

Preparing for God's Glory

2Chronicles 5:1-14 -

By Russell Muilenburg

Sunday, 09 May 2010 00:00

2 Chronicles 5 *No God Like You: Preparing for God's Glory* **A Home for God** I want to invite you to turn in your Bibles to 2 Chronicles 5. 2 Chronicles 5.

Today we are beginning a new series called “No God like You.” I get that title from 2 Chronicles 6:14, where Solomon prays: “O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven or on earth.” It’s a great verse, a great statement about our incomparable God.

And our source material for the next several weeks is going to be 2 Chronicles 6, because Solomon goes on to pray this great prayer to this incomparable God in which He gives a number of descriptions of what God is like. So my plan, for the next several weeks, is that we’ll look at Solomon’s prayer and learn about God.

But before we do that, I want to give the setting for Solomon’s prayer. I want us to understand the occasion for this scripture. And for that, we need 2 Chronicles 5.

This is the story of the dedication of the Temple Solomon built for God in Jerusalem. For centuries there has been no permanent place of worship in Israel. No permanent home for the Ark of the Covenant, which symbolized God’s presence.

Solomon’s father David wanted to build a temple, but God told him not to. David was a man of war. God told him it would be up to his son, Solomon, a man of peace, to build the temple. So David made the preparations—bought the land and dedicated material—and Solomon supervised the construction of the Temple on Mount Moriah.

Our passage picks up the story after the work is finished and the ark is being brought home. 2 Chronicles 5:

Preparing for God's Glory

2Chronicles 5:1-14 -

By Russell Mulenburg

Sunday, 09 May 2010 00:00

When all the work Solomon had done for the temple of the LORD was finished, he brought in the things his father David had dedicated—the silver and gold and all the furnishings—and he placed them in the treasuries of God's temple.

2

Then Solomon summoned to Jerusalem the elders of Israel, all the heads of the tribes and the chiefs of the Israelite families, to bring up the ark of the LORD's covenant from Zion, the City of David.

3

And all the men of Israel came together to the king at the time of the festival in the seventh month.

4

When all the elders of Israel had arrived, the Levites took up the ark,

5

and they brought up the ark and the Tent of Meeting and all the sacred furnishings in it. The priests, who were Levites, carried them up;

6

and King Solomon and the entire assembly of Israel that had gathered about him were before the ark, sacrificing so many sheep and cattle that they could not be recorded or counted.

7

The priests then brought the ark of the LORD's covenant to its place in the inner sanctuary of the temple, the Most Holy Place, and put it beneath the wings of the cherubim.

8

The cherubim spread their wings over the place of the ark and covered the ark and its carrying poles.

9

These poles were so long that their ends, extending from the ark, could be seen from in front of the inner sanctuary, but not from outside the Holy Place; and they are still there today.

10

There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets that Moses had placed in it at Horeb, where the LORD made a covenant with the Israelites after they came out of Egypt.

Preparing for God's Glory

2Chronicles 5:1-14 -

By Russell Mulenburg

Sunday, 09 May 2010 00:00

11

The priests then withdrew from the Holy Place. All the priests who were there had consecrated themselves, regardless of their divisions.

12

All the Levites who were musicians—Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun and their sons and relatives—stood on the east side of the altar, dressed in fine linen and playing cymbals, harps and lyres. They were accompanied by 120 priests sounding trumpets.

13

The trumpeters and singers joined in unison, as with one voice, to give praise and thanks to the LORD. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals and other instruments, they raised their voices in praise to the LORD and sang:

“He is good;

his love endures forever.” Then the temple of the LORD was filled with a cloud,¹⁴ and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the temple of God.

<<prayer>>

****Heavenly Father--as you have done in the past, even as you did in Solomon's day so long ago--we ask that you would now open the windows of heaven and pour down blessings upon us, until there is no room left for us to receive more. Show us your glory, we pray. Amen****

No Expense Spared

I am fascinated with the Old Testament descriptions of the Temple of the Lord. There is something about the splendor--and the pageantry--of it all that just captivates me.

About a dozen years ago Beth and I had the chance to visit Paris. One of the places we visited while we were there was the Palace of Versailles, the home of Louis the Fourteenth, the Sun King of France. I have never been in a more extravagant building.

For one thing, it is huge. The palace alone could hold a building the size of this about 10 times over, and its courtyard and gardens could comfortably hold the town of Milford.

