

GOD’S PEOPLE IN A TIME OF JUDGMENT

2 Chronicles 7:14

Scripture Reading: 2 Chronicles 7

Intro: The reading of the whole seventh chapter of 2 Chronicles shows us that this chapter had to do with one of the greatest, if not the very greatest, hour in all of the history of Israel. The Temple which David had wanted to build, but which was built under the direction of his son, King Solomon, was finished! After the various pieces of furniture which were to go into the Temple were in their places, and Solomon had prayed that long prayer in which he sought the continued blessing of the Lord, seeking to anticipate any condition that might arise in Israel which would grieve the Lord, when the burnt offerings and sacrifices were prepared, we read in verse 1 of our chapter that “fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the house.” And at that time not even the priests were able to enter the Temple because of the glory of the Lord.

The only other time that would have compared with it was when Moses and the children of Israel completed the building of the Tabernacle and the glory of the Lord came down upon that finished work. Not even Moses was able to enter the Tabernacle “because the cloud” – the cloud of the Lord’s presence which had guided them from the time they left Egypt – “the cloud had settled on it,” *i.e.*, on the Tabernacle, “and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle.”

Here at the dedication of the Temple sacrifices were made for a whole week. There was singing to the accompaniment of musical instruments which David had made. Solomon led the whole nation in prayer. And then that night the Lord appeared to Solomon and said this:

12 . . . I have heard thy prayer, and have chosen this place to myself for an house of sacrifice.

13 If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people;

14 If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land (2 Chron. 7:12b-14).

Notice that the Lord mentioned “no rain,” and “locusts,” and “pestilence,”

which has a wide variety of meanings. The dictionary calls *a pestilence* “any contagious or infectious epidemic disease that is virulent and devastating, spec., the bubonic plague.” The Hebrew word used here points to the plagues such as the Lord brought upon Egypt, and it emphasizes especially how the cattle and other livestock were affected. The mad cow disease is a good example.

I was told just yesterday that there has been less rain here in the northwest than at any time since they have been keeping records of the rainfall. The reason that our weather people talk about “mother nature” when they talk about the weather is because they just don’t know the Bible. Have you ever seen Mt. Hood with less snow than it has today? God sends the rain, and He withholds the rain. When bugs eat up our farmers’ crops, it is not because those farmers are so bad. Some are ungodly, but many farmers are God-fearing people. But when bugs eat up the crops, it is a warning to all of us. God is speaking, and we had better listen.

Now why did Solomon pray the way he prayed, and why did the Lord respond the way He did. Solomon gives us the answer which we find in his prayer in 2 Chronicles 6, the latter part of verse 30 and all of verse 31. Speaking to God about men, Solomon said to the Lord,

30 . . . whose heart Thou knowest; (for Thou only knowest the hearts of the children of men:)

31 That they may fear Thee, to walk in Thy ways, so long as they live in the land which Thou gavest unto our fathers (2 Chron. 6: 30b-31).

The Apostle John said that the Lord Jesus also knew what was in man. In John 2:24-25 when John was reporting that many people believed in Jesus when they saw His miracles, he added these words about our Lord:

24 But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men,

25 And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man (John 2:24-25).

On September 11, 2001 the world was given an astounding lesson on the depths to which men can go into sin. And let me say that it is only by the grace of God that life on this earth is as good as it is. It is no wonder that the people were worshiping and praising the Lord, saying, “For He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever” (2 Chron. 7:3b). If the Lord had not been good and merciful, the nation Israel would not have survived the

journey from Egypt to Canaan.

But the point of all that we see in these chapters is the Solomon knew that he was a sinner. He knew also that His people were sinners. And the Lord especially knows that all men are sinners. We were born sinners. We are sinners by nature, and too often sinners by choice. Sin has a hold on every person, and only through the Lord Jesus Christ can we be set free from the tyranny of sin. But we never get to the place in this life when it is no longer possible for us to sin. And therefore we always have to be on guard against any and everything that is displeasing to God.

Everybody in the world must decide how they are going to deal with the events that have recently hit our country. One thing is certain, and that is that God is speaking to us. God is seeking to awaken all of us to the fact that we need Him. We need Him not only for our physical safety as individuals and as a nation, but we need Him for our eternal safety and for the forgiveness of our sins. It seems very evidence from what we are seeing and hearing these days that those of us who know the Lord Jesus as our Savior, are in a minority. I am praying, and I am sure that many of you are praying, too, that God will awaken people to their need of God, not just to get us through this present crisis, but our need of Him every day and in every way. While millions of America are grieving, and many more are fearful, how wonderful it would be if God would work in many hearts so that people would see their need of Him, and their need of Christ, and would become convinced that the only way we can be saved is by turning to Christ for the forgiveness of sin and for the gift of eternal life.

