

Christ in 2 Chronicles

TRANSCRIPT (AUTO-GENERATED)

Are you there? Do you care? Are you there? And do you care? This is one of the best questions you could possibly ask if you are wondering about God, about faith in God. If he is there, if there is a creator, does he care about me?

The Christ in Scripture project that we have been in throughout this year has looked at much of the Old Testament history by this stage. We've had, I think, 27, is that right, Ben? 27 messages.

And I think in the story that we've been studying of the people of Israel and their god, we have seen that there is a creator god and he cares. Amen? There is a god and he cares.

This has been unveiled, unraveled, through narrative. Not through dot point storytelling, but through narrative. The god who cares reveals this to us through a grand story.

The story of his glory in the Old Testament and the New Testament. So are you there? Do you care?

Yes. And yes, Israel has come a long way along this journey of finding out about the invisible god who cares.

From Abram with his childless wife Sarah to Abraham, called of god, blessed with favour, father of a lineage of millions, the people of Israel. The god who is there and cares, rescued his people in this story. He empowered his people.

He has forgiven his people. He has provided a way for them to connect with him through the temple. Ultimately, he judged them in this story that we've been following, and then committed to restore them.

Again, are you there? Do you care? Yes, and yes.

2 Chronicles is traditionally, for the Jewish people, the last book of the Old Testament. Did you know that? 2 Chronicles.

It celebrates the completion of the temple, and describes the reign of many good kings, whilst lamenting the reign of many more evil kings.

2 Chronicles, if you read it, finishes in an unfinished way, with the fall of Jerusalem, and then the decree of Cyrus the Persian, the next paragraph, to all the people, to come back to their land.

Let me read the end of 2 Chronicles, which is really sort of the end of the story of the Old Testament. Chapter 36, verse 22.

In the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, in order to fulfil the word of the Lord, spoken by Jeremiah, the prophet, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus, king of Persia, to make a proclamation throughout his realm and also to put it in writing.

This is what Cyrus, king of Persia, says. The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah.

Any of his people among you may go up and may the Lord, their God, be with them. That's how it finishes, sort of unfinished.

We are going to focus our attention this morning on Yahweh's response to the great prayer that Solomon gave at the dedication of the temple.

I wanted to look at this because it's a unique moment when the fog of confusion and syncretistic chaos lifts and out of the mess comes this message from Yahweh that is simple, it's poignant, uncluttered truth which speaks to every generation.

For many of us, this has become a memory verse. Does anyone know this one? As a memory verse, a few of us.

Let me read it again. The God of Israel says, If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place. I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there.

If my people, if my people, the conditionality of God's unconditional love, the story of God's relationship with Israel and then through Christ, his relationship with us is predicated on if, if.

It's not, if you're good enough, Jesus will die for your sins. We know the Bible says, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

If doesn't define what God has already done, he has acted and loved first, and his grace is of his own volition, not our earning. And yet the appropriating of God's grace, the receiving of his forgiveness and salvation, is dependent on if.

Romans 10.9 says, if you declare with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Notice, if God's love is unconditional, we didn't earn it in any way.

His love will never end towards us, but to live in his love requires faith and belief. And combined with this is the phrase repent and believe. If we repent and believe, if we repent and believe, we receive salvation.

If my people, there is a response of obedience required. In the Old Testament, the people of God are very much set apart, aren't they? There are the people of God and the people of the nations.

2 Peter 3 is a glorious verse which tells us, the Lord is not slow in keeping his promise. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. So who can be the people of God?

Everyone. We are invited. Romans 10.13 also tells us, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Are you part of the people of God? Well, that depends if, right? If you call on His name, you can and I can be part of the people of God.

God's people are the ones who respond to the word if. If my people called by my name, to be called by God's name is to belong to Him, to bear His identity, to represent His character, to live for His reputation, His name.

