

A call to repentance

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Date: 01 January 2000

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[0 : 00] You will find my text this morning in the second book of Chronicles, chapter 7, and verses 13 and 14.

Second Chronicles, chapter 7, verse 13. If I shut up heaven and there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, shall humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

The great work of the early years of King Solomon's reign has been completed. The magnificent temple has been erected in Jerusalem.

The Solomon is here praying his great prayer of dedication at that temple.

The ark of the covenant of God has been brought into the temple, right into the Holy of Holies. The priests who had brought the ark in have emerged from the holy place, and with the Levites, a great company of people.

[1 : 36] They have stood at the end of the altar of burnt offering there in the courtyard of the temple, and praised God. There they sounded their trumpets and their cymbals, their psalteries and their harps, and they sang Jehovah's praise.

For good is the Lord, he is good, and his mercy endures forever. As this great pan of praise ascends, a cloud comes down and fills the temple.

The presence of God is there in the temple. The glory of the Lord filled the house. So overwhelmed are those priests that they cannot stand there and continue with their service.

The glory of the Lord filled the Lord's house. Solomon blessed the people, and he prayed this memorable prayer of dedication recorded for us in the previous chapter or chapters of this book. And then we read, The fire from heaven fell. The fire came and it consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices that were offered there upon the altar that day.

[3 : 06] The priests are unable to enter into the house of God. So overwhelmed are they by the glory of God that has come and filled the house.

All the members of that vast congregation of the children of Israel prostrated themselves on the pavement. They are filled with reverence and with awe and the spirit of worship as they realize that the glory of God has come upon his house.

Solomon offers many sacrifices. 22,000 oxen were offered in sacrifice and 20,000 sheep.

Everything was done on such a grand scale.

After days of sacrifice and a festival, Solomon dismissed the people. They returned, we read, to their tents, glad and merry in heart for the goodness that the Lord had showed them.

And then again, the Lord appeared to Solomon. He appeared to him yet again by night. And he told Solomon, I have heard your prayer.

[4 : 24] And he went on to say, If I shut up heaven, that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among the people, if my people who are called by my name shall humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

God had heard Solomon's prayer. You can link that with petitions that he made in his prayer. That was God's word to Solomon, the words of our text this morning.

Let us notice then here, first of all, divine chastisement. Divine chastisement. In the Lord's words to Solomon, the Lord here envisages a time of drought.

He says, I shut up heaven so that there be no rain. The harvest will fail, and the people will face starvation. He also envisages a terrible plague of locusts.

If I command the locusts to devour the land. Those terrible plagues of those insects, the locusts, did terrible damage throughout the land.

[5 : 49] They left the olive trees and the fig trees and the vines bare. We have a famous description of a plague of locusts in the book of Joel, chapter 2.

They come and the land that was like the Garden of Eden is left utterly desolate. And then too he envisages pestilence. If I send pestilence among my people, there may come a time when disease would ravage the land, slaying thousands.

And what is the point of it all? It is the chastisement of God upon the sins of the people. God's judgment, divine judgment, upon Israel because of their sin.

Over and over again, as the story of the children of Israel unfolds in the Old Testament, we find that this kind of thing happened, that chastisement such as these came upon the people because of their backsliding, because of their unfaithfulness, because of their idolatry, and their sin.

The people, you see, had to learn that God is holy, that sin is desperately serious, and that when God's people tolerate sin and indulge in it, then they have to suffer the chastisement of God.

[7 : 18] Indeed, there is a punishment that comes to them simply because they are God's people. God said centuries later to the Israelites through his prophet Amos, You only have I known of all the families of the earth.

Therefore, I will punish you for your sins. You only have I known. The word known there means you only have I loved with this special love that I have for my own.

You only have I loved in that special way among all the nations, all the families, the nations of the earth. Therefore, I will punish you for your iniquities.

The Christian church is made up of the people of God. The Christian church is the Israel of God, the new Israel.

It is made up of people who are his people, the people called by his name. And surely today, we see around us within the professing Christian church evidence of the displeasure of God, the chastisement of God, upon his church.

[8 : 31] The Christian church was once a very great power in this land, a mighty force to be reckoned with. It had a tremendous influence throughout society.

But today, people pay little heed, the great majority, pay little heed to what the church says or to what the church does. They regard the church simply as a massive irrelevancy.

Over large sections of it, over the church, to a large extent, is written, Ichabod, the glory, has departed. And this is an application to the nation as well.

We cannot say that any one nation today is a nation of people called by God's name. The people of Britain are not God's people in the same sense in which the Israelites were in Old Testament times, a people called by his name.

Yet this land of ours did know a better day than this. Surely it is clear to us as we look around that the judgments of God are abroad in the land today.

[9 : 46] The persistent economic troubles that we face, outbreaks of violence and rioting and unrest, the crumbling of family life in large sections of the community, the threat to that dread disease of AIDS, so often associated with a sinful behavior.

