

Open Doors

by David Ravenhill

David Ravenhill's sermon emphasizes the importance of restoring our relationship with God through honesty, transparency, and prioritizing spiritual purity as exemplified by King Hezekiah.

Duration: 57:50

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:14, 2 Chronicles 29:3-5, Psalm 51:10, Matthew 7:7, Romans 12:1, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, Hebrews 10:24-25, James 4:8, 1 Peter 2:5, Revelation 3:20

Topics: "Ministry", "Restoration", "Worship"

Description

David Ravenhill emphasizes the significance of opening the doors of our hearts and lives to God, drawing parallels from the life of King Hezekiah, who prioritized restoring the house of the Lord after it had been neglected. Hezekiah's actions serve as a reminder that true worship and service to God must come from a place of purity and transparency, as he opened the doors of the temple and repaired them to restore proper worship. Ravenhill urges believers to confront their spiritual apathy and unfaithfulness, encouraging them to be honest and open before God to experience His grace and restoration. The sermon calls for a return to genuine worship and a commitment to God's purposes, highlighting that the house of God should be a place of joy, prayer, and community. Ultimately, Ravenhill challenges the congregation to prioritize their relationship with God and to be willing to open the doors of their lives for His transformative work.

Transcript

Let's pray again, shall we? Father again, we need you. Thank you, Lord, for the promise, I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against heaven. Lord, this is your church here tonight.

We ask, Lord, that you would do what you said you would do, Lord, establish your purposes in each and every life. Lord, you know our down sittings, you know our uprisings, you're a good shepherd. You call your own sheep by name, and I pray, Lord, that you would administer specifically and individually to each and everyone tonight in Jesus' name, amen.

If you have your Bible, turn with me to the Old Testament, to 2 Chronicles, chapter 29. In my earlier days as a Christian, I avoided the Old Testament. I didn't get too much out of it, and the latter years, the older I get, I tend to enjoy the Old Testament.

How many of you know that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God? How many of you know that the only Bible they had in the New Testament was the Old Testament? That the New Testament church

studied the Old Testament Scriptures because there was no New Testament at that particular time? I know a lot of people think the Old Testament, you know, should be thrown out and we're living in the days of the New Testament, but the Bible says all Scripture is given by inspiration of God. The things that were written before time, the Bible says, were written for our instruction. I'm one of those visual sort of people, and, you know, the New Testament tends to be more principal.

The Old Testament tends to be more stories, and I get more of the principles out of the stories in the Old Testament. So, here we are in 2 Chronicles chapter 29, and this chapter deals with the life of Hezekiah, one of the great kings of Israel. Hezekiah was a man that brought about tremendous reformation in the nation of Israel.

His father was a king by the name of Ahaz. If you have time, you can read the previous chapter. Ahaz was not a very good king.

It says in verse 1 of chapter 28, Ahaz was 20 years old when he became king. He reigned 16 years in Jerusalem, and he did not do right in the sight of the Lord as his father David had done. It says he burned his sons in the fire, burned incense in the valley of Ben-Hinn, and so on.

He sacrificed and burned incense on the high places. It goes on. I mean, everything this man did was contrary to the ways of God.

In verse 19, the Lord humbled Judah because of Ahaz, king of Israel, for he brought about a lack of restraint in Judah and was very unfaithful to the Lord. And verse 22, he became yet more unfaithful to the Lord. I mean, this man is just on a downward spiral, and he takes the nation of Israel with him on this downward spiral.

The final thing that he does, he goes to the house of God, and he closes the doors of God's house and shuts the nation of Israel off from God in that sense. His son then becomes king. So let's pick it up in chapter 29.

Hezekiah became king when he was 25 years of age. He reigned for 29 years in Jerusalem. Verse 2, and he did what was right in the sight of the Lord.

You know, it doesn't matter what we do as long as it's right in the sight of God. Not in the sight of your elders, not in the sight of your board, not in the sight of your congregation, those all may be good individuals and so on, but ultimately, we are going to be judged by whether or not we have walked and done that which is right in the sight of God. We're going to stand before him one day, not before our denominational head, not before our elders, not before our deacon board.

We're going to stand one day face to face before the Lord Jesus Christ. And here was a man that lived his life again in the light of death. Verse 3, in the first year of it, well, let me go back to verse 2 for a moment.

He did what was right in the sight of the Lord according to all that his father David had done. It's tragic, I think, when you cannot look to your earthly father, your natural father as an example. Here was a man that could not look to his earthly father.

His earthly father was anything but a godly man. He was an ungodly man. He did everything again contrary to the word of God, burned his sons in the fire, erected high places, burned incense to all the various gods and so on, cut down the house of God.

And yet, Hezekiah finds an example in David. He goes beyond his natural father. He looks back and he finds a man and he says, I want to be a man of God like David.

We need some Davids in the house of God. We have too many. We have a whole generation of young men, young women that can't look many times to their own father as an example.

And they need to look to somebody. They need to be some Davids in the house of God that they say, listen, I want to be a man of God like that. I want to be a woman of God like that.

And so Hezekiah begins to pattern, if you like, his life after David, the king of Israel. 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. Go with me for a moment to verse 17.

