

Cleansing the Temple

by David Ravenhill

David Ravenhill emphasizes the importance of internal holiness and transparency in our spiritual lives through the example of King Hezekiah's restoration of the temple.

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Scripture: 2 Chronicles 29:1

Topics: "Purity", "Cleansing", "Holiness"

Description

David Ravenhill emphasizes the need for spiritual cleansing in the church, drawing parallels from King Hezekiah's restoration of the temple. Hezekiah prioritized opening the doors of the temple, symbolizing the importance of transparency and honesty in our relationship with God. Ravenhill warns against the dangers of unfaithfulness and the consequences of allowing uncleanness to persist in our lives. He calls for a return to holiness and a genuine relationship with God, encouraging believers to carry out the uncleanness and restore their commitment to Him. The sermon concludes with a call to action for individuals to open their hearts and allow God to bring healing and restoration.

Transcript

The old country preacher said it's good to see a packed out house, or a packed out house. It's wonderful to be in the presence of God, isn't it? Let's look to the Lord in prayer before we do anything else, shall we? Father, once again we recognize you as the Head, the Lord, the Master. You're the Great Shepherd of the sheep.

Lord, we ask that you would come tonight, Lord, just brood over this flock. Father, bring healing where there's a need of healing, encouragement where there's a need of encouragement, conviction where there's a need of conviction, change, Lord, where there's a need of change. Lord, you know our needs individually, corporately.

And so, Lord, we ask that you would do what only you can do. Touch our lives tonight, Lord, by the power of your Spirit. In Jesus' name, Amen.

If you have your Bible with you, and I hope you do, turn with me to the book of Chronicles, 2 Chronicles chapter 29. And I want to look into the life of a man by the name of Hezekiah. Hezekiah is one of those individuals I've come to appreciate.

He was a king. His father was a king over the nation of Israel. His father was one of those kings that did everything wrong.

Turned his back on God. He caused his sons and daughters to go through the fire, which was a ritual to the heathen gods. He burned incense on all the high places.

He tore down the things of God. His last terrible act was to go into the temple and board it up, close it down, turn the nation of Israel to idolatry and immorality and all the other things that go with idolatry. And basically, just to turn the nation away from God.

And then his son Hezekiah becomes king. And we're introduced to Hezekiah's life here in chapter 29 and verse 1. It says, Hezekiah became king when he was 25 years of age. And he reigned 29 years in Jerusalem.

His mother's name was Abijah, the daughter of Zechariah. And he did right in the sight of the Lord. That's a good beginning.

I don't care if you do right. If it's not in the sight of God, it doesn't count. We do right sometimes because we want to please the eldership or please the church or please our parents or please this person.

We're only doing it because we, you know, we want the recognition that comes from doing it. We sort of toe the line. Like a little boy that was told to sit down and you know, finally he did.

But he says, Mommy, I'm standing up on the inside, you know. And I think a lot of us are like that. We're doing that which is right outwardly, but inwardly we're craving for the things of the world and so on.

It's only that which is done right in the sight of the Lord that really makes any brownie points, if I can put it that way, with God Himself. But here is a man that has a longing to do that which is right in the sight of God. And it says in verse 3, in the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the Lord and he repaired them.

If you go over to verse 17, it says they began the consecration on the first day of the first month. So let me add those two verses together. In the first year of his reign, in the first month, on the first day, he opened the doors of the house of the Lord and he repaired them.

That's what I call priority. Here he becomes king before he passes any sort of legislature, before he signs anything into law, before he makes any sort of rules or regulations or anything else. The first year of his reign, the first month of his reign, the first day of his reign, he goes to the house of God which has been boarded up by his father and he opens up the house of God and he begins to bring about restoration and repair and cleansing in the house of God.

Now I believe that one of the things that God is doing today in a very real sense is bringing cleansing back into the house of God. Holiness for many, many years was, if I can use it, it's not intended to be a pun, was almost a dirty word. You know, we were afraid of holiness.

We were afraid of walking uprightly in righteousness and integrity and purity before God and we don't like preachers that sort of, you know, have that hardline message on holiness. The way we get out of that, we stone them with words like this, legalism, legalism, legalism. In other words, we don't want to hear this message of holiness.

We want to live our own selfish, carnal, fleshly lives. We don't want preachers telling us how to live and if they do touch on this area of walking in integrity before God and walking in that which is pleasing to Lord, then the only way we can sort of, you know, get even, so to speak, is say, oh that church is legalistic. What a tragedy, isn't it? God said be holy, not as your pastor is holy, not as the Apostle Paul is holy, be holy as I am holy.

That's a pretty high standard, but God wants a holy people. Prior to the first coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, there was one message that came from the wonderful messenger John the Baptist, prepare you the way of the Lord. What was that? Preparation, repentance.

I believe prior to the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, there is another message that is coming or I should say the same message but it's coming again, repentance. God is getting his church cleansed and so as we look at this and I realize this is in an Old Testament setting and I realize we're talking about a literal building, but I want you to look at it in the spiritual sense that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. We now are the house of God.

This is a nice building but it is not the church. I always get upset with people who say, isn't it good to be in the house of the Lord this morning? I say, no, it's good to be the house of the Lord this morning. This is not the house of God.

The Bible says in Acts 17, God does not dwell in temples made with hands. I don't care how many stained glass windows or how many millions of dollars you spend on them, God is not impressed. He's impressed with the condition of this house and this house alone and so here is a man that he's determined to get the house of God right again and that should be our priority like Hezekiah on the very first day, at the very first year, the very first month of the year before he does anything else he gets right with God and we need to have that priority in our own lives.

Before we recarpet the house and before we fix up this and that, we get involved in all the carnal things of life. We need to make sure that our spiritual relationship with God is right and so he begins then and it says he opened the doors of the house of the Lord. Notice if we go back to the previous chapter, verse 24, it says he has gathered together the utensils of the house of God.

