



Who's Temple? 1 Kings 7:48-8:11

I'm someone who likes old buildings, particularly old churches. When I was a student I used to visit Canterbury Cathedral and enjoyed looking at the beauties of the building. It was a structure that was raised to the glory of God. In fact in its heyday, church buildings were the grandest in the land, the intention being that only the best was for God.

Unfortunately there was often ulterior motives. Large ecclesiastical buildings often reflected the power and wealth of the church, or the power and wealth of benefactors. The buildings impressed men even though they were supposed to glorify God.

As I read through the passages associated with the building of the Temple, I started to feel the same way. It was started in the fourth year of Solomon's reign. David wanted to build the Temple but he wasn't allowed to. Solomon used his peace and wisdom dividend to start the work.

It was clear that Solomon used the finest materials to build the Temple - the best stone, cedars of Lebanon and the like. All materials were processed off premises and brought on to site and put in place to reduce the noise of hammers and chisels – was it because it was a holy site, or for environmental reasons?

The site of the temple traditionally is on Temple mount where the Dome on the Rock now is. That was true of Herod's Temple (the Third Temple) but the site of Solomon's has been brought into doubt in recent years and it's believed that it is nearby – although still under the area holy to Muslims, so archaeological excavations are not permitted, so no-one can check it out.

We also know that the interior of the Temple was also impressive. There was no lack of expenditure in there either. We read of some of the contents. They were all made of gold. Tons of gold. The best went into the temple, lots of treasure went into the temple storerooms.

But I can't help thinking, to whose glory was all this in aid of. We even call the First Temple Solomon's. Everything was built to impress. Even with a thought to somehow impress God perhaps? But take a look at verse 6

6 Then the priests carried the Covenant Box into the Temple and put it in the Most Holy Place, beneath the winged creatures.

What alerted me was this verse. I thought, just a minute, weren't there cherubim on the Ark? There certainly were. They weren't big as they formed the lid of the box. So what does Solomon do – he makes some bigger cherubim – huge ones and puts them in the Holy of Holies. What was wrong with the ones on the Ark? No-one except the High Priest ever saw them anyway.

One thing he couldn't change was the Ark itself and the contents of the Ark. In the end Solomon couldn't change the law of God – although I'm sure if he could he would have knowing his later exploits! The Ark was the continuity with Sinai. He could make the Temple as magnificent as he wanted. But he couldn't change the Ark. It was a constant.

This isn't just about buildings. Whatever our endeavour may be as God's people, what's the purpose of what we are doing. Is it according to God's will and to His glory. Or is there an ulterior motive. The more conspicuous the action, the more we need to ask that question.

To be fair to Solomon. I do tend to be a bit suspicious of him as he started to sow the seeds of his fall earlier in his life. Because of his wisdom and the desire to please God that he had, he had been blessed and this

reflected in the best he put into the Temple.

Which challenges us in another way. If we are led and determined to do something for God, are we giving Him the best or second best. It often shows in buildings.

As an interesting aside, the poles to carry the Ark were put in lengthways so they stuck out of the Holy of Holies. It let people know that it was still in there.

I think it reminds us that however we dress anything up, we can't get away from God's ways and His standards. You could strip all the gold and the riches away from the Temple, and what would be left was the Ark, the physical reminder of who they were as a people.

For us, the physical reminder isn't the Ark with its stones in it, but a book – the Bible. It is the Word of God and it reminds us of God's ways and standards. However we may dress t=up the church building we have inherited from the past, we can't get away from the reason it was founded. It's a reminder that we may change, our culture and community may change – but God hasn't. One of the biggest problems for church generally and our church in particular is that we are under pressure to dilute the word of God. We are under pressure by society over matters such as marriage, homosexuality, acceptable language, acceptable behaviour, personal integrity. All those things have changed in our community and these values lap over into the church. The Word of God is a reminder that God doesn't change. His standards don't change

That said His grace remains the same too and we are here at communion to remind ourselves that the way of Salvation remains constant too. We can't change what God has done, so we need to live our lives to conform to what doesn't change.

So as I've said, I was suspicious of Solomon because of the way in which he had made the Temple impressive, We even call the First Temple, Solomon's Temple.

But all this was trumped by the presence of God. God blesses even when human endeavour gets in the way. The Temple represented the best that Solomon and the people of Israel (or Tyre) could do. The best stone, the best wood, the finest craftsmen, the products of the best craftsmen. All gold-plated. It must have looked totally magnificent. Then this happens.

10 As the priests were leaving the Temple, it was suddenly filled with a cloud 11 shining with the dazzling light of the LORD's presence, and they could not go back in to perform their duties

Whatever Solomon had done for whatever motives, the glory of God outshines the glory of men.

We are reminded again as we come around the table, that who we are and what we do are a result of grace. Not of works. As we present our bodies – Temples of the Holy Spirit before God this evening, how glorious are they?

Let's call on God not just to be roughly like Jesus, but instead ask His glory to fill us, so that Jesus shines out through us.