It says, now they began the consecration on the first day of the first month. Let me join now those two verses together. Verse 3 then should read this way.

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 repaired them. That's what I call priority. The first day of the first month, of the first year that he was king, he opened the doors of the house of the Lord.

He doesn't wait a week. He doesn't, you know, vote salary increase for himself. He doesn't pass some legislature.

The very first priority of this man is to bring back the house of God to the condition that God intended. We sang a song just a few minutes ago. Lord, make me a sanctuary.

We're looking at a natural sanctuary, but the Bible says in the New Testament, of course, we are the sanctuary of God. We are the house of God. And this was a man that wanted a sanctuary that was going to glorify God.

And so he doesn't put it off. We need to learn something from this man. So often we relegate God to, you know, part of our life when I get time to it, I'll get around to praying.

When I get time to it, I'll get around to witnessing. When I get time to it, I'll do this and I'll do that and so on. No, the very first day, the very first month, the very first year of his reign, he goes to the house of God and he opened the doors of the house of the Lord.

Now as we go through this chapter, you'll notice one thing about it. There isn't a single thing that Hezekiah does, at least no recorded thing, concerning the outside of the house of God. He doesn't repair the roof.

He doesn't repair the shutters, if there were shutters. He doesn't, you know, paint the outside of the house of God. You see, the problem with God's house was not external, it was internal.

Everything that Hezekiah does is on the inside of the house of God. Likewise, in the spiritual sense, God doesn't care what you look like, the color of your hair, or how fashionable you may be or unfashionable, whether you wear designer clothes or not. God looks, not at the outward appearance, He looks at the heart.

Thou desirest truth in the inward part. And this man is concerned about the inside functioning of the house of God. It was not the way God intended it to be.

And so the first thing He does, He opens the doors of the house of the Lord and He repairs them. We need to open doors. I find a lot of Christians live behind closed doors.

You can talk to them about golf and they'll rattle off, you know, the latest and greatest things that are going on in the golf world or the NBA or, you know, NFL or whatever it is and they will talk your, your, you know, your head off. You talk about fishing and they'll talk all day about fishing. I took a flight just another, too long ago.

I'd take a little commuter flight every week from Tyler, Texas into Dallas and then use that as a hub to fly out from and there was a gentleman opposite me and he turned to the person behind him on the plane. They obviously didn't know each other and he said, excuse me, I noticed you're reading the paper. He said, what was the sports score on such and such a game? And he said, let me look and a few seconds later he said, oh, you know, something rather one by, you know, 30 to something and he says, oh, really? And before you know it, these guys were engaged in a constant dialogue the rest of the flight.

I mean, 35 minute flight. They never let up. You know, about this quarterback and that quarterback and this game and that game and who's going to win this and who's going to win that and so on.

I got off the plane. We got on the bus to go into the terminal and they're still talking about sport. I followed them down to the, you know, to one of the gates there.

I was behind them. They're still talking about sport. I mean, you know, all of a sudden this door opened wide open.

They were interested in sport. But there's a lot of times when the door is closed. You can go up to a brother and talk to him about certain things and he'd say, brother, how are things going spiritually? Sort of drops his head and went, well, okay.

All of a sudden you run into a closed door and the first thing the guy does, he opens the doors of the house to look. Now, we need to see something here. He didn't leave them open.

It says he repaired them. You see, doors are for two reasons. They serve a two-fold function to permit access and to prevent access.

You will go home tonight. You will open the door to your house. It will permit you access into your house, your apartment, whatever.

As soon as you get in, you are going to close the door to prevent access. You don't want somebody straying in off the street in the middle of the night walking into your home and so you close the door. Hezekiah opened the doors that had been boarded up but he repaired them.

There are times when you and I need to open the doors. The Bible says, lift up your heads or your gates and be lifted up your everlasting doors that the King of Glory may come in. There are certain times we need to throw open the doors.

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man open the door, I will come into him and he with me. There are times we need to open the doors.

There are times we need to close the doors to prevent access. Solomon said, I put a seal over the door of my lips. In other words, my lips are sealed.

Job says, I've made a covenant with mine eyes. You see, we've got certain entry points, if you like, into this house. Our ears, our eyes and we've got to close them at certain times and open them.

Job says, I've made a covenant with mine eyes not to gaze on a virgin. We have a little bit of an insight into this wonderful man of God, this man that was a man of integrity, a man of righteousness, a man that feared God, a man that turned away from evil, but he wasn't born that way. The grace of God had brought him to that place and now he opens up and he says, you know, there was a time I used to go to church just to look at the young women.

Oh, I enjoyed the dancers, you know. I mean, he's being very transparent, but he says, one day I got convicted and he says, from that moment on I made a covenant with mine eyes I was not going to gaze any longer upon the virgins. There are times these doors need to close.

The type of music we listen to and so on, those doors need to be closed. We need to cut off and avoid the appearance of evil and so the first thing he does, he opens the doors and he repaired them. Now, you will never get anywhere unless you are prepared to open doors.

