

If My People - 7

What do you REALLY want?

In this sermon I was expecting to start into the really juicy part which deals with humility and therefore that ugly five letter word - PRIDE. However as I began preparing what will be the first of three of four sermons on that one issue, I realised something very important. It was something which I talked about in the very first sermon of this series. Do you remember? I put forward the following formula for success, and by 'success' in this context, I mean us actually seeing God heal our land.

$$\frac{\text{Desire} + \text{Choice} + \text{Commitment}}{\text{Prayer}} = \text{SUCCESS}$$

Before we move on in this series, I believe we have to come back to the very beginning and look at that first word in this formula. We talked at length about our choices and the commitment we need to have to see those choices bear fruit and how essential it is to undergird and saturate all this with persistent prayer .. but nothing will happen without DESIRE. Until we *really* want God to heal our land, this formula; this teaching series; all of our prayer initiatives and every ecumenical program under the sun will amount to nothing.

1 Samuel 16:7 *"Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."*

God is not impressed by our prayer meetings or our mission statements or our programs or our Pastor's gatherings or our combined Churches initiatives or anything else we do. He often blesses those things and encourages us in them but He is not *impressed* by them. In other words, those things we do are not what moves the heart and the mighty hand of God to heal our land.

If, however, those things which we do and participate in are the *fruit of something else*; if they flow from a deep desire in our hearts; a crushing burden in our souls; an agony in our spirit for the lost and lonely and hurting people in our city and our nation; if that deep crushing desire to see God set His children free is what motivates us to pray and do all the ministry stuff, then that is something God can work with. So we need to allow the spirit of God to search our hearts today and expose the truth that lies within. We need the light of God's Spirit to shine into the dark corners of our wicked heart and reveal the ugly pride and self-serving motives that may be lurking there.

I believe it's entirely possible that many of us who pray for revival and long to see our city transformed, do so with wrong motives. This is where pride gets in right at the start. It's so subtle, so insidious and so incredibly damaging to the cause for which we pray. I am sorry if this is a hard word, but I believe that many people who pray for revival and transformation and for God to heal their land, do so for selfish reasons, motivated by corrupt desires. We may want to be part of a revival more than we want to see people set free. We may care more about our reputation and being part of a Church that is alive and active and making a difference in the community than we do about the people out there who are trapped in sin and shame and who face each day without hope, without purpose, without joy and without love. It is possible that we are focused on a ministry or a movement and not the people.

Until we get in touch with our real motives, desires and priorities and face the truth of what motivates us to even talk about revival; until we face the possibility that we really do not care all that much about the tens of thousands of people surrounding us each day who live outside the knowledge of God's love and grace and forgiveness; until we deal with our true desires and then ask God to change them if necessary, then there is no point in proceeding with this teaching series or continuing any of our Church ministries, in fact.

God is not impressed by any of that. God is not impressed by our worship or our music or our teaching or any of the hundreds of sermons I have preached about revival and transformation. That's all pleasing to God but none of that *impresses* God in the sense of moving His mighty hand to heal this land.

What impresses God; what moves God; what releases the awesome power of God across whole cities and nations is a broken and contrite heart, humbly bowed before the Lord, crushed by the burden of desire to see God's children set free from the clutches of sin and Satan.

If and when the desire of our heart matches the desire of God's heart and we begin to actually care more about real people than we do about revival and transformation - then our prayer initiatives and our programs will begin to move the mighty hand of God.

While you and I sit in our Christian fortress each Sunday singing praises to God and asking that He might heal our land – His lost children are being blown apart by sin and Satan. While you and I share the love and mutual support of our brothers and sisters in Christ, people as young as 10 years old are preparing for a night on the streets - devoid of hope, purpose and love.

I believe God is speaking to us every day and challenging our core beliefs and priorities, if only we had the courage to listen and respond. I believe He is saying:

*"I know you care about revival; I know you want to pray for the lost; I know you want to see your city transformed; I know you want Me to heal your land; but there is something I don't know, and until I know this one thing, I cannot answer any of your prayers. I want to know **do you really care about my children?** You are surrounded by My lost children every day – broken and full of pain and agony and the fruit of this fallen, sinful world in which they live. Show Me you care about them as hurting people. Look into their eyes; step into their shoes; sit with them as they cry, as they lash out in pain, as they break apart for lack of love. This is the seed bed of revival. This is where transformation begins. This is the cutting edge of the Kingdom of God. Do you still want Me to heal your land?"*

Brothers and sisters, until we have God's crushing burden for the people in our city; until we want to see the people in our land set free as much as God does - it will not happen. When we finally get to talk about what "*humbling ourselves*" really means in this verse, we will see that in the first instance it means that as we bow before the Lord in brokenness, contrition and humble submission, we are overtaken by His presence, overwhelmed by His heart and consumed by His desires and His passions. That will release in us a REAL burden for REAL people and we will stop praying for 'revival' and 'renewal' and 'transformation' and 'healing' and 'restoration' and we will start praying for people by name and we will start moving out of our comfort zone - prepared to be the answer to those prayers.

