

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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Sermon Title: God's If/Then Promise, 2 Chronicles 7:11-15

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INTRODUCTION: On this patriotic Sunday, I always consider my words carefully. I know as citizens of heaven, our earthly home is only temporary. I know it wanes terribly in comparison, and I don't want to preach a sermon which sounds like a politician running for office. I could stand up here and whoop and holler about America and get everyone in a frenzy (maybe!), but this is not my intention.

There are two points to my sermon today, and they are:

1. The word "**IF**" required action from the Israelites.
2. The "**THEN**" part of God's promise required action on his part.

During our midweek Bible study, I'm teaching about Solomon's temple and all that went into it. Before Solomon built the temple as a permanent place, the Israelites had a portable tabernacle.

I've preached from 2 Chronicles 7 several times during my tenure here. The reason is because it fits so well with patriotic days. Some may not agree, but when we study this passage, we see how these verses contain promises, which hinge on a huge word: IF.

SCRIPTURE: 2 Chronicles 7:11-15 ¹¹ *When Solomon had finished the temple of the LORD and the royal palace, and had succeeded in carrying out all he had in mind to do in the temple of the LORD and in his own palace, ¹² the LORD appeared to him at night and said:*

"I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a temple for sacrifices.

¹³ “When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, ¹⁴ if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land. ¹⁵ Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.

First, THE WORD “IF” REQUIRED ACTION FROM THE ISRAELITES.

I want to circle the word *if* in Verse 14. *If* is the fulcrum. It is the action word, which requires us to choose. We cannot be faced with *if* and do nothing. God himself is the author of the *if* in these verses.

ILLUSTRATION: Life is all about choices, and the word *if* has a lot to do with choices. A few years ago, a young husband and father I know was diagnosed with an aggressive cancer. His doctor told him he was in the latter stages of cancer. His doctor told him this news on Friday afternoon and said more tests were necessary. When he told me, he said he had no life insurance, and he grieved the thought of his wife having to figure things out on her own after he died. *If* he had just provided that security to his family...*if, if, if.*

Being such a young man, he could have bought a life insurance policy for his family at minimal cost, but he didn't. I grieved for him over the weekend, and many people prayed for a miracle. The following week, we learned he had been misdiagnosed, and everyone was relieved. I talked with him a few weeks later and asked him about the topic, which so troubled him when he was in the pit of despair. I asked him if he had bought any life insurance. He said no. Again, being such a young man, it would have been a simple and cheap transaction.

EXPLANATION: *If* requires action. In the case of God's response to Solomon's prayer, he started his instruction with “*If*”—only two measly letters in the English language. But, what a huge weight they carry.

APPLICATION: How many of us have said, “*If* I had only...”

- If I had only listened to my parents...
- If I had only paid more attention...

- If I had only worked harder in school...
- If I had only saved earlier in life...
- If I had only been more careful...

Hey, I'm not trying to project guilt...I'm in the same boat with you. The reason we have regrets and "if only's" is because early on, most of us didn't know what was on the other side of the "ifs". Most of us were just be-bopping through life, not really thinking of the future. Those who spent time in the military may remember the boxes which had to be checked for promotion. If you did those things, then you'd get promoted. But, in life we aren't given a checklist of things which, if completed, ensure success.

In this scripture, however, God told Solomon the formula for success. But, it hinged on one word— *if*.

The first requirement on the checklist was for them to humble themselves.

EXPLANATION: Now that they had an opulent and ornate place of worship with some areas covered in gold, they could have been arrogantly proud of their accomplishment. That's not what God wanted. The temple was to be a place of sacrifices, forgiveness of sin, and spiritual renewal. It was to be a place of humility.

Since the Israelites were at peace and prospering during this particular time under Solomon's reign and since they had a king who was so wise that other world leaders came to learn from him, it would have been very easy for them to be arrogant and think of themselves as better than everyone else.

SCRIPTURE: Proverbs 3:34 says, ³⁴*He mocks proud mockers but shows favor to the humble and oppressed.*

This is repeated in James.

SCRIPTURE: James 4:7-10 ⁷*Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and he will lift you up.* ⁷*Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.* ⁸*Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.* ⁹*Grieve, mourn and wail.*

Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom.¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

The scripture means “you humble yourselves.”

ILLUSTRATION: Before the presidential election, President Trump attended a Presbyterian church in Iowa, I believe. It just so happened the sermon topic of the day was humility. Afterwards, Mr. Trump wondered if the pastor had prepared the message specifically for him. My guess is the pastor did not, but God did. A dose of humility would have helped the president and perhaps helped him stay off of twitter and helped him to have used his words more wisely. I’d say most of you agree with me. A dose of humility would be good for all of us.