The Spirit of God cannot do with you what He wants to do unless we are going to be transparent and honest and become open before God. After all, He knows everything about you anyway. The Bible says, all things are laid bare and naked before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

God knows every single thing about you, but He wants you to be honest. In the parable of the sower, the seed that produced thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold fell into a certain type of heart, not a pure heart, not a righteous heart, as good as those are, but Jesus said it fell into honest, an honest heart. You see, I can minister maybe on marriage, your marriage may be on the rocks, and yet if you're not willing to be honest because of pride and you don't come forward, that word will never have an impact in your life.

Why? Because I'm not going to be honest. And so, we've got to open the doors, and the enemy will tell you whatever you do, don't open the doors. You know, you fool them long enough, as long as they don't know what's going on behind that closed door.

You know, and if you become honest and transparent, you never know what's going to happen and so on, and He'll get us to, you know, make sure we never open that door, and we carry those burdens, we carry those problems with us for years and years and years and years and years. It's amazing what people carry. We had a young girl on our team in New Guinea, back in the early 70s, 1970, 71.

She had come from Australasia, one of those countries, I won't mention which one, but she had been with us a few weeks. We noticed that she had become a little more withdrawn, she wasn't entering in, she wasn't as joyful seemingly as she had been, and so my co-worker and I called her in one day, and we said to her, I'll call her Mary, that wasn't her real name, we said, Mary, we've noticed that, you know, you're just not as joyful, you seem to be withdrawn from the rest of the group, and so on, we were very gracious in trying to help her, and we ran in to close the door. No, I'm fine.

No, no, you're obviously, you know, misunderstood, you know, I'm fine, nothing's going on, blah, blah, blah, and the more we sort of probed away, the more the door remained closed. All of a sudden, my co-worker said to her, he said, Mary, God just told me something about you. She looked at him and he said, God told me you've been in an incestuous relationship with your father.

And all of a sudden, that girl just burst into a thousand pieces. I mean, she sobbed like I've never seen a girl sob before. And then the story came out, as a child, she'd been sexually abused by her father, repeatedly, for many, many years.

Her father, unfortunately, was a member of a Pentecostal church. He served on the board of a deacon, I can't remember the details now. And she was terrified if she went to her mother, that she would get the responsibility of breaking up the home.

She was terrified if she went to the pastor, that her father would lose his position, and that she would get the responsibility of that and so on. She didn't know quite how to handle it, didn't know who to go to, and so she bottled all of this up inside her. Again, closed doors.

And the Spirit of God, in that case, very graciously, wonderfully, just released her from that situation. She's married today, got a number of children, serving God. But you see, what goes on behind closed doors, I could tell you hundreds of stories, unbelievable stories of what goes on in the house of God.

It's amazing, isn't it? And yet people can come in, greet one another, we can use all the religious jargon in the world, bless you brother, good to see you this morning, hallelujah, you know, and so on. And three or four months later, that same person can sit in your office, and all of a sudden, out it comes. All the filth, and all the problems that they're battling, and so on.

And so, here was a need for the doors to be opened. Verse five, he says, listen to me, you old Levites, consecrate yourself, consecrate the house of the Lord, the God of your fathers, and carry the uncleanness out from the holy place. You see, the house of God was defiled.

The house of God was unclean. The temple that was supposed to be the dwelling place of God was no longer functioning in that capacity. It had become defiled.

And here is a man that he's determined to clean up the house of God. Now, we're looking at this, obviously, in a New Testament concept of our own lives individually before God. We are the house of God.

And this house has to be clean and pure, as we sang just a few moments ago. And the only way we can carry the uncleanness out is if the door is open. Again, that honesty, that transparency.

Lord, I've been battling this thing for years and years and years and years and years, and I've fooled everybody. I've fooled my wife. I've fooled the kids.

And so on. Nobody knows this particular secret sin that lurks within me. But tonight, I'm going to get rid of this thing once and for all.

I don't care what people think. God, I've got to get right with you. Verse 6. He now gives us a little bit of the background as to how all of this happened.

Our fathers, he said, have been unfaithful. They've done evil in the sight of the Lord, our God, and have forsaken Him. You see, uncleanness begins in the house of God with the people of God when we begin to become unfaithful to God and we begin to forsake Him.

My wife made friends with a lady in Pensacola. They've since become good friends of ours. I wanted to get to know the husband, and he wanted to get to know me a little bit, and so we went out and sat down in a restaurant, had a meal together, and she had been unfaithful to him.

A number of years prior to this, God graciously had healed that situation and they were now serving God in the full-time capacity and so on, but he wanted me to know. He says, listen, as your wife told me, as your wife mentioned to you about our situation, and I said, yes, and he said, I want you to know, and as he began to relate just a little bit of that unfaithfulness on the part of his wife, here it was many years later, and yet here was a man that was just, his eyes teared up because of the pain of that experience. You know, the Bible says that we have a relationship with God like the marriage relationship, and when we are unfaithful to God, again, the pain that it brings to the heart of God, we've got to understand that.

The Christian life is one of a relationship. This is eternal life, that they may know thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent. It's not something that happened 20 years ago to Billy Graham Crusade, that was the beginning, but it's an ongoing relationship, and one of the things that happens repeatedly in the Old Testament, New Testament, is this concept of unfaithfulness.

