

Revival Starts by Seeking God

INTRO: The preaching schedule has just got a little weird. We have one sermon left to do in Nehemiah, which would have fallen on today. So I moved it. We will finish Nehemiah after I return from the mission trip to Tennessee. Next week the Bishop of Imlay City Ford will be filling in for me. So that left me with what to do for this Sunday.

As I thought and prayed on it, I felt drawn to do something touching on our nation as it is the 4th of July weekend. Then the message began to change some. I started to look at the quintessential passage for talking about nations and righteousness: 2 Chronicles 7:14 “If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray...” Personally I have had a hard time appropriating that passage for America. There are parallels, and it is the passage we will look at today, it is not a passage written to America.

So what is a pastor to do? As I was studying, a small part of the verse leaped out at me. God basically said, “preach this.” So that is what a pastor is to do - I’ll preach that. What’s “that?” Glad you asked. It is the part of the verse that says, “and seek my face.”

TRAN: Not only will I preach that, but today will serve as an introduction to the next sermon series. That is an odd way of doing things, but because this series will come back to the premise over and again, I feel like this is the way to preach this series.

So turn to 2 Chronicles 7:11-16 (p. 435)

- I. As we start, let me give you the background and setting here
 - A. Solomon has just finished building the Temple.
 1. This is the Temple that his father David always wanted to build
 2. However, God would not allow that desire to be realized in David’s lifetime, but rather have that dream fulfilled by David’s son
 - B. In order to dedicate the Temple, Solomon offers thousands of animals for sacrifice
 1. In fact the text says that Solomon offered so much as sacrifices that the altar could not hold it all so he had to consecrate other area to deal with some of the offerings
 2. It was not a good day in the kingdom if your were a sheep or a cow
 - C. Verse twelve tells us that the Lord appeared to Solomon
 1. This is the second time the Lord appeared to Solomon
 2. This time the Lord gives Solomon some direct answers to prayers that Solomon previously offered
 - a) Look back to chapter 6, starting with verse 24, 26, 28, 36

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- b) Over and over Solomon is asking for the Lord to be gracious in all of these different circumstances
- 3. So in 7:12 the Lord says “I have heard your prayer...”
 - a) This is what the Lord is referring to
 - b) Solomon prayed these things, and the Lord is about to answer in a direct way
 - (1) Anyone else wish we could get this direct an answer sometimes?
 - (2) God just shows up, and tells you what the deal is?
 - (3) Just so you know, this was not common, even for Solomon
 - (a) Too often we look back with over spiritualized eyes
 - (b) This was probably not a complete surprise to Solomon because God appeared to him once before
 - (c) But this was far from common

II. Solomon’s answer

A. The Lord repeats in large measure what Solomon prayed - v.13

- 1. When there is no rain (which means God is judging)
- 2. Or locusts run rampant (judgment)
- 3. Or a plague hits the people (judgment)

B. Verse 14 is what God requires

- 1. He starts by qualifying who this promise is for - it is for God’s people, called by His name
 - a) Who is called by His name?
 - (1) I doubt that this is to be taken as “called the same as God’s name” or that they are named after God
 - (2) What it does mean is that they are called into relationship by the power and authority of God’s name
 - (a) So Israel was called God’s chosen people by a choice that God made
 - (b) Even in the NT, Romans 10:13 “for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved”
 - i) That reaching out to God’s name
 - ii) That is reaching out to His power and authority
 - b) But we are NT people, this is a promise for the OT nation of Israel - this is not for us, right?
 - (1) Wrong.
 - (2) While the applications may be different, the process of repentance is the same - I’ll explain as we go
- 2. If His people do four things:
 - a) Humble themselves
 - b) Pray