But its exterior, as impressive as it is, pales in comparison to its interior. All vaulted ceilings and arched doorways, every room is a miniature art gallery. Paintings by French masters adorn the

Preparing for God's Glory

2Chronicles 5:1-14 -

By Russell Muilenburg

Sunday, 09 May 2010 00:00

walls and nearly every ceiling is covered by elaborate frescoes. Candle chandeliers--each with thousands of pieces of fine crystal for reflecting the light--hang everywhere. Wherever you look your eye falls on something worth far more than most homes.

As we toured it, we truly started to get a sense of what is meant by the expression "live like a king." It was impressive--and even upsetting--that one man could accumulate so much wealth.

And yet, according to the Bible, Versailles is a dump compared to the Temple Solomon built for the Lord.

2 Chronicles 3 and 4 give a brief description of the Temple. They're list chapters, the kind of Bible chapters that are hard to read because there's no story—it's more like an accountant's report. But few pages in recorded history describe as much wealth as these chapters do. When Solomon built and dedicated the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, he spared no expense.

Try to picture it in your mind, if you will.

The building itself is not that large--about 30 yards long and two stories high--but it is magnificent. Constructed of the finest lumber and stone available, it gleams white from its mount above Jerusalem.

Inside, everything has been overlaid with gold—fine gold, pure gold, solid gold (4:20-22). From the ceiling beams and doorframes to the walls and doors, the entire temple is gilded. In the Most Holy Place alone, the small room at the back of the temple, we are told over 23 tons of gold were used (3:8).

Plus, there are jewels everywhere. Carvings of angels adorn the walls and two golden Cherubim--both twice the size of a man--dominate the Most Holy Place. There are golden sprinkling bowls, golden lampstands, and a golden altar for burning incense to the Lord. Between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place hangs a richly embroidered curtain made of the finest fabric.

Preparing for God's Glory

2Chronicles 5:1-14 -

By Russell Mulenburg

Sunday, 09 May 2010 00:00

In the courtyard outside, the tools for offering sacrifices are made from bronze. An altar, pillars, washing basins, pots, shovels, meat forks and other related articles--so much bronze that its weight cannot even be recorded.

And then there's the pageantry of it all. This is the day of dedication, and a national assembly has been called. All the heads of the tribes and the chiefs of the Israelite families are assembled. It's like inauguration day, or a State of the Union address—with every important leader all gathered in the same spot at the same time.

And there is a great parade from the heart of the city to the top of the Temple Mount. The people are multi-hued and resplendent in the colors of their native tribes, all wearing their very best. At the center of it all is a collection of priests, dressed in white, carrying the ark of the Lord.

Before them is King Solomon himself---arrayed in the royal robes--surrounded by all of the elders of Israel.

They mark the procession of the ark with a trail of blood. At every sixth step the priests make (cf. 2 Samuel 6:13), another animal is sacrificed to the Lord. So many sheep and cattle are offered that they cannot even be counted or recorded.

Covering it all is a great blanket of song. 120 priests accompany the ark with their trumpets. Meanwhile, an orchestra and choir have been assembled in the Temple courtyard. Harps and lyres provide the melody and cymbals the rhythm as the voices of Israel are lifted up in praise to God. The music seems to pour off the mountain and wash over the people as they sing of the love and faithfulness of the Lord.

Picture it in your mind--the grandeur and splendor of Solomon's temple. The gold and the jewels and the bronze, the craftsmanship and the architecture; the crowds and colors, the priests and elders and the king; the sacrifices and the instruments and the shouts and the singing--all of this—it must have been spectacular! Like I said, it makes King Louis look like a

Preparing for God's Glory

2Chronicles 5:1-14 -

By Russell Muilenburg

Sunday, 09 May 2010 00:00

pauper. Versailles like a dump.

The Real Deal

And yet, it all pales in comparison to what happened next. Verses 13 and 14 again:

Then the temple of the LORD was filled with a cloud,

¹⁴

and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the temple of God.

After the temple had been completed, and after the celebration of sacrifice and song had begun, and after the ark of the covenant had been put in its place under the cherubim--then comes the main event. Then something truly spectacular happens: the glory of the Lord fills the temple!

It's an incredible picture. In the midst of all this activity and noise a cloud--like the one which had led the Israelites out of Egypt--settles on the top of the temple. It is both bright and dark; pulsating with light, energy and power. Priests drop their tools to stare in open-mouthed wonder, the musicians and singers fall silent, the people fall to their knees with their faces to the ground as the glory of the Lord surrounds and inhabits the temple.

And here's what we can't miss: Everything that goes before this would be pointless if this had not happened!

If God had not shown up the temple would have been no different than Versailles--a gaudy testament to one man's ego. It would have become a museum--interesting to visit and admire--but otherwise meaningless in the grand scale of things, a footnote to history.

