

I Will Heal Their Land

2 Chronicles 7

As you know, tomorrow noon will see the inauguration of a new president of the United States. This was set by the 20th amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which states, “The terms of the President and the Vice President shall end at noon on the 20th day of January.” This is a rare part of the Constitution which is still meticulously followed.

Now if you follow politics, you know that Inauguration Day is a day of partying in Washington, D.C. The victorious party celebrates its victory. There are several inaugural balls. There are cocktail parties attended by the upper crust. By tomorrow about this time there will be a new president. Will America be better or worse off? That remains to be seen. The real powers-that-be—unelected bureaucrats who really run the country—will be operating behind the scenes to try to hold onto their power and protect the swamp.

So there will be a lot of partying tomorrow in Washington, D.C.

Is there a better way to spend Inauguration Day? What if, instead of partying, Inauguration Day became a day for prayer and fasting—seeking the face of God?

Ultimately, our country would be better off with *God’s blessing* than with *man’s scheming*. Truly, “our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.”

Notice in our text this morning how God gives a magnificent promise: “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.” Here, God promises to heal the “land.” What does this mean?

The land where we live is part of our identity as humans. Like migratory birds, we long to get back to our roots—back to our land, back to our people. Think of the patriotic song “This land is your land, and this land is my land, from California to the New York island, from the Redwood Forest to the Gulf Stream waters, this land was made for you and me.” Who made the land? God did!

The United States of America is both a nation and a country, a people and a land. The word *nation* comes from a Latin word meaning *to be born*. It is defined as “a body of people united by common descent, history, culture, or language, inhabiting a particular area or territory.”¹ The word *country* refers to a region or area.

Our text teaches that if we humble ourselves, pray, seek God’s face, and turn from our sins, God will heal our *land*. “Land” can be taken both literally and figuratively. It can refer to the ground on which we walk, and it can refer by

¹ *New Oxford American Dictionary* (electronic edition)

metonymy to the people who inhabit the land. The promise is that God will heal our “land”—that is, the soil and the people who live on the soil. If we obey God, then our land will experience his blessing in both senses. People will flourish and the land itself would be healed—ridded of pollution and blight. In the words of Scripture, “the desert would blossom like a rose.”

What would America look like if God healed our land? Think of it! The gospel would go forth to change lives. People would be converted to Christ and begin to live like Christians, having mutual respect for one another and living together as neighbors. People would cooperate and get along and flourish. Crime would go down. Poverty would decrease. Wealth would increase. People would work together for the common good. Sounds pretty good!

There have been times in the life of our nation when these things were happening—a time when there was more respect for God, more church attendance—when children learned the Ten Commandments, when our streets were safer, when differences were settled amicably rather than by violence. This is what the Psalmist prayed for: “that our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as pillars, sculptured in palace style; that our barns may be full, supplying all kinds of produce; that our sheep may bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our fields; that our oxen may be well laden; that there be no breaking in or going out; that there be no outcry in our streets. Happy are the people who are in such a state; happy are the people whose God is the LORD!” (Ps. 144). The prophet Isaiah foretold a time when “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent’s meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD” (Isa. 65). Isn’t this what we want for our land?

I have three points this morning: (1) Context: old covenant worship; (2) Confession and forgiveness; (3) Continuity: Does this apply to us? First,

1. Context: old covenant worship

Second Chronicles 7 is a wonderful chapter. Under the leadership of Solomon the people of Israel had come together for the dedication of the temple. God had put it into Solomon’s heart to build a temple in Jerusalem. This would replace the tabernacle which was carried about by the Levites and set up from place to place as Israel wandered through the desert. In chapter 6 the temple had been completed. The people stood in front of it. King Solomon had prayed an eloquent, thoughtful prayer for God’s blessing on his people. In our reading today we heard the story of God’s sending tangible signs of his presence: fire from heaven, consuming the sacrifices, the glory of the LORD filling the temple; the people’s response to God’s presence, falling down on their faces to worship. In God’s providence Solomon had uttered an inspired prayer—the word of God—acting as prophet, priest and king, foreshadowing Christ. Note that the people didn’t just hear the word of God

and walk away. Rather, they responded with *worship*. We are not to just hear the word of God and walk away unaffected. Rather, we are to mediate upon it, reflect on it, pray over it and seek to incorporate it into our lives.