He cut the utensils of the house of God in pieces and he closed the doors to the house of the Lord, made altars for himself in every corner of Jerusalem. So the doors of the house of God had already been closed and the first thing Hezekiah does then, he opens the doors of the house of the Lord and he repairs them. Now let me say something as we go through this chapter and that is this, that Hezekiah did nothing to the outside of the temple.

There isn't any record of him sort of cleaning the outside, putting a new roof on, you know, repairing anything else other than getting access into the inside. In order to get access into the inside he had to open the doors. You see God is not interested in the outward appearance.

He's not concerned about how good you look outwardly. I have pastored for 35 years, my wife and I, and I have seen some beautiful temples, so to speak, dressed up on a Sunday morning in their finest and knowing, you know, when to bow and when to raise their hands and when to do this and when to do that and so on and so forth. And they look the epitome of spirituality.

As Steve Hill would say, they know how to sort of tilt their head at that consecrated angle when they're singing and they look extra spiritual. But then I found that the internal condition is not the same as what appears externally. And God is not interested in the externals.

He is interested in the internal condition of your life. Jesus reprimanded the scribes and the Pharisees because outwardly they look clean. He said, you guys look like whitewashed sepulchres.

Everything about you is immaculate. There's not a, you know, there's not a thing that's wrong with you outwardly. But Philip's translation says inwardly you're like an open sewer.

It's a little tough translation, but Jesus said inwardly you're full of dead men's bones and rottenness just like any tomb. And we need to ask ourselves what is the condition of my life internally like? When other people, what is the thing that other people don't see about me? The secret lusts that I have, the bondages that are in my life, the things I've never shared with my wife, never shared with my husband, the things that the kids don't know about, those things that the psalmist talks about as the secret sins in the light of your presence. A lot of secret sins.

A lot of things that we keep hidden. And so the first thing he does then, he opens the doors. Now I find that there's a lot of people that live behind closed doors.

In other words, you can only get so far in your relationship and you run into a closed door. They're not open. They're not transparent.

They want to tell you what's going on inside. And you'll say to a brother or a sister, you know, how's it going brother? Fine. You know, what's God doing in your life these days? Not much.

You know, things are okay. You know, and you, that's about it. They don't let you inside.

And the enemy is a master at getting us to keep those doors closed. Not being open, not being transparent. In the parable of the sower, when the seed was sown, it fell into different types of soil.

Those different types of soil represented different heart conditions. And the heart that brought forth thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold, the Bible says, was not a pure heart or righteous heart. It was an honest heart.

It was an honest heart. Nothing wrong with a pure heart, obviously. Nothing wrong with a righteous heart.

But God's looking for honesty. You see, and it's the honest heart that says, listen, God I need you. I've got things in my life that I know are not right.

And I want to open those doors. And yet the enemy says, listen, don't open the doors, whatever you do. Don't let people really know who you are.

If they do, maybe they'll not like you, or maybe this will happen, or whatever. And so we live behind closed doors. I'll give you an illustration.

We had a young lady, my wife and I, on our team, when we looked after a youth with a mission base many, many years ago, back in the early 70s, 71 and 72 in New Guinea. And she had come up from one of the Australasian countries. I won't mention which one, just to protect her.

We'll call her name Susie. It wasn't her real name. But Susie joined us on the team there.

And she was a girl that used to love to pray. And after a number of months, we noticed that she became a little more and more withdrawn. And she wasn't sort of fellowshipping.

We lived all together in a big house. My wife and I had a little tiny apartment underneath. And then we had, you know, a married couple, and then some single girls, and single guys, and some national people living with us.

And maybe about 16 of us all together, something like that in this house. And she just wasn't sort of fitting in like she did when she originally arrived. And so the co-worker and myself, we called her in one day.

And we said, Susie, you know, we're just concerned. We've noticed you seem to be a little withdrawn these days. And we were very gentle and trying to help her.

And, you know, she had a closed door. She said, no, I'm fine. You know, I said, well, you know, you just don't seem to be yourself.

Well, no, no, no, you don't understand. Things are okay. They're fine.

And we weren't able to get through. There was something there. That door was closed.

And finally, my co-worker, who moved in the realm of the Spirit, God spoke to him and gave him a word. And he looked at this girl. He said, Susie, God's just told me something about you.

And all of a sudden, of course, she sort of looked. And he said, he said, God told me that you've been involved in an incestuous relationship with your father. And all of a sudden, the doors opened.

And she sobbed, and she sobbed, and she sobbed, and she sobbed, and she sobbed. And she just cried uncontrollably. And then she told her story.

How as a little girl, her father began to interfere with her sexually. And her father was part of a Pentecostal Church. And he was a deacon or an elder.

I can't remember which now. And when this began to happen, of course, here she knew that if she went to her mother, maybe her mother wouldn't believe her. And maybe it would cause a breakup of the family.

And so she was afraid to say something. She was also afraid to go and tell her pastor, because here her father had a position in the church. And it might mean that he would, you know, get thrown out of the church or whatever.

And then she would get the blame, whatever happened. They either wouldn't believe her, or she would get the blame, and so on. And so she kept all of this bottled up inside her.

And the years went by, and she became a young woman. And she wasn't able to share. And no doubt the enemy says, listen, this is so embarrassing.

Don't ever open that door. You know, let people know you just the way you are. And that she struggled with all of this stuff that was going on inside.

It wasn't her fault, obviously. But all the uncleanness, and all the garbage, and all the memories of that. And she was all sort of bound up inside.

And all of a sudden, God just opened the door for her. And it just tumbled out. All, again, the tears.

But you see, we live behind closed doors. Oh, I could tell you story after story, keep you here all night of confessions that I've heard in my own office many, many, many times. Horrible things.

Things you would never dream that went on in the house of God. But you know, we're all people, aren't we? And we're all sinners. We're no different in the world.

Jesus said, I'd come again to be the physician of the sick, not those that are well. That's what brought us to Christ in the first place. We had a need.

