

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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THE TURNING POINT OF A NATION

2 Chronicles 7

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INTRODUCTION: The Book of Chronicles features the construction of Solomon's temple and his palace. This construction took 70,000 men to carry the supplies, 80,000 men as stonecutters, and 3,600 foremen over them.

When it was all finished, it was quite a sight to behold. Solomon decided to have lots of ceremonies to consecrate the new temple. Keep in mind, this was at a time when the nation of Israel was unified and prosperous. They honored God and had their focus on him. They also loved their king, and he loved them.

SCRIPTURE: 2 Chronicles 7:1-4

When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. ² The priests could not enter the temple of the LORD because the glory of the LORD filled it. ³ When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the LORD above the temple, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD, saying,

"He is good; his love endures forever."

⁴ Then the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the LORD.

SCRIPTURE: 2 Chronicles 7:11-12 **The LORD Appears to Solomon**

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.

EXPLANATION: The dedication of the temple must have been the most incredible thing that happened in the lifetime of these people. The craftsmanship, the attention to detail, the sheer beauty of it all. No one living in that day would have forgotten it as long as they lived. In our country, and in the generations living today, most of our nationwide days of memory have to do with a sad occasion such as the anniversary of an assassination or a disaster. The people of Solomon’s day had never had a celebration like this before.

In this one chapter, we have the dedication of Solomon’s temple. It must have been incredible: a time when the normal business of the day stopped, and everyone focused on the new temple and the ceremonies of its dedication.

SCRIPTURE: 2 Chronicles 7:13-16

“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. ¹⁶ I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my Name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there.”

EXPLANATION: Let’s assume the scripture is God’s formula for all people of all times. I am going to break this scripture apart, phrase by phrase, and see if it applies to us.

1. If my people...
2. who are called by my name...
3. 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.

First, IF MY PEOPLE...

The question is: Are we his people? Do we serve him? Do we worship him? Are we focused on being his hands and feet in this world? Are we more reliant on God than the government? Is our faith set on him more than our Social Security and our investments?

How, exactly, do we know if we are God's people? How do we know that being God's people is more than saying mere words? The book of I John tells us we are God's people if we follow his commands and have love for each other.

As a nation, though, are we God's people? My answer is no! As we see in scripture, the nation who rebels against God's commands will not stand. God sparing his wrath against our nation is only because of his grace.

But, at the same time, there are many people in this nation who are his people. They are the people who follow God's commands and love all people.

It's time for me to repeat my clear warning to all of you: As a friend of mine said recently, "We are living in a day when even the elect are being deceived." The "elect" is a Bible word for those who have been saved.

APPLICATION: Now let's bring it home: "*If my people...*" It's very easy for us to look at the ungodliness of all that's out there and say those people need to change their ways. And anyone with ungodliness should indeed change their ways. It's easy for us to be repulsed at the ungodliness of others and indeed we should be repulsed.

It's so easy for us to point the finger at those who are clearly not God's people. But the phrase "*If my people*" gives clear instruction to God's people, not those who are not God's people. Being one person among the people of God means that I have decided to be a PERSON of God. Being a person of God requires me to be repentant, open to God's will, and to invite the Holy Spirit to continually evaluate me, convicting me of wrongdoing, self-righteousness, and pride.

Second, *WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME...*

How do we know if we are called by God's name? As believers on this side of history, on this side of the cross, the answer is in knowing Jesus as Lord and Savior.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 7:21-23

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

EXPLANATION: This means there will be people judged by God himself as people not called by his name.

APPLICATION: The question is not about others, though, but for each and every one of us. Are we called by God's name? As a church, are we called by God's name? As a church, are we on God's mission? Everyone who is called by God's name does God's will.

One time a woman asked me where I stood on a particular issue. I gave her my answer. She told me, as a minister, that I said what she expected me to say. For her, however, she believed she could be a Christian yet have an anti-biblical view on something. She felt that a minister could not waiver on that particular issue but that it was okay for non-ministers to. Do you see how messed up our reasoning can get?

Third, *WILL HUMBLE THEMSELVES AND PRAY AND SEEK MY FACE AND TURN FROM THEIR WICKED WAYS*

I included these together because it's written as one continuous thought. Humbling ourselves is not easy. For some people, it's next to impossible.

