



8. A Passion for the Nations (2 Chronicles 7: 11-22)

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.

This particular set of verses were spoken by God to Solomon at the consecration of the first Temple. It's a set of wonderful promises and dire warnings against turning away from the God the nation had pledged itself to. And the consequences didn't sound nice.

"As for you, if you walk before me as David your father did, and do all I command, and observe my decrees and laws, 18 I will establish your royal throne, as I covenanted with David your father when I said, 'You shall never fail to have a man to rule over Israel.'

19 "But if you turn away and forsake the decrees and commands I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them, 20 then I will uproot Israel from my land, which I have given them, and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name. I will make it a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples. 21 And though this temple is now so imposing, all who pass by will be appalled and say, 'Why has the LORD done such a thing to this land and to this temple?' 22 People will answer, 'Because they have forsaken the LORD, the God of their fathers, who brought them out of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, worshiping and serving them--that is why he brought all this disaster on them.'"

God brings disaster on a people who have turned away from Him and He brings it on the land too and it's much a product of their evil deeds as it is His judgement. Sometimes the judgement of God is leaving people to their own devices.

The situation of disobedience is one of disaster – the land is ravaged because of judgement – land is parched, eaten by locusts, people killed by plague. It means of life is being destroyed. That happened to Egypt when Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites go – plug for Exodus series.

Never was a scripture true than the lands of the West in the 21st Century. We somehow only ever see sin as a personal thing that requires a personal Saviour. But the sin of a nation is much talked about in Scripture as it is here in 2 Chronicles 7. National sin destroys the environment and the fabric of society. We are a nation and a people who have turned away from God and our land is becoming sick from the selfishness of people's lives – pollution, soil erosion, poisoned food, stress of modern life, crime. And as we listen to the news and learn about the global environmental consequences of the sin of our race, then this passage comes across clearly to us. We are supposed to have a good quality of life and we do, but the sickness is there and we are horrified as we hear some of the stories. Here's a few from the news yesterday.

Dozens killed in Uzbekistan - Residents of the eastern Uzbek city of Andijan say they fear hundreds of people may have been killed during the suppression of mass protests there.

Boy killed in Croydon - A 16-year-old schoolboy has died after being attacked by a group of youths last month. Scotland Yard has launched a murder inquiry following the death of Stefan Persaud, who was attacked in Croydon, south London, on 23 April.

Chile spy chief - The former head of Chile's secret police, Gen Manuel Contreras, says he has details of the fate of 580 people who disappeared during military rule.

Columbia drugs haul - The Colombian authorities have seized cocaine valued at more than \$300m (£162m) in what they say is the single largest drugs haul ever. They found the cocaine, weighing at least 12 tonnes, on a jungle riverbank near the south-west Colombian coast.

But as we have heard in so many sermons before – the judgement of God falls on the church too. The history of rural churches around here has been decline. But it's not just that, the sickness is so bad that people think that churches are evil and hurt people. I've come across so many people since coming to Swaffham who used to run well or had an interest or an upbringing in spiritual things but were hurt. That's our history and we see the marks of sickness – closed buildings, the erosion of Christian values and now the repeal of laws for religious freedom.

Let me read a few verses again:

I will uproot Israel from my land, which I have given them, and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name. I will make it a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples. 21 And though this temple is now so imposing, all who pass by will be appalled and say, 'Why has the LORD done such a thing to this land and to this temple?' 22 People will answer, 'Because they have forsaken the LORD, the God of their fathers, who brought them out of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, worshiping and serving them--that is why he brought all this disaster on them.'"

I'll re-word some of it for you: *And though this church building is now so imposing, all who pass by will be appalled and say, 'Why has the LORD done such a thing to this church building by allowing it to be turned into a carpet warehouse?' 22 People will answer, 'Because they have forsaken the LORD Jesus Christ, and have embraced the gods of money, material things and self, worshiping and serving them--that is why he brought all this disaster on them.'"*

But with this warning to Solomon comes with a promise. It's a conditional promise – if you do this, then I'll do that.

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."

It's a promise of forgiveness and healing and I believe this is a general promise by the Father to all people who have turned away and desire to turn back to Him.

