

## If My People - 23

*God will heal our land*

**2 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 I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land."*

We come now to the final sermon in this series. We have spent many months exploring this one verse and the many side-roads which flow from it and connect back to it. We've also used this verse as a springboard to study a number of important issues including humility, prayer, faith, the sovereignty of God, intimacy with God, sin, confession, repentance and of course, grace - to mention just a few!

I want to strongly encourage you to re-connect with all this teaching by video, manuscript or podcast and let God really challenge you by His Word within. We've explored so many foundational principles of the Christian life in this series. It has been a challenging journey and one in which we've been encouraged to see that we are called into a partnership with our Sovereign God and Creator of this universe. A partnership in which we have a responsibility and a significant part to play.

Throughout this teaching series I've always attempted to re-interpret or apply this verse in a New Covenant, New Testament context so as to avoid the common error perpetrated by many who try to apply Old Testament, Old-Covenant Scriptures to our lives today, without a clear understanding of the New Covenant reality in which we now live.

If we are always careful to interpret the Old Testament, through the New Testament; by that I mean if we are rooted and grounded in our understanding of who we are in Christ and what the life, death and resurrection of Jesus really means to us today and has achieved for us in eternity, then I believe the Lord is able to breathe life and relevance and power into challenging texts like this one.

We must understand that this verse is NOT a formula for revival - although thousands of sermons, books and songs seem to suggest that. It is just not that simple. We spent a lot of time early in this series talking about the 'If ...then' realities of life and how so often God chooses not to act in certain ways until we fulfil our part of the partnership.

The Bible, all of Church history and even our own experience will tell us that there are certain things God chooses to not do until we act in a certain way. However, to take that the next step and say there are certain things God can't do until we act in a certain way .. is to deny His sovereign power. God choosing not to act because of us is very different to God being unable to act because of us.

A covenant ... is not a contract.

A partnership ... is not a clinical, cause-and-effect, business deal.

A relationship ... is not an exact science.

A promise ... is not a formula.

God says: *“If My people who are called by My name ...”* He is talking about relationship here. He is talking about intimacy, communion, unity of heart, mind and purpose. He is talking to those for whom Jesus died; those whose names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life; those whose tickets to heaven have been bought and paid for by none other than Jesus. And what does He say to these people?

He says, *“When you allow the life I have placed in you to emerge ... when you submit to the power within ... when you let Christ Who is in you, the hope of glory ... shine in and through your life ... then you will see the fruit of that submission and surrender. You will see My Spirit move in your life, your family, your Church, your city and your entire nation!”*

That is the essence of this much-quoted verse. It’s not a simple, mathematical formula for revival. In fact, there is nothing ‘simple’ or ‘mathematical’ about humbling ourselves, praying, seeking God’s face and turning from our sin. We have spent months exploring the depths of those responses on our part and how they permeate everything we think, say and do. These ‘tasks’ or ‘responsibilities’ which are presented here as our part in this partnership, can only be played out on the stage of relationship.

If we are in fact the *“my people”* God is referring to in this verse; if we are the ones whom He has called into this wonderful partnership; if we are the people of God whom He desires to use to heal this land; then we must understand that His bidding is His enabling. He never calls us to be or to do that which He does not Himself empower us to be and to do.

- ⇒ *Christ is in us, the Hope of Glory. (Col.1:27)*
- ⇒ *It’s no longer we who live, but Christ Who lives in us. (Gal.3:20)*
- ⇒ *It is God who works in us to will and to act according to His good purpose. (Phil.2:13)*
- ⇒ *The fruit of the Spirit of God is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness and self-control. (Gal.5:22)*
- ⇒ *We are servants of the gospel by the gift of God's grace given to us through the working of his power. (Eph. 3:7)*
- ⇒ *God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us. (Eph. 3:20)*
- ⇒ *It is by His power that He fulfils every good purpose of ours and every act prompted by our faith. (2 Thes.1:11)*

Do we get the picture? On the one hand God calls us into partnership and tells us that we have an incredibly important role in His plan, purpose and mission on earth. We are His key players. It says in Ephesians 3:10 that God’s intent is that *“...through the Church (that’s you and me!) the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms.”*

He has no ‘Plan B’ friends. When God says He is going to heal our land, save His people and bring His lost children home, how is He going to do that? Through whom shall He work? He has no one else other than you and me and all those who claim to be His people in this city and this nation.

It is through us and only us that God will fulfil His purpose – not because He has no choice, but because that is His choice – to use us. Our responsibility in the transformation of this city and this nation is without question. God has high hopes for you and me. He plans for us to be revealing His manifold wisdom to even angels and demons (rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms).

So, let's be very clear about the role we have in the wider scheme of things. God has no intention of waving His sovereign hand across this nation and changing the minds and hearts of all people overnight. He is more than able to do just that. There is nothing at all stopping Him from doing it that way - other than His own will and purpose.

God's plan, as revealed so clearly to us in the Bible, is to work with us, His much-loved people, His children, His disciples, His soldiers in the army of God, as together, we march against the powers of darkness every day. Our responsibility is very clear and very high and that is because God has chosen it to be so. It's a hard road for Him, for we are sinful, weak, disobedient, frail creatures. But His passion for a relationship and a partnership; His passion to let us be part of His unbelievable cosmic plan, is what moves God to include us in this incredible global mission.

Our responsibility is very clear and most of us take it far too lightly and deep down we think (or hope) that God will just do whatever He wants one day, in spite of us. That is clearly not the case. The Bible, Church history and our own personal journey all testify that whilst God can do it that way, He chooses not to and instead, He calls us to be part of His plan.

