

Dr. John Oswalt, Kings, Session 8, 1 Kings 8

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We didn't quite finish last week. There's one final thought that I want to remind us of: what's all this stuff about the tabernacle? You've got 16 chapters in Exodus. You've got these four or five chapters in Kings.

You've got about five chapters in Ezekiel. What's all this stuff about the temple about? And as we were suggesting last time, it's about God's desire to come to the temple. And I don't know any place clearer that the ultimate goal of God is stated than in Ephesians chapters two and three.

So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens, along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family together.

We are his house. It's all about us. It's all about God's desire to come home to the human heart built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets.

And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. We are carefully joined together in him becoming a holy temple for the Lord. Through him, you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling, this dwelling where God lives by his spirit.

That's the end of chapter two. Then, chapter three begins. When I think of this, I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus for the benefit of you Gentiles, and then for 13 verses he gives us a parenthesis, his ministry to the Gentiles and how exciting that is to him.

Then he comes back finally in verse 14, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father. So, this is one of the more interesting parentheses in Paul's letters, but it's there between verse one of chapter three and verse 14. When I think of all this, when I think of the fact that we are to be God's house, I fall down on my knees and pray.

By my count, there are about four times where Paul says, I fall on my knees and pray to the Father, the creator of everything in heaven and on earth. And I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources, he will empower you with inner strength through his spirit. Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him.

What's Paul praying for? I'm praying for power that you can grasp this idea that you are Christ's home. Your roots will go down. I think maybe if I were writing it, I would say your cellar will go down into God's love and keep you strong.

And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide he's giving us the dimensions of his house, how wide, how long, how high, and how

deep his love is. We're invited into that house. May you experience the love of Christ, though it's too great to understand fully.

Then you will be made perfect. You will be brought to completeness. You will be made into what you were made for with all the fullness of the life and power that comes from God.

Now, all glory to God, who's able, through his mighty power at work in us to accomplish infinitely more than we ask or think, that is, to live in us, to live in us. The God who is beyond the farthest galaxy wants to come home and take up residence here to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and forever.

Yeah, that's what all this stuff is about. Tabernacle, temple, new temple. It's about God's desire to come home here and take up residence.

Christianity is not a set of ethics. Oh, it is a set of ethics, but it's not just a set of ethics. Christianity is not just a theological construction.

Yes, it is a theological construction, but it's not just a theological construction. Christianity is not a worldview. Oh, yes, it is a worldview, but it's not just a worldview.

Christianity, unless it is that living relationship with God, is nothing. With that, ah yes, ethical ideals, theological construct, worldview, all important, but all that pales beside the reality of Christ in you, the hope of glory. All right, that's free.

Dedicating the temple. As I say in the introduction, in chapter 3, where Solomon asked for the ability to govern God's people wisely, if that was his first shining hour, chapter 8 is his second shining hour. We see Solomon at his best here.

We see him understanding who God is and what God wants to accomplish. We see him, as Danny mentioned at the outset, in his faithfulness to his promises. We see that Solomon really understands what this place is about, and we'll get into that in a few minutes.

But it makes Solomon's end the more tragic because we see he understands, he knows, he's got it together, and yet he's obviously not applying this day by day. And that's where this passage speaks so deeply to me. You can know all the stuff there is to know, but if you're not applying it to your life, day after day, it doesn't count for much.

Now, it's mentioned that this was in the feast of the seventh month. This is the feast of booths. Now, as a child, I was very concerned that the Bible had a feast of booths, but it's not booze, it's booths.

It's called the Feast of Tabernacles, the Feast of Tents. This is the harvest festival. Israel had three great feasts, the feast of Passover in April. More or less, their months are lunar months, so they move around the calendar.

And this is the feast at the beginning of harvest. It's also the feast of the one of the new years. Then, 50 days later, at the beginning of June, is the feast of first fruits, or Pentecost, which is five weeks.

First, first. And that is, this is the barley harvest, this is the wheat harvest. And then, in September, October, the feast of tents.