Our marriage was breaking up. But this was going wrong, and that was going wrong. You know, we were looking for peace, or something rather.

And it was out of the fact that we were sick that brought us to the great physician. And we found healing and cleansing. But many times, there are areas of our life we just don't want people to know about.

Things that we struggle with, that we think, you know, I shouldn't be struggling with these. I've been a Christian for six months, or six years, or 60 years for that matter. You know, and I've never been able to share.

Because if I share, what's, you know, people are going to think, they're not going to think that, you know, I'm as spiritual as I've made out all these years. And you know, I've let the years go by, and I've never really opened up in this area. If I start opening up now, you know, and we've got all sorts of reasons.

Fears. Fears of what people will think. Pride that keeps us from opening the doors, and so on.

But you see, before the uncleanness can be carried out, the doors had to be opened. You see, we will never get rid of all the stuff that goes on inside, until we become transparent. Until we become honest.

And we've got all sorts of doors, don't we? Just as a natural building has got doors. You've got a door here, and a door back there, and so on. And we've got doors.

We've got the eyes are a door. They let in all sorts of pollution, don't they? The psalmist says, you know, I will set a watch over the door of my lips. He said, this is a door.

It can let things out, and so on. You see, what Hezekiah does now, he repairs the doors. He doesn't take them off.

He repairs them. Doors need to open at certain times, and doors need to close at certain times. Doors prevent access, but doors also permit access.

You go home tonight, and your door permits you access into your house. But once you get in your house, you close the door. Why? To prevent access.

After all, it's night. You never know who's in the neighborhood, and so on. So we don't want somebody coming into our house.

So we need to let certain things in, but we need to keep certain things out. The same thing is true spiritually. The Bible says, lift up your heads or your gates.

Be lifted up, you everlasting doors. What? The King of glory may come in. Now that's a good thing to let in.

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man open the door, you know, I will come in. Thank God we need to allow certain things to come in, but also we need to stop certain things from coming in.

So we need to permit things in. We need to prevent things from coming in. Job, in my devotions, I'm just sort of, you know, methodically reading through the Word of God.

I'm now in the book of Job. Not especially looking forward to getting through the book. Well, looking forward to getting through the book of Job.

But you know, Job isn't one of those exciting books, especially. You know, trying to figure out, you know, all that's going on there. But, you know, Job says, I have made a covenant with mine eyes not to gaze upon a virgin.

The book of Job begins with this wonderful description of this man of God. A man of righteousness. A man that eschewed evil.

A man that turned God, and so on. I mean, he's, you know, you put him up on a pedestal. I mean, after all, he was God's sort of pride and joy when the devil came roaming around.

You know, God couldn't help but say, Devil, have you ever considered my servant Job? You know, I bet you can't make him sin. I bet you can't make him fall. You know, test him all you want.

You know, just spare his life. I mean, God was so proud of him. You know, he literally just said, Here devil, have a go at him.

But you know, Job says, I made a covenant with my eyes not to gaze upon a virgin. See, here was a man like any other man. A man of subject to like passions as we are, who found himself in the house of God looking at the young women.

Until obviously, the Spirit of God convicted him one day, and he says, I've made a covenant now with my eyes. I'm not going to gaze anymore. I'm not going to lust anymore in the house of God.

And so, we need to make sure the doors of God's house are repaired. They open at certain times. They close at certain times.

We let certain things in. We don't let certain things in. We're enjoying being with Kim, and her husband hopefully is coming tonight.

She's been a little lonely, but we've been keeping her, you know, amused here, because they're there with Gary and his precious wife. And we're all, you know, it's like the Brady Bunch. We're having a good time.

But anyway, we're all in the same house. But I noticed on top of the television, there is a little sign there, WWJD. What would Jesus do? What a good place to have it.

Right over the television. Why? Because there is a door, isn't it? Something that can come in and totally defile everything that God is trying to do. Undermine what God is trying to do.

Fill it. Fill this temple full of uncleanness. And we've got to ask ourselves, Lord, I don't want to open the door and allow things to come in.

So that's the first thing that he does. And then he gathers us together in verse 5 with all the leadership. And he says, consecrate yourselves now and consecrate the house of the Lord, the God of your fathers, and carry the uncleanness out from the holy place.

He says, listen, this house is full of uncleanness. God's house. I mean that's terrible, isn't it? To imagine that God's house, this Holy God, this righteous God, His house that was supposed to be a place that was typified by holiness.

After all, the holy place, the holy of holies, this holy place and holy of holies, the dwelling place of God, where God says, I will dwell with you. I will dwell among you. And so on.

This place is full of uncleanness. And likewise, this house can be full of uncleanness. And what God is wanting us to do is carry out the uncleanness.

Get rid of the uncleanness. And the only way we can do that again is to be honest, to be transparent, to allow those doors to open, to get over our pride, to get over our fears, to get over... Oh, I'm not suggesting you stand up publicly and tell every Tom, Dick and Harry, you know, all your dirty linen. Don't get me wrong.

I'm talking about whatever it takes. Going to a brother, going to a sister, coming to the altar, opening your heart before God and saying, God, you know everything that's going on inside me anyway. You see my down sittings, the Bible says.

You see my uprisings. You know my frame. You know that I'm dust.

You know everything that's going on. The New Testament says everything is naked before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do it. In other words, we can't cover things up.

God knows. He sees right through us. And so the uncleanness had to be carried out from the holy place.

Verse 6, we find out what caused all of this in the first place. Now, what we're looking at in this chapter tonight is the process that took place before revival came. There is going to be a move of God.

The people are getting right. They're getting revived. They've spent years again away from God, neglecting the house of God, neglecting the things of God.

They've been involved in idolatry and immorality and all sorts of other things. I know revival is going to happen. And thank God that's the thing that you and I are looking for, I trust, is a real revival.

