

3/19/23 Christ Fellowship

“If My People” – 2 Chronicles 7:14

How would you define wisdom? The dictionary says it is the quality of having experience, knowledge, and good judgment. What is the difference in being smart and being wise? I think part of it has to do with learning lessons. A smart person learns a lesson that they were meant to learn. A wise person learns a lesson somebody else was meant to learn. Do you know what I mean?

A smart person does something that turns out badly for them and decides not to do that again. The wise person sees the smart person learn that lesson and he also learns that lesson. I say that this morning because the passage we are going to read was not written to us. It was not written to the United States. It wasn't written to Gentiles. It wasn't written to Christ Fellowship. But we can learn from it.

You have to be very careful when you read the scriptures to make sure you take everything in context. You need to know the setting, the background, who is writing, for what reason were they writing and to whom is being written. All of that is important.

In my studies this week, I listened to one of my favorite old preachers preaching on this passage but he was downright upset that some people use this passage or preach on this passage because it was written to the Hebrew people in Israel some 400-plus years before Jesus. And I believe that if this were the only place in scripture that this was taught, he would have a good point. But the theme of this verse is repeated over and over from the Old Testament to the New and so, therefore, is a good lesson for all of us to learn.

I hope you brought your Bibles with you this morning. You should be in the habit of always bringing your copy to church with you. I want you to read this verse along with me as I read it out loud and not just take my word for it. This will probably be a verse that is familiar to most of you. It is often read in the context of revival or spiritual awakening. It is used often in context of the United States and I think that is fine, even if that was not Ezra's idea when he wrote this, as most scholars believe him to be the author of 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles.

**Second Chronicles 7:14** is in context to Solomon building a big, beautiful temple for the Hebrews to worship in. It took thousands of men many years but they have finally finished the temple that Solomon's father, David, had in mind so many years before. And to dedicate this temple was part celebration, part worship, part revival, and part prayer time. And even though Solomon made a lot of mistakes later in his life, he did this part right. He built the temple right. He made the right sacrifices and he prayed the right prayers. And by “right”, I mean it was all to the glory of God.

And because he did it right, God answered his prayer. **Verse 12** says God came to Solomon at night, probably in a dream, and told Solomon He had heard his prayer. But that wasn't all. As the commercial says, *"But wait! There's more!"* God went on to tell him the words Ezra recorded and what we now have as these familiar and inspiring words in **2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 7:14**. Let's read it.

*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.*

There was a time in America, some of you can remember, when pregnancy outside of marriage was a scandal, when homosexuality was a sin, when pornography was a moral sickness, when marriage was sacred, and living together without marriage was a disgrace. When child abuse was almost never heard of; when women didn't smoke or curse; when we did not have to lock our houses and our automobiles. When drugs were something you got at the drugstore; when alcoholism was considered a sin, not a disease; when our students were allowed to pray in school, and the Ten Commandments were posted on the walls. In public schools where Creation could be taught as an answer to godless evolution. In America, I can remember a time when high school students could actually read their diplomas. (Adrian Rogers, It's Time To Pray In America)

We have fallen a long way since then. And unless God steps in and does a mighty, mighty work in our country, I don't see how it can last many more years. One way or another, our country is on the verge of collapse. Morally, for sure but also financially, and even militarily, we just are not the same country we used to be.

But we all know that God can do anything and I would like to think that America's best days are ahead but not at the rate we are going. Something drastic would have to happen. It would take real revival and Christians actually doing what this verse says to do. But for today and for tonight in our prayer meeting, I want to think smaller. When it says God will heal our land, I would love to include the whole country, and we should at times, but I want to focus on God just healing Chico, Texas. In fact, God, I pray that you would start on West Kentucky Street right out here. Heal this street and start right here in this church and begin first with me.

So, if that is going to happen, let's see how it's going to happen. This verse is a good way to start a revival but it's also a good way to think about prayer itself. I believe that God chooses not to hear every prayer. Selfish prayers prayed by unbelieving people will fall on God's deaf ears. But this passage, this verse wasn't written with them in mind. It was written to believers, God's own people that are called by His name.

