

II Chronicles 7:14

The Prescription for a Sick Nation

Introduction

As we know from our doctors and experience, it is important to have the *right* prescription. Many people actually even die from the wrong prescription. If I have a simple cold or headache, I will probably resort to over-the-counter meds. But if I have something more serious, I may need to have a doctor write a prescription designed for my specific illness. I might need an antibiotic for an infection, or I might need an inhaler for my asthma. Likewise, many of you might be taking some type of prescription on a regular basis. Sometimes I get both an antibiotic and a steroid, like Prednisone, at the same time. I could skip the Prednisone, because I don't like what it does to me. But it also works well, and I know that I must take all of the meds for it to properly work.

I like to think of our well-known passage this morning, II Chronicles 7:14, as a prescription for a sick nation. It has even been put to song. We just observed the National Day of Prayer. Next weekend is Memorial Day. And in a little over a month, we will celebrate our nation's birth. So, I think that this text is appropriate this morning. But for it to work properly, like a prescription, all of it must be used.

Let's first look briefly at the context, the dedication of the Solomonic temple, about 3,000 years ago (circa 966-7 BC). The ark and holy utensils were brought into the holy of holies, after which the temple was filled with the glory of God. Solomon gave a speech to the nation, which was not political, but entirely spiritual. Then Solomon prays, and he prays much more than he speaks. We tend to speak much more than we pray! This was an unusual "state of the nation" speech, to say the least. There were so many freewill offerings, they couldn't be counted. That night, God came to Solomon and gives him some advice. He came to him when things were going well in Israel, with a warning about when things might go south. Under Solomon, the Jews enjoyed the pinnacle of their civilization. The Lord had already known that Israel would drift away from Him, and that there would be a future diaspora, predicted in many places in the Bible, by Moses in the last chapters of Deuteronomy, for example.

II Chronicles 7:12-14

:12 **The reception:** a personal appearance to Solomon when no one else was around.

:13 **The prediction:** This was an allusion to the Land of Israel Covenant, which is found in those last chapters of Deuteronomy. He doesn't just say "if" but "when". *When* the nation loses its wealth and its health, it needs the prescription found in verse fourteen.

:14 The prescription

- The Lord was giving advice to an already wise king. We will find that there were four things that Israel was to do, four conditions. Then, in consequence, there are three things that God would do, three promises so to speak. Remember that Solomon was a political leader, one of the greatest ones of all time. He led Israel during its zenith, its absolute peak. There are many good things that could be done to help a nation, but we will see that the Lord doesn't tell Solomon to form a political action committee, hire a lobbyist, start a fund drive, or print more shekels. He doesn't recommend a stimulus package or a health-care plan. The prescription is entirely *spiritual*, because a departure from the Lord is entirely a *spiritual* problem.
- We will examine our text phrase-by-phrase.

Four Conditions for Israel to Meet

“If My people, who are called by my name...”

- The identity of the original people in this verse is quite clear, the theocratic nation of Israel. But we are in the Church age today. (The church isn't in the Old Testament. The church is called a mystery in the New Testament, which is a transliteration of the word, *mysterion*. The word in 1st-century Greek meant brand new revelation, not previously known (Eph. 3:1-10; Col. 1:24-27). So, Israel is not the church in the Old Testament and the church is not Israel in the New Testament. The Church and Israel are still distinguished in the New Testament.)
- However, there is still a fairly direct application of our text, except possibly for one thing, which we shall see later. So, let's not get sidetracked this morning by the debate over whether the US is or was a Christian nation. I doubt if we could agree on a definition of “Christian”, for that matter. However, we should at least all agree that the US has a great spiritual heritage, and religion constituted an important feature in its origin.
- God's people today, called by His name, are identified in the New Testament (e.g. I Cor. 1:2; Rom. 1:6-7). True believers in Jesus Christ are those who are “called by His name” today. So, the application for our text is, for the most part legitimate, for true believers.
- Prov. 14:34. Those who have been studying the Minor Prophets with me know that many Gentile nations have been judged for their wickedness. Therefore, I believe that the promises *apply* for the US, if God's people, composed of all born-again believers, meet these conditions.
- But let me caution you. We can't change other people. I can't even change myself. The Holy Spirit is the Change Agent.

“...humble themselves...”