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- c) Seek His face
- d) And turn from sin
 - (1) These four items are not meant to be sequential steps
 - (2) Many of these happen at the same time
- 3. If these four things happen, God will
 - a) Hear from heaven
 - b) Forgive their sin
 - c) And heal their land
 - (1) It is this last result that will look different in application across time
 - (2) For the nation of Israel it literally meant, heal their land
 - (3) God had it in the law that He would send plagues and drought on the land for ignoring certain commands
 - (4) So for us today, the “healing of the land” will look differently
- C. Allow me to illustrate how this verse has been given a very incorrect meaning
 - 1. Sadly, this verse has been appropriated for the USA as if the United States are God’s people
 - a) This verse was not given to the USA
 - b) It was given to Israel
 - c) So to think that all we have to do is follow this verse and our nation will right itself from its wrongs is incorrect
 - 2. In the same breath I tell you that Psalm 33:12 is not wrong, “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord...”
 - a) We as a nation have left our moorings
 - b) READ: State of Mississippi Proclamation
 - c) Should we be trying to instill a Theocracy (a government where God is the head)
 - (1) No!
 - (2) Should we pray that, as a nation we understand our heritage and the value of humility before Almighty God - of course
- III. With the background of the message established, I want to look at these “steps” of repentance more closely
 - A. The first is humility
 - 1. Humility is an expectation of God - put less subtly, it is a command
 - a) Micah 6:8 (on screen)
 - b) James 4:10 (on screen)
 - 2. In fact, God takes it one step farther, God opposes the proud
 - a) 1 Peter 5:5
 - b) This makes perfect sense

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- (1) Pride comes in when we believe the lies Satan hands us
 - (2) Satan tries to twist our understanding of who God is
 - (a) Think of Eve in the garden
 - (b) “God didn’t really say that...He knows you will be like Him if you eat this fruit.”
 - (c) What is Satan doing? Trying to get Eve to think that God is not good - that God is not who He says He is
 - (3) As soon as that happens, as soon as Eve buys Satan’s lies, or we buy Satan’s lies, we start to think we know better than God
 - (a) That is called pride ladies and gentlemen
 - (b) God hates pride
 - c) God will even go so far as to humble the proud
 - (1) Luke 18:14 (on screen)
 - (2) God is in the business of humility
 3. The Hebrew word means to subdue pride and submit in loyalty to God’s will
 4. So this first step is not an easy one, but it is one that must be done if we want to see renewal and revival in our hearts, in our churches and in our nation
- B. The second step is pray
1. Did you realize prayer is an act of humility - or at least it should be
 - a) Prayer is a statement that we are incapable of helping ourselves
 - b) And that may be the reason we the church has so little prayer
 - (1) Step one of humility is our hang up
 - (2) So we can hardly enter into step two
 2. Assuming we make it to step two, what do we pray?
 - a) Seems logical that the first thing would be confession
 - b) If we have humbled ourselves before God we probably are at a point that we recognize our sins
 - c) Considering the final step is turn from their wicked ways, it seems logical that confession, which is just agreeing with God that what we have done IS sin - it seems confession is in order
 - (1) We are not surprising God that we sinned - He already knows
 - (2) We are agreeing that it was sin - we are agreeing that we broke God’s commands
 - (3) That takes humility to agree with God that what we have done is sin
 3. My next question though is, “Why confession?” - why is that what needs to happen in these steps
 - a) My answer is that we are seeking God’s face

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- (1) We will get to what that means in a few minutes here
- (2) But if we are seeking God's face, humility and confession are the order of the day
- b) Turn to Isaiah 6:1-5
 - (1) Most likely this is a vision, but being caught up into the throne room cannot be ruled out
 - (2) Isaiah's first signal that he is in a very unique setting is that the angels are calling out to each other, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty..."
 - (a) Isaiah is in front of the Lord, on His throne
 - (b) And the Lord is holy
 - i) I don't think we get the idea of holiness as well as we should
 - ii) God is so much different from us that we cannot handle Him as He is
 - (1) For Moses he toned down His glory by placing Moses in the opening of a rock and passed by so Moses could only see His back
 - (a) Moses face still glowed so bright the Israelites asked him to wear a veil
 - (2) Ezekiel, when having his vision of God could only see the Lord's mid-section
 - (3) God "clothed" Himself in humanity when coming to earth - we know Him as Jesus
 - iii) His holiness speaks not only of His righteousness
 - (1) We often think of holiness as being good, or righteous
 - (2) It speaks of His apartness - that He is so completely unlike us
 - (3) Isaiah's response to the Lord's presence and holiness - "Woe to me...I am a man of unclean lips."
 - (a) He realized just how sinful he and his people were
- c) Now, there is a difference between us and Isaiah
 - (1) We, as followers of Christ have exchanged our sinful natures with Christ, so that God the Father sees Jesus on us
 - (2) We have the righteousness of Christ covering us - and that makes us worthy to be in the Lord's presence
 - (3) However, our sins still break our relationship with God
 - (4) So when we enter His presence, we do want to recognize the ways in which our lives are out of whack with God's design, things that have stressed the relationship