And for us who are here today, we who are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, we all need to face the question, What is the Lord saying to me? And that is the reason I have chosen this verse which, if I remember correctly, first came to my attention at the beginning of World War II when this verse was everywhere.

As we turn to it, let me point out that it is addressed to:

I. "MY PEOPLE, WHICH ARE CALLED BY MY NAME."

Now I know that this was addressed primarily to the nation Israel, but there is certainly an application to us today, Jewish and Gentile Christians, who by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ have

become the people of God. Things are never as completely right in our lives as they need to be. We can always be better. We can always love the Lord more. We can always be more obedient to His Word. But I take great comfort in the fact that the Lord says concerning us, “My people.”

There are similar words in Isaiah’s prophecy. One of them is found in chapter 43, verses 1 and 2. Listen to what the Lord said at that time:

1 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.

2 When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee (Isa. 43:1-2).

I know these words were spoken to the people of God in OT times, but they apply just as much to those of us who love the Lord today. He knows us by name. He is acquainted with our needs. He delights in saying, “Thou art mine.” And if you read on down to the fourth verse of Isaiah 43 you will see that the Lord went on to say, “Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honorable, and I have loved thee . . .”

These are days when we need to be living on the words of God, drinking deeply of their wonderful truth. How thankful we ought to be that it can truly be said of us, if Christ is our Savior, *that we are the Lord’s people, called by His Name*. Now He addressed Himself to His own people because it is that which is going on our lives which can have a great effect upon the nation in which we live – this country of ours which has been so greatly blessed by God in the past, and upon which we all want to see His blessing restored in the days ahead. But let us remember that His blessing upon us is on His terms, not ours.

Now the verse begins with that conditional word, “if.” “If my people, which are called by My Name . . .” And then the Lord spoke of four things that He wanted His people to do, not just to meet some special emergency, but as a way of life.

Perhaps some of you remember that Gospel tract which must have been printed in multiplied millions of copies, which was called *Four Things God Wants You to Know*. And it went on to tell how to be saved. Well, our text for today, speaking to those of us who know the Lord, tells us:

II. FOUR THINGS GOD WANT US TO DO.

Those of us who read the Word of God regularly know of many, many ways in which people in our country are displeasing the Lord every day. They are sins which God has spoken very clearly about. And it may be that we get so occupied with other people's sins that we forget to look at ourselves under the searchlight of the Word of God. Now this verse calls us, not to look at the world for this moment, nor are we to look at each other, *but we are to look at ourselves! And if we are concerned not only about the Lord's blessing upon ourselves and our loved ones, but upon our nation, these are four things that God wants us to do.*

The first is that we are:

A. To humble ourselves.

We have a good example of humility in the second and third verses of our chapter. Let me read them to you again. (Read 2 Chron. 7:2-3.)

When you look at the people of the world, and listen to them talk, you have constant examples of pride. And unfortunately there is a lot of pride among us as believers. Some have called it *the root sin*, that is, the sin out of which all other sins are produced. But what was it that caused the people of Israel to fall on their faces to the ground to worship and praise the Lord? It was when they saw "the glory of the Lord." Now the place where we see the Lord is in the Word of God. That is why we need to be reading the Word constantly, not just once a day, but throughout every day. And we need to be looking for the Lord as we read, crying out to God to make Himself known to us. And it is when we begin to understand God in His glory, in His holiness, and how infinitely greater He is than we are, that we see how insignificant and sinful we are in ourselves, and we begin to marvel that He would ever have anything to do with us.

We have in the Bible another good example of what it takes to make us as humble as we need to be. It is found in Isaiah 6. Please turn with me to that chapter, and you follow as I read. (Read verses 1-7, and explain it.)

There is something about growing in our knowledge of God and of Christ that makes us realize that we don't amount to anything in ourselves. Our greatest honor is that God loves us, and yet somehow we realize that we

don't deserve His love.

I need to be more humble, and so do you. Our pride is one of the greatest problems we have, and it causes us a lot of trouble. So those of us who are in the church of Jesus Christ need to humble ourselves, and for that we need a constant supply of the grace of God.

What is the second thing that God wants us to do?

B. "And pray."

It is easy for us to think that we are praying when we are only saying prayers. And there is a difference, you know. True praying follows true humility. We begin to pray when we realize how great our need is, and how utterly dependent we are upon God for everything. Living in an affluent society like we have lived in, is not conducive to real praying. We pray when we get into trouble of some kind, or some emergency arises, but real prayer needs to be a part of our lives every day.

But we are beginning to understand what it is to pray when we believe that it is essential that we take time to pray for others.