Israel was unfaithful to God. He wanted to marry her. He wanted to, you know, she was to be his bride, so to speak.

He wooed her and washed her and cleansed her and so on, and then she went after the other nations and after the other gods and committed idolatry and so on. And so it begins with unfaithfulness, a forsaking of Him. In other words, our relationship with God begins to diminish.

We get involved in other things. Again, like Mary and Martha, we get cumbered about. In the case of Martha, with much serving.

We substitute that intimacy with God, that relationship with God for other things, busy activities. You know, it can begin that simple. Not only that, it says, but they've turned away their faces from the dwelling place of the Lord and they turn their backs.

You see, once we forsake Him, then, of course, we have no interest in the dwelling place of God. A good indication, when people are not coming to the house of God on a regular basis, something is wrong. They have become unfaithful.

There's no longer a passion. There's no longer a desire. You guys, almost every single one of you here that are married, you know that time when you were courting your wife and, you know, you couldn't wait to meet her.

I mean, I don't care how tired you were. I don't care, you know, what you've been doing. If she made the slightest suggestion, hey, let's get together tonight.

I mean, you were there and chances are you weren't late. Why? Because there was a passion. There was a desire.

There was a relationship. You wanted to be with the one that you love. And it didn't matter where it was.

It didn't matter how inconvenient it was. It didn't matter how you had to get there. You were going to get there.

You know, whether you had to run, whether you had to walk, whether you had to borrow somebody's car or get on your bicycle or whatever it is, I'm going to be there because I'm in love. We have to have a relationship like that with God. He's coming back for a passionate bride.

Three things about the bride of Christ. She's pure, she's passionate, and she's got a purpose. She's a helpmaker.

In the Song of Solomon it begins where she says, kiss me with the kisses of your mouth. She is passionate. She wants to be held by him, wants to be embraced by him, wants to be kissed by him and so on.

A little while later they talk about, you know, how lovely you are. You're radiant and so on. Talks about her purity.

There's nothing greater than the beauty of holiness. But then she's no longer, I mean, no sooner in love with him and she says, listen, word you pasture your flock. All of a sudden she becomes interested in what he's interested in.

He is a shepherd. And suddenly she becomes, listen, take me down to the flock there. I want to get to know something about the sheep and what you do and so on.

And I, you know, when we fall in love with Jesus, we're going to be passionate towards him. We're going to be pure because he is pure and two can't walk together unless they're in agreement. But also, we've got to have his purpose.

Lord, tell me about your flock. That's your passion, your flock, your house. And I've got to have that same passion towards your house, not neglecting the assembling of ourselves together.

You see, when we forsake him, we begin to forsake the dwelling place of God, the house of the Lord and we turn our backs. Verse 7, it says, they shut the doors of the porch and they put out the lamps. Now, here is this moral decline, if you like.

It begins with this unfaithfulness, forsaking him, then forsaking the house of God and in the process, the lamp goes out. A lamp, obviously, symbolizes the work of the Spirit of God. There's no longer the lamps burning.

In other words, the Spirit of God is no longer speaking to you. There's no insight. There's no sense of God, God's presence in your life.

The lamp has gone out. You're walking in darkness. There's no revelation.

There's no inspiration. Not only does it say the lamp has gone out, but they said they've not burned incense. Incense talk about two things, prayer and praise.

More particularly in the Word of God, the burning of incense was the time of prayer. But it's also talking about praise as well. You see, once you lose that passion, once you begin to drift away from the house of God, once the lamps go out and the Spirit of God is no longer active in your life, you're no longer listening to the voice of God, you're no longer led by the Spirit of God, you're walking in darkness, excuse me, the last thing you want to do is begin to get on your face and pray.

The last thing you want to do is praise God. There's no incense in the house of God. You see, all these are indicative of somebody who has begun to dry up spiritually in their life.

These activities are no longer a part of their, their life. Not only have they not burned incense, it says they've not offered burnt offerings in the Holy Place to the God of Israel. And the burnt offering, of course, was the one sacrifice that was given totally to God.

Sacrifice, Paul talks about there in Romans 12, I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, you present your body a living sacrifice. I've passed it long enough to know that, you know, when there is a need to fulfill, you know, some office in the church, teaching Sunday school or whatever it is, and you ask, and there's a whole house on a Sunday morning, five, six, seven hundred people or whatever, and you say, you know, we need some people to teach the five-year-olds, the eight-year-olds, the ten-year-olds. We need somebody to help with the youth.

We need some home group leaders this year, you know. And there's no burnt offering. There's no voluntary desire, nobody saying, listen, I'll gladly do it.

That's indicative that something is wrong in the house of God. Priorities are not right. Because the burnt offerings are not being offered any longer.

There's no giving of themselves. There's no willingness to be involved in the things of God. Instead, the withholding from God.

They know that it's going to cost them. If they're going to teach those seven-year-old boys, it means that Saturday night, instead of watching whatever they're watching, they need to spend some quality time. Prepare that message.