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4. This is why we confess
- C. The third step is seeking God's face
 1. This is the step that we will be building the sermon series around
 2. What does it mean to seek the face of God
 - a) We use that phrase so easily in the Christian world
 - b) Does it not drive anyone else nuts that we use phrases that sound spiritual but no one really understands what it means?
 - c) How do we seek God's face?
 3. Let me give you a couple of Bible verses:
 - a) 1 Chronicles 16:11 "Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always."
 - b) Psalm 27:8 "My heart says of you, 'Seek his face!' Your face, Lord, I will seek."
 - (1) David sounds so desperate here
 - (2) His heart cries out to seek the face of God
 - (3) I have little doubt many of us feel the same way
 - (a) We want to seek His face
 - (b) But we don't quite know what that means or how
 - i) We might have our way that we seek His face
 - ii) But we wonder if it is the right way
 4. So let's use some illustrations from life on earth to see if we can figure this out
 - a) When we seek the face of a friend what are we saying?
 - (1) We want to spend time with that friend
 - (2) We want to be in their presence, and enjoy the warmth and comfort that comes from being with them
 - (3) For example: When my dad passed away, there were a few faces I literally was seeking
 - (a) It was Sunday morning here at church, and I literally just wanted to see a few people and have them give me a hug and comfort me with their presence
 - (b) So in this sense of seeking someone's face, we are saying we want to be in the presence of someone
 - b) I had a conversation with one of our college age students a couple days before preparing this message
 - (1) We were talking about other students they had been in the youth group with, and they expressed a desire to spend time with these other students to catch up on life
 - (2) The reason we catch up on life is to see how one another has changed over time

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- (a) We are looking at how they have grown in their life circumstances
 - i) So for example, the first year I went out to MA for vacation, I got to see several of my former students
 - ii) And I met several of THEIR children - But I'm not old
 - iii) We spent time talking about the "good ol' days" but seeing how life has changed each of us
- (b) We also can see how people have grown in who they are
 - i) I sat and talked with one of my former "kids" (who is now 37 and has four kids of her own)
 - ii) As we had lunch together I could see so many ways in which her faith had grown since the last time I saw her (in her college years)
 - iii) I was experiencing who she was as a person
 - (1) There was plenty of good ol' Jen to enjoy
 - (2) But there was plenty of ways in which I could mark ways in which she has become stronger as a person, in her faith, because of life
- (c) This can happen just in wanting to get to know someone better
 - i) I have had this happen when new people have come to church
 - ii) They want to get to know their pastor better, and they want to be known by their pastor so they "seek my face"
- (3) So another way in which we seek someone's face is to better understand who they are
- 5. So what we can say is that to "seek someone's face" really is to spend time in their presence, and to know who they are (whether they have changed, or by getting to know they the first time)
- 6. Here is where the illustration shows it's inexact parallel
 - a) When we seek the face of God, it would certainly be to spend time in His presence
 - b) It would be to get to know Him, but it would not be to see how He has grown
 - (1) That is one of the most beautiful truths about God - He does not change
 - (2) However, we might see how our understanding of Him has changed - but God does not change
- 7. Let me combine these two truths here
 - a) The only way to get to know someone is to spend time in their presence

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- b) That is the way to get to know the real person
 - c) The same is true with God
 - d) And the more you know Him, the more time you want to spend with Him
8. That is where this series will be going
- a) I want to look at some of the truths of who God is
 - (1) Not from a cold theological perspective
 - (a) I could rattle off a bunch of truths about God
 - (b) You could even memorize those
 - (c) But that is facts
 - (2) I want us to look behind the truth to “what difference does it make for us”
- D. The final step is turning from wicked ways
- 1. My contention is, the more you really get to know God, the less those wicked ways will hold any appeal
 - 2. That is why we are going to focus through the rest of the summer on who God is, and how it makes a difference to us