

God Answers Solomon's Prayer

2Chronicles 7:11-16 -

By Russell Muilenburg

Sunday, 04 July 2010 00:00

2 Chronicles 7:11-22 *Not God Like You: God Answers Solomon's Prayer* ☐ **The Most Patriotic Verse in the Bible?**

We live in a great country. God has blessed us. We have a lot of freedoms—not the least of which is the freedom to worship as we feel led without the fear of coercion or imprisonment. And we know these freedoms are God-given, and we thank Him for them.

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Today, of course, we celebrate our country. And it just so happens, on the day of our Independence, we're scheduled to look at what just might be the most patriotic verse in the Bible.

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 will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

The reason I say this might be the most patriotic verse in the Bible is because it gets quoted a LOT with reference to our nation. It's the theme verse for the National Day of Prayer. Just this week I received two e-mails asking pastors to pray for our country and they both started with this verse. A couple of years ago, Beth wanted us all to wear matching t-shirts for the 4th

and she ended up buying shirts that had the flag on them with this verse scripted onto the stripes. I would guess that you could walk into any Christian book store in the country and you'll find at least one item with red, white and blue and this verse printed on it.

It's probably the most well-known verse in 2 Chronicles, and it gets used a lot with reference to America. In fact, the way it is quoted, you'd almost swear this verse was written with the United States in mind.

But there, of course, is where we need to be careful.

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There is a lot of debate these days about whether or not America is a Christian nation. To hear some of the politicians and preachers talk, America has replaced ancient Israel as God's chosen people. To hear some quote this verse, it seems that "my people" and "Americans" could almost be used interchangeably.

But we need to keep in mind that ancient Israel had a very unique relationship to God. When God said the words of 2 Chronicles 7:14, Israel was a theocratic monarchy. In other words, God ruled the nation directly through King Solomon. Solomon was appointed by God, and in a very real way he ran the country on God's behalf. Religion and citizenship necessarily went hand-in-hand in ancient Israel. If you were a part of Israel, you were a part of the people of God.

But of course, America is different. You do not have to believe in God to be an American, nor should you. That's one of the freedoms we cherish. Christians were involved in the formation of our country, they have been involved throughout its history, and they continue to be influential in the public sphere today. But we would never say—at any point in our country's history—that God was ruling the nation directly. America has never been a theocracy—nor is it likely to be until Jesus comes again.

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Better than calling America a Christian nation then—and implying that only Christians should be in charge—we should talk about America as a country that is inhabited by many Christians. And we should recognize that as American Christians, we have a unique opportunity to influence our nation for God.

So that doesn't mean that this verse—2 Chronicles 7:14--has nothing to say to us today; just that we have to be careful that we don't assume that there is a direct connection between the people and land of Israel back then with the people and land of America today.

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Answered Prayer

In order to understand these words of God properly, then, it helps to pay attention to the context in which they were spoken.

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You will remember that for the past two months or so we have been looking at the prayer Solomon prayed on the day of dedication for the temple in Jerusalem. You'll remember that it was a spectacular day—filled with the pomp and circumstance of a national parade and thousands of sacrifices and a huge worship service—capped by the spectacle of God's glory descending and filling the temple.

And Solomon's prayer highlights how glorious God is. He starts by saying: "O Lord God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven or on earth" and then he goes on to pray in such a way as to highlight what it is about God that makes him so unique. He is unmatched and unrivaled because He is: A God who keeps His promises; a God who is great, and yet near; a God who forgives; a God who hears the prayers of all people; a God who upholds the cause of His people; and a God who is angry about sin.

It's a great prayer, and it's helped us to know God better so that, like the Israelites who witnessed the cloud descending, we will fall down in worship of our great God.

And now, in 2 Chronicles 7, God is answering Solomon's prayer. Let's look at what He says,

2 Chronicles

7:11

-16:

11

When Solomon had finished the temple of the LORD and the royal palace, and had succeeded in carrying out all he had in mind to do in the temple of the LORD and in his own palace,

12

the LORD appeared to him at night and said:

"I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a temple for sacrifices. ¹³ "When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, 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 will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

15

Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.

16

I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my Name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there.