Quit expecting sinners to start being better people. Stop expecting unbelievers to come to their senses and start living good, moral lives. Stop expecting revival to come from out there. **1 Peter 4:17** says that judgment starts in the house of God. It starts with us and won't happen without us. It is not going to start in Washington, DC. It's not going to start in Hollywood or on Wall Street. But it very well could start on West Kentucky Street if we do what God says we are supposed to do.

Look at the verse again. And keep your Bibles open because we will go back to this verse several times. The verse says, if my people...what? Will humble themselves...oh shoot! Stop right there. That's a deal breaker right there for some of us. Our country is so proud, we strut before God. We celebrate "Pride" and "Pride Week" and we call what is evil good and what is good evil and we do it with pride. But that's what sinners do. They don't know any better. Just expect that. But we shouldn't expect it in the church but it sure is there.

Okay, I kind of have something I need to confess right here. That woke you up, didn't it? A few weeks ago, I stood here and started my message by saying that one of these days I'm going to tell a story that makes me look good; a story in which I am the hero and everybody is impressed. That's not the truth. Lord, help me to make that not the truth, ever! I don't ever want to make myself look good, especially from the pulpit. There's no place for that in the church at all.

God says humble yourself! And if you don't, He will. And remember, God is speaking to us in the church. We, as Christians, have no business making ourselves ever look good. You might bring out some of your good qualities if you are in a job interview or something, maybe, but even then humility is very endearing. I want you to think about this. If you are about to tell a story – wherever you are, but certainly at church – and you think it might make you look good, how about this? Keep your mouth shut. Instead, tell a story that makes God look good and just see what happens.

I have an idea that God sometimes wants to scream at us, *"What part of 'Humble yourself' don't you understand?"* You cannot make God and you look good at the same time. Choose God and humble yourself. Actually, I have a really great sermon to preach on humility. But I'm waiting on a bigger crowd before I preach it. 😊 Humble yourself!

What's the next thing God tells us to do after we humble ourselves? Pray and seek His face. What does it mean to seek God's face? Well, we all want God to do something, right? And we should. We should expect God to be at work in our lives, in our church and in our country. But that is seeking God's hand. God says to seek His face. Seek His presence, His smile, His countenance.

It's the difference in saying, "God, I need you to do this and that..." as opposed to, "God, I need you." "God, I just want to be with you and want to see your smile. I just need to be in your presence." It's when you do that that you will find out that God's presence...is enough. Seek His face. Do you ever pray just wanting to be with God, even for just a few minutes? Don't ask for anything. No prayer requests. There is a time and place for that and we are encouraged to do so but sometime try just being quiet, letting Him talk and you listen as you seek His face without asking Him for anything.

The next thing God says is that the people are to turn from their wicked ways. Now, wait a minute. I thought God was talking to His people here. Surely we don't have any wicked ways, do we? I found it interesting when I looked that word "wicked" up in my concordance. The original Hebrew word is "ra" and it said it is used to denote evil words, evil thoughts and evil actions. And it ended by saying it is anything that is less than God's reflection. Isn't that interesting, especially in light of the fact that we are supposed to be seeking God's face?

So "ra" is what happens when we are not seeking God's face. It is sin. Anything that is not God's reflection is sin. Anything that displeases God is sin. It is sin in words, thoughts and actions. Well, gee, Todd, if you put it that way, I guess we all have wicked ways in us. So, now what do we do?

Well, we turn away from those sins. What is that word called? Repentance. We have to completely turn away from that sin and go the other direction. Listen to this verse in **Psalm 80, verse 4**. "O LORD God Almighty, how long will your anger smolder against the prayers of your people?" The people of Israel were trying to pray without repenting and it made God mad! Do you see that? Jesus said in **Luke 13:3**, "*Unless you repent, you will perish.*"

Repentance is not just being convicted of sin. In Acts 24, Paul preached to the Roman governor Felix and it says that Felix trembled, that he was afraid because of his sin. But what did Felix do? He sent Paul away and never called for him again. Repentance is more than being convicted of sin.