During the week, it means they've got to take those little kids before God in prayer. They may not have earthly fathers, may come from divided homes, and if they're going to be a real shepherd to that little congregation that God has entrusted them with, and incidentally, he watches how we look after the little things before he promotes us to the big things. And if we're going to take that seriously, there could be another Billy Graham in that little group.

There could be another John Wesley. There could be a Charles Finney. There could be, you know, somebody else.

And if we pour into them with a real sense of, God, these are potential leaders of tomorrow, and I'm going to bring them on a daily basis before the throne of God. I'm going to mention Johnny's name, and Fred's name, and Susan's name, and Mary's name. It's going to cost you something.

But you see, I don't want to give up my time. I'd rather watch and see who wins the NFL. I'd rather watch and see, you know, who wins the Masters or whatever it may be.

And those are all indications that something is wrong in the house of God. The burnt offering is no longer being offered. Verse 8, Therefore, he says, with that as a background, therefore, the wrath of the Lord was against Judah and Jerusalem.

Isn't it sad when God stands opposed to his own people or we don't have that concept of God, do we? We've presented God sort of a one-sided, lovable, laughable, you know, teddy bear sort of a God that, you know, it doesn't matter what we do, how we live and so on. He's always there loving us and caring for us and so on and so forth. Listen, God gets angry with his own people.

He gets disappointed. Many of us bask, I think, in the unconditional love of God. But you read the book of Malachi and it says, I've loved you with an everlasting love.

God is a God that gives unconditional love to us. But he goes on a few verses later but he says, I'm not pleased with you. And you know, I've got kids and when they were growing up, there was, and still is, unconditional love for those children on my part as a father.

But I was not always pleased with them. And we need to understand, God is not always pleased with his people. And here he's angry with what has gone on.

And 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 behold, our fathers have fallen by the sword.

In other words, because of their turning their back on God, they died. They fell by the sword. Our sons and our daughters and our wives are in captivity because of this.

We wonder why. Why is Johnny on drugs? Why is Johnny no interest in church? Why does Susie get involved with these guys that, you know, break my heart and so on. We need to ask ourselves those questions.

Why are our sons and our daughters in captivity? Because our fathers have not been faithful to God. They haven't set the example. They haven't come to Sunday school with their kids.

They haven't come to church. Their kids don't see them going to the prayer meeting. Their kids don't see them going to the cell group.

And then you wonder, why is my kid the way he is? Why don't you have any desire for God? Why is he more motivated with this and that and the other thing? Why is he no different in the world? And our sons and our daughters are in bondage because of this. And here now, Hezekiah says, he says, it's in my heart to make a covenant with the Lord, the God of Israel, that he's burning anger to turn away from us. My sons, he says in verse 11, do not be negligent now for the Lord has chosen you to stand before him, to minister to him and to be his ministers and burn incense.

He says, listen, I've got a, I'm making a covenant today to put things right with God, to get this whole thing that is just spiraled out of control, to get it back and to once again restore the house of God to its right condition. He says, listen, we have the privilege, he presents the ideal now. The Lord has chosen us to stand before him.

There's nothing greater than that, that you and I have the privilege of standing before Almighty God. You received in the mail tomorrow an invitation to go to the White House to meet, you know, the President Bush and his wife. I mean, you would be flashing that all over.

You would be delighted that you were chosen to represent Mesa, you know, Arizona there at the White House, some banquet or something. I mean, you'd be thrilled. Listen, we can come into the presence of the King of Kings and we can stand before him and not only that, we can minister to him.

What an incredible privilege that we can have as we come again in these times together, these times of worship. You know, they're not just part of a routine and we get that over so we can get into the Word of

God. No, the latter part of the meeting is manhood.

The first part of the meeting is God. And yet we come in like, oh, it doesn't really matter as long as we get there for the Word. That's selfish.

As long as I get fed, as long as I get the Word, you know, we'll cut God short by ten minutes. You know, after all, it takes a while for him to warm up and so on. You've got to come with a desire to minister to him.

The first part of the meeting is towards God. We need to recognize that. We need to remember that.

We should be there on time, prepared and ready. You know, we should have been to the laver already, the priest, before he ever ministered, had to spend time at laver washing. We need to come washed and prepared and ready to present to God an acceptable sacrifice.

And a sacrifice doesn't mean that you stand there sort of half yawning and, oh God, I hope, you know, this has cost me a little bit this morning. I was up all night, but, you know, here's my sacrifice. No, the sacrifice all the way through the Word of God, and they understood this in the New Testament, was that you went out to the flock and you chose the very best.

Because the job of the priest was to inspect that sacrifice. And if it had the slightest blemish whatsoever, it was rejected. If it limped, if it had an eye that was half closed or an ear that was torn a little bit or a bit of flesh pulled out of it or a broken bone or, you know, two eyes that were different colors or whatever, I mean, it was rejected.

It had to be what we would call today the blue ribbon winner at the state fair. The very best sacrifice possible. And when the Bible talks about a sacrifice of praise, it has nothing to do with, you know, oh, I'm so tired, but Lord, you know, it's giving God the very best that you can.