2 Chronicles 7:14 is a great verse; it has inspired many good sermons and sermon series; it has birthed a few good songs along the way too - but are we prepared to REALLY take this verse seriously? Do we actually think that God can and will heal our land when we, His people, humble ourselves, pray, seek His face and turn from our sin?

Do we really believe that is what God's agenda is right now? Well let me remind you about a small group of people who decided to take 2 Chronicles 7:14 seriously many years ago. As I share this story again, I believe God wants us to listen very carefully for HIS agenda, HIS heart and HIS promise to us and every other Church and city in the world. Like every story, there are specific things which apply to the people concerned at that time, but there are also solid principles which reveal the heart of God for us all and His will for us here and now. It is the latter I believe God will show us now – if we are brave enough to receive it.

It was over 60 years ago when the Presbytery of the Free Church of Scotland, met in Stornoway to discuss the sad state of the church. Dead, dry and without much hope, some of the churches were about ready to close their doors. The young people were in the pubs and the dance halls - they were not at all interested in spiritual things. As a result of this meeting, seven men and one of the elders decided to pray and seek God for the Hebrides Island. They met in an old barn by the side of the road. Three times a week they met and prayed and sought the face of God. As they humbled themselves and knelt in the straw of the old barn, God reminded them of a verse of scripture. Yes, you guessed it:

Chronicles 7:14 *"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 will I hear from heaven and forgive their sin and heal their land."*

They decided to take this verse seriously for the first time in their lives and treat it as the promise it is. So they began to pray according to this verse. The Holy Spirit soon gave them a revelation - that God was a covenant-keeping God. As God revealed the "if – then" reality of this verse and His dealing with mankind, these men came to terms with their responsibility for the condition of their Church and their land. They realized that if they were to humble themselves and pray and seek His face, and turn from their sin then God was bound by His own covenant to come and HEAL THEIR LAND. So they continued to pray day after day - keeping their faith strong and reminding God of His word. They cleansed their hearts, they sought His face and they held on to the covenant promise. They had no doubt that God would heal their land and visit the people of the Hebrides.

At the same time, two elderly ladies, sisters in fact, one was 82 and the other was 84 years, had also received a similar conviction from God and were also praying continually in their cottage - for God to come in His power and visit their island. One night after five months, as the men were praying and travailing before God, suddenly the barn was filled with the glory of God. At exactly the same time, the little cottage where the sisters were praying, was also filled with the glory of God - they knew that God had heard them and that He was about to descend in power among them.

The sisters felt that God wanted them to write to Duncan Campbell, a well-known Keswick speaker - a godly man of prayer. God revealed to the sisters that he was the man the Lord was calling to preach during this visitation of the Spirit. Duncan Campbell received the letter but replied that his itinerary was full, and that they should continue to pray and that he would come the following year. When the sisters heard this they boldly said, *"God is coming in two weeks - not next year!"* They continued to pray even harder and were not surprised at all to learn that Duncan Campbell's itinerary was changed unexpectedly - so he decided to go instead to the Hebrides and be available to preach.

The first night of the meetings in the Church at Barvas was relatively uneventful - nothing much happened, but one of the praying deacons said to Duncan Campbell, *"Don't be discouraged, it is coming. I can already hear the sound of heaven's chariot wheels. We will have another night of prayer and then we will see what God is going to do."*

The meeting finished and about thirty people went to a nearby cottage and continued to pray into that night. At about 3am God swept into the cottage and about a dozen were laid prostrate on the floor, unable to move. Something had happened! Revival had come! As they left the cottage they found the lights burning in every house as men and women had been simultaneously touched by the Holy Spirit and we were seeking God. They found men laying by the roadside before the sun had even risen. They were under conviction of sin, crying out for God to have mercy on them.

The events of the second night will never be forgotten by those who were there! Buses came from the four corners of the island. Seven men were being driven to the meeting in a butchers truck, when suddenly the Spirit fell on them in great conviction - they were all converted before they even reached the Church!

As the preacher spoke, tremendous conviction swept through the people and tears streamed down the faces of those present. So deep was the distress of some that their voices could be heard outside. The meeting finally ended and people began to move outside. A young man began to pray under a tremendous burden of intercession, He prayed non-stop for 45 minutes and as he prayed people gathered outside the Church until there were twice as many outside as there had been inside.

