

"MY PEOPLE"
2 Chronicles 7:14

Intro: The text that I have chosen for this service is
2 Chron. 7:14. They give us the words of Lord which
He spoke to Solomon in answer to Solomon's prayer at the
dedication of the Temple.

Solomon was King David's son, born to Bathsheba, who was one of the greatest, one of the godliest, of Israel's kings. To him was given a very distinct honor, one that his father, David, had hoped would have been given to him. But the Lord appointed Solomon to build the first temple that Israel had. The temple was the most important building in all of Israel because it was there that the Lord had chosen to dwell. The early part of 2 Chronicles 7 tells us that for the second time "the glory of the Lord filled the house," i.e., the temple. The latter part of chapter 6 tells us that when the temple was finished, and the ark of the covenant was in the most holy place, and the Levitical musicians and singers had sounded out the praises of the Lord, that the house of the Lord was filled with the glory of the Lord to such an extent that the priests were not able to minister before the Lord. Israel had had many glorious times, but nothing could have been greater than that. The words that the Levites sang were, "For he is good," speaking of the Lord, "for his mercy endureth for ever" (2 Chron. 5:13m).

Chapter 6 tells us how King Solomon praised the Lord, remembering the Lord's goodness in the past, and praying that the blessing of the Lord would continue upon Israel's kings and Israel's people throughout the days to come.

But Solomon was keenly aware of one thing! HE KNEW THAT THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL WERE SINNERS, SINNERS BY NATURE, AND OFTEN SINNERS BY CHOICE. He knew that the people of God could not always be counted on to obey the Lord. In fact, Solomon knew that there would be times when they would not obey the Lord. And so the latter part of Solomon's prayer was given over to the anticipation of Israel's future sins along with Solomon's intercession for the people in such times of need.

Over and over again in the Old Testament Scriptures we see that the Lord used several kinds of judgments against His people when they sinned. He might bring famine on them so that they would not have enough food to eat. He might use pestilence—which could mean diseases of various kinds, or plagues such as the Lord brought on Egypt in Moses' day. OR HE MIGHT USE WAR! The troubles that Israel had with the Assyrians, and then with the Babylonians, were the result of Israel's sinful disobedience against the Lord. The Law of

Moses had warned the people of Israel over and over again about the high cost of disobedience. Sometimes punishments were personal; sometimes they were national. We must not take times of quietness and prosperity as times when God is pleased, or that God has turned His back and is not paying attention to what is going on. God is not only a God of amazing patience and goodness in spite of man's continual sinning, but He is a God of righteousness. Psalm 7:11 tells us that **"God is angry with the wicked every day."** However, it is especially grievous to the Lord when His people persist in sin.

Solomon knew that the blessing of the Lord may continue for a time even when the Lord's people are sinning. But he also knew that blessing under such conditions does not continue forever. There comes a time when the Lord deals in judgment with His own, sometimes even to the point of death.

As I refer to this verse today I hope I can say some things that are not being said with reference to our present crisis in the Middle East. I know that we are not Israel, and that this verse was given to Solomon for Israel. But I believe that there are truths contained in this verse which are timeless. What the Lord wanted from His people in those days, He wants of His people today. He did not have one standard for His people in ancient Israel, and another standard for His church. Salvation was the same then that it is now, and the divine standards of a holy walk were the same then as now. They may have had a special priesthood, and they had offerings to bring which we do not bring today, nor a temple where they are to be offered. But holiness of life is holiness of life, whether we are speaking of Solomon's day, or the last decade of the twentieth century. So I trust that you will listen with your heart, and that we will learn some things today that will help to bring blessing once again upon our nation.

God has been speaking to us through many problems which we have: increasing crime, homosexuality, dishonesty in business, aids, broken homes, rebellious children, financial troubles, the drug traffic, shortages of rain, floods, and many other things. It seems as though every week some new problem is discovered. **AND NOW WE ARE IN WAR.**

And yet how many times during this past week have you heard any of our leaders, political or military, or any of the people in the news media, tell us that God is in all of this? How many have warned us that we need to fear the Lord far more than we need to fear Saddam Hussein. He is just a man, and the Lord can wipe him out in an instant of time. But no man can stand up against the Lord! Our God is sovereign in

the affairs of all of the nations. He is not asleep. He does not have His back turned. He is very busy seeking to speak to us through the circumstances of our lives, but I have seen very little evidence that anyone is listening to Him.