Repentance is more than confession of sin. You say, "If I confess my sin, have I repented?" No, you've not, if that's all there is to it. Pharaoh confessed his sin. Listen to this verse in **Exodus chapter 9 verse 23**. You remember that God sent plagues to Egypt to convict Pharaoh that he might turn from his sin. And the Bible says in Exodus chapter 9 verse 23, "*And Moses stretched forth his rod toward Heaven; and the Lord sent thunder and hail, and the fire ran along the ground; and the Lord rained hail upon the land of Egypt.*" Now what happened when the fire and the hail came, or when the lightning was running on the ground? Pharaoh confessed his sin. **Exodus 9 verse 27**, "*And Pharaoh sent, and called for Moses and Aaron, and said unto*

*them, 'I have sinned.'*" But what happened when the storm died? The confession that was born in the storm died in the calm. (Adrian Rogers)

Repentance is more than just feeling sorry for your sin. It is more than just admitting it. It is more than just being convicted. You must turn away from it. I hear people say all the time, *"Well, that's just how God made me. My daddy had anger issues and so I do."* Or, *"My mama was a drunk and so I am too. I can't help it. It's just how I was raised."* Or, how about this favorite? *"Everybody sins every day."* No, they don't! Stop it! Repent. Turn away from that sinful lifestyle and quit doing those things that displease God. Quit making excuses for it. Own those sins. Confess them to God and repent of them. That is part of humbling yourself.

The drunk husband snuck up the stairs quietly. He looked in the bathroom mirror and bandaged the bumps and bruises he'd received in a fight earlier that night. He then proceeded to climb into bed, smiling at the thought that he'd pulled one over on his wife. When morning came, he opened his eyes and there stood his wife. *"You were drunk last night weren't you!"* *"No, honey."* *"Well, if you weren't, then who put all the band-aids on the bathroom mirror?"* (sermonillustrations.com)

You can't hide your sins from God any better than that drunk husband so just admit them, confess them and repent of them. But I hear ya. *"Todd, what about the folks out there that sin really bad? My sins aren't that bad but my neighbors, they do some really bad stuff. What about them?"* Well, God's not talking to them at all in this verse. He is talking to His own people. He is talking to Christ Fellowship.

Can you imagine what would happen if every church in Wise County today did what this verse says we should do? Can you imagine if every church in America did this? There is no power in Washington DC, no laws that could be passed, no restrictions, no monitoring, no rule, no weapon, no bill that could keep this country from rising up.

If just the Christians in this country humbled themselves and prayed and sought God's face and repented then we wouldn't have to worry about liberals having "family-friendly" drag shows in our elementary schools. If Christians would repent and seek God's face, porn wouldn't be the problem it is today. If Christians turned away from sin, gay pride would turn to gay shame, bars would go out of business, prisons would be turned into businesses, the Mexican cartels would have to get jobs making Mexican food instead of meth and our land would be healed.

But it starts right here. How bad do you want it? Do you want it bad enough to quit watching that show on TV? Do you want it bad enough to give up that habit? To change your speech, to change what comes out of your mouth as well as what goes in? What is God dealing with you

about today? Is it an action, a thought or a word? Let's just be still before God for a minute, bowing our heads and closing our eyes and just listen to God speak to you.

Then, as the music plays, maybe you want to use your chair as an altar to pray or use the stairs up here. Or just pray just as you are to God, confessing and repenting – agreeing with God – about all your sins.

Do you have that relationship with Him? Jesus was born and lived a perfect, sinless life so He could be the perfect sacrifice for all of those sins. He died on the cross to pay the price the Father said was due but He rose again and lives today. God loved you so much He sent Jesus to suffer what you should have to suffer and all you have to do is believe it. But that belief means a completely changed heart and changed mind and changed life. Do you have that today? If not, I need to talk with you right now. Don't wait another second.