As magnificent as the construction and celebration described in chapters 3-5 are, they are outstripped and overwhelmed by the arrival of God's glory. This is what this passage is all about...this is where the temple gets its significance...this is why the Chronicler spends so much time and ink describing this building... because it houses the presence of God.

Preparing for God's Glory

2Chronicles 5:1-14 -

By Russell Muilenburg

Sunday, 09 May 2010 00:00

The glory of the Lord transforms the temple from an empty shell to the vital center of worship. God's presence changes this celebration from an ordinary festival observation to vital communion with the Living God. His choice of this place changes the people of Israel from just one nation among many to the chosen conduit for bringing His grace to the world.

I am fascinated with the Old Testament descriptions of the Temple of God because in the Old Testament the Temple of God represents the presence of God, and it is the presence of God which changes things. It is the glory of the Lord which gives life and meaning to the temple, to this celebration, and--ultimately--to the people of God.

We Need God

And I am convinced that we stand in need of God's presence today. We need to see--and be filled by--the glory of the Lord. We need such an experience of His power and presence that--like the priests in Solomon's day--we are left speechless and motionless.

In fact, that's the message today. That's my one point.

We need God.

We need God.

As a church, we need God. If we are going to be effective as a church, then we need God.

- If we want what we do here on Sunday Morning to be more than just a routine—more than just some nice singing and some drab speeches—then we need God to show up.
- If we want to be effective in helping our world—if we want to help the poor and the hurting and the oppressed, if we want to make Spencer a better place—then we need God to be in our midst.
- If we want our congregation to be more than just a club--more than just an association of like-minded people like Kiwanis or the Rotary or the Republican party--then we need the presence of God.

And don't get me wrong. I'm not opposed to Rotary club or political party affiliation. I'm a member of Kiwanis. It's just that there should be a qualitative difference between groups like that and the church. And that difference is the presence of God. We should be people who have

Preparing for God's Glory

2Chronicles 5:1-14 -

By Russell Mulenburg

Sunday, 09 May 2010 00:00

seen—and are filled by—the presence of God. And that makes us a whole lot different than any other organization on earth. Without God, the church is like a light bulb that hasn't been screwed into the socket. Like an engine without any gasoline. Like a cookie that's been baked without sugar.

If God isn't present in our midst, if He isn't alive and active in our church, then we're just another group of people trying to get by on our own cleverness and strength. No power. No go. No taste. We need God.

More than that. We need God in our individual lives. Each of us needs an encounter with the one true, living God. The key, I believe, to living lives of purpose and meaning is to be connected to the God who created us.

We need God. We can't truly be all that we were created to be unless we first stop to behold the wonder and glory of God.

And that's the purpose of this series of messages that we are beginning today. When Solomon gets up in front of this assembly in 2 Chronicles 6 and says: "O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven or on earth" he is beginning a prayer that paints a wonderful and complex portrait of God. He is telling us about the one and only, eternal and glorious, merciful and mighty, all powerful sovereign of the universe and He's inviting us to fall down on our faces in His presence.

And this is what we need. We need to plumb and explore the depths of God in order to deepen our love and faith in Him.

Great and Terrible

I have a book on my shelf called
A Great and Terrible Love.

It's about the attributes of God. Like this series we are about to begin, it is a book that examines the character of God as it is described in the Bible.

The author's argument is that we need to encounter a God whose love is very great—a God "who will listen without judgment; who will embrace without conditions; who will give us permission to be who we are—sordid, sinful, lost, confused." But, at the same time, he says, we

Preparing for God's Glory

2Chronicles 5:1-14 -

By Russell Mulenburg

Sunday, 09 May 2010 00:00

also need to encounter a God whose love is a terrible. A God whose love is “extremely formidable” and causes “great fear and alarm.” A God who is big and mysterious and complicated and powerful and holy and wild.

The author writes:

We are not attracted to God merely because of his great love. We instinctively know we need more than a divine grandfather who pats us on the head, or a cosmic bellhop who fulfills all our wishes, or a buddy and traveling companion. There is also something strangely and fearsomely attractive about the one who forms light and creates darkness, whose love is not only great but terrible.

He then quotes an author named J.B. Phillips, who about 50 years ago wrote a book called *Your God is Too Small*

:

“Many men and women today are living, often with inner dissatisfaction, without any faith in God at all. This is not because they are particularly wicked or selfish... but because they have not found with their adult minds a God big enough....to command their highest admiration and respect, and consequently their willing co-operation.” (from Mark Galli, *A Great and Terrible Love*, p. 13-14)

In other words, what we need is not opinions about God, but facts. We need to encounter Him not as we would want Him to be--not as we imagine Him to be—but as He really is.