Let us look at this verse and see what guidance we can get from it.

First of all, let me call your attention to the words of this verse which I have taken as my subject:

I. "MY PEOPLE."

Think about that expression for a moment with me. The Lord God of heaven and earth was speaking. He is the One Who said, "My people."

All of us who are following the daily schedule of Bible readings which we hand out at the beginning of each year, have been reading the book of Exodus. This where the expression, my people, becomes prominent in the Word of God.

E.g., cf. Ex. 3:1-10, esp. vv. 7, 10. Notice the their's and them's. It all has to do with the Lord's people.

Then see Ex. 5:1. And remember how many times this was repeated during the plagues. See Ex. 7:16; 8:1, 20.

See also Ex. 6:6, 7.

I love that first verse of Isa. 43:1 where the Lord said,
But now thus saith the Lord that created thee,
O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel,
Fear not: for I have redeemed thee,
I have called thee by thy name; **thou art mine.**

It is obvious that the Lord in His wonderful grace loved to dwell on the fact that the people of Israel were His people-- and they still are! They are not paying much more attention to the Lord than Americans are, but God has never given them up, and He never will. This does not mean that every Jew is saved, nor that every Jew will be saved. But God has His people among the Jews, that elect nation, and one by one in every generation, He is bringing them to Himself.

But this is not just OT truth; we find the same thing in the NT.

Listen to 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1. The Lord loves to say that we are His people, we are His sons and His daughters. We are His!

He not only made us, but, more importantly, He has redeemed us. And He loves to say, "My people."

See what Peter wrote in 1 Pet. 2:9, 10.

~ Aren't we like that, too, about the people we love? She is my wife. He is my son. She is my daughter, my daughter-in-law, my granddaughter, my grandson. They are mine!

I wonder: Has the truth that you are one of the Lord's people ever really gripped your heart? If the Lord delights in it, shouldn't you, and shouldn't I?

The Lord does not say that about everyone, but He does say that about those of us who know Him through Jesus Christ, the only way He can be known.

"If my people...."

~ Let me say this to you today, based upon 2 Chron. 7:14: When trouble comes upon a nation, or nations, the Lord looks to see what is going on in the hearts of His people. Those of us who know the Lord have insights into world troubles that people do not have who do not know the Lord. We are "called by" His "name." By God's grace, and not for any other reason, we are the Lord's people, His people, or as the Lord Himself would say, "My people"!

And listen to me. The Lord's people are not just in the United States. They are all over the world. I am sure that in Iraq there are some who know the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior. There may not be many, but there are some. And I can assure you that they are just as grieved about this war as we are. You will find the Lord's people scattered among the nations of the earth. The McCalebs saw many of them when they were in Thailand recently. You will find them in Israel, in Jordan, in Saudi Arabia. They are in every state in our union, people about whom the Lord says, "They are **my people!**" What is this terrible war doing to us? Is it doing anything?

Let me show you what it needs to do. Let me call it:

II. GOD'S WORK IN HIS PEOPLE.

~ There are four things that the Lord will accomplish in the hearts of His people. Listen to the Word, and you will see where your attention should be.

A. "Shall humble themselves." This is the place where the Lord begins to work on us, and where we need to

work on ourselves.

Pride is "the root sin." Pride is so deeply ingrained in us that most of do not recognize it when we see it. We can see it so easily in others, but not in ourselves. It is the sin of pride (because it is a sin) which keeps sinners from wanting to be told that they are sinners, and it keeps the people of God from many, many blessings they would otherwise have. Pride in anyone is despicable, but it is especially offensive and out of place when you see it in the people of God.

If you want to know the truth about yourself, don't listen to some silly psychologist who tries to build up your self worth, and increase your self-esteem. The problem with us that we have too much of that already. Trouble in any form, war or whatever else it might be, is always a call for the people of God to humble themselves.