- The Hebrew word for humble here is Anah, which means to bring low. That is in our job description, to bring ourselves low. It's also taught in the New Testament (Phil. 2:5-11; I Pet. 5:5-7). Exalting is in the Lord's job description, not ours.
- [Humility is in the essence of faith. Humility ceases to place confidence in itself and places confidence in God (Heb. 11:6).]
- Today we may be more concerned with self-esteem than humility. It's a character trait I say that should be on the endangered species list. I don't believe that I have ever see such arrogance as I see today. Yet until we humble ourselves like the publican in the New Testament, our prayers will bounce off of the ceiling. As a young man, I had developed a big head. But over the years, the Lord taught me that, apart from Christ, I am nothing but a zero with the edges rubbed off!

“...and pray,”

- (I might be going from preaching to meddling now. But an old preacher used to say, “I likes to make folks glad. But before I can make ‘em glad, I gotts to make ‘em sad. But before I can make ‘em sad, I gotts to make em mad”. So, if you get upset with me this morning, remember that my goal is to make folks glad.)
- (It is a chronic issue in churches that any type of prayer meeting is least attended. This is in all churches, so I'm not just singling out anyone. There are, of course, legitimate reasons why people don't show up for something like a prayer meeting: some folks live far away, or they are at work, or they are gone on vacations, or a sick shut-ins.)
- Surveys have shown that the biggest fear that folks have is public speaking. People are more afraid of public speaking than they are of sharks or black-widow spiders. They don't list public prayer on their survey lists. But I think that folks might be even more afraid of praying in public. So, that's a fear that we need to overcome.
- Perhaps you feel that you don't know how to pray. Join the club (Rom. 8:26).
- Sometimes one-liner prayers are most effective: II Sam. 15:31 (ten words, ten seconds); Mk. 9:24 (six words, six seconds – healed demon possessed son) Read Moody's card; (Read prayer in faith card.)
- And since we are discussing prayer for America, let's remember that most folks are lost. It takes a miraculous work of the Holy Spirit to bring a person to faith (Rom. 8:7; I Cor. 2:14). Regarding my earlier comment about the Holy Spirit being the Change Agent, this can be something about which we pray. It is He who changes hearts. So, we need to be praying for the salvation of the lost within our orbit, our friends, relatives, neighbors, co-workers – whomever they may be.

“and seek My face...”

- This is not a typical expression that we would use today. In fact, the Bible says that, “No one has seen God at any time” (Jn. 1:8). But we might say, “up close and personal” as an equivalent. Prayer *to* God needs to be personal *with* God. [It’s not a ritual (read attitude card).] Prayer should be an intimate two-way conversation with God, praying and reading His word. Devotion is still a good word to use here.
- Jacob actually named the place where he wrestled with the Lord, Peniel, or face of God, in Gen. 32:30. Jacob may have failed at many things, but as a mature believer, he received a blessing, a sign of the Lord’s favor, for striving with the Lord. This text has often been used as an illustration of striving in prayer (cf. Nu. 6:25; Deut. 31:17, 18; 32:20; 34:10; I Chron. 16:11; Psa. 10:11; 13:1; 27:8-9; 31:16; 51:9; 67:1; 80:3, 7, 19; 102:2; 119:135).

“...and turn from their wicked ways,”

- Unfortunately, it’s sometimes hard to tell Christians from non-Christians today. We should stick out in a way that reflects the living God dwelling within. Some have asked the question, “If we were tried in a court of law for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict us?”.
- It could be that we need to do this daily, or whenever we go astray in any way. One of the first verses that we teach new Christians to learn is I John 1:9. We should keep short accounts with the Lord.

We can’t take a smorgasbord approach, a buffet, where we can take what we want and leave the rest! *All four of the conditions must be met!* The prescription must be correct. It can’t be lacking something.

Three Promises from God

“*then* I will hear from heaven,”

- Psa. 66:18; Isa. 59:1-2
- The Lord won’t hear *any other prayer until we pray a prayer of confession!*

“will forgive their sin,”

- This is a promise! Out of 7,000 promises in the Bible, the Lord hasn’t broken one yet!
- All the great prayers of the Bible *predominate* with confession of sin (Ezra 9; Nehemiah 9; Daniel 9).
- One’s sensitivity to sin and personal spiritual growth are directly proportional!

“and will heal their land.”

- Now, America doesn't have a Land Covenant like Israel. So, we don't have a promise regarding the soil beneath our feet. But I think that we can *apply* this as *spiritual* healing. And I think that we would all agree that America is in desperate need of spiritual healing.
- Solomon was one of the greatest political leaders of all time. But the answer wasn't the man in the office. It was the God who is in heaven (Prov. 21:1).

