

If My People – 2 Chronicles 7:12-14

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Pilgrims*

1. Several years ago, I took a tour of Boston & Plymouth to see the locations where much of early American history took place.
2. Our guide was a descendant of one of the original Mayflower passengers.
 - a. Because of that, he had access to a special room in the Plymouth Library that housed the original journals & letters of the Pilgrim Fathers.
 - b. He'd spent hundreds of hours there, pouring over their account of life in the New World.
 - c. As we visited the different locations important to the history of the Pilgrims, he shared their story with us, often quoting their journals.
 - d. Let me just say, the version of history we got on that tour is very different from that taught in most schools today!
3. The Pilgrims came to the New World with a desire to build a society totally shaped by Scripture. They integrated the Bible into every aspect of life & community.
4. When we visited the recreation of *Plymouth Plantation*, we saw the church, which was the center of village life & where most of each Sunday was spent.
 - a. They sang hymns – the Pilgrims loved to sing!
 - b. They listened to the teaching of the Word of God; sermons often lasted 2 to 3 hours!
 - c. But the majority of their time was spent in group prayer.
5. Detailed records were kept of life at Plymouth so we know what sermons were preached on which Sundays.
6. We even know what *themes* marked their prayer at different times.
7. One thing that becomes clear as you read these records is that they viewed everything that happened to them as either the blessing or discipline of God.
 - a. When the crops were abundant, they praised & thanked the Lord for His blessing.
 - b. When there was drought, they called for a special time of fasting & prayer, seeking wisdom on where & how they'd offended the Almighty so they could repent & be restored.
 - c. When the Native Americans harassed them, or a pest ravaged their fields, the first thing they did was to seek God.
 - d. He would answer them with a word about where & how they'd turned from Him.
 - e. Then they would repent & ask forgiveness, mend their ways & relief would always swiftly follow.
 - 1) The Native Americans would send an emissary promising peace,
 - 2) The pests would leave, the rain would fall.
 - f. It happened far too many times to be coincidence.
8. The reason the Pilgrims responded to events this way is because of they viewed the world through the lens of Scripture – and they were well acquainted with the passage before us today.

B. Last Time / Today

1. Last week, we took a look at the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem.
2. God demonstrated His acceptance of it by filling the place with His glory.
3. Solomon then prayed a long prayer we find recorded in ch. 6
 - a. This prayer was prophetic – What King Solomon said was inspired by the Holy Spirit.
 - b. He asked God’s favor on Israel,
 - 1) but then looking forward to a time when the people would turn their backs on the Lord & He would of necessity discipline them with hard trials,
 - 2) when they came to their senses & repented, Solomon asked that God would relent & restore blessing once again.
 - c. The Prayer is long because Solomon spells out several forms God’s discipline may take; drought, famine, plague, pestilence, foreign oppression, social turmoil.
4. Solomon concluded his prayer, they finished their offerings, the celebrations wound down & people turned to their homes.
5. Then we read –

II. TEXT

A. V. 12

Then the LORD appeared to Solomon by night, and said to him: “I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice.

1. This is the second time God appeared to Solomon; the 1st was at his inauguration 12 years before.
2. Then God had given him a blank check, telling him to ask what he wanted.
3. Solomon had asked for the practical wisdom to rule well.
4. Now God appears again, to let Solomon know that all he’s prayed earlier in the day is answered.

B. Vs. 13-14

¹³ When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people,

1. All these were the things Solomon had proposed as the ways God would discipline Israel when they turned their backs on Him.
2. God admits He may indeed use their trials. “When I.”
3. Why would God bring distress on His people - & notice, they **ARE** His people.
4. The answer is simple: Love demands it.
5. God IS love, & life, & light – all true goodness & blessing lies IN Him.
 - a. To turn from God is to turn to hate & death, to darkness & the curse.
 - b. God loves us so much, He’s so committed to our ultimate blessing that when we foolishly turn from Him, He allows trials to arise that are meant to alert us to the fact we’re on the wrong path.
 - c. The writer of Hebrews reminds us that divine discipline is proof God loves us.

Hebrews 12 - ⁵ And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks

to you as to sons: “My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; ⁶ For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.” ⁷ If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? ⁸ But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. ⁹ Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. ¹¹ Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

6. So, *when* there’s drought, or plague, or pestilence -

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 will forgive their sin and heal their land.

7. In other words, when the discipline works & people wake up to the real cause of their distress, admit their error, turn *away* from their sin & *back* to the Lord, then He will forgive, remove the distress & restore blessing.