There is not a person among us who has anything to be proud of. We have many things to be thankful for, but nothing to be proud of. All that we have, we have received. All of our blessings are traceable directly to God, and we should be humbled that He has blessed us the way He has.

Let me call you to humble yourself daily before the Lord.

B. "And pray."

A proud person does not pray. He doesn't feel the need to pray. How strange it is that the Lord should be calling upon His people to pray, to spend time talking to Him. If we prayed more, we would sin less. A praying person is a person who senses His need. He is trusting the Lord. He looks to the Lord for blessing upon himself, upon his family, upon his work, upon his problems and needs.

Pride is sin. And prayerlessness is sin. We can be grieving the Lord today by what we are failing to do as much as we can by what we are doing.

Did you pray before you came to church this morning? Have you been praying this week? Have you prayed for your family, your relatives, your fellow-Christians, the ministry of the Word here at home and abroad? What a difference it would make in all of us if we were really praying people.

But notice what the Lord added:

C. "And seek my face." This is a part of praying, a part which we often neglect to our own loss.

Seeking the Lord's face means to seek the Lord. You know, in prayer it is so easy to lose sight of the Lord. We want His blessings, especially when we are in some trial, but the big question is, How much do we want the Lord? Can you honestly say what David said in Psalm 27:4? "One thing have I desired of the Lord...."

How carelessly and thoughtlessly we can sing,

I am thine, O Lord, I have heard thy voice,
And it told thy love to me;
But I long to rise in the arms of faith,
And be closer drawn to thee.

O the pure delight of a single hour
That before thy throne I spend,
When I kneel in prayer, and with thee, my God,
I commune as friend with friend!

Prayer is not just asking God for things we need; prayer is fellowship with God.

In my student days in Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship we used to sing Margaret Clarkson's hymn, We Come, O Christ, To Thee. Listen to the words.

(Read the hymn.)

This is what it means to seek the Lord's face. Seeking the Lord's face means to worship the Lord. Humbling ourselves before the Lord, we pray and make our needs known to the Lord. But we do not stop there. We worship in His presence, reveling in Who He is, and in what He has done, and every provision that He has made for our happiness, our security, and our blessing.

But there is one more point.

D. "And turn from your wicked ways."

"Ways" speak, not just of individual acts of sin, but of a way of life. And they are "wicked" because they are evil in God's sight, grieving Him, hurting ourselves, and anyone else who has anything to do with us.

Are there things in your life that you need to turn from, things that you keep on doing even though you know that you are displeasing to God? We need an awakening, a revival, among those of us who are the Lord's people.

One thing is certain: If we are humbling ourselves daily

before the Lord, praying, really seeking the Lord, we are going to find it harder and harder to continue on in our "wicked ways."

May the Lord give us the grace to hear what He said so long ago to Solomon, and then make a full application to our own hearts.

One thing remains in the verse:

III. THE PROMISED BLESSINGS.

There are three blessings here:

- A. "I will hear from heaven."
- B. "I will forgive their sin."
- C. "And will heal their land."

When we can be assured that God hears us, we know our prayers will be answered. When God forgives our sin, He also cleanses us, and expects that we will forsake our sin--not continuing on in it.

I can't promise you that if we obey this verse, the war in the Middle East will suddenly come to an end. I do not know what the Lord's purpose in that war is. But I do know that if we are to see the Lord's blessing, and if we are to have any hope at all in all of our present needs, **THEN WHAT TAKES PLACE IN OUR LIVES AS THE LORD'S PEOPLE WILL PRECEDE THAT BLESSING.**

Concl: I hope you have been listening for yourself.

Probably in God's sight the greatest need in America today is the need that He sees in the hearts and lives of His own people. At the very time when the ministry of the church is needed the most, the church herself is in great need. The Word is no longer preached as it once was. The church honors the wisdom of men more than the wisdom of God. We are even using the world's methods to try to bring people into the church. Holiness of life is distasteful to many who claim to be the Lord's. Let us get our own lives right with the Lord, and trust that the fire will spread to the lives of others.