Now, the arable land was much too precious to live on. So, your village was at the edge of the arable land, at the edge of the cultivatable land, and you had to walk out to your fields, which were little bitty portions. If any of you've been in Japan, you know, after years and years and years of inheritance and everything, if your inheritance is a quarter of an acre, you're doing very well.

And so, you've got to walk out to your field. Well, when harvest comes, you don't have time to walk back and forth to the village. You build a little shack out there, a lean-to, out in your field, and just stay there overnight.

So, that's what this is about, and it's a reminder of the 40 years in the desert. As they say, this is the harvest festival. Harvest is over now, finally, with the grape harvest being the end, and you are rejoicing over the harvest.

You're going to survive for another year, probably. Or if it's a bad harvest, then you're wondering. The pagans, at this point, are having a funeral.

Actually, they're having a wake, in the best Irish sense of the word, a drunken orgy. If you're Irish, I'm sorry. Because the vegetation god has died, and if you don't give him a good funeral, he may not decide to come back in the spring, and things are not going to be good.

So, these people are weeping and laughing and living it up. What's Israel doing? Well, number one, they're remembering, dear God, what a mess we made, and how good you were. Our shoes didn't wear out, our clothes didn't wear out, we had food for every day.

Incredible. And they're also remembering something else. They're remembering their sins for the past year.

Particularly, and this is always difficult for us, the unintentional sins. Crying over unintentional sins? All the ways that we offended you this year, God.

All the ways we broke your heart. No, we're not talking about intentional sin. That's sin with a high hand.

And there are no stated sacrifices for that. That has to be dealt with case by case. No, it's this.

So, the pagans are weeping, so are the Israelites, but over two very different things. For these reasons, they also, they would have been having a New Year's festival when they're trying to be sure that the chaos monster is defeated once again, and it'll be a good year. For these reasons, I don't get upset when people say to me, well, Christmas, that's just on the pagan Saturnalia.

Mm-hmm, it is. Just like God told the Hebrew people to have their festivals on the dates when the pagans are celebrating, precisely in your face. So, there it is.

It's that feast, and I don't think that's accidental. This is when the temple is being dedicated, on these days when you're remembering your sin and God's goodness, and the fact that he keeps his promises. A couple of other things that are there, I won't go over them in the introduction.

They're interesting tidbits to me, but that's the extent of it. So, that's the introduction. Question? I thought the New Year was Rosh Hashanah.

I was afraid you'd ask that. There are two New Years in the Bible. There's a New Year at the end of harvest, and there's a New Year at the beginning of harvest, and you get fights about who celebrated which one when.

So, yes, now today, Rosh Hashanah, the head of the year, is at this time. I liked going to school at Brandeis University because one week after the semester started, we had 10 vacation days for Rosh Hashanah and booths and the Day of Atonement. So, yes, there are two New Year festivals.

Okay. Is there anything else you want to talk about there? Okay. In the beginning of the chapter, chapter 8, nine verses are given over to bringing the covenant box.

As we said last week, the ark is just a King James word for the box. Noah went to sea in a box. Nine verses to bringing the covenant box into the temple.

Why do you think that much space is given to it? Okay. It's where God had told Moses he would meet them. Yes.

In a real sense, this is what the temple is about, a place for meeting God. What else is the significance of the covenant box? Not only the place where God meets them, but what else? It holds the covenant. And why is that important? What's the importance of the covenant to the Hebrew people? It's central to their very existence.

This makes us who we are. Eat your hearts out, Gentiles. We have this arrangement with God that defines us.

And again, we talked a bit about it last week, but to think that you can have an idol in the covenant, in the Holy of Holies. You can manipulate God through magic, or you can remember what kind of a faithful God he is and what it means to live in a covenant relationship with the Most High God. Take your choice.

Take your choice. So yes, I think it's exactly significant that this large number of verses would be given over to this because it's at the heart of what this whole thing is all about. And by the way, in Bible study, that's one of the laws, laws of proportion.

