

## II Chronicles 7:11-14 9-4-16

### *If My People*

II Chronicles 7:**11-14** *Thus Solomon finished the house of the LORD and the king's palace, and successfully completed all that he had planned on doing in the house of the LORD and in his palace.<sup>12</sup> Then the LORD appeared to Solomon at night and said to him, "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice.<sup>13</sup> "If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people,<sup>14</sup> and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.* This well-known verse is God's response to the prayer of Solomon from the previous chapter in which he asked God to hear the prayers offered from the new temple in Jerusalem. I want you to ponder it with me under the following three headings: the predicament, the prayers, and the promise.

First, the predicament which is set forth in verse **13** *"If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people.* These are three dreaded possibilities that would lead to economic ruin, misery and death. It is presented as the context for the prayers of verse 14 but it is significant for us itself in that it tells us something about the character of God. According to the verse we read where do these natural disasters come from? Are they just the works of a fickle "Mother Nature?" Are they the intrigues of a sadistic devil? From whence do these disasters arise? God says, "If **I** shut up the heavens, if **I** command the locust, if **I** send pestilence." Now I ask you, would God do such a thing? Drought, famine, plague - would God do that? For many people the answer would be, "Never, not **my** god. My god is loving and kind and good. He only sends good things." Well, if your personal god doesn't send these things then he must not be the god who spoke to Solomon. This God claims that He has and He will send some terrible things to the earth for His own purposes and out of His own justice.

Now, the whole philosophical problem of sin and suffering is a tough one, but to say, as some do, that the devil is out there controlling the weather and the viruses, and poor God, as loving as he is, can't do anything about it, well that is pretty frightening isn't it? I may not understand why God does what He does but I prefer the Scriptural portrait of God as a Sovereign Lord, who reigns with complete control over His creation. In His book you'll read many times about God's various

judgments. The Bible says famines, plagues and even invading armies come from God. Isaiah 45:**6c-7** *I am the LORD, and there is no other,<sup>7</sup> The One forming light and creating darkness, Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these.* Do you see that? God makes very plain here that He is the cause, not only of your prosperity but also of your calamity. God is willing to take the blame. God admits that He is sovereign. And God is willing to face your questions if you are willing to face His.

So, what do we conclude? That our God is a holy God and does punish sin. He punishes it eternally with hellfire and he often punishes it temporally with the problems listed in verse 13. In the book of Deuteronomy, in fact, God promises to His people that if they chose the way of disobedience He would send these disasters upon them. He doesn't promise that to anyone else. It was possible for the Egyptians to worship the sun and still prosper. It was possible for the Syrians to murder and steal and still prosper for a season but not for Israel. How about for the United States? I don't know. We have no promises made to us as a nation, but we have a general rule in Proverbs 14:**34** *Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.* Many would think that our current national malaise, our moral degradation, our financial weakness, our political corruption is an indicator of divine judgment. Some even think our presidential election suggests such a judgment. I can't know for sure, but that makes sense. We are calling good evil and evil good. We have supported what God calls abhorrent and we are likely to reap as we have sown. We already find ourselves in predicaments like we see in verse 13.

When we get there, as individuals or as a church, what do we do? The answer is in verse **14** *If My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.* The solution to our mess, the prescription of God for our ills, is found in our praying and in praying a certain way. First we are called to pray with humility. God says to humble ourselves. And this is a humility that arises out of hard times, it arises out of discipline. The drought, famine and plague are the divine equivalent of a good spanking. What does it mean to humble yourself under discipline? Think about a child. Most of you have found yourselves on one side or the other of an instrument of discipline. You have seen the various responses. There are those children who respond to discipline with sweetness and a swift change of behavior but there are also children who become angry and more self-willed. They get disciplined, they feel the pain, but they are far from humble. He has been humbled but he has not humbled himself. And the same thing happens with adults. Many

times when God disciplines us thru various means the response he sees is far from humility. Adults will blame other people for the problems; they will make excuses for their sin. But to humble yourself is to admit your guilt, to say "it was my fault", to agree with God that whatever calamity has come your way is deserved. By his fatherly grace, God himself acts to humble us. But there is a great difference between being humbled and humbling yourself. The first time I heard someone say that we were discussing a man whose prosperous Christian ministry had been devastated. God had taken him through some very tough times, he was being humbled for sure, but that doesn't mean he had humbled himself. God says we must respond to our humiliations or our troubles by humbling ourselves. We admit our guilt, our failures. And then we go on to say, "not only am I to blame for the problem but what's more, I can't do anything on my own to solve it." You say that thru your prayers. There is a tight connection between humility and prayer. Prayer admits our weakness, our need. So many Christians have weak prayer lives and the usual excuse made is that *I don't pray because I'm lazy*. Laziness is a sin we often excuse, but even those who recognize laziness as a sin will use it as their preferred reason for prayerlessness because it sounds so much better than the truth such as -- We don't pray because we don't love others. We don't pray because of pride, arrogance, self-sufficiency. We don't need God! We likely don't say it, but our lack of prayer betrays us. Ravenhill says that the prayer meeting is the engine room of the church, it's the powerhouse that either moves us or leaves us stranded. I've heard the story of Charles Spurgeon that when some men came to his church in London and asked him what made his church so strong Spurgeon told them it was the heating system down in the basement; and then he took the men down to see it - a basement prayer meeting where a crowd had gathered to called on God to give power to their preacher's words. God responds when His people know they need him and when they call on Him with humble hearts.