These surely are some of the signs of the judgment of God abroad in our land. The Bible tells us it is righteousness that exalts a nation.

Sin is a reproach to any people. But then also, this has a personal application to us as individuals.

The New Testament makes it very plain that when the Christian believer tolerates sin in his life and persists in his sinful way, then he has to endure the chastisement of God.

It comes to him in the love of God. It's God's fatherly discipline that comes to him, designed to bring him back to faithfulness to his God. But it can be very unpleasant indeed.

[10 : 58] Whom the Lord loves, he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives, the Bible tells us. No chastisement for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous, is what we read in Hebrews chapter 12.

Do you find, my Christian friend, that things are going wrong in your life? That you're meeting with many disappointments and failures and unpleasant experiences?

Do you find the going exceedingly hard? Does it seem as though the hand of God is against you in your circumstances? Now please do not misunderstand me.

I'm not saying, not for one moment am I saying, that all the adversities that Christian people endure are the chastisement of God upon them for particular sins.

That would be a harsh and a cruel doctrine. And God is never harsh or cruel to his people. Some of his choicest saints have to suffer and encounter much great adversity.

[12 : 04] But the New Testament does make it plain to us that sometimes illnesses and failures in business perhaps and disappointments of various kinds are the chastisement of God upon his people for their unfaithfulness.

Sin is desperately serious and God will not allow his people to indulge in it with impunity. Divine chastisement.

But then here secondly we notice the people's duty. The people's duty. When the people do have to suffer the chastisement of God what must the people do?

What does God require of them? It's all here in our text. First of all we're told they must humble themselves. If my people who are called by my name shall humble themselves.

God's sinning people must humble themselves. They must confess that the judgments that the chastisements that have come to them are richly deserved by the sin they have brought them upon themselves.

[13 : 21] They must confess their sin before God and ask for his forgiveness. They must humble themselves. And this is what the church in our day must do.

There is surely much in the church today that cannot be pleasing to God. There is a tolerating of false doctrine and the flouting of God's law.

There is a lack of seriousness and the flippancy that so often marks our worship. there even in our own denomination where we've been thankfully preserved from false doctrine.

Is it the case that we are always zealous to make the message of the gospel known to our fellows? Do we have a real love and a concern for the lost around us?

And are we wholeheartedly committed to the bringing of the gospel to men and women at home and overseas? Are we warm and loving and caring and Christlike in our attitudes?

[14 : 26] I trust that in saying these things I'm not adopting a censorious spirit. I'm simply concerned that we should examine ourselves as a church.

And when the church and the church herself must humble itself must humble herself before God before the land will experience the blessing.

But let us be concerned this morning particularly with the application of this to ourselves as individuals. If we are backsliding from faithfulness to him if we are tolerating sin then what we must do is humbly confess that before God and acknowledge that the chastisement that comes to us is deserved.

Is it the case my friend my Christian friend that you are drifting that I am drifting away from faithfulness to God? Are you going through the motions of worship and devotion but find that your heart is not in it?

If your devotional life and mine were thrown up on a screen here today for all to see the time we give to prayer and to the reading of God's word how would we feel?

[15 : 50] Are we true to God? Are you true to God in private and in public? Secondly that they should pray if my people who are called by my name shall humble themselves and pray.

They must pray about the situation. They must confess. their sin before God and plead with him to remove the chastisement and to give his blessing.

They must pray. Can it truly be said my Christian friend that you're a man that you're a woman of prayer?

Are you praying about your own situation? If your relationship with God is not what it ought to be then you should be earnest prayer. There is nothing more important than that you or I should be right with God.

You see you cannot repent any moment you choose to do so. Repentance is the gift of God which he gives. You must seek it earnestly from him in prayer.

[17 : 00] Sue him for it in earnest and he will not deny it to you. are you praying for the church the church in our land?

Not until the church is a praying church not until we are giving ourselves earnestly to prayer will we see the blessing throughout the church in our own congregation and throughout the church of Christ.

We cannot command the blessing. It is for the sovereign God to give it in his own time and in his own will that he tells us here to pray and he says if we do so he will hear from heaven and he will heal.

He doesn't speak those words to us to mock us. He means what he says. If we truly pray to him in private and together then he will hear.

And what of the land? Are you praying for the land? Are you praying for revival? Are you praying for revival in this community and throughout the land?

[18:12] Does the terrible state of our land today trouble you? So trouble you that it sends you to your knees? Do you know anything of what it is to wrestle with God in prayer?