It may not happen corporately, but it can happen individually. You know, there's a sovereign thing sometimes about the corporate visitation of God in revival. But we can have a personal visitation with God.

And so we have to, again, be willing to open the doors, carry the uncleanness out. And this is how it all begins in verse 6. For our fathers have been unfaithful. Begins with unfaithfulness.

I sat down, I guess, maybe a year ago now, with a friend in Pensacola. And we were having a cup of coffee or tea or something together. And he said to me, he said, Do you know about my situation? He says, Has your wife told you? And I said, Well, she's told me a little bit.

And his wife had been unfaithful to him. And they were a Christian couple. And this woman, and I don't know all the details, but anyway, had gone through a period of unfaithfulness.

And it happened a number of years ago. And we had developed a relationship with this couple. And he wanted me to know, you know, he wanted to know that I knew about it.

You know how sometimes if you're going to have a relationship, you know, you don't want to keep things hidden because you think, Does he know or doesn't he? You know, his wife told him or whatever. And so he wanted to be open and transparent. And he said, You know, do you know about, you know, my wife and I? And as he told me about the unfaithfulness, the tears just wound up, even though it was many years ago, the fact that he'd been betrayed.

You know, there's a greater faithfulness than the physical. It's the spiritual. So many times we're unfaithful.

You see, the Bible says that we're in a marriage relationship, at least a courtship. We have a wonderful bridegroom. We're the bride.

It's a love relationship. It's a passionate. It should be a passionate relationship, an exciting relationship.

I've never seen people that are in love miserable. You know, they're just sort of starry-eyed. They can't wait to, you know, be with the one that they love and so on and so forth.

And you know, I've never seen a bride walk down the aisle sort of sobbing her eyes out. Do I have to do this? Do I have to? You know, I mean, she's excited. She can't wait, you know.

And she's doing her best to walk, you know, nice and neatly, you know. But really she's, you know, longing to sort of stride down there, get over and get away with her beloved, you know. But God says, listen, you've been unfaithful to me.

And in the New Testament, the Bible says, you adulterers and adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? He that is a friend of the world is no friend of mine. You see, that's unfaithfulness. And sometimes we do.

We love the things of the world more than the house of God, don't we? We love all that the world has to give us and so on. We can spend all our time and our money and everything else, you know, on that sort of love relationship. And God says, listen, it's adultery.

Now I didn't say that. Don't be, you know, be hard on me. That's what the Lord says.

You adulterers and adulteresses, know you're not. Friendship with the world is enmity against me. And so often we're unfaithful to God.

Oh, you know, I'll be hard on you for a little while because I'm only here for a couple days and I'll let Gary mop up after I leave. But, you know, I go to churches all over the nation and around the nations for that matter. And I see churches on a Sunday morning where you have to have two, you know, two different meetings in order to get everybody in, you know, a 9 to 10 30 meeting and then 11 to 1 o'clock meeting or whatever it is.

And you know, those churches are just jammed to the gills. Two services, sometimes three services on a Sunday morning. And then Sunday night you can put everybody, you know, on the first third of the first

part of the church.

And you see, we do our sort of religious thing, don't we? But, you know, the same lover waits on Sunday night that waits on Sunday morning. But we sort of, well, you know, after I don't want to spend too much time with this guy, you know. I mean that, you know, I think there's a lot of unfaithfulness.

And what would we rather do? We'd rather sit at home and enjoy the world. You see, I don't think we'll ever really have revival until we say, God, you've got to do something in my life. You've got to put back the passion.

You've got to put back the desire. You've got to change me. I don't want to be religion, religious.

You know, the one thing that God was harder on, Jesus was harder on than any other group of individuals, was the religious community. He even stood up one occasion, he says, you know, prostitutes and tax gatherers will make it into the kingdom of God before you guys. I mean that's not exactly seeker-sensitive.

That's not the way to start a pastor's conference when you're addressing the scribes and the Pharisees. But that's what Jesus did. Why? Because he said, listen, I hate just the religion, you know, where you stand on the street corner, not because you have any fellowship with me, you stand on the street corner and pray to be seen of men, you know.

And God is looking for a heart relationship, a love relationship. And he says, listen, you've been unfaithful. And then the second thing he says, not only that, but you've done evil in the sight of Lord your God.

Once we're unfaithful, we lose our love relationship, then we drift off and, of course, open ourselves up to all sorts of things, and we do evil in the sight of God. And it says we have forsaken him. They forsook him.

Again, the Christian life, more than anything else, is a relationship. Eternal life is not a place. We think of eternal life as, you know, when we all get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be, and eternal life and heaven are one and the same.

No. Eternal life. This is eternal life, Jesus said, that you may know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.

Eternal life is a relationship. That where I am, there you may be also. And we've got to realize that God is looking for something deeper.

And just as sort of a Sunday morning, you know, put in an hour or two, drop in a few cents into the time, you know, in the box, and sort of do out a good deed. We'll never have a revival until we get honest before God. We open the doors and say, God, I don't have that desire.

I'll be honest with you. See, that's where it begins. God doesn't say, listen, I expect you to be here.

He says, listen, start with honesty. Open the doors and say, God, you need to put a new passion in me, a new desire, a new love relationship. And so it says, they've forsaken him, and then they've turned their faces away from the dwelling place of the Lord, and they've turned their backs.

You see, once we've forsaken him, then of course we begin to forsake the dwelling place, don't we? The reason we don't come on a Sunday night or a Wednesday night, or especially to the prayer meeting, is what? Because we've forsaken him, really. We really have. My father used to say, if you want to know how

popular the church is, you go on Sunday morning.

You want to know how popular the preacher is, you go on Sunday evening. If you want to know how popular the Lord is, you go to the prayer meeting. It's true, isn't it? I mean we really don't want to hang around him too much, you know, an hour or two a week at max.

Lovers don't do that. Lovers love to be with each other. Verse 7, it says, they have also shut the doors of the porch, and they've put out the lamps.