When he stopped praying, an elder read Psalm 132 and as the great congregation began to sing, the people streamed back into the Church again and the meeting continued until 4am. The moment people took their seats the Spirit of God began to sweep through the Church with great conviction and hardened sinners wept and confessed their sins. As the meeting was finally closing, a messenger hurried to the preacher, *"Come with me! There's a crowd of people outside the police station; they are weeping and in awful distress. We don't know what's wrong with them, but they are calling for someone to come and pray with them."*

Describing the scene outside the police station the Minister later declared, *"Oh I saw a sight I never thought possible. Something I shall never forget. Under a starlit sky, men and women were kneeling everywhere, by the roadside, outside the cottages, even behind the hay stacks, crying for God to have mercy on them!"* Nearly 600 people had been making their way to the Church, when suddenly, right outside the Police Station, the Spirit of God had fallen upon them in great conviction, causing them to fall to their knees in repentance.

Then the revival began to sweep into Arnol, another district where people had been praying and crying out to God because of the deadness of religion. In desperation a little band of men made their way to a farmhouse to plead the promises of God. Just after midnight a young man rose and prayed a bold prayer that will never be forgotten by those present:

"Lord, You made a promise, are you going to fulfil it? We believe that You are a covenant-keeping God. Will you be true to Your covenant? You have said that You will pour waters upon him who is thirsty and floods upon the dry ground. Lord, I know how these ministers stand in your presence, but if I know my own heart I know where I stand, and I tell Thee now that I am thirsty. Oh, I am thirsty for a manifestation of the presence and power of God! And Lord, before I sit down, I want to tell You that Your honour is at stake here!"

Then came the answer. While the man prayed the house shook like a leaf as God turned loose His mighty power - the dishes rattled on the sideboard. The elder exclaimed, *"It's an earth tremor!"* Then wave after wave of divine power swept throughout the farmhouse. Simultaneously, the Spirit of God swept through the entire village.

People could no longer sleep; houses were lit all night; people walked the streets under the conviction of the Spirit; people knelt by their bedsides crying out to God to help them. As the praying men left the prayer meeting, the preacher walked into a house for a glass of milk. He found the lady of the house, with seven others down upon their knees crying out for forgiveness. Within 48 hours the local hotel, usually crowded with the men of the village, was closed and remained closed. Within 48 hours nearly every young person between the ages of 12 and 20 had surrendered to Christ, and every young man between the ages of 18 and 35 could be found in the prayer meetings.

This, my friends, is what can happen when people like us take God seriously and when the words of 2 Chronicles 7:14 are treated as a promise of God and not just a challenging verse of Scripture. The people who met to pray in that barn were no different to you and me. Those two precious ladies who prayed together in their home were not super saints with special powers - they were just two normal, Godly, Christian women with a genuine desire to see God's people set free.

Do you want that kind of reality to unfold in this city? Notice I didn't ask if you wanted to be part of an exciting revival story ... I asked if you wanted the reality behind the story. Do you want to be here until 4am in the morning, weeping on your face before God as His Spirit moves in power? Do you want to have totally unchurched people suddenly appear from nowhere, undone by the power of God, totally ignorant of what Church is all about or how to dress or speak or behave? They will just come because God calls them and convicts them. Is that what you really want? You'd better hope that revival doesn't come if your answer is no!

Are you prepared to have your comfort zone annihilated so that you may never be comfortable again, in the sense of being in control of what is happening around you and to you and in you? This is what happens when the kingdom of darkness gets a revival-sized kick in the teeth from the Kingdom of God. When Jesus said, *"The kingdom of God is forcefully advancing and forceful men lay hold of it ..."* THIS is what He saw. Is this what you signed up for? Is this what Church is all about when you think of Church at its best? Does this sound a little threatening? Will this upset your predictable, non-threatening, Church life a little too much? God is asking these questions friends - not me - God is asking us all if we REALLY want Him to heal our land - His way?

God is in the business of revealing hearts and as painful as it may be for some of us, He is going to reveal every heart in this Church and He will show us what is in there; He will show us how much we REALLY want Him to heal our land; He will reveal our selfishness, our insecurities, our pride, our arrogance, our laziness, our wrong priorities and our greed. It will all come out - not to judge us or condemn us - but to reveal the real barriers to city-wide transformation and nation-wide revival. All those barriers lie within your heart and mine and God will systematically expose them and give us the power to remove them and press on to see the fulfilment of His plan and purpose in our Church, in our city and across our wonderful land.

This may be a rough ride, but an exciting ride. It will be an uncomfortable ride at times, but it will be God's ride, not ours; God's agenda - not ours and if we are serious about revival; if we genuinely care about His lost children; we will strap ourselves in and get ready for the ride of our life. The choice is ours: God's way or our way. Revival or dead religion. A city transformed or a city doomed. A nation on its face in worship before Jesus or a nation slipping faster and faster into total moral decay.

The ball is in our court ... as it has always been. Are we serious or not?