On the other hand, the flip side of this coin, the counterpart of our responsibility is the promise that God will be our strength and our power and our source of purpose and motivation. At first glance, and without a clear understanding of the rest of Scripture, this verse in 2 Chronicles 7:14 seems to imply that our first task is to humble ourselves, pray, seek His face and turn from our sin and THEN God's task is to heal our land.

That narrow interpretation is what gives us a formula, not a promise. The fact is, God is active from beginning to end in this verse ... in this process ... and in our lives. Without the presence and power of God in our daily lives; without His amazing grace (His empowering presence) at work in us; we cannot begin to know what it means to humble ourselves or pray or seek His face or turn from our sin.

**1 Corinthians 15:10** *“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them - yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.”*

**Ephesians 1:7-9** *“In Him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ ... ”*

**2 Corinthians 12:9-10** *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”*

Thousands of years before any of these wonderful verses were written, a man called Zechariah gave us an even clearer message which is universally applicable in days of old and today:

**Zechariah 4:6** *“It's not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty.”*

The Spirit of God; the presence of God within us; His empowering presence; His grace; is what will enable us to fulfil our calling and purpose. Many years after Zechariah's scrolls were laid to rest, the Apostle Paul spoke of the Spirit of God also. Study these familiar words, and may God breath fresh life and power into them as you read them.

**1 Corinthians 2:6-16** *"We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" - but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit."*

*The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.*

*The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment: "For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ."*

Brothers and sisters, God wants to heal our land. God wants to heal every land across the world. He wants the light of righteousness and truth and justice to overpower the darkness of sin and deception and oppression. He wants all of His lost, rebellious prodigals to come home and be embraced by His strong, loving arms of grace. He wants us to want that as much as He does.

God wants our hearts to break over our city, our nation and our world - just like His heart is breaking every day. Even more than that, God is going to use anything and everything at His disposal to bring us, His people, to that point of humility, prayer, intimacy and repentance, so that His power can be unleashed in us.

This is why in every place around the world where God is moving with unprecedented power and effectiveness, the reality of 2 Chronicles 7:14 is being played out in people's lives. Humility, prayer, brokenness, repentance and intimacy with God are all components of every revival.

The question people have debated for centuries is a 'chicken and egg' dilemma. Which comes first – the Sovereign move of God to bring humility, prayer and repentance in His people ... OR ... is it the decision of His people to humble themselves, pray, seek His face and turn from their sin which 'triggers' or 'activates' or 'releases' the power of God in our midst to bring revival and heal our land?

Our western mindset can be a blessing sometimes and at other times it can be a dreadful curse. All too often we take a "both/and" reality and turn it into an "either/or" reality. That is what many people have done with this question of revival. As I pointed out so clearly in the 'Coins and Railways' sermon (Part 17, 'Growing in Christ' series), the Sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man should never be set against each other as adversaries, alternate viewpoints or opposing sides to an argument.

The Arminian / Calvinist debates of former centuries were by and large a total waste of time and a tragic testimony to our inability to hold two equally valid truths in tension together as the Bible does. Like two sides to a coin or two perfectly parallel railway tracks, God's sovereignty and omnipotence stands unquestioned - alongside our responsibility to make choices which are consistent with His purpose and will in order to see the fruit of those choices impact our lives and the lives of others.

So, in reference to revival and the age-old question: which comes first, our actions or the sovereign move of God's spirit - the answer is so clear in the Bible and in Church history, that I cannot understand why so much debate has ensued. The answer is BOTH. They are as inseparable as two sides of a coin. They are as essential in the process of God healing our land as the left and right railway track. If we try to stress one at the expense of the other, the train is derailed, and much damage is done.

2 Chronicles 7:14 seems to imply that our first priority is to humble ourselves ... and I spoke early in the series about humility being the 'key to the Throne Room of God' and I spent a lot of time talking about humility and pride and I would encourage you to re-connect to those few sermons regularly. However, I would suggest that humbling ourselves is not possible unless we allow the Spirit of God to empower that intention and make it possible.

This verse has been used in millions of Churches, books, sermons and songs as the 'foundational' verse for revival ... if not for the whole purpose of the Church. Well, if it is that simple, why are we not all in revival right now? I want to offer you a different foundational verse today ... one which, if accepted and followed, will breathe life and power into 2 Chronicles 7:14 and every other promise in the Bible.

It is not a verse you might expect, but it is one I believe carries the secret to all others.

**Psalms 73:25** *"Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you."*

We end this series where we began. Do you remember the first message? It was called "A Hard Word" and I talked about desire and how foundational it is to everything God wants to do in us and through us. *"Earth has nothing I desire besides you."* Until we get to the place of saying that and believing that, then 2 Chronicles 7:14 will carry no secrets, no power and it will bear no fruit.

Until everyone and everything stands second to God; until knowing Him, loving Him, being near to Him, becomes our deepest desire, our greatest pleasure and our primary motivation for living; we will continue to thrash around in the mire of mediocrity; singing about revival, praying for revival, longing to be part of revival in our land, yet still not becoming the channel and conduit for that revival.

God is not going to revive and heal this land through anyone other than His people. God has nobody other than you and me through whom He can channel His life-changing, nation-transforming power. So, as we finish this epic journey today, I plead with you to hear the Father's voice today:

*"If My people ... will seek me while I may be found, call on Me while I am near ... draw near to me ... seek first My Kingdom and my righteousness ... If My people ... will wait upon me and renew their strength ... then they will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint ... and I will heal their land ... because ... My people ... will find me, when they seek me with all their heart."*