Now if you know anything about the tabernacle, you know that there was an outer court, and then the holy place, and in the holy place there was a lampstand. And when Moses was told to make that lampstand, God says, I want you to put that lampstand so it sheds light on that which is in front of it. And the lampstand, of course, is symbolic of the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

It was the oil, of course, and the fire, the flame. The lamp has gone out, and I find that in a lot of temples, again, the light has gone out. The lamp has gone out.

The Holy Spirit is no longer speaking. The Holy Spirit is no longer active. There's no awareness of the Spirit of God's activity in your life.

You say, well, you know, it's been years since I've ever really felt anything. And I'm not saying that feelings are everything, but we are emotional people. You know, the lamp has gone out.

And when the lamp goes out, of course, it is to shed light on that which is in front of it. And the thing that was in front of the lampstand was the table of showbread that represents the Word of God. And it is the light shining on the Word of God.

After all, He is the one to teach us and guide us and inspire us and bring the Word of God to life. The letter kills, the Spirit brings life. And when the Holy Spirit is not actively working in our lives, then the Word of God has no meaning to us.

It's a book that we sort of pick up once in a blue moon, sort of thumb through it. We can't sort of really make head or tail of it, because we're not really that interested in it. Why? Because the lamp has gone out.

And we need a fresh touch of the Holy Spirit in our lives. You see, again, we need to be honest. We need to open the door and say, God, everything that's being said tonight is true.

I don't like it, but it's true. I don't really enjoy sitting down. I'd far rather watch an evening of television than get alone with you.

I'd far rather read some novel than I would to just go into my bedroom or sit down and allow you to speak to me. See, the lamp has gone out. We need to rekindle the fire once again.

And then it says, not only have they shut the doors and put out the lamps, but they've not burned incense. And of course, the incense typify two things. Incense typifies our prayer life and our praises, our worship, our thanksgiving, our adoration.

And a good way to know what you're like spiritually, again, if we're being honest, is to say, you know, how much do I really enjoy the place of prayer? After all, is there any incense going up? The psalmist says, let my prayers be like incense. Luke chapter 2, it says there that the incense offering was the time of prayer.

The time of prayer was at the time of the incense offering.

And so all the way through the Scriptures, incense, the burning incense represents praise. It represents prayer. And when there's no incense being burned, there's no prayer.

There's no praise. And you say, but I love to praise God. I'm not talking about when you come on a Sunday morning or a Friday night to special meetings like this.

I'm talking about the condition of your heart the rest of the week. Are you one of those individuals, you wake up again and you're thanking God and you every morning, your mercies and great is your faithfulness, that you have a relationship with God where there's always a, you know, praying without ceasing. That doesn't mean you're constantly, you know, down on your knees praying.

But praying without ceasing is that constant communion that you have with God, 24 hours a day, where you know that there's nothing that is between you. It's rather like a mother that has a sick child. And maybe she has to go to work or maybe she has to slip down to the store or maybe she's got to vacuum the house.

But in the back of her mind all the time, she's thinking of that sick child. I wonder how he is or she is and, you know, and so on. In other words, you're constantly preoccupied or at least maybe it's like being in love.

You know, you can't be with that person all the time. You're dating that girl or that guy or whatever. But, you know, every waking moment you're thinking of them even while you're in the office or, you know, taking the train to work or whatever it is.

And praying without ceasing again is that constant contact with God, just thinking about Him and knowing that at any moment you can sort of just pick up the conversation, so to speak. And the incense needs to be there. The praise needs to be there.

Because you go around the house where there's just something that sort of bubbles up and you find yourself just praising God. It's that love relationship again. And then it says, not only have they not burned incense, it says they've not offered the burnt offerings in the holy place to the God of Israel.

Now the burnt offering was a voluntary offering. The burnt offering was the offering that Paul refers to, most expositors will tell us, in Romans chapter 12 where he says, I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God that you present your body, a living sacrifice, really as a burnt offering. That it's totally God's.

You see, if you understand the offerings in the Old Testament, there were sin offerings and peace offerings and all sorts of offerings. And some of the offerings, of course, part of the offering, the actual sacrifice, was given to the priests. That's how they lived.

They ate. And they ate meat day after day after day after day after day. That was God's means of providing.

And so a certain portion went to the Lord. Some of it was thrown out. Some of it was given to the priest.

But in the burnt offering, the whole thing was consumed and given to God. And the burnt offering, of course, in our life today is that volunteering where we give ourself to God and say, Lord, take my life and

let it be consecrated, Lord, today. Take my silver and my gold.

Not a mite would I withhold. The burnt offering is evident when the pastor stands up and he says, you know, it's a new year and Mrs. So-and-so has been looking after the eighth graders and she's moving or she's retiring. She's done it for 15 years.

And, you know, we need somebody that would look after the eighth grade Sunday school class or, you know, the fourth through sixth grade Sunday school class. You know what it's like. It's like pulling teeth, you know.

But there's no burnt offering. Oh, no, I don't want to do that because that will mean I'm going to have to go to church every single week. And I like to skip once in a while.

And, you know, that will mean that Saturday nights I'm going to have to prepare and, you know, my favorite programs on. You know, we've got all the reasons why, don't we? But the burnt offering isn't there. The Bible says, thy people will volunteer freely in the day of thy power.

And God is looking for that freewill offering. Listen, I'm not much of a teacher, but I'll do my best. And I'll begin to seek God and I'll begin to pray and I'll take that little class of five-year-old kids that everybody else thinks is just a, you know, waste of time.

And, Lord, I'll pray for Johnny and I'll pray for Mary because one day Johnny may become the next Billy Graham and Mary may become a great woman of God. And I'll take seriously and I'll write up their names on a piece of paper and day after day I'll call them out before you. And I may not see them because next year they'll go to another class, but I want to have an input into their life.

I want to show them the love of God. I want to make sure that they understand, you know, the house of God is a fun place to be in. And little Susie there who doesn't have a father, you know, I want to be a father for that little girl.

