't have the Bible and Explore Bible Notes and all the helpful commentaries that we have. God speaks today, maybe through the written word, maybe through our consciences, maybe through Christian friends. But God **speaks** – he communicates his gospel message to us today. He invites us to come into a relationship with him. That's what he's saying **today**, to you and me, just like he was saying it to Solomon 3000 years ago.

God hears. The Lord says to Solomon in verse 12, *'I have heard your prayer'*; In verse 14 he says, *'then will I hear from heaven'*; in verse 15 he says, *'my ears will be attentive to the prayers offered in this place.'* God **hears**. He isn't distant, he hasn't separated himself from us, he's not hidden himself away from us. He wants to be vitally connected with us, and as the song goes, 'he's only a prayer away.' He **hears** – he longs to hear his **people**, those who he's called by name, those he's chosen for himself, he longs to hear them. And he **does**. He listens to us.

David says in Psalm 94, *'Does he who implanted the ear not hear? Does he who formed the eye not see?'* What a ridiculous thought. He created man and woman in his own image; he gave us ears and eyes. Of course he hears. Of course he sees.

God speaks. God hears. God sees. Verse 15 again, *'Now my eyes will be open …'* God sees everything. His eyes are open. In another Psalm David says that God neither slumbers nor sleeps, he is always awake and he sees all that's going on both outwardly and inwardly. He sees your **actions**, he sees your **difficulties**, he sees your **successes**; but he also sees your **thoughts**, your **motivations**, what's going on in your **heart**. So it's a **blessing**, but it's also a warning. God sees.

For me it's an encouragement, because God sees me, sees what I'm going through, sees how **weak** I am, sees how rebellious and **neglectful** I am sometimes. And he still loves me. God sees the good and the bad; the times when I walk with him and the times when I get distracted. And still he cares for me like a shepherd cares for all his sheep, even the one that wanders off for a while. God sees.

'Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive,' God says. *'My eyes and my **heart** will always be there.'* What does he mean when he talks about his heart? If you read through the Bible you'll **discover** the heart of God. You will find that God is love. Everything about God is love. Everything he does is love. He sent his son Jesus in love. Jesus died on the cross in love. In love God draws people to himself through faith in Jesus. This is the heart of God.

Psalm 103 contains these words: *'The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.'* The heart of God. *'For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.'* Such great love. The heart of God.

God is love. He can't stop **loving**. That would be to go against his very nature. He can't stop loving **you**. He wants you in a relationship with himself. He doesn't want **any** to die and live without him for eternity. He's speaking to **you**. He hears what **you** say and pray. He sees where **you** stand. He knows **you**. And his heart reaches **out** to you. And he'll **go on** reaching out to you, because God never changes. In the Old Testament he is called 'I am', because he is, always has been and always will be. He'll **never** change, he's the same yesterday, today and forever.

God's speaking to you. He's listening to you. He's watching over you. His heart of love's reaching out to you. **Even** now. What's your response? Are you responding at all? Are you rejecting him?

We have to look at verse 14 to find **what God requires of us** - and this is our **third** point this evening – what should our **response** be to God? Let's read verse 14 again: *'if my people, who are called by my name, will 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 heal their land.'*

At the end of verse 13 and at the beginning of verse 14, God speaks about his people. In Old Testament times, of course, his people were one nation in one particular area of the world, and so when verse 14 says 'I will heal their land', it was perhaps easier to apply that to the one nation which was God's people.

Today, of course, God's people are a world-wide family, and so there's not one particular nation of the world which would be referred to as the land of God's people. We could of course say that the whole **world** belongs to God and so the world also belongs to God's **people** and so the application of this verse is universal.

But do notice, God is talking about his own people here, and I will remind you of this later.

There may be someone here who says, *'Well, I'm not a Christian, so this doesn't refer to **me**.'* Well, before you go off to sleep, you don't get off with it **that** easily, my friend! Let me just remind you of what I said **earlier**: God has taken the initiative, God has **brought** you here tonight, God wants **you** to become his child, he **wants** you to become one of his people, so I believe this **is** relevant to you – that's why I'm preaching this to **everyone** here. You may not be a Christian – yet.