How much space does the author give to a certain idea or a certain discussion? Typically, that means it's important. And then the question is, why is it important? Why does the author think this is an important thing? Okay. In verses 10 and 11 then of chapter 8, we have an interesting event taking place.

When the priests withdrew from the holy place, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord, and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled his temple. What kind of a cloud is this? They can't go in there because there's a cloud in there. I've never had any trouble walking through fog.

Go back to Exodus, Exodus chapter 40, the end of the tabernacle material, verses 34 and 35. Then, the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

Now, do you see the, what's the word that is being used as a synonym for cloud? Glory, glory. And what's being said here is, this is not just fog. Glory, in Hebrew, is solidity, or weightiness, or significance.

Some of you who have had the misfortune of being in too many classes with me may remember this. In Hebrew, the basic meaning of a word is carried in the three consonants. Those three consonants mean heavy.

Then, the particular word that you're using is shaped by the vowels that you use. For instance, B is soft after a vowel, so this is liver. That's the word for liver.

Why would you call liver, why would you use those consonants with liver? Because it's the heaviest organ. It's the one that's solid. The others all have holes in them, but the liver is a solid chunk of meat.

It's the heavy organ. Glory is kabod/kavod. There are our three radicals.

Glory in English tends to be something thin and passing, you know, like the glory of last year's football team that was 13-0 and is this year's 0-13 football team—the glory of a sunset. Karen, Karen, come here, come here, look at this, look at this. It's gone.

But that's not glory in the Old Testament. The glory of God is like a brick wall.

And when His glory, again, you know, we think of something gleaming, something, that's not the point. It's the solidity of His presence. You walk into it, and it won't.

It's His reality, God's reality. And so, it's no accident at all that Isaiah is in the temple and he hears the seraphim as the temple is filling with smoke. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of heaven's armies and the whole earth is full of His glory.

Wow. Not just this building. No, no, no.

God's solidity and reality are what give the world their reality. So, no, they couldn't go in that temple. It was full of bricks.

The reality of God was there and it was so real, it was tangible. Boy, I hope there are instant replays in heaven. I want to see some of these moments.

Oh, we can't go in there. So, what's this place about? It's about God's reality in the world. And the question then for me is, is God's glory in my life? Is God's reality in me? Or am I thin and ephemeral and passing? Now, I get on the scales, and I know there's some reality about me, but that's not quite what we're talking about here.

But having become a person who is real, dependable, and reliable, God's glory in us is giving us significance. I keep referring to C.S. Lewis and his book or his novel, *The Great Divorce*. But the people in hell are just vapors.

They have thinned themselves out to pure, distilled selfishness. And when, by chance, they get an opportunity to take a bus trip to heaven, it scares the socks off them because the place is so real. The first guy that jumps out of the bus screams because the grass grows right through his feet.

God's real, and we, his people, need to be real as well. Now, look at verses 16 to 20. I live in hope when I give you these lessons a week in advance.

I hope maybe one or two of you will look at them in advance. But between verses 16 and 20, how many times does the name appear? Anybody do it? Five. In five verses, five times.

I've not chosen a city in any tribe of Israel to have a temple built so that my name might be there. Verse 17, my father David had in his heart to build a temple for the name of the Lord, the God of Israel. Verse 18, but the Lord said to my father, David, you did well to have it in your heart to build a temple for my name.

Verse 19, nevertheless, you are not the one to build the temple, but your son, your own flesh and blood. He is the one who will build the temple for my name. Verse 20, the Lord has kept the promise he made.

I have succeeded David, my father. Now, I sit on the throne of Israel, just as the Lord promised. And I have built a temple for the name of Yahweh, the God of Israel.

So, let me ask you why the temple was built? What have we just read? For the name, for the name. What are we talking about? Name is reputation, character. What is this temple about? Well, the temple is a place of religious manipulation.

What else? Why else would you build this incredibly expensive building except to try to make God do what you want? I mean, that's what religion is about. I see Jerry sitting back there, shaking his head. No, no, it's not about religious manipulation.

It's a place where the truth about God and His nature can be displayed to the world. A shadow of heaven. But I'm building this place for David's name? No.