The third commandment says, you shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God. Exodus 20 verse 7, the Lord's prayer begins, our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Clearly the name of the Lord is immensely important and this is what Israel failed to do, didn't they? To represent the character and the reputation of the name of the Lord. And no, names are important, aren't they?

If you go to a show and you go backstage and you mention a person's name that's part of the show, everything can change. You get access when you have a relationship with a particular name.

You might be buying a product and talking to a salesman or a saleswoman and you mention a name that they know and you might get a discount. Names matter.

Yahweh at this moment of clarity with Solomon and the people of Israel is reminding them, there is nothing more powerful in the universe than the name of the Lord, amen.

Yahweh is saying, if my people who are called and authorized by my name, who represent the reputation of my name to the nations, if my people called by my name, will humble themselves and pray.

A theme in the story of God's revealed glory, a very strong theme of God interacting with people, is this truth from James. He opposes the proud but gives favor to the humble. He opposes the proud.

He wants to find human beings who are created, relating to the creator with humility. Yahweh says in Isaiah 42, verse 8, I am the Lord that is my name. I will not yield my glory to another or my praise to idols.

Do you know why God won't share his glory with another? Is it because he's vain? Is that why?

Is it because he's needy? I won't share my glory with another. Is it because he's proud?

None of the above. God will not share his glory because, as the song we've been singing recently says, his glory is my good, amen? His glory is my good.

The only right thing in the universe is for the eternal Creator to receive all the glory. In fact, I'd put to you that the balance of life itself loses its equilibrium when God's glory is grabbed at. It cannot be robbed, but humans still try.

Demons still try. The chief end of humanity is to glorify God and enjoy him forever, or as John Piper used to say, and still does, to glorify God by enjoying him forever. Humanity is invited into relationship as creature with creator.

Anything else is untrue. So this makes complete sense. Humble yourself and pray.

Why is prayer added to humility? Because prayer is the most natural place to reveal our dependence on our creator.

It is in prayer that we most purely express our delight in our heavenly father, our dependence upon his provision and our determination to do his will. If my people will humble themselves and pray.

Remember, this is this point of clarity in all the mess and confusion of the Old Testament. God is responding to the airbrushed story of Israel in 2 Corinthians.

And he's saying, if my people will humble themselves and pray, delighting, depending, devoting. My people called by my name, humble themselves and pray and seek my face. When God says, I want you to seek my face, what does he mean?

To know someone's face is to know them, isn't it? It's an idea of intimacy that we know the person. The blessing of Numbers 6 says, Lord, turn your face toward them.

Make your countenance shine upon them. If you ask, what does it mean to seek the Lord? What is your response to that?

We asked our Bible study, our Life Hub the other day, and it was interesting what people said.

One person said, it's at least intentionality to seek the Lord, to know more about him, to seek the Lord, to spend time with him, to seek his satisfaction, to be in his presence.

Rather, they're told to seek the Lord rather than seeking the blessing of idols because really that's why idolatry had legs, isn't it? They would go and offer things to the God of money that they might get money.

They would offer sacrifices to the God of sex so that they might have pleasure and fertility in sex. They would go to the God of war and provide some offering, sacrifice, that they might have victory.

Rather than seek those things from the idols of the nations, Yahweh says, I want you to seek my face. Whose face are you seeking? Whose face are you seeking?

How do you seek the Lord? I've mentioned this before, but when I was about 20 years old, I grew up in the Christian household and I had faith for sure. But when I was about 20, I had this experience of God taking hold of me.

And I read the New Testament for the first time. And I understood with some others, there was a little mini revival that went on in our church in the northern suburbs of Sydney. And we felt like the spirit was saying, prayer is really important.

I want you to seek my face. And we thought, what is that? And so we started to pray and we asked the pastors at church, could we come in and have a key to come in and pray at night?

And so we did this for seven months every night. We would come in late at night, the lights were off and we sought the Lord. And I felt like I really learned a lot in that.

We experimented with fasting. And so we would fast for three days, just water. We fast for five days, seven days, then we got to ten days.