And one day when the books are opened and they become a Billy Graham or they become this or they become that, God has a record. He says, listen, you played just as much a part in that girl's life or that little boy's life as that professor did when they were 20 years of age in school. They got all the credit for them being a great pastor one day or whatever.

But the voluntary offering of ourselves, we don't do it very much. We don't, after all, we love our independence, don't we? And we blame the pastor for all the things in the church. My wife and I lived in New Zealand for 15 years.

There's three million people and 15 million sheep. And you know, I've never seen a shepherd give birth to a sheep, to a lamb. It's the sheep that reproduce.

The shepherd feeds them. He cares for them. And it's the sheep that reproduce.

But you see, we've got the concept, listen, we pay the pastor at least a little bit. And he's supposed to reproduce and he's supposed to do this, he's supposed to do that, you know, and that lets us off the hook. No, we're the body of Christ and we're members in particular.

And we all need to function together. Imagine if my body looked at the head and just said, head, we want you to do everything. And my legs refused to get out of bed in the morning.

My arms refused, you know. We're the body of Christ. The only way this church will ever grow and so on is for us to begin to offer the burnt offering.

Say, Lord, there's only one life will soon be passed. Only what's done for Christ will last. Lord, the things that are seen are just temporal.

The things that are unseen are eternal. And Lord, I'm gonna get involved. I'm gonna see what I can do.

I'm gonna begin to pray. I'm gonna uphold, you know, those labor among us and so on. The voluntary offering.

But you see, all of that had closed down. The house of God, all, nothing was working properly. Everything had stopped.

Everything was ceased, had ceased. Why? Because there's uncleanness, there's unfaithfulness. Verse 8, therefore, because of all of this, therefore the wrath of the Lord was against Judah and Jerusalem.

Can you imagine God being against his own people? Oh, we've got this picture of God as just a great big lovable father figure, warm, cuddly, fuzzy sort of a God that just wants to, you know. No, he gets upset. Oh, it's a righteous indignation.

But when he sees the condition of the church that he redeemed with his own blood, and he knows the potential of that church, and he sees the disappointment, he's angry. And he sees Judah, the place of praise, Jerusalem that was to be the center of his presence. And everything's closed down and nothing's operating the way it should be operating.

And God's angry with him. After all, that's the only thing that he has to reach the nations with. Jerusalem was to be the praise of the whole earth.

Jerusalem was to be a light in the midst of the darkness. The house of God was to be the place where people saw the presence of God and so on. And we need to ask God, God restore once again a joy to the house of God.

Restore this passion for the house of God again. And it all begins with cleansing. The uncleanness has to be taken out.

That's the number one obstacle. Your sins have separated between you and your God. Caused him to hide his face from you, so he doesn't hear anymore.

And so he says, therefore the wrath of the Lord was against Judah and Jerusalem. He made them an object of terror, of horror, of hissing, as you see with your own eyes. For our fathers have fallen by the sword.

Our sons and our daughters and our wives are in captivity because of this. This is all the result of being unfaithful. This is all the result of allowing uncleanness to come in.

This is all the result of shutting the doors. This is all the result of not burning incense. This is all the result of no burnt offerings.

God was opposing them, number one. Number two, people were dying. Our fathers have fallen by the sword.

Our sons and our daughters and our wives have gone into bondage of captivity. Oh I'm sure in a congregation of this size, we can look and we can say, listen I've got children in captivity. In captivity to drugs, in captivity to alcohol, in captivity to this, in captivity to that.

You know, my husband's not even coming to church anymore, or this or that, the other thing. And there's even death. Oh it may not be physical death, but spiritual death.

We've got to a place where we're dead in trespasses and sins, all because we've forsaken him. Now notice what Hezekiah does after all of this. In verse 10 he says, it's in my heart to make a covenant with the Lord, the God of Israel, that his burning anger may turn away from us.

My sons, he said, do not be negligent now. For the Lord has chosen you to stand before him, to minister to him, and to be his ministers in the burning sins. He begins now by saying, listen, we need to make a fresh start, a new covenant, a new agreement.

We need to get serious about this. Write it down on a piece of paper, so to speak. We have got to change.

Things cannot continue on the way they are. Let's make a covenant with God. After all, this is a covenant, isn't it? Marriage covenant.

We need to have a spiritual marriage covenant. God, I'm going to marry into your purpose. I vow, Lord, that things are not going to be the same.

I've drifted. I've allowed this to come in. I've allowed myself to get caught up in this and that, the other thing.

And the way in which Hezekiah does it, he says, listen, look at what God has called you to be. First of all, he says, the Lord has chosen you to stand before him. What an incredible privilege that is.

That you and I have the privilege of being able to come into the very presence of God. I don't think there's a person here, if we had an invitation to the White House, to some great big function, wouldn't be waving it around all excited to think, that we were chosen out of everybody in Rhode Island or something to represent the state, you know, the White House at some major function. I mean, what a privilege to go into the seat of government.

I mean, right into the very White House itself. And so listen, we've got a privilege that surpasses that by far. To come into the presence of the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

And not only that, it says, but to minister to Him. To really minister to Him. I don't understand why God needs to be ministered to.

I mean, He's self-contained. In that sense, He's God. And yet, we have the privilege of coming in, standing before Him, and being able to bless the Lord.

Lift up your hands. Bless the Lord in the house of the Lord. And not only that, He says, and to be His ministers.

Not just to minister to Him, but to represent Him. Incredible privilege. I am convinced, and I honestly mean this, I'm convinced that when we get to heaven, we're gonna look back and regret all the wasted hours when we see God in all His majesty and all His glory.

And think, you know, I spent years doing this and doing that. Never really coming into the presence of God. Never really serving Him.

Never really representing Him. We need to see again the privilege that we have. Having access into His presence, and being able to minister to Him, and then to be His ministers.