For Solomon's name? No. For Yahweh's name. Oh, God, when people see this building, may they think about who you are, your glory, your reality, your nature.

Now, when we look at the prayer, we're going to see something about this reputation and character because it's rather amazing. So, moving right along. Verse 23: what is it that makes Yahweh unique? Yahweh, the God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth who keeps your covenant of love.

What is it that makes Yahweh different from every other God? He keeps his covenant of, and the Hebrew word is *hesed*, unfailing, steadfast, the undying devotion of a superior to an inferior, especially when they don't deserve it. A covenant of that kind of love. So, yes, Danny and Chris, you got it right.

He's the God who keeps his promises. He's the God who, when we don't deserve it, gives us this undying love, and he binds himself. Remember Exodus 24, sealing the covenant.

Moses kills 12 bulls and catches their blood, a lot of blood in 12 bulls. And he says to the people, after having read the covenant, are you going to do this? And they say, Moses, we already said we were. Yes, we're going to do it.

Now, hurry up, or the Baptists are going to get to the cafeteria before we will. Moses says, all right, all right. And half of the blood he threw on the altar.

May God strike God dead if God ever breaks this covenant. Now, are you ready? You're already, are you? You're going to keep this covenant, are you? What were they thinking as the blood trickled down their faces? What did I just say? May God make me like those bulls. But God swore by himself.

The people broke the covenant within five weeks and kept breaking it for another thousand years. And God kept keeping it. That's who he is.

That's the name that the temple was made to celebrate. Yes, yes, yes. Remember, you're carrying my name.

David. Well, I think ultimately, yes, he is. At this point, he's just trying to get the point across that the soul that sins shall die.

Somebody's going to have to die here. If it's not you, then who is it? Yeah. Well, I think yes, ultimately.

And that's what the writer of the Hebrews picks up on. Okay. Now, again, I said, this is a temple.

What's the big square construction out in front of the building? It's got steps up to it. The altar, the great bronze altar, is a place of sacrifice. Well, that's what temples are about.

Temples are about killing sheep, so God won't kill you. I want you to notice that although we're told at the beginning that Solomon sacrificed a bunch of animals and at the end, he sacrificed a big bunch of animals, in the prayer, there is not one word about this building being a place of sacrifice. Not one word about it being a place of religious manipulation.

I think that is stunning. That's what you think about when you think about a temple. It's about a place where you do these religious rituals.

What is the function of this place? According to verse 29, may your eyes be open toward this temple, night and day, this place of which you said, my name will be there, so that you will hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place. It's a

house of prayer. Now, again, I'm confident that, once again, Solomon is at his best here.

Solomon understands ritual does nothing to God. We cannot make God do something by our actions here. Rather, it is a place where God invites us.

These are important words during this pandemic. Worship is not about making God do our will. Worship is about receiving his invitation.

Come up here on my lap and talk to me, please. Really? Really? Really? And if he doesn't give us that invitation, then all our religious behavior is worthless. But he does give us the invitation.

He does invite us to call him Papa. He does invite us to pour out our hearts to him, because he loves to hear his children's voices. As I said, I think Solomon is at the peak of his understanding here.

I think it's also important that he stresses this; I think when he says, in verse 27, will God really dwell on the earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I've built. You got it.

You got it. Yes, God says, I'll meet you here. This will symbolize God's desire for this intimate face-to-face communication.

And again, God is good. He gives us these spaces where we can visualize, where we can feel. And again, you'd think God made us or something, if you didn't know better.

He knows that we need to be able to visualize, that we need to be able to conceptualize, and he's given us all these good things. I look at the cathedrals in Europe with definite mixed emotions. On the one hand, the immense resources and time that were poured into those things, and you say, oh dear, build on the backs of the peasants.

And yet, and yet, God, God invites us here. So, no, I can't contain you in this house that I've made. But nevertheless, may it somehow symbolize what you've offered to us in yourself.

All right, pushing on. I ask you in verses 31 to 53 to list the conditions that can be brought before Yahweh. And in the interest of time, I won't invite you to answer the question.