Centering your mind on Him, offering unto God an acceptable sacrifice. That's why the psalmist says let the words of my mouth and meditation of my heart be acceptable. Every worship leader needs to study Malachi 1. Again, that chapter deals with a nation that was bringing sacrifices and finally God's had enough and He says, oh, that there was somebody, if only somebody, He said, would shut the gate that they might not uselessly kindle fire upon my altar.

He says, there's sacrifices going on, there's burnt offerings, all of these things are going on, the fires are burning on the brazen altar there, but He says, it's all useless. And they, of course, they respond, well, what's wrong? He says, because you're offering the lame and the blind and the sick. He says, you won't do that to the governor, you won't give the governor that sort of a sacrifice? You won't present the, you know, some dignitary with that sort of a gift that's blemished? He says, am I not a great king, said the Lord? And God again says, just shut the gates because He says, you're wasting my time, you're wasting your time.

None of this is having the impact that you think it is. And I believe there's times, even on a Sunday morning, when we need sometimes just to shut the gates and say, listen, people are talking back there, people are looking around, people are coming in late, you know, there's, this is not an acceptable sacrifice and God is screaming out of the heavens, oh, that somebody would shut the gates. You're uselessly kindling fire on my altar.

But we have the privilege, again, of coming before Him, ministering to Him, and then it says, and to be His ministers. When we stand in His presence, then and only then can we go and minister for Him. And it says, and to burn incense.

So He presents the ideal here for the nation of Israel. Listen, we've got to get back. This is what we're losing.

This is what we're missing. This is far greater than any high place. This is far greater than burning your sons in the fire.

This is greater than anything else. To be able to have access into the presence of the King of Kings, and to be able to minister to Him, satisfy His needs. So they assemble, in verse 15.

They assembled their brothers, they consecrated themselves, they went in to cleanse the house of the Lord according to the commandments of the King by the word of the Lord. Notice the cleansing was in accordance with God's word. It wasn't according to the standards of the day.

Today we're marrying homosexuals. Today we're bringing homosexuals into a priesthood. All sorts of things.

No. It's got to be according to the commandment of the Lord. The word of God.

Not according to what's popular. Not according to what other people think. Hezekiah says, I am going to cleanse this thing according to God's standard.

God's standard that's presented in His word. So the priest went in, verse 16, into the inner part of the house of the Lord to cleanse it. You see, that was what God wants.

He wants to get right in to the very core of your being. He knows you. It's what's inside you that God is interested.

Amazing to me, in many of the sacrifices in the Old Testament, much of what we would value was thrown out. The hide, the stakes, many times, and so on. And the thing that was offered to God was basically the guts.

You know, the kidney, and the entrails, and everything else. Why? Because that was really the internal functioning. God was trying to say symbolically, it's what's really at work inside you that I'm concerned about.

Not the outward appearance. I don't care how many muscles you've got, and what your flesh looks like, and so on. God desires truth in the inward parts.

And it was the internal organs that God was interested in. The fat, and the lobe, and the liver, and all of those things that were offered up to God. And so here now, they go into the inner part of the house of God to cleanse it.

And every unclean thing that they found in the temple, they brought out to the court of the house of the Lord. Now you can't do that unless the doors are open. You can't take what's inside out unless you're willing to open the doors and be transparent.

So it says, the Levites received it. They carried it to the Kidron Valley. That was the garbage dump basically, where the fires were kept burning.

They began the consecration on the first day of the first month, And on the eighth day of the month, they entered the porch. They consecrated the house of the Lord in eight days and finished in 16 days. This was not superficial.

This was a very, very thorough cleansing of the house of God. Every single thing. I mean, you've got all these Levites that are being consecrated.

This isn't just, you know, some little lady from the maid service that they've called up in the yellow pages and says, Hey, would you come and sort of, you know, do a quick job here. You've got an entire group of men working 16 days, 8 or 10 hours a day cleansing the house of God. I mean, they were thorough in what they were doing.

But this is the desire of this man, Hezekiah. We've got to get things right again in the house of God. And I don't care how long it takes, whether it takes a day, two days, three days, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16.

We're going to do it right according to God's word. Then they went to the king. We've cleansed, verse 18, the whole house of the Lord, the altar of burnt offerings, all its utensils, the table of showbread and all its utensils.

You see, let me just say something here. When the lamp goes out, if we can go back to that verse for a moment, the lamp, there's the lamp stand. And when Moses was told to make the lamp stand, the seven branch candlestick, God said to Moses, I want you to place it so that it gives light to that which is in front of it.

In other words, it had a specific function. It was to cast light to that which was in front of it. That which was directly opposite the lamp stand was the table of showbread.

Table of showbread representing the word of God. The lamp stand representing the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit illuminating the word of God.

And when the lamp goes out, the word of God becomes just an old history book to us. We don't get anything out of it. It's dry.

It's musty. It doesn't mean anything to us. Why? Because the lamp has gone out and the spirit of God is no longer quickening and making alive the word of God.

And this is all part, again, of the process of just drying up spiritually. Verse 19, all the utensils that King Ahaz has discarded during his reign and his unfaithfulness we have prepared, consecrated, behold they are before the altar of the Lord. Everything now is restored and then it says, verse 25, he stationed the Levites in the house of the Lord with symbols, with harps, with lyres, according to the command of David of Gad, the king's seer, of Nathan the prophet, for the command was from the Lord through his prophets.