And I remember lying prostrate on the ground in that church as a 21-year-old and a 20-year-old, and having a really hungry stomach, seven days into a fast.

And I was praying, Lord, I know now what it feels like to hunger for your righteousness because I'm really hungry for food. I'm hungry for food.

And I felt like God's saying, that's what I want you to be hungering for me like, that you would hunger for me to seek my face.

And sometimes when you're lying on your face and you're on your knees in the dark with others, the only prayer you pray is, who are you, Lord? Who are you? Do you care?

What do you want with me? And then you listen. I think that's something of what God is asking for, from his people.

If my people, called by my name, will humble themselves and pray, seek my face, my face for the intimate relationship of knowing the living God and turn from evil. Yahweh is not being ambiguous or vague.

The people of Israel and Judah have become so mixed up with the wickedness of the nations. God is graciously warning them to come out of the whirlpool of evil. This is the theme of the Bible, isn't it?

You find it land, ultimately, in Revelation, where it says, come out of her, my people. Come out of Babylon. This is the idea of the ark.

There's always an ark of grace going through as a metaphor, as a theme. Noah's Ark is the picture of the judgment of God is coming on the world. You need to be in the ark, not in Babylon.

Amen? And so in Revelation, it's like, come out of Babylon. She will be judged.

You need to not have the mark of the beast, but the mark of the blood of Christ on you. And that is to turn from evil and be in the ark of God and his grace, which is ultimately to be in Christ.

Later on from the Gospels, we're told to have nothing to do with the deeds of darkness, aren't we? But to be children of the light. The New Testament says, don't even talk about what the disobedient do in secret.

There's this high calling on the church, followers of Jesus, to live lives that are turning away from evil. And of course, this is a struggle because we sin. But we're called to humble ourselves, pray, seek the Lord's face, turn from evil.

And Yahweh says, I will hear from heaven.

One of my favorite sections, it might sound strange in a way, but of the whole Bible is this portion in Chapter 6 and 7. If you look at my Bible, in Chapter 6 and 7, there's underlines everywhere. And the main underline is hear from heaven.

Hear from heaven. Solomon prays that Yahweh would hear from heaven. And I want to show you, look, there's so much power in this.

Verse 21 and 25, Solomon says, hear from heaven and forgive. Verse 21, hear the supplications of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray towards this place. This is when there is a temple.

And the temple is the Venn diagram of heaven and earth. And in between, it's this thin space, a liminal space, a place on earth that the heavenly realm and the earthly realm is thin.

And God is hearing, and this is what the temple was always meant to be. And Solomon has this sense about this, and he says, hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive.

When your people turn back and give praise to your name, praying and making supplication before you in this temple, hear from heaven and forgive the sins of your people. He knows they're going to sin.

But his longing, his cry is, somebody out there hear. Of course, behind that is, God, are you there and do you care? Do you care?

Verse 23, he asked that Yahweh would hear from heaven and do justice. So before, it was to forgive. Now he's saying, do justice.

Hear from heaven and act. Judge between your servants, condemning the guilty and bringing down on their heads what they have done and vindicating the innocent by treating them in accordance with their innocence.

We need God to hear from heaven and act, amen? That's what we need. We need a God who cares and will respond because he hears our cry.

Verse 27, Solomon prays for restoration. When they pray toward this place and give praise to your name and turn from this sin because you have afflicted them, then hear from heaven and forgive the sins of your servants, your people of Israel.

Teach them the right way to live and send rain on the land and you gave your people for an inheritance. The prayer is for restoration.

He prays, verse 33, for mercy as for the foreigner who does not belong to your people of Israel but has come from a distant land because of your great name and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm.

When they come and pray toward this temple, then hear from heaven. This thin space between the heavens and the earth. Your dwelling place.

Do whatever the foreigner asks of you so that all the prophets of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your own people Israel. All the peoples of the earth, not the prophets, and may know that this house I have built bears your name.