I hope you have and hope you did. But number one, if you feel you've been wronged by a neighbor, you can bring that to the temple. If you have been defeated in battle because of your sin, you can bring that to the temple.

If there's no rain because of your sin, if disaster or disease has come, if you as a foreigner are so moved by this place and the glory of God that's here, you can pray to this place. No, you can pray to the God who is represented in this place. If you go to war and God has led you, you can bring that to God.

If you end up in exile in a foreign land because of your sin, you can turn toward Jerusalem, this place, and cry out to God. If you do, God will render correct judgment here. The guilty will be punished, and the innocent will be cleared.

Now, it's interesting to wonder how that might have happened. Perhaps it was Urim and Thummim, two guys. One says he did it.

No, no, he did it. I have two sons. I know that line very, very well.

And maybe you throw the Urim and Thummim down on the ground, and the Urim says he did it. Judgment. You can pray in repentance.

God will forgive your sin. You can, again, and I sort of ran out of space here. Again, you can pray in repentance. Interestingly, he will teach you the right way to live and forgive you.

No, I don't want to know the right way to live, God. I just want rain. Interestingly, we're not told that the disaster or disease are the result of sin, but he does say in the response, he will forgive you and act.

And by the way, lest I forget here, remember that the word that is typically translated as repent is literally turned around. It is not remorse. It is not feeling bad.

It is to stop doing that. And do the other thing. It is a word of action.

And if the foreigner prays, God, will you please hear him or her and do what they're asking? Why? So that they will know your name. You're a God who answers prayer. You're a God who fulfills his promises.

Unlike the pagan deities. He's interested in the least and the last: the lost, the hurting, and the distraught. Yes.

Yes. Yes. He always has an answer.

He will respond. He will respond. Now, sometimes the answer is no, but nevertheless.

Yes. Yes. The whole range of life.

But interestingly, there's nothing here about, well, God, I'd like to be rich. Please give me more money. I don't see that here.

Does he care about those issues? Yes, he does. Yes, he does. But again, what am I praying for? What am I praying about? Where are my concerns? Yes.

Yes. All right. Let's look at his blessing.

Verses 56 to 61. 54, when Solomon had finished all these prayers and supplications to the Lord, he rose from before the altar of the Lord where he had been kneeling with his hands spread out toward heaven. He stood and blessed the whole assembly of Israel in a loud voice.

And what I called your attention to was what he says about Yahweh's nature. That's in the first two verses, 56 and 57. What does this blessing say about God's nature? We've already said it, but let's say it again. He fulfills his word.

He gave rest to his people just as he promised. Back there in Egypt, he said, I'm going to take you into this good land and give you rest there. And Solomon's saying, he's done it.

He's done it. We don't have any enemies left who are in a position to put us in danger. Wow.

Wow. He's a God who does what he promises. He's a God who gives his people rest.

Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave. But then, what about verse 57? What does it tell us? What did Jesus say before he left the world? I will never leave you nor forsake you. Wow.

Wow. What a God. What a God.

Again, I emphasize that he didn't have to do any of this. After we've slapped him in the face after we've tried to usurp his place by making ourselves God, may he be with us as he was with our ancestors. May he never leave us nor forsake us.

And he's praying that because he knows it's a reality in the character of God. What then is his request for the people? What does he want this promise keeping God to do for them? Yes. Yes.

May he bless you. May he make you really, really rich. No.

No. The best thing he could do for you, for me, is to turn our hearts from self-centered and self-serving to walk in obedience to him. I've said it before, I'll say it many times again.

That's the description of the Christian life right through the Bible or the believing life right through the Bible. It's a walk. It's a walk.

Day after day, putting one foot in front of the other. And it's a walk that is characterized by what? Obedience. Now, obedience is a word that has fallen on hard times in our society.

Oh, yeah. Here's this heavenly tyrant who says, you will do what I say, or I'll beat you to a pulp. Obey me.

Well, that's not much fun. It's the world system. It's the wrong picture.