But how do we learn to pray? We can learn by listening to others pray if we are listening to people who really know how to pray. But the best way to pray is by the prayers of the Bible. That is one reason they have been recorded for us. We might not think that what Isaiah said about himself when he saw the Lord, was prayer, but the Lord took it as a confession of sin, and He cleansed him. The Israelites in our chapter were praying when kneeling and on their faces before God, they said, "For He is good; and His mercy endureth for ever."

We are learning to pray when we can say what Samuel said to the people of Israel when they had sinned against the Lord by asking for a king so they could be like other nations. This is what he said: "Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you" (1 Sam. 12:23). That's a good prayer for pastors, and for parents, and for everybody who has a friend who is a Christian.

What is the condition of your prayer life? Prayerlessness is sin, and it needs to be confessed and forsaken just like any other sin.

But there is a fourth word for us:

C. “And seek My face.”

When Central Bible Church was downtown, and those of us who attended enjoyed the ministry of Dr. John G. Mitchell, we used to sing out of a hymnal called, *Hymns of the Christian Life*. Some of the hymns were written by A. B. Simpson, who I think is mainly credited with starting the Christian and Missionary Alliance church. The first line of one of his hymns said volumes when it comes to prayer. This is how it went: “Once it was the blessing, now it is the Lord.” By that he meant that once when he prayed he was seeking the Lord’s blessing, but now he was seeking the Lord.

You know, it is by our faces that we are distinguished from one another. So the Lord indicated that what we are to be concerned about is that we are seeking Him just because we want to be with Him. But to seek His face also means that we are seeking His approval. I could always tell by looking at my Dad’s face whether he was please with me, or displeased. So in seeking the Lord’s face we are seeking Him, and we are seeking His approval. Luke tells us that after Peter had denied three times that he knew the Lord, the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Peter saw the Lord’s face, and when he did, he remembered that the Lord had predicted that he would do what he had done, but it was the Lord’s face that broke Peter’s heart, and he went out and wept bitterly.

In Psalm 27 David wrote about the Lord’s face, and this is what he said,
7 Hear, O LORD, when I cry with my voice: have mercy also upon me, and answer me.
8 When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek.
9 Hide not thy face far from me; put not thy servant away in anger: thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation (Psa. 27:7-9).

What a difference it makes in our praying when we realize that we are coming to a living God, Who wants us to seek Him first, and then to have His blessing because we desire above everything else to be with Him, and to please Him.

The last of the four things that the Lord wants us to do is to:

D. To turn from our “wicked ways.”

We need to ask ourselves in these days when our country has suffered such a severe blow, “Do I have any wicked ways?” To be wicked can be disgraceful, but it may mean any way in which I am displeasing the Lord. It is any sinful way. Are there things in my life that are not good in God’s sight? If so, we need to turn from them, and never go back to them. King Solomon has given us a good word on this point:

He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy (Prov. 28:13).

We are not confessing our sins when we may go back and commit them over again. It is when we confess our sins with every intention of *turning from them and never going back to them again, that we will experience the blessing of the Lord.* We need to pray constantly that the Lord will help us to love what He loves, and to hate what He hates. Sin never brings true joy. Sin always hurts us, and often hurts others as well.

If we can sincerely do the first three points, then we will be prepared to do the fourth.

The last point of our text has to do with:

III. THREE OF GOD’S PROMISES.

A. “Then will I hear from heaven.”

This is when the “if” at the beginning of the verse is brought together with the “then” of God’s promises. God hears everything we say. He even knows everything that we think. But the word “hear” when the Lord uses it like He did here, means that He will respond; He will answer. He will grant our petition.

B. “And will forgive their sin.”

He means the sin of His people. We know now that the forgiveness of our sins is not just because of our confession, but we know that God forgives our sins because His Son died paying the penalty for all of our sins. And where there is forgiveness, there is cleansing.

But notice the last promise.

C. And will heal their land.”

Again let me say that I know that this verse was originally given to the people of Israel. But notice what would happen if they were to ignore what the Lord has had to say in this verse. (Read verses 19-22.) The land was given to Israel. The temple was the place where God would dwell among them. But their possession of the land, and the security of the Temple, was dependent upon their obedience to the promises of God, and their refusal to worship and serve other gods.

Concl: So our situation is different today. As a nation we have no covenant relationship with the Lord. We do as believers, but not as a nation. However, I believe that I am being faithful to this text when I say that the best thing that we as believers in Christ can do for our country, is to make sure that our relationship with the Lord is what He wants it to be. Then and only then can we expect to be salt and light in this world in which we live. A lot is being said in these days about what we need to do for our country, but the best we can do, and the way we can be a blessing for the healing of many in our land, is to do exactly as the Lord said in these verses. If the blessing of the Lord is to be ours, it will only be as those of us who know the Lord really get down to business with the Lord and live lives that bring honor and glory to His Name.