

Lay Your Heart on God's Altar

Ψ **The LORD is faithful.** (vv.22-23)

Ψ **The LORD is listening.** (vv.41-43)

In the name of Jesus, our true soul-mate, dearly fellow “foreigners” – redeemed:

If hindsight is 20-20, foresight is priceless.

Last Fall I met a man who felt like a foreigner in his own country. In the ancient mountain city of Dali, Ting Wang and I went to dinner at a family street restaurant. She stopped at a nearby table to talk to a young man, then came over laughing. “He wants us to eat with him,” she said. “He’s lonely.” Turns out he was a Chinese businessman who had served seven or eight years in the Red Army. After enlisting to help victims of a terrible earthquake, he described camping in the street amid rubble too deep to pitch a tent. In the military he had rank and purpose. After he got out, he felt lost – no orders, no mission. His worst fear was how to afford a Chinese bride. His heart was broken before the altar.

You should have seen his eyes when I told him about Christian women who don’t live for themselves but for God and their families. He was beaming to hear about Jesus our heavenly Bridegroom loving us all the way to the cross to take away our sins. My friends, that foreigner was in King Solomon’s prayer (1000 B.C.) at the dedication of the LORD’s temple in Jerusalem. So were you and I. God has just walked over to your table. He wants you to **Lay Your Heart on God’s Altar**. First, look back....

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Solomon’s prayer in 1 Kings 8 has ten petitions. Nine are for God’s chosen nation of Israel through which God would send the world’s Savior. After seven years building, a huge assembly gathered for the dedication. They saw King Solomon, already famous for his wealth and wisdom, stand *“before the altar of the LORD...spread out his hands toward heaven and [say]: ‘O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below – you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way.’”*

Some of you might object: “Wait a minute! The Israelites sinned forty years in the desert with Moses. Their hearts ran away from God during the period of the Judges. Their first King Saul was evil. Solomon’s father King David committed adultery and murder. Solomon would marry 1,000 women; his harem stole his heart from God. Where was there any ‘wholehearted continuance’ among the Israelites?”

You’re right, of course. Israel was unfaithful. But can you see yourself in this mirror? Look back when you were a baby. Did you say this to your Mom and Dad? “Go ahead, get some sleep. I’ll just lie here quietly until you’re rested. Then you can feed me”? Look around. As a teenager, do you ever get angry at your parents, even rebellious? If you’re older, do you ever sin vicariously? That means letting a substitute sin while you enjoy watching? Hollywood thrives on vicarious immorality and violence. Even if we do not personally commit murder and adultery, our hearts prove again and again: We are unfaithful.

That’s why Solomon’s dedication prayer is so amazing. In those other nine petitions he keeps asking the LORD to forgive and have mercy on His people. Why? Because **The LORD is faithful**.

One of my favorite examples was a member of Solomon’s family a few generations back. She ran a brothel in the bustling border town of Jericho. Customers called her Rahab the harlot. She committed treason when she hid some spies from the invading army of Israel. Rahab begged them: *“I know that the LORD has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you.”*¹⁰ *We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the*

Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. ¹¹ *When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.* ¹² *Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that you will show kindness (רַחֲמִים) to my family, because I have shown kindness (רַחֲמִים) to you. Give me a sure sign* ¹³ *that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and that you will save us from death.”* (Joshua 2:9-13 NIV84) Everyone else was afraid and chose to fight. Rahab feared the LORD and did not want to be on opposite sides against the Almighty. Their army would lose; God would win. True “fear” of God takes His threats seriously, but faithful “fear” also seeks God’s help in the courage of faith-born love. Rahab asked; God saved her whole family. Later Rahab married an Israelite, had a son Boaz. Boaz married another foreigner named Ruth a few generations before David and Solomon.

Please don’t sit alone. **Lay Your Heart on God’s Altar.** In kindness **The LORD is faithful.** God had you on His heart as Solomon prayed for us foreigners, non-Jew Gentiles. Now look around....

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“As for the foreigner who does not belong to your people Israel but has come from a distant land because of your name – for men will hear of your great name and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm – when he comes and prays toward this temple, then hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and do whatever the foreigner asks of you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your own people Israel, and may know that this house I have built bears your Name.” Can you hear echoes of great-great-grandma Rahab’s heartfelt prayer in Solomon’s petition?

Now some of our visitors might object. “Preacher, you mean I have to go to Jerusalem?”

Actually, no, but God wants your heart there. **Lay Your Heart on God’s Altar** because God gave His all for you. It never was the building. The LORD’s Name captured Rahab’s heart and kept Solomon’s family safe as long as he stayed focused on the LORD. You see, God’s Name is His reputation. We learn what God is like in His opened up Name-reputation, this Holy Book we call the Bible. The LORD is the Savior God, the One and only. He loves to give freely His loving kindness and tender mercy to everyone who will listen. After all, God gave His greatest and best in His Son. Christ is the phone number to God. **The LORD is listening.** *“He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”* (Romans 8:32 NIV84)

Maybe you tried prayer and gave up. Is that what you do when your cell phone gets cut off from someone you love? Don’t you call them back? Let me tell you about a woman who kept calling even though it seemed the Lord was not listening, even when He said something that sounded downright mean.

Imagine walking down the street with someone calling out to you. Your friends ask, “Do you know her?” A foreigner kept shouting at Jesus until His disciples asked Him to get rid of her. So Jesus says to her, *“I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”* Instead of leaving, *she came and knelt before him, “Lord, help me!” she said.* Get this! Jesus replied, *“It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.”* I can’t even say what most of us would tell Jesus at that point. “A dog? You tell me I’m a sinner?” This foreigner knew no one else could help her. We have no Savior but Jesus. So the Canaanite woman just decided to go with it. *“Yes, Lord,” she said, “but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” Then Jesus answered, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed from that very hour.* (Matthew 15:21-28) **Lay Your Heart on the God’s Altar.** Even when it seems your calls get dropped, **The LORD is listening.**

Hindsight is 20-20; foresight priceless. Look ahead: Jesus says, *“Whoever comes to me I will never drive away....For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”* (John 6:37,40) Then you will really be able to look back and see 20-20: **The LORD is faithful. The LORD is listening. Lay Your Heart on God’s Altar** – priceless foresight: By God’s grace you are bound for glory. Who is God bringing with you? Whose heart can God win by your witness? Fire up your altar, O Lord, your altar in our hearts. Amen.

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