It goes on and on. The key point being Solomon knows that his creator God is there and he cares. He's listening.

The temple as was with the tabernacle is this intersection point, a liminal space, a thin space between God and humanity. This is what we find in the great story of salvation.

God connects in special places with people because we need God to be there, to care and listen and respond. Amen. We need God.

So very quickly, if you think of the story in Eden, God with humanity, Genesis 2 and 3, it's all about the presence of God. There's no temple because it's like creation is the temple, but sin wrecks that.

And then we have the patriarchs who live in the blessing of God's favor, wanting to have relationship with them. And every now and then you'll have these spots where they build little altars and they say, surely God was in this place.

Because this is what matters, the intersection between heaven and earth, the special thin space where God hears. And then there's the burning bush, the holy ground of Exodus 3, a thin space.

Sinai, God comes down, Exodus 19, there's distance, boundaries, mediators, holiness, there's fire from heaven. And there's the tabernacle, the tent that the people are to build.

And everyone knows this is where God's holy presence comes because there always needs to be a place where God can hear from heaven and interact with his people.

Then the temple is what is built by Solomon, the permanent house, the nexus point between the heavens and the earth. Of course, then the exile happens because God's spirit leaves the temple.

And then there's 400 years of silence and then what happens? We have this incredible moment in history where God comes down, John 1. The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us and the word for dwelling is literally tabernacle, tabernacle.

Jesus is Emmanuel as Isaiah told us. God with us, the nexus point on earth was Jesus, amen? The kingdom has come because I'm the king, Jesus says, I'm the king and I'm here with you.

The kingdom has come among you, repent and believe. And then we come in the story to the cross. And in Jesus' death, the barrier between heaven and earth is torn apart and opened.

The temple curtain is torn from top to bottom. And then we have the church, and fire doesn't come down on the tabernacle or the temple, it comes down on who? The people.

The people are now the dwelling place of the Spirit of God. You together are the temple of God, 1 Corinthians 3, built together as this temple. And so, anywhere we go, isn't that wonderful?

We are the nexus point between the heavens and the earth. Where we go, he is hearing from heaven. And that's why Jesus says, what you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, because there's this connection.

It's incredible. And then finally, there's new creation in Revelation, where it's everywhere. The presence of God is everywhere.

At every point of development in the story, everything always depends on Yahweh hearing from heaven. Hear from heaven. If my people called by my name will humble themselves and pray, seek my face, turn from heaven.

Turn from evil. Hear from heaven. He says, I will forgive, heal and restore.

Yahweh's heart is to forgive and to heal and restore. And this is true truth. I would put it to you.

This is a moment in this chaotic, winding history of Israel where God is speaking to his people and letting them know the wonderful truth of the kingdom. I want to restore you. You're a mess.

Your kings are a mess. You've disappointed me to no end. But I want you to know if all that stuff, I will forgive you, heal you and restore you.

Isn't that incredible to know that that's the heart of the God who is there and cares? I will forgive. Who needs forgiveness, healing and restoration?

Who needs forgiveness, healing and restoration? Because you know when you look in the mirror, I have failed my own standards, let alone yours Lord God.

Well, can I encourage you, if you repent of your sins, if you ask for mercy from God, He will what? Hear from heaven. And He will heal, forgive and restore.

If you, if I, He will. If you, He says, I will. If my people called by my name will humble themselves and pray, seek my face, turn from evil, hear from heaven, I will forgive, heal and restore, because my eyes are open and ears attentive.

The text says, now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place. I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there.

This is the great invitation. From the creator to the created, come to me and find rest, grace and recovery. My eyes are open.

I see you. Does anyone feel like you're unseen? The promise of this incredible text is that God's eyes are open and he sees us.

He sees his people, that's the context, but it's extrapolated through Christ to us. And my ears, he says, are attentive. I hear you.

If we, he will. If we, he will. In Christ, we have been called by the name.