The picture is my loving father who says, honey, would you do this for me? Sure, dad. Sure. We're not talking about a demand.

We're talking about a desire. And the desire that is not for his good, but a desire that's for our good. Walk in obedience to him and keep the commands, decrees, and laws he gave to our ancestors.

And as I've said to you before, Torah means instructions. Guess what? God gave us the instruction manual. Eat your hearts out, Gentiles.

We got the manual. Well, you've got to do this or you're going to go to hell. This is the way I made you to live.

If you live in keeping with these instructions, you'll live forever. Turn our hearts toward him so that we may walk in obedience. What else? Verse 59.

Do what? Uphold the cause of his servant and the cause of his people, Israel. Don't you just love this? According to each day's need. Oh, no, no.

I want to have the promise of my needs met for the next 13 years. He only gives enough manna for the day. But he gives enough manna for the day.

And he hasn't lost the recipe. That's exactly right. But, oh, my.

And you see, again, if you didn't know better, you would think Jesus had read the Old Testament. Give us this day our daily bread. Give us our bread for today.

But that requires trust. Well, what about tomorrow? And Jesus will say that tomorrow's evils will take care of themselves. Don't sweat it.

Yep. When tomorrow gets here, it's today. So, this faithful, promise-keeping God is present with us in every situation.

Turn our hearts to him so that we may walk in obedience and then know that he is upholding us and supplying what we need when we need it. And then, at the end, may your hearts be perfect toward the Lord our God to live.

And again, this is NIV. It says live, but it's walk again. He must walk in his decrees and carefully guard his commands as they are today.

This is going to be a key word that we're going to run into several more times in the book of Kings. The King James regularly translated it perfect. Modern translations choke every time they see perfect.

A little more Hebrew. This is one consonant, SH. Those three consonants mean to be complete.

So, we know one noun that is made from it very well. Shalom, which we translate peace. Well, that's not wrong, but it's unfortunate.

Peace to us means the absence of conflict, but that's not really what this is about. This is about two parties being whole with one another.

No division. My peace gives I unto you, not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Jesus is thinking Hebrew there.

Our New Testament is Greek, but he's thinking Hebrew. I can put you together, Oswalt. I can take the broken pieces of you and put them together.

You can be in the most amazing conflict and have shalom. This is also what you do with debt. If you've got an outstanding debt, you need to shalom it.

Pay it off. Here's the debt. Here's the payment.

And so, it is. God wants to, and in this case, it is to forgive the grammar and passive participle and make it whole. So, when the NIV says may your hearts be fully committed, that's not wrong.

But in my mind, it misses the flavor. May your hearts be completely one, undivided. King James is perfect.

Now, I understand why I've been in the translation racket for a good part of my life. I understand why modern translations choke on perfect because today, perfect means flawless. It's a perfect diamond.

He's not saying, may your hearts be flawless toward God. He's saying, may your hearts be totally his. No limits, no rivals, all his.

Well, if you understand perfect correctly in that sense, yes, perfectly his, completely his. All his. And then, as I say, why? So that you will walk and guard.

We really don't quite know how to handle the Hebrew here because it will say to keep it carefully very frequently. Well, it's literally guard to keep, which is not good English. So, you get carefully kept.

But it misses some of the power of guard. Guard yourselves. Guard God's word.

Guard his instructions. Guard your heart. Yeah.

Don't let the enemy get within striking distance. And I'll stop here. But again and again, as I especially talk to younger people, I see people who are again and again saying, how close to hell can I live and not fall in? No, it's the wrong question.

The question is, how close to my savior can I live? Guard it. So, that's his prayer. The people then went out with joy because, notice it, they were joyful and glad in heart for all the good things.

Now, I'm going to misquote the Bible what had happened to them. For all the good things the Lord had done for his servant and for his people, Israel. Why were they joyful? Because God had proven himself faithful.

And I want to suggest to you, that is the cause for joy. The world is up and down. The world's in and out.

There are good days and bad days. But God keeps his promises. And we can live there with joy--with joy.