A brief History of American Revivals

My major in seminary was Historical Theology. I took an entire course on American Revivals, which was a real blessing. I shared some of this with our adult Sunday School class, and I will share some of this now briefly. Though many books and dissertations have been written on each of these.

The Definition of a National Revival (Calvin Colton, 1843): “A revival, therefore, may be defined, as the multiplied power of religion over a community of minds, when the Spirit of God awakens Christians to special faith and effort, and brings sinners to repentance”. “It is broad in effect over a lengthy period of time”. This is in distinction to a “local” revival.

The Characteristics (William Sprague, 1832):

- “An increase of zeal and devotedness on the part of God’s people”.
- “The alarm and conviction of those who have hitherto been careless”.
- “There are those...who are indulging a hope that they are reconciled to God and are born of the Spirit”.
- Great excitement, great numbers who profess conversion, and great opposition.
- Fervent group prayer, great evangelistic preaching, small group Bible studies, and turning from sinful practices.

The Great Awakening (1720-1740)

- As it wasn't known that there would be a 2nd great awakening, it was simply called The Great Awakening. It began with the Dutch Reformed, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists.
- Conditions: frontier settlement, deterioration of faith, constant wars (Pequot War – 1637; King Phillip’s War- 1672; King William’s War – 1689; Queen Anne’s War - 1701).
- Much of this revival centered in colonial New England, among the Congregationalists, which, unfortunately, were later decimated by first deism and then transcendentalism. But the revival branched out into the frontier and colonies.
- You might remember some names of great preachers like George Whitefield, John Wesley, Theodore Jacobus Frelinghuysen, and of course, the Congregationalist, Jonathan Edwards.
- There were up to 250,000 converts and 350 new churches. Many colleges were formed.

The Second Great Awakening (1800-1820)

- This followed the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 was during the revival.
- Morality had declined almost proportional to the frontiersmen moving west (the “Wild West”). College campuses were also in moral decline.
- Deism had dealt a fatal blow to many denominations and congregations.
- Centered in colleges: Williams, Amherst, Yale, Princeton, Hampton-Sydney. What a contrast to today!
- At least some of this revival was characterized by weak theology and emotional excess.
- But again, there were many conversions and increased church attendance, especially among the Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians. New denominations sprang up, such as Disciples of Christ and the Shakers.
- New organizations were formed: American Bible Society, American Tract Society, American Sunday School Union.

Finney’s “Revival” – Not Genuine

The Layman’s Prayer Revival (1856-1858)

- As you can tell, it preceded the Civil War by only a few years. Sometimes there would be a cease fire called during a battle so that the ABS could pass out Bibles to both sides. Many soldiers were possibly saved because of the revival.
- The nation was seriously divided coupled with a general moral decline.
- After a period of economic prosperity, there was a crash in 1857 that resulted in bank failures and bankruptcies.
- People began to seek religious help. Gospel tracts were distributed and prayer meetings sprung up. The meetings were organized by lay workers and were very disciplined, but began spontaneously. They would meet during the lunch hour, which would begin and end on time, as folks needed to return to work. They didn’t allow discussion of politics. It was a bottom-up revival, not top-down.
- Many hymns were written that we still sing today: Just as I am, O, For a Thousand Tongues, There is a Fountain, Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus, Beneath the Cross of Jesus.
- There were over a million converts. The Salvation Army and YMCA began, very different from today. D. L. Moody was converted.
- This had an international impact: the British Isles, Scandinavia, Europe, South Africa, and Australia. It eventuated in the era of the evangelists.

The Era of the Great Evangelists (1880-1935)

The Era of Billy Graham (1950-)

The Jesus Revolution (1960’s-1970’s)

- I came to faith in Christ during the time of this revival. The movie of the same name, with Kelsey Grammar, is a portrayal of this time. It is fairly accurate, but doesn’t really get into the doctrinal weaknesses that attended some of the movement.

- It began on the Asbury campus, but spread to the west coast. CCM began during this time. We were all expecting the rapture to happen at any time, singing “I Wish We’d All Been Ready”.
- It constitutes our last American revival.

In conclusion, I hope this morning that you haven’t just been educated a *little*, but challenged a *lot*. “There won’t be any healing without a lot of kneeling!!”

How bad do we want the US to be healed? Personally, I have to look in the mirror to see if I am meeting these four conditions.

As you have heard it prayed before, “Lord, we want revival. Let it begin with me.”

Will God heal America? Only if we, as a nation, meet these conditions!

Revival has happened before. It can happen again! Read Lincoln card.