In Christ, we have perfectly humbled ourselves before God in prayerful obedience. Did you know that? We have.

In Christ, we have sought the Father's face and he has delighted in us. In Christ, we have turned from evil and have found righteous in God's sight. In Christ, we are perfectly heard in heaven.

In Christ, we are forgiven, healed, restored by his stripes, we are healed. How? Because of the great exchange of the gospel.

What we deserved, Christ took. And what Christ deserved, we take by faith in Jesus. Amen.

That is the good news of the gospel. He gets what we deserved. But by faith in him, if we would call on the name of the Lord, turn from our sin and put our hope in him, we get what Christ deserved.

Righteousness and right relationship with Father God. Hallelujah. Do you know this text?

If you don't know it, I hope you have enjoyed understanding it and hearing it. This is to the people of Israel, but it is to us through Christ.

If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, we do that turning by the grace of God. The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all people.

It teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions, but to live self-controlled, upright, godly lives while we wait for the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who loved us and gave himself for us to

redeem for himself, are people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. That's how you turn from the wicked ways. Then I will hear from heaven. Don't doubt it.

If you call on the name of the Lord, don't doubt he will hear from heaven. He says, I will forgive their sin and will heal their land. My eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.

I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there. The invitation is for you and I to become the temple.

We become the temple, the presence of God. Can I ask you, you've heard how important it is to humble ourselves.

I want to just ask you straight out, does anyone need to publicly humble themselves and stand up and pray that they might be known by the Father, through the Son and live forever? Because the offer is there today. The offer is there.

If you've never done it, if you've never humbled yourself and offered your heart, I want to just let you know there's an invitation today and we would love to pray with you.

You could stand now and say, Lord, I give you my heart, I'll lead you in a prayer of salvation and I'll invite you to go over and pray with the prayer team and they just love to pray with you. Let's begin that journey.

I mean it, would anyone like to say today, I don't know if I've ever made a full on commitment, I want to follow Jesus, I want to call on his name. The band could come up, and we're going to sing some worship together.

But as they're moving, can I lead you in a prayer of receiving the grace of God, that you might live forever, and know Jesus? My invitation to you is to acknowledge that in humility by standing. And now I'd love to pray for you.

I wonder if you're watching online, or you're watching this video in the future. I trust the Spirit is talking to you as well. Do you know that you are a child of the living God?

To all who would believe in his name, he gave the right to become the people of God. John 1. We are not the people of God just because we are human.

We need to believe. If you call on his name, all who do so will be saved. Let me pray.

Lord God, if there's anyone here who you have stirred in their heart to give their life to you, follow you and receive eternal life, would you help them admit that they are a sinner?

Would you help them believe that Jesus, your son, died for them and rose again? Would you help them commit to follow you all the days of their life? That you would be their Lord and Saviour.

Lord, I pray for those of us here who do know you already. Thank you for the truth of your word. These are your words, Lord God, Yahweh.

King of Kings. Thank you so much for the invitation to be restored, healed and made whole. Lord, for those of us who are prodigal sons and daughters, we're getting caught up in the wickedness of the world.

Would you help us? Would you reveal a fresh understanding to the eyes of our heart that we might know the truth to which you have called us, the glorious inheritance of the saints to be part of this kingdom of light and salt?

Lord, for those of us who feel very ashamed because of failure, and we feel buried under the accusations of the enemy, that heap shame on us. Thank you Lord Jesus, that you took the shame when you were nailed to that cross.

You have borne our pain and our shame. You've made a way for us to be forgiven, declared guilt and shame free. Only because of you and your grace and your spirit in us.

Lord, would you do a work of restoration? I pray you would prompt some of us to go and receive prayer. And Lord, that you would use our prayer team and you would anoint them in the name of Jesus and fill them with the power of your name.

That they might pray with great discernment and insight. You might make manifest in them the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit. That there might be this tangible expression of authority through your church, to your church.

In the name of Jesus, we pray.