The second requirement was to pray. *“If my people who are called by my name will humbles themselves and pray...”*

APPLICATION: Humility in prayer is what gets God’s attention. I’ve heard so many prayers, and I don’t want to judge anyone else’s prayers, so I’ll judge my own. Many of my prayers have not been in humility. Many of my prayers have been about what I want instead of humbly asking what God wants. Many of my prayers have been about what I want God to do in the lives of others instead of humbly making requests. Many of my prayers have been about how I want God to change my circumstances rather than humbly asking God what he is trying to show me in my circumstances or humbly asking him to let me be his vessel despite my circumstances.

When we go to the Lord in prayer, let us absolve our minds of personal agenda. If we don’t, our prayers are worthless words and will not be heard.

SCRIPTURE: *James 5:16¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.*

The next requirement was to seek God’s face. *“If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face...”*

APPLICATION: Following the sequence is important: humility, prayer, seeking God's face. Too many times we get the sequence out of order, don't we? And, we leave out the humility thing. We make an important decision without seeking God's will, and then we pray God will bless the prayer-less decision we made.

ILLUSTRATION: We can learn about seeking God's face from Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Before the crucifixion, he prayed, *"If it is possible let this cup pass from me, however, not my will but your will be done"* (Matthew 26:39).

APPLICATION: Seeking God's face won't make you the most popular person in the room. It won't win you any award or trophies, but it will give you peace.

Seeking God's face isn't easy, but it's part of Christian discipleship. A long time ago, the phrase "easy-believeism" came as a reaction to people who think they are saved from merely saying what's called the sinner's prayer but with no follow through whatsoever. Seeking God's face is the complete opposite of "easy-believeism." It means you will let go of trying to manipulate God to do what you want him to do. It means you will follow his leading in your life.

The next requirement was to turn from wicked ways. *"If my people, who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways,"*

No one likes to hear sermons about sin. Most don't want to be convicted of sin, and frankly, most don't want to repent of sin. Sin is all around us. Sin has inundated every person and every society since the beginning of time.

ILLUSTRATION: On Friday, I spoke with a teenage girl about her salvation experience. The room was full of adult women. The girl said she was hesitant to be baptized because she felt pretty sure she would sin again. I appreciate her humility in that statement, which led to a great teaching time with the women.

APPLICATION: When we sin, we should confess our sin.

SCRIPTURE: I John 1: 9 ⁹*"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

I believe today could be defined as the decade in which we justify our sin. At the top of the list is the same-sex marriage ruling by the Supreme Court. And, the trickle-down effect of that ruling is just beginning.

Back to the word “*if*”—God’s promise was *if* the people did the things he required, then God would act on their behalf: he would hear them, forgive their sin, and heal their land.

In today’s scripture, the “*if*” required action by the Israelites.

Second, THE “*THEN*” PART OF GOD’S PROMISE REQUIRED ACTION ON HIS PART.

Followed by the *if*, which requires action on our part, comes the *then*, in which God obligated himself to act on his part.

SCRIPTURE: 2 Chronicles 7:14 ¹⁴“...*then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*”

ILLUSTRATION: I asked some of my Facebook friends if they ever made such offers with their children.

- Terry Taylor said if he did what his parents told him to do, then his parents promised not to give him a whipping.
- A woman said her son complained and called doing chores dumb jobs. So, our *if* statement was, “*If you call your daily work a dumb job, then you will be assigned a dumb job.*” His slip of tongue led to cleaning tiny lattice holes with a pipe cleaner and emptying the dishwasher while blindfolded.
- Glenda Minton said, “*If you will wash breakfast dishes, then I will prepare your lunch to take to school.*”

- Another woman said, “*If* you will just put your laundry in the basket, *then* I will do it for you.” One of them couldn't be bothered, so I didn't do their laundry!

APPLICATION: Don't we need God's healing on our country today? I'm glad to be an American. What a privilege to grow up and live in this land. But, we need national healing.

In Solomon's time, God gave a conditional promise to an entire nation, and I believe he will keep his promise to any nation in the world who puts him first.

Let's look at Verse 15.

SCRIPTURE: Chronicles 7:15 ¹⁵ *Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.*

EXPLANATION: God's word to Solomon was clear, and if the people did not do what he required, *then* his eyes and ears would be closed to the prayers of people.

CONCLUSION: Here are some *if/then* statements for you to consider: *If* you repent of your sin, *then* Jesus will save you. *If* you put your hope in him, *then* he'll give you something to hope for. *If* you do it today, *then* he'll save you today. Won't you put your faith in Jesus today?

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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