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Divergent Divinity

I Kings 8:1-66

Intro: Dedication ceremonies are a fairly common occurrence among churches. We've had a few baby dedications in this facility, which have usually involved more than just babies. Some churches have occasion to dedicate a new wing or fellowship hall while others go so far as dedicating new pew cushions or Sunday school chairs. I guess there is nothing wrong with that as long as everyone realizes that it's not the chairs that need to be dedicated as much as it is the posteriors that get planted in them.

Dedication ceremonies are proper and can be enjoyable and the event at Solomon's temple was just that. **Ch8** records the celebration and dedication of the completed temple in Jerusalem. And, after all the excessive detail we have trudged through in **ch6-7**, it's nice to have a celebration at the end of it all.

6:38 tells us that the temple was completed in the 8th month but **8:2** will reveal that the dedication was held in the 7th month. This means Solomon held off this celebration for 11 months and there could be several reasons for this. 1st) Solomon intended this to be a spectacular opening ceremony for the temple, likely on a scale similar to that of the opening ceremonies of the Olympic Games. 2nd) Solomon wanted all of Israel to attend this ceremony so he waited for the most convenient time. This dedication would coincide with the Feast of Tabernacles, after the nation had gathered in all her harvest and the people would then converge on Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast. 3rd) It has also been speculated that this dedication occurred on a year of Jubilee, which would be theologically symbolic.

Ch6 is long (66) and there's a lot going on here but most of it is self-explanatory. The Bible deals with many different subjects: it has a lot of history, science, wisdom, morality, prophecy and plenty of excitement through and through. But, the most important aspect of the Bible, its premier function is its exclusive (not exhaustive) revelation of the character and nature of God. Above all else, the Bible reveals what God is like and it does this on every page, even in the middle of a national celebration. Our focus in **ch8** won't be on the specifics of the celebration but on the divine characteristics revealed in it. What is interesting about these characteristic

is that they are presented in pairs that would appear to be mutually exclusive and yet, they exist in perfect harmony in our God. Some seem to be conflicting while some are complementary. So let's take a good look at some of these contrasting or complimenting character combinations of our God

1-13 – Now, we might think that even though Solomon waited 11 months to dedicate the temple, surely it was being used before that. That would be a wrong assumption. The temple was not ready for normal operations until the Ark of the Covenant was brought in and set up in the Holy of holies. The Ark wasn't just a piece of furniture in the temple it was the most important item in the temple. The Ark represented Yahweh's presence and that's what distinguished this temple from all others: the presence of the Lord God Jehovah. The Ark made this temple the house of the Lord! Of course, Solomon was careful to obey God's specific instructions for transporting the Ark. He didn't want a repeat of his father's error in **II Sam 6**, where David did the right thing in the wrong way and Uzzah paid for it with his life.

After the ark is installed in the temple, things get exciting! As soon as the priests exit the Holy of holies, **v10** says the cloud filled the house of the Lord. Notice, this is not a cloud, it's the cloud. If you're still confused, **v11** clarifies it for us when it says the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord. The author equates the cloud with the glory of the Lord. This is nothing less than the Shekinah glory of God! This is the cloud that protected a fleeing Israel from the pursuing army of Pharaoh as they escaped from Egypt; the cloud from which God spoke to Moses and Israel on Mt. Sinai; the cloud that covered and guided Israel in the wilderness, the cloud the stood by the door of the tabernacle. In fact, this same appearance of the Shekinah glory of God occurred at the dedication of the tabernacle in **Ex 40**.

But, there is something divergent (disparate) in this cloud that reveals an aspect of God's character. The cloud is clearly visible and as such, it is a sign of God's presence. But, the cloud also conceals – it prevents Israel from seeing God in the full blaze of His glory. God is clearly present in the temple but it is impossible for Solomon, the priests or any Israelite to see Him directly, to look upon His glory openly, face-to-face. The cloud both represents God's glory and covers God's glory – it both reveals and conceals – at the same time! As illuminating as this is, what are we

supposed to do with it? How does this contrasting combination point to the character of God?

V9 gives us a hint when it tells us that the only thing the Ark contained were 2 stone tablets of the Big 10. The Ark used to contain a pot of manna and Aaron's rod that budded but those were both reminders of times of rebellion in Israel. Now, all it held were the 2 tablets inscribed with the 10 stipulations of Jehovah's covenant with Israel. What else could this imply but that the people of God live under the Word of God; they live under the will of God as it is expressed in His covenant with them. This is the clarity that we have from God.