C. For Whom?

1. It’s crucial that we keep the context of this passage in mind.
2. This was a promise made to Solomon in response to *his* prayer at the dedication of the Temple.
3. Solomon had prayed for Israel & God’s promise was to them.
4. God’s covenant with Israel is unique, no other nation enjoys that same relationship with God that Israel does, including the United States.
5. But the principle of blessing & discipline contained in this passage *does* apply to our nation in a unique way precisely because the Founding Fathers, following the example of the Pilgrims, sought to integrate the Scriptures into our system.
6. There are many examples & quotes I could summon at this point to prove my point but time doesn’t permit. Let me give just one –
7. Our 2nd President, John Adams stated: “Our Constitution was made *only* for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”
 - a. The principle of individual liberty that runs through *all* our founding documents is based on the idea of self-government;
 - b. That a moral & religious people don’t *need* external government because they live in the light of a conscience informed by a belief in God.
 - c. He is the Heavenly Judge Who see & hears all.
 - d. One of the more popular sayings at the time of the founding of our Republic was that people would *either* be ruled by the Bible or the bayonet.

8. While God initiated the covenant with Israel & they responded to His invitation, it was the Founders of the US who in a sense initiated a national covenant with God by laying our foundations in the Word of God & imploring His divine blessing.
9. And God responded by *blessing* our nation like no other.
10. But here we are, 220 years later & the worldview that shaped the Founders is just about completely gone from all but a few.
11. The manifold blessings that have elevated us to the highest standard of living in the history of the world are quickly souring like milk in the noonday sun.
12. I don't need to list off the litany of trials & troubles our nation is facing. We all know them well enough because we live in the midst of them.
13. We're beset by trouble both within & without.
14. We hear so much about the war in Iraq & Afghanistan. It fills the news each day.
 - a. Several of the media outlets have made clear their opposition to the administration & the war & list the names of soldiers killed each day.
 - b. Their goal is to raise public opposition to the war & force the administration to pull our troops out.
 - c. I was shocked to learn this week that in fact, it's *safer* to be an American in Iraq than Los Angeles!
 - 1) In July, the death toll for American soldiers in Iraq was 15. In LA, there were 18 murders.
 - 2) NBC News reported that on 1 weekend in June, the 6th-8th, there were 14 homicides in LA.
 - 3) For the first 7 months of 2008, the death toll in Iraq was 232. In LA it was nearly twice that at 429.
15. The point ought to be obvious – we've turned our back on God so He's sent discipline to chasten us.
16. The question is = Will we recognize it for what it is & do the right thing?

D. Return!

1. Look at v. 14 again . . .
- 14 if My people, who are called by My name -**
2. The only ones who're likely to recognize the trials besetting us as the chastening of God are His people.
3. The challenge here isn't to the lost – it's to God's people, believers, Christians.
4. We need to see the distresses of our time for what they are – warnings from God we're headed in the wrong direction.
5. We've got to stop chalking up terrorism & gas-prices, gangs & drug abuse, violence, drought & disasters as just random hard times.
6. We need to react to these things as the Pilgrims did – as the chastening hand of God.
- 14 if My people, who are called by My name will humble themselves,**
7. We have to admit we've been wrong! We have to stop playing the holier-than-thou attitude that characterizes so much of the modern evangelical church.
8. We've spent far too much time comparing ourselves to the godless heathen

- hell-bent sinners & coming off as moral & good.
9. We wring our hands at the advances made in same-sex marriage & the removal or moral restraints in the media, & we feel a certain sense of self-righteousness because we don't stand with those who take such positions.
 10. But we have to face a very tough question – How could our culture – OUR society, have slid so far into moral depravity if we, the Church, had been the salt & light Jesus said we would be as we followed Him?
 - a. There WAS a day when righteousness exalted our nation!
 - b. That we've slid so far is WHOSE fault? Isn't it believers? Isn't it the Church?
 11. 150 years ago, the French diplomat Alex de Tocqueville visited the US. He came to discover why America was rising so quickly among the nations. He wrote . . .

I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her commodious harbors and her ample rivers—and it was not there ... in her fertile fields and boundless forests—and it was not there ... in her rich mines and her vast world commerce—and it was not there ... in her democratic Congress and her matchless Constitution—and it was not there. Not until I went into the churches of America and heard her pulpits flame with righteousness did I understand the secret of her genius and power. America is great because she is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, [she] will cease to be great.

12. Note that God calls for His people to, not BE humbled, but to humble *themselves*.
 13. It's time for God's people to stop pointing the finger at everyone else's sin & short-comings & get on our face in humility at how we've been so busy loving ourselves we have none left for the lost.
- 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,**
14. In a word – repent! Turn from sin, back to God.
 15. God is *not* going to remove His chastening & restore blessing as long as we're still hanging on to the very thing that's wrong.
 16. God cannot & will not bless disobedience.

III. CONCLUSION

A. Up To Us

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 will forgive their sin and heal their land.

1. Listen, the answer to the distress of our days is not a new president or energy policy.
2. The solution to the many trials troubling our nation & world isn't located in the Oval Office or United Nations.
3. It's right here with us.
4. If we will simply admit our error of self-reliance & spiritual complacency,

- a. Confess & put away any known sin,
- b. And consistently seek God in prayer –
- c. Then God will forgive us, remove the distress & return His favor.

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 will forgive their sin and heal their land.