ILLUSTRATION: I don't know what's going to happen in our upcoming election but I can tell you one thing, whichever side wins, there will be untold boasting, pride, and arrogance for the next four years. I've never seen such pride and

arrogance among our politicians as I am seeing today. It's out of hand. I can take only so much of it and then I cannot listen any longer.

Within the last couple of weeks in the media, I saw pictures of two women holding signs. One said, "Every knee will not bow." Another said, "Put God out of California." Many people are far from humbling themselves.

EXPLANATION: It's no coincidence that the sequence of scripture is "humble themselves" followed by "and pray". Prayer is the first step toward humility because going to God in prayer means we acknowledge we need help. It is an acknowledgment that we cannot do it on our own.

At times, the nation of Israel forgot God. They believed they became great on their own efforts, without God. Every time they did that, they failed.

ILLUSTRATION: Totalitarian governments do their best to suppress religious freedom. Why? Because religion is considered a weakness. It is perceived as a threat to human achievement.

In many ways, our nation continues down the road of increased secularism. If you are not aware of threats to churches, you're not paying attention. COVID-19 has revealed the good, bad, and ugly about our society. There has been a lot of good, really, and we've talked about a lot of that. The bad and ugly is that it has revealed the controlling, and in some cases, anti-religious-freedom attitudes of some of our elected leaders. I'll not mention the person's name, but this morning I was talking with Susan about a particular elected leader who is really a modern-day manifestation of Jezebel. Downright wickedness. The spirit of Jezebel is alive and well today.

EXPLANATION: "...will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways" is not on the minds of many of our political leaders today. Unfortunately, it is not on the minds of some of our religious leaders either.

APPLICATION: Now, let's look inward. While our nation continues to go secular, it's important for believers to humble ourselves, pray, seek God's face, and turn from our wicked ways.

At the dedication of Solomon's new temple, look how the people humbled themselves.

SCRIPTURE: 2 Chronicles 7:3

When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the LORD above the temple, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD, saying, "He is good; his love endures forever."

Recently there was a prayer rally in Washington DC. I went to one there in 1997 and found the participants to be very real and sincere. We should have a prayer rally like that at least once per year.

SCRIPTURE: James 4:10 says, *Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.*

APPLICATION: So, my counsel to you is to be proactive at humbling yourselves. Don't wait until God humbles you or until he allows you to trip and fall.

Now as a church, have we humbled ourselves? Are we broken enough for God to use, or do we think we have all the answers? Are we praying? Are we seeking God's face? Are we turning from our wicked ways?

When we hear the word wicked, we think of the worst of all evil. But, did you know the Bible says:

SCRIPTURE: I Samuel 15:23

For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry...(KJV).

Let me review: *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.*

WE HAVE GOD’S CONDITIONAL IF/THEN STATEMENT

God told the people, if you do these things, then he will hear, forgive sin, and heal their land.

CONCLUSION: Let me ask you, don’t we need our sins forgiven? Don’t we need healing in our land? No doubt, sin is rampant, and no doubt, there is spiritual sickness in the land. No doubt, our nation needs forgiveness and healing.

SCRIPTURE: 2 Chronicles 7:17-22

“As for you, if you walk before me faithfully as David your father did, and do all I command, and observe my decrees and laws, ¹⁸ I will establish your royal throne, as I covenanted with David your father when I said, ‘You shall never fail to have a successor to rule over Israel.’

¹⁹ “But if you turn away and forsake the decrees and commands I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them, ²⁰ then I will uproot Israel from my land, which I have given them, and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name. I will make it a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples. ²¹ This temple will become a heap of rubble. All who pass by will be appalled and say, ‘Why has the LORD done such a thing to this land and to this temple?’ ²² People will answer, ‘Because they have forsaken the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who brought them out of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, worshiping and serving them—that is why he brought all this disaster on them.’”

Now, let me wrap this up:

What I said earlier is something I want everyone to take note of. Forgiveness and healing of the land takes place when God’s people pursue it. *“If my people,”* not *“if the whole world,”* or *“if others,”* but *“if my people.”*

Let us commit to be the people of God, regardless of what the world is doing.

Let us commit to be the Church of God, regardless of what other churches are doing.

Our invitation time is open for people to receive Jesus as Lord. It is also open for prayers of repentance or healing.

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