The Levites stood with the musical instruments of David and the priests with the trumpets. When the burnt offering began, verse 27, the song of the Lord began with the trumpets accompanied by the instruments of David. The whole assembly worshipped.

The singers sang. The trumpets sounded. All this continued until the burnt offering was finished.

Now the song of the Lord begins. You see, there is an order in the word of God. Righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

You can never put it in any other order. The work of righteousness, the Bible says, And it's always righteousness. Righteousness being right with God.

They got right with God. Now the celebration is genuine. It is from the heart.

They're clean. They've got clean hands and a pure heart and they are sacrificing. They're shouting.

They're singing. The trumpets are sounding. I mean, they're having a real celebration ceremony and it is acceptable because the house of God is clean.

It says the whole assembly worshipped. Verse 30 it says, They sang praises with joy and they bowed down and worshipped. You know, when you are right with God, you sing praises with joy.

I've always liked the way in which Joshua found out who was responsible for them being defeated at Ai. Remember, they'd successfully taken over Jericho and then a few days later there was this little town and they said, Hey, that's a cinch. We'll be able to take that.

They sent just a few hundred men up there and said, Listen, we took Jericho and they got severely beaten. Joshua falls on his face before God. God says, Get up, Israel, of sin.

Therefore, they cannot stand before their enemies. Joshua has to find out and so he lines them up tribe by tribe, seemingly, if you look at that, family by family and he basically says, He comes to Achan and Achan can't praise God. He says, You're the guy.

I mean, basically, that's the way he did it. You know, we can't praise God when there's sin in our life. We don't feel like it.

But I tell you, when you're clean, you want to dance, you want to praise God, you want to put up your hands, you're excited about the things of God. And they're excited now about the things of God. And so there's this joy, they bow down and they sang praises.

Verse 35, the latter part of verse, Thus the house of the Lord was established again, or the service of the house of the Lord was established again. That's what God wants. He wants God's house to be established again.

I don't know if you know what the house of God looks like when it's established. Let me read something that has always challenged me. In 2 Chronicles chapter 7, chapter 6 rather.

This is where Solomon is opening the house of God, the temple that he has built, of course the plan came from David. But God said to David, you can't build it, you're a man of war, your son will build it. Basically it was sort of like a Lego kit, David had it all ready, Solomon assembled it.

And finally it's all ready and Solomon begins to pray. He's cutting the ribbon that particular day, so to speak. And notice a part of his prayer because this gives us an understanding of what God is looking for in the house of God.

Now this is Old Testament. And the Bible says the glory of the latter house will be greater than the former. This is what a man of God, Solomon, anticipated going on in the house of God.

Verse 32, also he says, concerning the foreigner who is not from thy people Israel. The foreigner, another word for foreigner is the unsaved, the Gentile. So he says, concerning the Gentiles who are not of your people Israel.

When they come from a far country because of your great namesake and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm, when they come and pray to this house or towards this house, then hear thou from heaven. This is Solomon saying, God, listen, I'm anticipating unsaved people coming from around the world and they're going to come to this house because they've heard this is a house where God answers prayer. They've heard that your name is here.

Your power is demonstrated here. And they're going to come from the ends of the earth. And Lord, when they pray, answer them.

Hear thou from heaven thy dwelling place and do all that the foreigner calls to thee in order that all the people of the earth may know thy name. Now what's he saying there? He's saying, listen, when your glory comes into your house and when it is noised abroad once again that God is in the house, we're going to attract the unsaved. And the unsaved are going to come in from nations.

They're going to say, listen, I've been a Muslim all of my life. And I was devoted and I got up and I prayed three times a day and so on. And little, you know, Susie was born and she's got club feet and a cleft palate.

And we prayed and, you know, Allah hasn't done a thing for us. Or we've been into the Buddhist temple and we've brought our little bowls of rice daily, sacrificially given. And nothing has happened.

But we hear there is a God that answers prayer. And we're going to pray to your God now and see if your God is any better than Allah. See if your God is any better than Buddha.

And God, when they pray, answer them because they're going to go back and your name is going to be spread abroad on the face of the earth. I mean, this is the Old Testament. This is the concept of this man.

The house of God is not just for us, he said. It's not just for us Jews. My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.

And when they get answers, they're going to go back to their village. They're going to go back to, you know, Japan and say, hey Buddha, listen, I've been a Buddhist all of my life. But look at Susie now.

She is totally healed. Look at Johnny now. He had AIDS, but he doesn't have AIDS anymore.

Look at this person now. You know, look at, I mean, this was the Old Testament. And the glory of the latter house is to be greater than the former.

And here Hezekiah now is working, if you like, towards that. And he says, thus the service of the house of the Lord was established again. And the people rejoiced at what God had prepared for the people because the thing came about suddenly.

It doesn't take long. God can suddenly move in the house of God. If we are prepared to open the doors, if we're prepared to get right, if we're prepared to be transparent before Him, all of a sudden, suddenly we can change in a moment.