Oh that the spirit of prayers and of supplications were poured out upon us that would then be the prelude to a better day than this that would be a sign of coming blessing father father's look and for the father's smile we when we have offended

God by our sin must seek his face in earnest we must pray to him we must be in earnest in seeking him pleading with him for his favour upon us again pleading that he'll restore to us the evident tokens of his favour and that he will remove the chastisement comfort us and strengthen us and bless us God sent a message to his erring people his people in exile in Babylon centuries later who were there in Babylon as a chastisement for their sins he sent a message to them through the prophet Jeremiah Jeremiah sent them a letter we have it in the 29th chapter of his prophecy and God's word through Jeremiah to them was this you will seek me and find me when you will search for me with all your heart you will seek me and find me when you will search for me with all your heart seek

God seek him for yourself oh my Christian brother or sister you who may be drifting away from faithfulness to God seek him wholeheartedly and you will find him and know again his favor and seek his favor for the church and for the nation as well when God's people know the chastisement of God what must they do they must humble themselves they must pray they must seek his face and therefore our text says they must turn from their wicked ways turn from their wicked ways in other words they must repent the humbling and the praying and the seeking of God's face will have been genuine only if there has been repenting the chastised sinning believer cannot be restored to a right relationship with

God cannot know again God's favor unless there is repentance there must must must be a turning away from sinful attitudes and actions oh I beg of you my friends examine yourselves here today if sin is being tolerated turn from it as the spirit enables you to do so deal with it mercilessly slay it put it to death put it away mortify it that's the people's duty to humble themselves your duty and mine to humble ourselves to pray to seek God's face and to turn from their wicked ways to repent divine chastisement the people's duty and now thirdly divine blessing divine blessing the road from divine chastisement to divine blessing is the highway of repentance when a sinning believer takes that way

[23:08] God comes to him and God says to him I will hear from heaven I will hear the word hear in the scriptures with reference to prayer always means I will answer put sin away and God will answer your cry he will hear you as you confess your sin he will enable you to overcome it he will bless you with the choicest of blessings Jesus said if you abide in me and my words abide in you he shall ask what he will and it shall be done unto you answered prayer if we are to know answers to our prayers it is vital that we put sin away if I regard iniquity in my heart said the psalmist the Lord will not hear me we have whatsoever we ask of him we read in the first epistle of

John whatsoever we ask of him we receive because we keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight when we obey God God answers our prayers for Jesus sake I will hear from heaven and God also says I will forgive their sin there can be no forgiveness without repentance our repentance of course is not the ground of our forgiveness the only ground on which God forgives us is the finished work of Christ his work his sacrifice at the cross but when we truly humble ourselves before God truly repent of sin turn from it then God for Jesus sake fully and freely forgives when we see sin as the desperately serious thing that it is when we see it as that which is a terrible offense against our loving father in heaven who loves us with an everlasting love it will grieve us greatly but oh the sweetness of the word when it sounds in our hearts

I forgive your sin repent humbly return in faithfulness to God and that sweet word will sound in your ears and in your soul I forgive your sin and God also says this I will heal their land I will heal their land when the chastised backslider returns to faithfulness to God God heals him he lays aside the

rod of his chastisement he blesses him with blessings innumerable his sorrow is turned into joy he restores to him the joy of his salvation no chastisement for the present seems to be joyous but grievous nevertheless afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who are exercised thereby those who have learned the lesson return in faithfulness to

God you will triumph over the very sin that ensnared you and that overcame you sin shall not have dominion over you and you shall yet rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory when Christian people return in faithfulness to God when they are revived the church itself knows a period of wonderful refreshing and revival from heaven listen to these words that God spoke to Israel centuries later through the prophet Hosea this is how it will be like when Israel returns to faithfulness to God he says I will heal their back sliding I will love them freely for mine anger is turned away from him I will be as the Jew unto Israel what marvelous refreshment he shall grow as the lily what purity and cast forth his roots as

Lebanon what wonderful stability his branches shall spread what a great influence he will have and his beauty shall be as the olive tree what attractiveness and his smell as Lebanon what fragrance the blessing of God oh for such a day as that experienced by the church of God and when the church is revived the land will prosper judgment must begin at the house of God and when it does when the people of God are affected there will be blessing throughout the whole land the gospel will be preached in great power sinners will be convicted many will be born in a day multitudes will be gathered in to the kingdom of God are you my friend looking for such a day are you longing for it are you praying for it

[28 : 49] God is asking you and me today to examine ourselves if we turn from our wicked way if there is any wicked way in us and we turn from it and seek God the blessing will come if there is any sin we are tolerating let us turn away from it let us seek God and his blessing will come upon us and who knows how many other lives will be influenced and touched by the blessing that will flow through us Jesus said he who believes in me out from his inner man shall flow rivers of living water will you then heed the call this morning to humble yourself to pray to seek God's face to turn from your wicked way to repent will you will

I let us pray oh lord our gracious God we pray that hearing the voice of God we will heed what God is saying to us we pray that if we know anything of this divine chastisement that we will do what thou dost require of us that we will indeed humble ourselves before thee pray to thee seek thy face and turn from every wicked way and may we know then in rich measure the blessing of God hearing and answering our prayers the blessing of God forgiving our sins healing us blessing his church and giving his blessing throughout the whole nation lord heal us and heal our church and heal our land we earnestly pray for

Jesus sake amen