So then, we must pray first with humility. Secondly, we see from verse 14 of our text that we are to pray or seek God's face not only with humility but with repentance. God says my people must turn from their wicked ways. It is a lesson of Scripture that the quality of one's life and character affects the impact of one's prayers. Isaiah 1:**15** *So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you, yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood.* Do you think that you can live in neglect of the commandments of God and then come and expect him to be responsive to your requests? God says you can pray fervently and you can pray often but your sin has closed his ears. Psalm 66:**18** *If I regard wickedness in my heart,*

*the Lord will not hear.* That is, if you go to speak with God while you are still living with sins that you refuse to lay down then God is deaf to you. Your prayers will carry no weight in heaven.

When the pastor and author, Norman Vincent Peale was a boy, he found a big cigar, slipped into an alley, and lit up. It didn't taste good, but it made him feel very grown up -- until he saw his father coming. Quickly he put the cigar behind his back and tried to act casual. Desperate to divert his father's attention, Norman pointed to a billboard advertising the circus. *Can I go, Dad? Please, let's go when it comes to town.* His father's replied: *Son, never make a petition while at the same time trying to hide a smoldering disobedience.* Prayer is to come in the context of repentance. The way to the Father is described as a narrow gate and you cannot enter with your arms full of worldly baggage. You must lay that stuff down, turn from it and then come to seek God's face. How bout it? Are you willing to give up some carnal pleasure or cherished sins to seek the face of God?

That then is the type of praying God responds to - praying marked by humility and by a turning from sin, for that prayer God makes enormous promises. He says to Solomon here "then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land." That is the promise of God. Its meaning to Solomon when given is clear enough. It's meaning to us is less so. God made many promises to national Israel that do not necessarily apply to the United States. Believers may find here a formula to promote national peace and prosperity but I would draw short of calling it a promise to do so. What makes more sense is to talk about God healing the church. And the church is certainly ill. We have been devastated by the locusts of humanism and materialism. The church, at least in our day, in our land, has experienced very little revival, very little rain from heaven. Too many of our children depart from her in adulthood. II Chronicles.7:14 points the way to restoration and revival. We need for God to rend the heavens and come down.

Will you look with me at one of the most tremendous words in all the Bible, Isaiah 62:**1ab** *For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not keep quiet.* Now when I read those terms *Zion* and *Jerusalem* I think of the city of God, really the people of God which is the church. **1-3** *For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, And for Jerusalem's sake I will not keep quiet, until her righteousness goes forth like brightness, And her salvation like a torch that is burning.* **2** *The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; and you will be called by a new name which the mouth of the LORD will designate.* **3** *You will also be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, And a royal diadem in the hand of your God.* Every time I read that it takes my breath away. Do you see what the church is supposed to be? Can you see her glory as the bride of

Christ and the delight of her God. She is called a crown of beauty and a royal diadem. God says this is what we are to be to him. But the point is in verse 1 *For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not keep quiet, Until her righteousness goes forth like brightness, And her salvation like a torch that is burning.* Not silent, not quiet, but speaking to whom? To the church? That must be done but what is envisioned here is not preaching but prayer. 6 *On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen; all day and all night they will never keep silent. You who remind the LORD, take no rest for yourselves;* it is the Lord that these watchmen address. 6c-7 *You who remind the LORD, take no rest for yourselves And give Him no rest until He establishes and makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth.* I read again what God will do when His people pray. I read about healing the land and making us gorgeous, making us world changers, making us pure worshippers and I sign up to join the watchmen. How about you? Can you make verse 1 your own? Can you say, 1ab *For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not keep quiet.* Can you agree to give up some sleep or some amusements in order to join those valiant ones who cry out to God to make His church a praise in all the earth? Will you join the watchmen who care enough about the Lord's people to seek God's face and pester him, as it were, to visit us with sanctifying power? We have set before you a challenge to pray for the children of our church. Will you step into that by faith and join us in watching what God will do in the lives of 150 young people? We have special prayer meetings coming up this weekend, for the nation, for the church. Sure, you can pray on your own and I hope you pray there too. But rare is the opportunity to join with so many to humble ourselves and pray and seek His face and turn from our wicked ways? God has agreed in advance to respond to that kind of praying with forgiveness and healing. If my people....will you?