At a break at presbytery the other day I heard the story of a well-meaning Baptist whose “preaching” consisted of reading the Bible aloud in the audience of his hearers *in the original Hebrew and Greek*—that is all. I’m sure it was well intended. He wanted his hearers to hear the inspired word of God, with nothing added: no human interpretation to contaminate the pure word of God. The man likely commended himself for his commitment to pure biblical doctrine. No one could accuse him of mishandling the word of God; he just read it as it was written in the Bible. But what’s wrong with that picture? Consider his hearers. They were ordinary people, not specialists in Hebrew and Greek. They were English speakers. They had no knowledge of the original languages. There is no way that simply hearing the reading of the Old Testament in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek could speak to their heart. But beyond that, the Bible says that “it pleased God by the foolishness of *preaching* to save them that believe” (1 Cor. 1:21). God intends that his word be not only read, but preached. I think all of us would agree that simply reading the Bible aloud in the original languages is not preaching. God’s word *should* be read aloud, in the language of the hearers! It should be translated into all the languages and tongues of earth. But it should be *preached* as well—preached by men called by God, examined by the church and found to be men of good character, with a competent knowledge of Scripture and an aptness to preach and teach the Word, ordained by the laying on of hands of the elders, and sent out to preach.

Biblical worship consists of people gathering together at the call of the elders to meet with God and hear his word, then responding with worship, singing and prayer. There is a rhythm to it: God speaks, and man responds, God speaks, and man responds. Biblical worship is a dialogue between the God of heaven and his church.

In verse 3 of our text this morning the people respond to Solomon’s inspired prayer by acknowledging that God is good, singing the words of Psalm 106:1, “Praise the LORD! Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.” (That Psalm has become a favorite of our congregation: “O sing hallelujah! Praise God for his goodness; his covenant mercy forever endures.” We sang the complete Psalm last Lord’s day.)

After the people sing the Psalm they offer lavish and plenteous sacrifices of bulls and sheep, the Levites leading the singing with instruments of music, the priests sounding trumpets (not ram’s horns [singular: שׁוֹפָר], such as those blown by the priests after the Israelites marched around the city of Jericho seven times, when, upon hearing that signal, the people shouted with a great shout, and the

walls came tumbling down; but rather long, straight metal trumpets, playing musical notes to accompany the people's singing). This worship service continued for seven days (Jewish inclusive time, including both the first and the seventh day, that is, a full week)—and then seven days more! You think an hour-and-a-half-long worship service is long; how about a *full-two-week-long* worship service? But that's nothing, considering the heavenly worship that will take place throughout eternity! Too much worship, you say? Then, you haven't considered the filthiness and accursedness of your sins, or the cost of your redemption—the infinite cost of the life-blood of the very Son of God; you haven't fully considered the fact that because of your sins, you were bound for eternity in the lake of fire—unending suffering in outer darkness.

Two days ago President Biden commuted the sentences of almost 2,500 offenders. The governor of Virginia criticized the president for granting clemency to “two violent criminals” who killed a police officer, stating that he was “beyond outraged.” How many others who committed first-degree murder, and deserved to be put to death for their crimes, were released back into society to roam our streets and terrorize others? The purpose of civil government is to enact justice on behalf of God Almighty, in accordance with his unchanging word, in order to protect the innocent and law-abiding (not absolutely innocent in the sight of a holy God, but free from legal guilt).

So the Israelites, after hearing the public prayer offered by their king-priest Solomon, and having bowed and worshipped with their faces to the ground in an act of contrition before the Lord, now offered animal sacrifices (both “the king and all the people,” confessing their common guilt and need for blood atonement) as they dedicated the house of God. At the close of this fourteen-days-long worship service, the people were sent away, back to their tents, “joyful and glad of heart for the good that the LORD had done for David, for Solomon, and for His people Israel.” What a momentous and meaningful worship service!

How different is modern “worship,” and how much we've fallen! Trite, repetitive songs sung to pop ballads by performers on a stage under spotlights; perfectly-timed services of just under an hour, so that people are not inconvenienced too much. Worship—if it's worship at all—is trivialized. It's *not* worship, according to the biblical standard. “O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker” (Ps. 95:6). In biblical worship the focus is on *God*—not performers.

After the people are dismissed, the LORD appeared to Solomon by night (v. 12) and reassured him that he had chosen the temple as the place where sacrifices were to be offered to him. This indicated that the LORD would be present in the temple always, as long as he and his sons were faithful to him. But if they turned away and served other gods, then God would uproot them from the land and forsake his

temple. Sadly, this second scenario is what actually happened. Eventually, the Spirit of God left the temple, and it was destroyed.

This is the Old Testament context. There are elements of the ceremonial law here, particularly the animal sacrifices which point to the ultimate Sacrifice, our Lord Jesus Christ who gave his life as the innocent victim who shed his blood for the sins of his people—the Son of God dying, so that guilty sinners might have life. But now that Christ has come, God’s people still worship. God is our God, and is worthy of worship. The Old Testament ceremonies are done away with, but the moral obligation to worship is eternal. God’s people come now in the newness of the Spirit rather than the oldness of the letter.

Second, consider

2. Confession and forgiveness

Here is the heart of our text. God gives the beautiful promise “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.”