God made His will clear, His word obvious. The Ark contained the transcript of His will in legible Hebrew words. Yet, God veiled His presence in a cloud, hiding the full beauty of His being. The cloud both displays and conceals God's splendor. Though God doesn't show Himself in a totally transparent way, He has still made His will clear in the stone tablets. The cloud points to God's obscurity; the ark points to His clarity. The cloud suggests that we cannot know Him exhaustively; the Ark testifies that we can know Him adequately. God satisfies our need for clarity but not our passion for curiosity. Here we have the mystery and clarity of God side-by-side!

This scene from the dedication carries an important practical application for us today. It teaches us that we don't live from the sight of God but rather from the speech of God. That was the lesson of the episode at Mt. Sinai. There, the emphasis was on hearing God, not seeing God lest Israel be tempted to make images of their God and worship them instead of Him. God's intention for Israel was that they be a people of the Word, both hearing it and obeying it; much like the church is to do today. There is a mystery about God that humbles us because we don't always understand Him and His ways. But, this mystery also encourages us to trust God and rest upon His Word. I cannot penetrate the secrets God has kept to Himself but I can seek to obey the commandments He has clearly given to me.

14-26 – This next characteristic is not so surprising (we've seen it before) but it's just as amazing as the first. In the opening lines of Solomon's prayer, he points out the incomparability of God (**23**). How is God incomparable? He is incomparable (without parallel) in His faithfulness to His covenant promises. Which ones? The ones He made to David, specifically – He

promised that David's son would build a house for Him and that has been fulfilled in 2 ways: 1) Solomon was installed as king after David and 2) he has built a temple for the name of the Lord. As Solomon sees it, there is no truth gap with God, What His mouth speaks, His hand accomplishes.

But wait, there's more! The realization of God's faithfulness leads to an expectancy of His continued faithfulness. Sure, there's a condition for Solomon & sons to meet but the line of Solomon's logic is simply this: You've been true to what You promised David up to this point; now let that same faithfulness continue into the future. In essence: do in the future what You've done to date! We might not feel the full punch of this truth but in Solomon's day, the religions of the Ancient Near East world was governed by pagan deities that were notorious for not keeping their promises. Even if a pagan deity assured you of blessing, you couldn't be sure of that assurance as some other deity might exercise the power of veto to cancel the benefit you thought was guaranteed. That's the problem when your spiritual world is governed by committee (pantheon).

Solomon declares that Yahweh is not like that. He always keeps His promises! And that's why His people are always so full of hope – His faithfulness to-date breeds a hopeful expectancy of the future!

27-30 – Here we have the juxtaposition of 2 characteristics of God that seem to be in direct conflict with each other – the immensity and intimacy of God. First, Solomon recognizes that this temple he's built, a place for [Yahweh] to dwell forever (**13b**) is only relatively speaking. Here he acknowledges the uncontainability of God. Here is a God who wrecks all our categories and frustrates all our attempts to wrangle His majesty into understandable descriptions. Here is the immensity of God – not even the highest of heaven can contain Him so how could He even dwell on earth, let alone a temple? This description highlights our happy failure to get a grip on the massive majesty of God.

But, for all of His massive, uncontainable majesty, Solomon presumes that this same God will hear the prayers of His servant and respond to his pleas for grace (**28**). What an amazing assumption! The true God is revealed in **v27** but yet, you can still converse with Him personally with prayers, pleas for grace and cries. What Solomon's teaching is: transcendence doesn't destroy intimacy. God is transcendent and available. This is an intimacy of

the ear (28) and of the eye (29) and it is constant (night and day). Here's reason for both trembling and joy. God's people can never comprehend Him in all the fullness of His being but they can apprehend Him through prayer. I can't take in God in His grandeur but I can engage Him in His grace. His majesty dwarfs our universe but His ear receives our prayers.

31-53 – This is the main body of Solomon's prayer and in it we can't help but recognize both the severity and mercy of God. The house of the Lord has been built; this is the supreme privilege of God's people and yet, the supreme fact of God's people is they always seem to be in sinful situations. They always seem to stand in need of forgiveness! The cold, hard reality of Solomon's prayer is that it squarely addresses the typical sinfulness of God's people and yet, in spite of this – there is no despair! Even in the worst case scenario of captivity and exile (43-53) they still have the opportunity to repent and plead for grace (48). There is a way to restoration and forgiveness!

Now, Solomon isn't being prescient here or prophetic. In fact, he's not offering up some new idea at all. He's simply praying out of the Pentateuch. Most of what he says in his prayer comes from **Lev 26** and **Deut 30**. God had already promised the things Solomon is asking for here! Solomon's prayer combines both the threats and promises of God. He holds together both the severity and mercy of God and his prayer establishes the pattern for subsequent prayers of later biblical characters such as Daniel and Nehemiah. We can see both the sad realism and the bright hope here. Sinful Israel will suffer God's severity but that severity may bring them to a place of repentance and restoration.