Too often we say things like “Well, the God I believe in...” and then we follow up with an idea that completely justifies our acting exactly as we choose too. We say: “The God I believe in would never send anybody to Hell” and we use it to justify our decision not to tell anybody else about Jesus. We say: “The God I believe in wants me to be happy” and we use it to justify our decision to start sleeping with a boyfriend or a girlfriend. We say: “The God I believe in...” and we fill in the blank in a way that is perfectly in keeping with how we want the world to work.

Preparing for God's Glory

2Chronicles 5:1-14 -

By Russell Mulenburg

Sunday, 09 May 2010 00:00

But what we need is not opinions about God, but facts. We need Biblical truth. We need to get a glimpse of His glory filling the temple. The kind of glimpse that stops us in our tracks and knocks us to our knees in worship.

No Other Stream

I love the phrasing of 2 Chronicles 6:14. Solomon says: "O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven or on earth."

It's so important that we get this.

There is no god like our God. There is nothing to compare Him to. Nothing to equal Him. Nothing to challenge Him.

He is unmatched. Unrivaled. Untameable. Uncontainable.

He is unfettered. Unlimited. Undaunted. And Untainted.

No other creature in heaven or on earth is like Him. Not the angels in heaven nor the kings on earth nor the devil in Hell. Nothing is as strong as Him. Nothing as smart. Nothing as creative or loving. Nothing as merciful or just. Nothing as loyal. Nothing as glorious.

He is the God who keeps His promises. The God who is great, and yet the God who is near. The God who is angry about sin, but also the God who forgives. He is the God who upholds the cause of His chosen ones, and still He is the God who hears the prayers of all people.

There is no god like our God. And we need Him.

Preparing for God's Glory

2Chronicles 5:1-14 -

By Russell Muilenburg

Sunday, 09 May 2010 00:00

In C.S. Lewis's classic book

The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe

there is a well-known scene where the Beavers are telling the children about Aslan. When Lucy discovers that Aslan is in fact a lion she asks if he is "quite safe." Mr. Beaver responds: "Safe? Safe? Who said anything about safe? Of course He isn't safe. But he's good."

It's a great scene. But equally great, and lesser known, is the scene from another book in the Narnia series called

The Silver Chair.

In this book a haughty girl named Jill Pole finds herself alone in the woods and growing thirsty. She finds her way to a stream. But before she can rush forward and drink she catches sight of Aslan the lion—huge and golden—sitting still as a statue but terribly alive along the water's edge.

She waits for a long time, wrestling with her thoughts, hoping he will go away, but growing increasingly parched. Finally, Aslan speaks: "If you are thirsty, you may drink." Jill is startled by this and holds back.

Lewis writes;

"Are you not thirsty?" said the Lion.

"I am dying of thirst," said Jill.

"Then drink," said the Lion.

"May I—could I—would you mind going away while I do?" said Jill.

The Lion answered this only by a look and a very low growl. And just as Jill gazed at its motionless bulk, she realized that she might as well have asked the whole mountain to move aside for her convenience.

The delicious rippling noise of the stream was driving her near frantic.

"Will you promise not to—do anything to me, if I come?"

Preparing for God's Glory

2Chronicles 5:1-14 -

By Russell Mulenburg

Sunday, 09 May 2010 00:00

"I make no promise," said the Lion.

Jill was so thirsty now that, without noticing it, she had come a step nearer.

"Do you eat girls?" she said.

"I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms," said the Lion. It didn't say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. It just said it.

"I daren't come and drink," said Jill.

"Then you will die of thirst," said the Lion.

"Oh dear!" said Jill, coming another step nearer. "I suppose I must go and look for another stream then."

"There is no other stream," said the Lion. (story told by Mark Buchanen in *The Holy Wild*, p. 24-26)

That is where this series comes in.

There is no God like you

. There is no other stream.

We need God. We need His presence. We need His power. We need His love.

And we don't need opinions about Him. We need facts. Biblical truth.

We need the God who, without apology, without anger, without boast, swallows up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms.

We need the God who gives us no other options. Either we drink from this stream, or we die.

Preparing for God's Glory

2Chronicles 5:1-14 -

By Russell Mulenburg

Sunday, 09 May 2010 00:00

2Chronicles 5:1-14 (ESV)ERROR: The IP key is no longer supported. Please use your access key, the testing key 'TEST'