God's speaking about his people and we find the context in verse 13, which tells us that he is speaking about times of difficulty, *'When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people ...'* God's talking about times of extreme hardship and difficulty

God's people in times of difficulty – God's people will still go through bad experiences – we haven't had a plague of **locusts** for a long time, but Christians will in this life have times of difficulty. God doesn't promise an easy life to his people. Christians suffer. Christians get hurt.

Christians were in Haiti when that earthquake struck. Christians were in Japan when that tsunami hit. Christians were in Pakistan when those floods swept from north to south. Christians were among those miners in Chile when they got trapped. But what did we hear as they were released – they came out praising God. God promises to be **with** his people in those times of extreme difficulty and pain.

But I believe in this verse 14 we see principles of what God requires of us, of **all** of us, who would have a relationship with him.

God draws people to himself. He calls people to become his children. When a person becomes a Christian, they become a child of God, a **new** person, it's as if he's born again this time of a **heavenly** Father. Jesus tells a man called Nicodemus that to see the kingdom of God, in other words to become a **child** of God, to become a **Christian**, he has to be born again.

And that's **why** God draws people to himself – that's why **you're** here – either God has drawn you and you're **already** a Christian, or God is in the **process** of doing just that, he wants you to become his child under his loving care.

How does this happen? Well, this verse says, *'if my people … will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways …'* This is how we come to God.

We **humble** ourselves. Oh no! Everything **about** me, everything **within** me, everything in my **nature** cries out 'Don't do it!' I don't **want** to humble myself because that would mean I need help. I can't do it myself. I'm not in ultimate control of my life. And my human nature shouts out 'No, don't do it. It's dangerous. You'll lose everything that's **you**.' Well, yes – that's the **idea**! We humble ourselves before God – he's the **creator**, **I'm** only the created. Humbling ourselves just recognises the **truth**.

We humble ourselves and pray. We speak to God. We come to him and tell him that we need him. He draws us to himself, but we need to **respond**, and **tell** him we need his forgiveness for the way we've led our lives **without** him. We pray to him, we speak to him. Remember, he hears and listens.

We seek his face. If you speak to someone, and they've got their back turned towards you, you think that's very rude, don't you. Well God says that when you humble yourself and pray to him, he's **facing** you, he's listening to **every word** you say. But to be facing God, **you** have to turn from your wicked ways, this verse says, otherwise you're not **facing** God.

You may say, 'Wicked ways – that's a bit harsh, it was only a little lie; only a little bad thought; oops that word just slipped out; I didn't **mean** to hurt him.' God says '**Turn** to me. Seek my **face**. Go **my** way.'

Humble yourself, pray, seek his face, turn from your wicked ways, and then God has a wonderful promise waiting for you: *'**then** will I hear from heaven and will **forgive** their sin and will heal their land.'*

God will **hear**, forgive **sins**, God will **heal**. And all of this happens now through **Jesus**. In Hebrews we read, *'In the past God spoke through our forefathers through the prophets … but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.'* As we said earlier, God's taken the initiative, he's spoken through his Son Jesus, he heard man's cry for mercy and brought forgiveness of sin, through Jesus taking our punishment on the cross. There is no other way to be right with God.

Isaiah wrote, *'We **all** like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us **all**.' 'and by his wounds we are healed.'* The **ultimate** healing is being made right with God, and because Jesus suffered on that cross, because he rose victorious over death, we can be made right with God. Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven.

Do you know anything of this? I'm speaking to every one of us here – remember God is addressing his people in this verse 14. We need to do these things continuously. Have you humbled yourself before God, prayed for forgiveness, have you sought God, have you turned your back on godless ways? Have you felt God's love, have you received his forgiveness, do you know that you're right with God, have you been healed?

God **has** taken the initiative. He's waiting with **open arms** for your response.

Just spend a few moments in quiet; think about these things; search your heart; seek his face now.