And of course then, you've got all this wonderful celebration. They celebrate the Passover that hadn't been celebrated before for years and years and years. Verse 9, chapter 30, Now 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.

In other words, when God begins to move, prison doors are open, backsliders start coming back, for the Lord your God is gracious and compassionate, will not turn His face away from you if you return to Him. Listen, if you return to Him, He's a gracious God. He is a compassionate God.

He is a merciful God. He's here tonight because of His mercy, His love for you. And if you return, if you come back, if you come back again with those doors open, He will meet you the right way.

But it says, some of the people laughed, verse 10, they scorned, they mocked, nevertheless, some of the men humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. Always different responses. Some will laugh, some will mock, some will scorn, others will humble themselves.

And it's the ones that humble themselves God can meet. And you can go on and read about it, this celebration that went on day after day with loud instruments, it says in verse 21. Hezekiah encourages the people.

There was great joy in Jerusalem, verse 26. Verse 27, the Levitical priests rose, blessed the people and their voice was heard and their prayer came to His holy dwelling place in heaven. God now is listening and answering prayer.

You see, our prayers will not go beyond the ceiling of the church or your home or whatever. If I regard iniquity in my heart, God will not hear me. Here is a nation that is not seeking God.

The doors are closed. There's uncleanness. God has cut them off in that sense.

As soon as they get right and they humble themselves, they open the doors, all of a sudden now God is beginning to answer prayer. And you can go. It says they brought in abundantly the tide of all.

Boy, a change of heart here, isn't there? I mean amazing all the things that took place. A whole new dimension of celebration. A whole new dimension of giving.

This joy, this peace, this happiness, all because they were willing to put God as a priority and say, listen, we've got to get right with it. I don't know you. I'm sure many of you, I trust most of you, are on fire for God.

But if there's that area that's already begun to encroach upon your life of unfaithfulness, just that lack of passion, that lack of desire, that lukewarmness is where it all begins. That apathy begins there and then gradually the enemy begins to take ground. Just a gradual cooling off.

The Bible says in the last days the love of many will wax cold. My wife loves candles. I told her if she'd have been a Catholic we'd have emptied purgatory by now.

And every night, you know, she may go off to bed and there's a candle there and I've got to blow it out. And you know, I can come back a few minutes later after checking the house, making doors close and so

on and that wax is still nice and soft for several minutes. But you know, gradually it begins to wax cold.

And you go in the morning and it's hot. And you know, it's a process. The Bible says the love of many.

It's a gradual thing. You just begin to get a little harder, a little bit harder, a little bit harder, a little bit harder. And pretty soon, you know, hot.

No longer soft, pliable. That's the sign of the last days. That's where it begins.

The Bible says in the last days men will be what? Lovers of pleasure, lovers of money, all the lovers rather than lovers of God. In other words, just replaced with a love for other things. Oh, not necessarily major sins.

It's just that my affections now are more towards this. I'm more towards that. You know.

May not be some gross sin that you're involved in. It's just that all of a sudden you've got a desire for something else. And that desire surpasses your desire for God.

That's where it all begins. Unfaithfulness to Him. Then unfaithfulness to the house of God.

And then gradually the lamps go out and we begin this downward spiral. Hezekiah says, very first day that I can do something about it, I will. Now that my father is gone and I'm in charge, I'm not going to wait one single day.

Not just the first year, not just the first month, but the first day of my reign, I'm going to get the house of God back the way it should be. That's the priority. Don't put it off.

Today, if you hear His voice. Let's close in prayer. Father, we say with the psalmist, Search me, O God.

Know my heart. Try me and know my ways. See if there's any wicked way in me.

Lord, You know us better than we know ourselves. And I pray, Lord, by Your Holy Spirit tonight that, Lord, You would begin to search the hearts of Your people. Lord, if there's that gradual cooling process that has begun.

Lord, tonight You would ignite again that passion, that flame. Lord, if there are those that are already, Lord, in a place where the doors are closed, there's uncleanness in the house of God. Lord, maybe it's been there for weeks, maybe even years.

Maybe it's never, ever really been dealt with. Lord, because of pride that, Lord, tonight they would humble themselves. Go to a brother, go to a sister, confess their faults and say, I've got to get right with God.

I need that joy once again. I need the joy of my first love. Lord, restore unto me the joy of my salvation.

Lord, I don't get anything out of the house of God. I don't enjoy the worship. I don't enjoy the teaching or preaching.

Father, I'm asking You tonight, Lord, to touch my life. Lord, I humble myself before Me, believing that, Lord, if I return to You, that You will return to me. If you want God like that tonight, just as we stand together, why don't you come? Again, we're going to make this altar available.

If you're kneeling, well, you're going to be left alone. If you're standing, I'm going to assume that you want somebody to pray with you. I've always believed there are mature people that need, they know exactly what they need to do.

They just want time to be alone with God. And I want to offer you that if you're kneeling, that you won't have anybody come and pray with you. But if you're standing, I'm going to assume that you want somebody to agree with you.

You need to confess something or acknowledge something or maybe you're confused about something. I want somebody to pray with you. So let's just stand and just respond.

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