Have you experienced this with God in your own life? Of course we have! Sure, some more than others, depending on how thick your skull is but we can all relate stories where God has brought both judgment and kindness, distress and deliverance, chastisement and consolation, wounding and healing.

As expected, most of Solomon's prayer focuses on Israel's difficulties: her sins, disasters and needs. But in **41-43**, Solomon prays for the people from outside of Israel, the foreigner, the pagan who is attracted to Yahweh. Solomon assumes that foreigners will at least come because of the testimony the nations will hear concerning God's deeds. It wouldn't be a

surprise to have an outsider come and pray at the Lord's temple and Solomon implores God both to hear and act according to their request so that international missions might take off through these converts (43b).

The temple was given by God to Israel in particular but Solomon didn't expect the temple to remain Israel's best kept secret. He expected it to be a mission station; it was expected to have a universal impact on the pagan world around it. The temple was God's gift to Israel but it was intended to draw those far beyond Israel's border into the joy of atonement and an intimate relationship with God through prayer. Solomon reflects this particular / universal aspect of God's character in his prayer. He expects foreign gentiles to come and share in Israel's privilege because he knows that God expects this too. This means Yahweh is no museum piece god, no mascot of an Israelite monarchy but the Lord of all the earth Who will draw all kinds of non-kosher people to Himself.

54-61 – At the end of his prayer, Solomon stands and addresses the congregation and speaks a blessing over them, a blessing which suspiciously sounds a lot like a prayer. In this blessing, Solomon upholds both the prophetic and the practical aspects of God. I don't mean to imply that prophecy is not practical, because it is, very much so. But, in his entire prayer (**22-53**) Solomon presupposes the entire scheme of God's redemptive plan, especially what's found in the Davidic covenant. He alludes to the rest that God had brought about for Israel through David's military victories (**56**) and his mention of God's presence (**57**), enabling (**58**) and support (**59**) has in view the grand finale of all things (**60**). If you know Bible prophecy, this won't happen completely until the last days.

But, if Solomon had the things of the last days in view, he certainly hadn't forgotten the need for daily things. He asks (**59**) that the words he used to pray for grace may be "kept on file" with God, day and night (24 hr call). With these words, he asks God to maintain his cause (and that of Israel) – as each day may require. This literally translates as: a matter of a day in its day. It's the same phrase used in Ex 16:4 to describe how Israel was to gather manna, "a day's portion every day" or enough for that day. It almost sounds like another prayer: give us this day, our daily bread... So, there's the entire scope of God's plan of redemption with the ultimate view of all peoples acknowledging God and yet there's also the regular, day-to-day need that Solomon and Israel have to be constantly supported by a God

who keeps the words of Solomon's prayer constantly before His ever-watchful eyes and ever-attentive ears.

Here we have the grand scheme of God's redemptive work presented alongside of the daily needs of His people and, to be sure, the one never gets lost in the other. God is the Lord of the last days and He is the Lord of every day. There is no danger of Him not seeing the forest for the trees. He doesn't get lost in the details or the big picture. He will bring His entire word to pass eventually but He will also bring His Word to pass practically, in our own individual lives for His own individual purposes. He is working to bring the ultimate consummation of His kingdom in the final days but He will still not forget about you in this first week of February. He cares about what each day requires for you and for me. How could we not trust or adore a God such as this?

62-66 – What a blow out! The 7 day Feast of tabernacles was extended another 7 days to accommodate the temple celebration and all that good BBQ! This was supposed to serve as an example of what living for the Lord looked like.

Sadly, the example wasn't taken to heart.

Solomon's constant reference to God's promises points to the secret of having power in prayer: take God's promises to heart in faith, accepting them and trusting them as fact, then go boldly (yet reverently) before His throne in prayer and simply call on Him to fulfill His promises. Why did God give the promises in the first place? He certainly wasn't trying to impress anyone. No, God gave His promises to be used! He gave them to be trusted, relied on – expected.

He gave them specifically for the purpose of being used in prayer.

The prayer that produces results is the prayer that lays hold of God's promises. Just because God promises doesn't mean we automatically possess. But through believing prayer (like Solomon's); God promises and we appropriate. If we fail to appropriate the promise by faith, then the promise is left unclaimed. What a shame when it is right there for the asking. We serve a powerful and compassionate God who only wants the best for His people. Have we learned to fully trust His will for our lives? 😊