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The important thing to see here is that God says "Yes." His answer to Solomon's prayer is yes.

The main thrust of Solomon's prayer has been that God would pay special attention to this temple (cf. 6:20). He knows that God will not dwell in an earthly building, but he asks that this temple would represent God's presence in the midst of Israel.

And God says yes. Verse 12 says that has chosen this place as a temple for sacrifice. Verses 15 and 16 says that his eyes and ears will be open to the prayers offered in this place and that His name will be forever associated with this temple. God answers Solomon's prayer by saying that He is committed to the people of Israel.

But notice, these promises are not a blank check from God. He has not committed Himself to fulfill these promises 'no matter what.' There is no sense in which Solomon and the people of Israel can just take God for granted.

God is a covenant-making God. A covenant is a contract between two parties. It involves commitments and promises from both sides. God promises to be the God of Israel, but He expects them to be His people. They have to hold up their end of the bargain.

And

verse 14

is Israel's end of the bargain. If they are going to be God's people, then this is what God wants: they must "humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways."

While America is not the same as Israel, and the circumstances today are not the same as when the temple was being dedicated, I think the principles here continue to apply to God's people at all times and in all places. This is how the unmatched and unrivaled God wants His people to respond to Him. This is how Christians can be an influence for God in America today:

Humility

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The first requirement God gives to us is

humility

. God says: "If my people...will humble themselves."

In the ancient church, pride was listed as one of the seven deadly sins. And yet, today, it has almost become a virtue. We hear so much about "believing in yourself" and "having a strong self-esteem" that we admire those who are confident in their abilities. While arrogance is still considered a human failing, we expect people to show a certain amount of pride.

And often, it is those who claim to be on the side of God who display the most pride. Those who argue for a return to Christian values are often the ones most likely to puff up their own righteousness and look down on those who disagree. Not everybody, of course. But often the most outspoken seem to be the most prideful.

But, we must see, too much pride can get in the way of one's relationship with God.

In the gospel of Luke, Jesus tells a story which--we are told--was specifically directed towards those "who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else." In other words, it's a story about the dangers of pride in the people who say they are on God's side.

Here's the story:

Two men [Jesus says] went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

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The Pharisee—the one who would have been publicly identified with God--was proud, he was focused on himself. You can hear it in his prayer: "I do this, I am not like that, I...I...I."; He couldn't be devoted to God because he was too devoted to himself.

But the tax collector was humble. He didn't call attention to himself, but focused his pleas upon his merciful Father. No wonder

Jesus said

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I tell you that this man [meaning the tax collector], rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. (Luke 18:9-14)

You see the difference between humility and pride. Pride says: "I can do it myself."; Humility says: "I need the help of the Lord."; Pride says: "Look at how great I am."; Humility says: "Look at how great God is."; Pride says: "I am good enough."; Humility says: "I have offended the Lord and need His forgiveness.";

The unmatched and unrivaled God wants us to respond to him with humility. Unless we are humble we do not let God be God. Humility reminds us of our failings, our shortcomings, and our ever-present need for the Lord.

Urgency

The second requirement God gives to us is

urgency

. He says: "If my people...will humble themselves and pray and seek my face..."; God wants us to pray and seek His face. He wants us to be focused on Him and His will.

It is clear that this verse is telling us to pray. That's why it used as the theme verse for the National Day of Prayer. But what isn't as often mentioned--in fact, something about this verse which is often overlooked--is that it also tells us

how

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to pray. This isn't just a reminder to say grace before a meal or to recite your bedtime prayers, it is instruction to call on God unceasingly.

God wants us to "seek his face." The word "seek" implies intensity and focused determination.

I think of a hunting dog. When a dog marks its quarry, it locks on with unwavering focus. Nothing is going to distract it or turn it away. My dog is not a hunting dog. He's a 10 year-old miniature schnauzer who thinks he's still 2. He's hyper and excitable and barks a lot. But when he sits at the sliding door looking into our back yard, and he sees a rabbit, he locks in. His eyes get wide, the hair stands up, he starts a low growl, and nothing will tear him away from that window. If he could, he'd go right through the glass.

That's how God wants us to pray. He wants us to go hard after his presence.