Here are four conditions followed by three results. Here is a gracious promise (humble yourselves, pray, seek God’s face, turn from sin) followed by three results (I will hear, forgive and heal). Think of some of these terms.

1. “Will humble themselves.” Humility is the beginning of all true religion. Here is the Creator-creature distinction. Here is a universal requirement, binding upon every man, woman and child on earth. We were made to worship. Either we worship the God of heaven in true holiness; or we end up worshipping a false God who cannot hear, cannot save, and cannot deliver from hell; or thirdly, we worship *ourselves* (think of all the advertising that assures us, “Buy this; you *deserve* it.”). Peter got it exactly right: “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time” (1 Pet. 5:6). If we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God in time, we will be exalted in eternity. If we exalt ourselves, we will go down to hell.

Consider the example of Manasseh, who lived about 300 years after Solomon, the king who dedicates the temple. Manasseh was arguably the most wicked king Israel ever had. He was the son and successor of Hezekiah on the throne of Judah. He reigned 55 years—a nightmare for the godly. As it says in Proverbs, “When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn” (Prov. 29:2).

Manasseh’s reign was characterized by a tragic relapse into idolatry with all its vices. While he was on the throne, a systematic and persistent attempt was made to banish the worship of Jehovah out of the land.² But God converted Manasseh!

² Easton’s Bible Dictionary, “Manasseh” (Logos Bible Software)

“And the Lord spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they would not listen. Therefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the army of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh with hooks, bound him with bronze fetters, and carried him off to Babylon. Now when he was in affliction, he implored the Lord his God, and *humbled himself greatly* before the God of his fathers, and prayed to Him; and He received his entreaty, heard his supplication, and brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord was God” (2 Chron. 33:10–13).

2. “And pray.” Heartfelt prayer is a response to the word of God. It is a realization that God is true, and that we need *him* above anything else. It is an indication that a heart is regenerate. Remember what the Lord said to Ananias of Damascus, when he told him to go to the street called Straight and call on Saul of Tarsus, the dreaded persecutor of Christians? The Lord told him, “Behold, he prayeth” (Acts 9:11). Saul of Tarsus was a changed man; he was converted! The evidence was clear: “Behold, he *prayeth*.” The wicked repeat prayers, but they don’t come from a heart that knows its need of God. But those who *know* that they are sinners, who know that their only hope of eternal life is Christ, *really pray*! The Christian prays, realizing that he does not contribute one thing to his salvation. “He must increase, but I must decrease.”³

3. “And seek my face.” Those who seek God’s face are those who realize that they have a need that only God can fulfill. They want to listen to God, they want to see his smile—“The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace” (Num. 6:26). Is that what you want above anything else: to know that the Lord of Glory smiles upon you and is well-pleased with you, not because you yourself deserve it, but because in Christ your sins are laid on him, and his perfect righteousness is credited to you? Just as a husband wants to see his wife’s smile, and a wife wants to see her husband’s smile, so the Christian wants to see his Lord’s smile, both now, and at the final judgment.

4. “And turn from their wicked ways.” Turning from sin is evidence of true repentance. As our Catechism says (summarizing Scripture), “Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, *turn from it unto God*, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience.”

Is this your attitude? Do you grieve over your sins, or do you make excuses for them? Do you hate your sins, or do you just hate the fact that you got caught? Do you want to turn from your sins, flee from them, and live a life of new obedience, or do you enjoy them so much that you secretly long to return to them? What gives you more pleasure, to spend time in communion with God, or to pursue sinful

³ John 3:30

pleasures? May we be like Moses, who chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season!

3. Continuity: Does this apply to us?

Indeed it does! Though the context of 2 Chronicles 7 is old covenant worship, it is fulfilled in Christ. The type is fulfilled in the antitype, the shadows are fulfilled in the substance. Christ is the substance. He is the Lamb of God, who takes away our sin. He is the Great High Priest through whom we have communion with God. He, even in heaven today, is the incarnate Son of God, whose face we shall behold throughout eternity, as the courts of heaven resound with the praises of the the God who redeemed us at great cost, so that we could be in his presence forevermore.

Tomorrow is inauguration day. There will be a ceremonial transfer of power. We will have a new president, but whether he will have the will and the means to release us from the stranglehold of the deep state remains to be seen. We must not put our trust in princes, but in the Lord of glory. Washington, D.C. will party tomorrow, but what will we do? If we truly care about the future we are leaving to our heirs, we should pray. Pray fervently for God's mercy. Pray that God will send his Spirit to convert hearts, that they might embrace Jesus Christ. Pray for our leaders, that they might desire justice for the oppressed rather than the campaign contributions from strong interests that want to use the system for their own advantage. Fast for the day, if you are inclined. But through it all, look to Jesus! Our sins are forgiven in him. And he alone has the power to heal our land. Amen.