And so, the people respond. Verse 15, it says, all these brothers assembled. They consecrated themselves.

They went in to cleanse the house of the Lord, according to the commandment of the King, by the Word of the Lord. Notice how they cleansed it, according to the Word of the Lord. Not according to the way they thought it should be cleansed.

Not according to the American way of cleansing, but cleansing according to the Word of God. Calling sin what God calls sin. Oh, I don't do homosexual things.

I don't, you know, I don't commit adultery. I don't do this. I don't do that.

But according to the Word of God, God hates those that sow seeds of discord among the brethren. That's the Word of God. You see, we tend to think, I'm not that bad.

You know, I mean everybody gossips a little bit. Everybody does this. No, they cleansed it according to the standard of God's Word.

Verse 16, so the priests went into the inner part of the house of the Lord, to cleanse it. And every unclean thing, not just a few, every unclean thing which they found in the temple of the Lord, they brought out to the court of the house of the Lord. Then the Levites received it.

They carried it out to the Kidron Valley. The Kidron Valley really was a garbage dump. The place where they burnt everything.

Verse 17, and they began the consecration on the first day of the first month. On the eighth day of the month, they entered the porch of the Lord. Then they consecrated the house of the Lord in eight days and finished on the sixteenth day of the first month.

You see, this was not a superficial cleansing. This was a real detailed cleansing. Sixteen days, over two weeks, to go through that house and cleanse every single thing according to the Word of God.

That's what God's looking for today. This is the beginning of revival when we begin to be honest with God, and we respond to God's Word, and we say, Lord, I will cleanse myself according to your Word. By your grace, Lord, I'm going to deal with this area.

I'm going to deal with that area. Those things that are being covered. Those things that are being kept, again, from husband, or wife, or children, or children keeping them from parents, or whatever.

Look, I'm going to be open. I'm going to open this door, and I'm going to take all that uncleanness out by your grace. I'm not going to allow one single thing to remain in there.

I don't care how long it takes. This was not superficial. It was a thorough work of God.

And then they went to King Hezekiah, finally, in verse 18. It says, we have cleansed the whole house of the Lord, the altar of burnt offering, and all its utensils, the table of showbread. We talked about that.

It wasn't in that other verse, but there we have it, with all of its utensils. Moreover, all the utensils which King Ahaz has discarded during his reign and his unfaithfulness, we have prepared, we've consecrated, and behold, they are before the altar of the Lord. The altar of the Lord was repaired.

The sacrifices began again. Now notice what happened after all of this. Verse 25, then Hezekiah stationed the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, with harps, with lyres, according to the command of David, and of Gad the king's seer, and of Nathan the prophet.

For the command was from the Lord through his prophets, and the Levites stood with the musical instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets, and they gave the order, and the burnt offerings began. When the burnt offering began, the song of the Lord also began, with the trumpets accompanied by the instruments of David, king of Israel, and the whole assembly worshipped. The singers sang, trumpets sounded, all this continued until the burnt offering was finished.

At the completion of the burnt offering, the king and all who were present bowed down, and they worshipped. Verse 30, and King Hezekiah, the officials ordered the Levites to sing praises to the Lord with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer, and they began to sing praises with joy, and they bowed down. Now look at the celebration that took place.

You see, there is no such thing as genuine celebration without consecration, without cleansing. There is an order in the Word of God. You see it repeatedly.

Righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. It is never in any other order, because there is no peace, and there's no joy without righteousness. The Bible says there's no, there's no joy without righteousness, and so there is righteousness first, getting right with God, and then when we're right with God, we have the peace of God, and when we have the peace of God, then the joy of the Lord is our strength, and it was after this deep work of cleansing that all of a sudden the, the instruments began, the singers were brought in, the choir was brought in, the trumpets began to sound.

There's incredible celebration, incredible rejoicing in Jerusalem. Here was a city that had been in, in idolatry just a few days ago, and now because of this thorough cleansing, the whole place is euphoric. Whole place is up in praise and worship, and they began again with the burnt offerings.

Notice in verse 32, and the number of the burnt offerings, 70 bulls, a hundred rams. I mean, there's lavish giving to God now, lavish giving. You see, once we get back to God, and we honestly find the joy of the Lord is our strength, we find this relationship again, this love relationship, and you know, it's hard to praise God when there's sin in your life.

Isn't that right? In fact, you may recall the story in the book of Joshua, of one of the Israelites by the name of Achan. Achan was the character you recall who, after their wonderful success at Jericho, bringing down the walls of Jericho, they went up against a little tiny town called Ai, and they were so full of confidence

after Jericho, they thought, listen, we don't have to send everybody up there, we'll just send a few people, and they got wiped out. And of course, Joshua falls on his face before God, and God says, hey, quit praying to me, get up on your feet.

He says, Israel is sin, therefore they cannot stand before their enemies. And there was sin in the camp, and the way in which Joshua determined who the sinners were, they came by, tribe by tribe, and family by family, until finally they came to Achan, and he says, basically, praise God, brother. It's hard to praise God when you've got sin in your life.

He says, gotcha. See, when you can't praise God, there's something wrong. But when things are right, and your relationship with God is right, there's an automatic wanting to praise Him.

He lifted me also out of a horrible pit, and out on a miry clay. He set my feet on a solid rock. He's put a new song in my mouth.

I can praise God now. Lord, I'm clean. Thank you, Lord, for washing me.

Thank you, Lord, for cleansing me. Thank you, Lord, that I'm in a right place with you. Your blood has forgiven me.

And so they're bowing down. They're in worship now before the Lord. And so verse 35, the last part of the verse, it says, thus the service of the house of the Lord was established again.

That's revival. Established again. Functioning the way God intended it to function.

Oh, it was established once before, but they drifted. They'd shut down the lamps. They closed the doors, and so on.

But now it's established again. Some of you need to be established again. Oh, you may have been saved for many, many years, but somehow you know that things are not the way they used to be.