Jeremiah 29:11 contains another much-quoted and well loved promise of God.

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For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

But it wasn't until this week that I really paid attention to the verses that come after it. Verses that tell us how God wants us to respond to him:

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Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.

13

You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

God wants our whole-hearted attention and prayers.

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During World War II many commodities were in short supply in England and it became necessary to ration certain goods. As a result, whenever, the hard to get items--like lady's nylons or fresh eggs--became available, there would be long lines (what the English call queues) in the streets. Consequently, there developed something called the "queue complex." People would be walking down the street and they'd see a long line snaking out of store and they'd join it. They didn't know what the line was for, but they were sure that if others wanted it they'd want it too.

What a tremendous difference it would make to the life of our country if the people of God showed the same concern in regard to spiritual things! If only we would be as avid for the things of God as we are for other things.

If the Christians in America want to help our nation, we need to seek God's face with this kind of urgency. We need to be focused in prayer.

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Repentance

So, we should respond to the unmatched and unrivaled God with humility and urgency. Third, God asks us to **repent.**

God says: "If my people...will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways."

The final requirement God has for His people is that they turn from wickedness. Now, we think of "wickedness" as violence and impurity and flagrant greed. We hear talk of wickedness and it isn't too likely that we are going to think it applies to us. But, by the Bible's definition, wickedness is any behavior which breaks God's holy law. Anytime we put other things in front of God, then we are acting wickedly.

And one of the best things God's people can do for our country is to repent of our sins. We need to recognize our shortcomings and own up to them. And, more than just pointing out what everybody else is doing wrong in our nation—the people who belong to the other political party, the people who live in another region of the country, the people who belong to a different social

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class or racial group—we need to recognize that we share in a collective guilt.

One of those e-mails I got this week says:

Ours is a government "of the people." We share the guilt of our collective national sins.

I was listening to a guy on the radio this week talking about the oil spill in the gulf. He talked about all the people who could be blamed—the BP executives, the engineers on site, the government regulators, etc. But then he said, he had to admit, he was to blame as well. Not because he blew up the oil rig or messed up the response plan—but because he drives a car. Because he heats his house. Because he is a part of a culture that has an insatiable hunger for oil. In that sense, we are all responsible for the disaster in the gulf and we all need to repent of the way we've treated God's creation.

In Isaiah chapter 6, when the prophet is granted a vision of God in His throne room, with His glory filling the temple and angels hovering around Him calling out "Holy, Holy, Holy", Isaiah's first instinct is to fall on his knees in sorrow and terror.

"Woe to me," [he] cried, "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty."

Isaiah recognized the he was a part of the sins of his people. He couldn't just point out what was wrong with his country and lay it at the feet of somebody else. He shared responsibility, and thus he repented on behalf of all.

Likewise, if God's people here in America want to help our nation, we need to turn not only from our personal wickedness, but also the wickedness of our nation as a whole.

Knowing God Better Helps us Pray Better

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So this is how God asks His people to respond to Him: with humility, with urgency, and with repentance. To the extent that God's people do this He promises to forgive and bless them.

This verse isn't written specifically for America, nor does it make any specific promises for our country. But to the extent that Christians in our nation humble themselves and pray and seek God's face and turn from wickedness, we can bring God's blessing onto our land.

Finally, as we wrap up this series I want to point out one more thing.

God's answer to Solomon's prayer was "yes." That's not because God was unusually fond of Solomon or because Solomon was particularly clever in the way he persuaded God to answer him. Rather, God says "yes" to Solomon's prayer because Solomon knew God and thus asked accordingly.

As one commentator says: "It was not simply that God gave what Solomon asked; it was that Solomon asked what in the first place God wanted him to ask."

The whole point of this series has been to help us know God better. I said at the beginning that we want to behold God's glory as they did on that first day of dedication so that like the people gathered there we will fall down in worship. We need no other reason for knowing God, He is worthy of all of our attention.

But there is also this: the better we know God the more our actions and our prayers are going to align with Him. The better we know God, the more we are going to want the things He wants. The better we know God, the more we are going to become like Him.

And so, if you want God to answer your prayers, continue to study and get to know the unmatched, unrivaled of the universe. There is no one like Him.

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