Are you disturbed by what has happened to the church of God in these days. Are you concerned what might happen to this church fellowship in the future as we find it in an area of the country where decline has been strong? This promise is for us. We can know forgiveness, we can see a healed land again as Jesus transforms lives. I expect many of you have seen the Transformations videos. If you've not, perhaps we'll get them and show them on our nice new TV. They are stories around the world where people have taken this promise and prayed into it and found that not only the lives of people have been changed but whole societies. The most recent one is on Uganda which if you remember was torn by civil wars caused by evil dictators like Idi Amin and Milton Obote. Christians started to come before God to repent for the sins of their people and the destruction of their fertile lands because of the civil wars. The church in Uganda is growing rapidly today but as God moves in power in that land there have been social and environmental changes to the land too. Not only have the people known the healing and wholeness of God, but villages have been re-established and farms have become productive again.

What is this promise about then?

It's a conditional promise. If we want to see the healing and wholeness of God amongst our people again – and in our nation – then we need to do three things

- **Humble ourselves** I'd say we are part of a culture that doesn't do humility. We like the idea of dignity, importance, self assertion. But humility in this context means the opposite. It means that we have to admit our part in the downfall of the church. I expect many of you remember a book called *Adolf Hitler: my part in his downfall* by Spike Milligan. As you read the book you realise that Gunner Milligan was just part of a large army and fought in the North African and Italian campaigns being repatriated to the UK with shell-shock. His part in Hitler's downfall was small, but he did his bit. We have all done our bit in the decline of the church however much we accept that or not and however large our part was or not. We need to come before God in humility recognising that – because we can all do our bit in claiming the promise too! This is actually the last in our Heart of Service series. The greatest service all of us can do to change a world that we seem so powerless to change as

being just one of 6000 million people, is that we can pay to the God who can, has done and will continue to do something about it!

- **Pray and seek God's face.** God wants us to pray and seek His face. If we realise that a change is necessary in our world, in our land, our community or our church, then it starts by praying and seeking God's face. There isn't an alternative to this. So often we see the problem and we try to change things ourselves don't we. Let's pray and seek God's ways.
- **Repent turn from our wicked ways** We need to repent. I've noticed that a lot of people get that confused. They think that it is about saying sorry. If you want a word for that, then that's *penitence* – and that's covered by what we just said about humbling ourselves. There's a difference with repentance. Repentance means turning from something – turn from our wicked ways and go God's way. God doesn't just require being penitent, He requires us to *change*. That was the challenge in Solomon's time and it is the challenge now. We sometimes have infant school morals. You know what I mean. Joey hits Johnny. Teacher says: "That's not nice Joey, say you're sorry". Joey grudgingly says sorry and when Teacher is out of sight knocks Johnny's lights out! Funny it may be but the morals of the infant school are the morals of society and often the morals of Christians. Somehow if we say sorry then that's alright. That's not enough – we need to repent – we need to turn from our wicked ways and obey our God!

But look at the promises that come with humility, prayer and repentance *hen will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*

- ◆ **Hear** God always hears the prayer of those ready to come to Him in humility and repentance. That's a promise. We're coming before God to pray for our nation and the world this morning. We are part of that world and that nation. We need to recognise our part and come before God in that knowing He hears.
- ◆ **Forgive** The second part of the promise is that God always forgives those who come before Him in humility and repentance. As we come around the table this morning we know we can come before God pleading the shed blood of Jesus. We have a world and nation who need to have the forgiveness we have found in Christ.
- ◆ **Heal** We have a promise that our land will be healed. It isn't just a case of praying for our nation that men and women will be saved but that our land will be saved from the consequences of the sin of people. Revival is always accompanied by social change. That's history. I was reading a book on the Welsh Revival a few days ago and the consequences over the revival were that pubs closed through lack of business, the Police force didn't have much work to do and productivity increased in the coal mines. People's lives were changed and the community was transformed as a result. And that's what we are called on to pray for today. Not just that people come to Christ but that we will see the transformation in society that comes from it. Let's remember that as we come to prayer this morning, b.