You've lost your first love. You've lost that fervor that you once had. And God is wanting to bring it back.

I don't want to go on too much more, but let's just drop just for a moment into chapter 30. They begin to celebrate the Passover there. And in verse 5, it says, they established a decree to circulate a proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, that they should come and celebrate the Passover of the Lord, the God of Israel, at Jerusalem.

For they had not celebrated it in great numbers as it was prescribed. And so they sent couriers throughout the land, in verse 6. And it says, O sons of Israel, return to the Lord God of Abraham and Isaac and Israel, that he may return to those of you who have escaped and left from the hand of the king of Assyria. Notice, when we return to him, he says he'll return to us.

Do not be like your fathers, verse 7, and your brothers, who were unfaithful to the Lord their God. So he made them a horror, as you see. Do not stiffen your neck like your fathers.

Oh, don't become proud. Don't become arrogant. Don't say, listen, I don't care who this guy is, or where he came from.

I'm not going to, you know. No, let the Spirit of God have his way. Verse 9, if you return to the Lord, your brothers and your sons will find compassion before those who led them captive, and will return to this land.

Listen, if we return to God, guess what? We come out of our bondage. We come out of our captivity. For the Lord your God is gracious and compassionate, will not turn his face away from you, if you return to him.

Isn't that a beautiful promise? We have a God that's not here tonight just to bring you under condemnation. A God that wants to bring you into a place of liberation. He's a God of compassion.

He's a God of mercy. He's a God of kindness. And it says, if we return to him, he will return to us.

And so the couriers went throughout all the land. Verse 10 says, they went to the country of Ephraim and Manasseh as far as Zebulun. But they laughed them to scorn.

They mocked them. Nevertheless, some of the men of Asser, Manasseh, Zebulun humbled themselves, and they came to Jerusalem. You see, you have different responses.

There were those that laughed. There were those that scorned. There were those that just didn't listen to the message.

There were others that said, listen, I'm gonna humble myself. I'm gonna go back to God. I'm gonna go back to the house of God, back to Jerusalem.

I'm gonna find a God of my father's. I'm gonna find that joy that I once had. I'm gonna find that peace that I once had.

I'm gonna find that relationship that I once had. It's been gone. It's been gone for weeks.

It's been gone for months. It's been gone for years. But I'm going back.

I'm gonna walk humbly before God. And you can go on again. It talks about how they prepare the heart to see God, and the celebration that took place.

All of that in chapter 30. God is a God of compassion. The only instrument that He has to reach this world is the church.

Your life, my life, and the thing that stops Him, and the thing that hinders Him, again, is the uncleanness. And I'm not saying it has to be major sin in that sense. It can be just that lack of first love, that lack of compassion, that lack of dedication to the house of God, that lack of commitment.

Lack of commitment, first of all, to Him, because they forsook Him, and then they turned their back on the house of God. Say, God, give me a fresh hunger for your word. Rekindle that light again.

Lord, I want your Holy Spirit to be active in my life again. I used to prophesy. I used to sing in the house of God.

I used to give a message in tongues. I used to interpret. I used to teach Sunday school.

I used to do this. I used to do that. You know, I don't have any desire anymore.

But Lord, I'm honest tonight. I thank you for your mercy. I thank you for your compassion.

I'm gonna open the door, and carry out, get rid of those things that stood between us. Let's just close in prayer. Father, we thank you tonight for your patience with us.

Lord, I think in my own life, the years and years and years that you were patient with me. But Lord, you have a longing to see lives set free, people brought out of their bondage, brought out of their captivity. And I pray, Lord, tonight that there would be the grace and the humility to open doors, not to care about what others think, but to humble themselves in the sight of the Lord, and to allow you, Lord, to restore and to rekindle that passion and that first love.

And so Holy Spirit, we ask that you would just in the very stillness of this moment begin to brood over this congregation. And in your own gentle, compassionate way, Lord, reveal your love and your mercy. Bring healing, Lord.

Bring restoration. Have your way. Let's just allow God to speak to us.

I'm going to be gone in a few days. It doesn't really matter. You're not accountable to me.

In one sense, you're not accountable to Pastor Gary, but you are accountable to God. You're part of his body, part of his church, and he is so jealous for his church, so desirous that you and I come into the fullness of all that God intended. And I think many times we're sort of like a student that goes to the professor, not that anybody would do this, but the first day of class, and you say, Professor, what's the very least I have to do to get by in your class? Instead of saying, I want to get an A, I want to excel.

And many times I think we try and just scrape into heaven on the essentials. God, what's the very least I need to do to make sure that I can get to heaven one day? I think that's so disappointing to God. We should be saying, God, what can I do to please you? How can I be involved with you, Lord? I want to be a laborer together with you.

I want to build what you're building. I want to be involved in what you're involved in. Lord, I don't want to drag my feet.

I don't want to be lukewarm. I don't want to be indifferent, Lord. I'm asking you tonight, Lord, to change my life.

I can't change it by myself, Lord. You know the desires that I have for the things of the world. Lord, I'm asking you to change my heart, O God.

Renew a right spirit within me, Lord. Put back again that passion. Put back that fervor, Lord.

Have your way. If we could just stand quietly. I'm going to ask the worship team to come again.

These altars are open. I'm not going to drag you forward because that's not exactly a voluntary offering. Why don't you come and let me just do something I've done for many, many years.

If you're kneeling or sitting, I'm going to just leave you alone. I believe there's a time and a place. Some of you are mature enough.

You know what needs to be done. And you just want to find a quiet place and be left alone and get right with God. I also recognize that there are times when we need counsel and we need somebody to agree with us and pray with us.

Or maybe we've got a problem or a difficulty, and if you're standing, somebody will come and pray with you. And so let's do that at least for the next couple of nights. If you just want to be alone, just come and kneel.

But if you're standing, somebody will come and help you. And let God have His way. Why don't you just respond now as God lays it upon your heart.

Just come.

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