

COMING BACK TO GOD

Message 8

INTRO: This is the final message in coming back to God. We looked in a former series at leaving God, and now we have looked at coming back to God.

In an earlier message I quoted Dr. John R. Rice who quoted B. H. Carroll of a picture in words about a time of drought. It is the picture of the heart of one who has truly known God and is in a backslidden state. B.H. Carroll describes it like this: *I have witnessed a drought in Texas. The earth was iron and the heavens brass. Dust clouded the thoroughfares and choked the travelers. Watercourses ran dry, grass scorched and crackled, corn leaves twisted and wilted, stock died around the last water holes, the ground cracked in fissures, and the song of birds died out in parched throats. Men despaired. The whole earth prayed: 'Rain, rain, rain! O Heaven, send rain!' Suddenly a cloud rises above the horizon and floats into vision like an angel of hope. It spreads a cool shade over the burning and glowing earth. Expectation gives life to desire. The lowing herds look up. The shriveled flowers open their tiny cups. The corn leaves untwist and rustle with gladness. And just when all trusting, suffering life opens her confiding heart to the promise of relief, the cloud, the cheating cloud, like a heartless coquette, gathers her drapery about her and floats scornfully away, leaving the angry sun free to dart his fires of death into the open heart of all suffering life.*

One can just see a vast parched land. There are deep cracks in the earth, and swirls of dust, and not a cloud in the sky. Contrast that now with a lush valley, with a river flowing through it, and vegetation that looks like it will burst with water if you should touch it. There is the picture of a spiritually vibrant Christian such as we find in Psalm 1. His or her troubles in life may be big, but the soul is spiritually rich. There is no hidden sin. There is no hypocrisy. There is a searching for the will of God in all things. There is honest business and honest work. There is a diligent study of God's Word. There is a hunger for truth and righteousness. No matter what you do to this person, the top on their list is the

spiritual life. God takes second place to nothing in their lives. All of this is subservient to God Almighty!

We sing this song:

1. There shall be showers of blessing:
This is the promise of love;
There shall be seasons refreshing,
Sent from the Savior above.
 - o *Refrain:*
Showers of blessing,
Showers of blessing we need:
Mercy-drops round us are falling,
But for the showers we plead.
2. There shall be showers of blessing,
Precious reviving again;
Over the hills and the valleys,
Sound of abundance of rain.
3. There shall be showers of blessing;
Send them upon us, O Lord;
Grant to us now a refreshing,
Come, and now honor Thy Word.
4. There shall be showers of blessing:
Oh, that today they might fall,
Now as to God we're confessing,
Now as on Jesus we call!
5. There shall be showers of blessing,
If we but trust and obey;
There shall be seasons refreshing,
If we let God have His way.

Note the song does not say there are showers of blessing. It says there shall be showers of blessing. According to stanza 2, these showers will come after revival comes. It says there will be the sound of abundance of rain coming over the hills and the valleys. Line three asks God for a refreshing. It asks God to honor His Word. But on what basis shall God honor His Word?

Stanza 4, "Now as to God we're confessing, Now as on Jesus we call." Only when such a time comes can God honor His Word. Line 5 furthers this thought when it says, "There shall be showers of blessing, if we but trust and obey." First confession and calling on God, and then trust and obedience to Him. The last two lines then say, "There shall be seasons refreshing if we let God have His way."

There it is. *If My people, which are called by My name will humble themselves and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, THEN, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.*

God said if you turn from your sin and turn to Me, I will hear from heaven, and will forgive your sin, and heal your land. If we do these things, God will honor His Word, which in this passage is that He will hear from heaven and forgive their sin and heal their land.

III. HOW GOD RESPONDS TO MAN'S BREAKING

A. Hear Them

Let us go once more to 2 Chronicles 7:14. Now as we read 2 Chronicles 7:14, notice the order of things that God does when man returns to Him: "if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways...", there we have man's part, and then comes God's part: "...1. then I will hear from heaven, and 2. will forgive their sin and 3. heal their land."

When man returns to God, what is the very first thing that happens to God? His ears are opened to their cry! And what opens His ears? The voice of confession! He hears their prayers. The first response from God, when man humbles himself, prays, seeks His face and turns from his wicked ways is that He will hear them. Psalm 66:18 says, *If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.* It is an amazing thing what opens God's ears. His ears are

closed to the proud, but humility and turning from sin opens His ears.

I have had times when I allowed sin entrance, and God would not listen to me. The first time that happened I was a long time until I could hear Him. When I heard Him, and concluded I must clean up the sin, which was a lie I had told my boss, when I heard Him and finally got up the courage to face this thing I learned what it was to be in a place where God would hear me again.

When we sin, our ears close to God and we cannot hear Him. Over and over the NT says, "He that has ears to hear, let him hear." Here is the amazing thing, many times people do not have ears to hear. Oh, we may think we hear, but we don't. Jeremiah 17:9 says, *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?* What is clear about the heart is that it is so bad that we cannot know it. It is that deceitful. It is that misleading. Only through the Word of God can we begin to fathom the depth of our depravity.

Turn to Pslam 51. Sin closes our ears to God and it closes God's ears to us. Sin is very destructive. I wonder if you have ever pondered Psalm 51:4. It is generally agreed that David spoke this Psalm after God discovered his sin with Bathsheba to him. Note verse 4 as we read verses 1-4.

1 Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me.

4 Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight – That You may be found just when You speak, And blameless when You judge.

Now notice verse 4 in particular: *Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight – That You may be found just when You speak, And blameless when You judge.* This is a difficult verse. Was David's sin only against God? It is not reasonable to think that David did not sin against Bathsheba, against her husband Uriah, against Israel's army and against the nation of Israel. How could he say, "Against You, you only have I sinned..."

I do not know the answer to that question. Might I suggest this? When he recognized his sin, and recognized what his sin had done against God, it was as if he could only see what he had done to God! This summer my wife and I had several occasions to see the tremendous pain a cheating spouse brings on the marriage partner. The pain is immeasurable. It is indescribable. The heart hurts so horribly that death looks pleasant. Most of us do not know the depth of this pain, and I pray we might not need to.

But as I prepared this message I thought, if it is true that the primary reason why sin is so very, very horrible is not because of what it does to man, but because of what it does to God; then what pain does a sin like David's sin bring to God? What pain does a cheating partner bring to God? May it be an encouragement to anyone who bears such pain, that if you are living for the Lord, the Lord knows your pain in a deeper way than you do. Someone has said, "Shared joy is twice the joy; shared pain is half the pain." And I wonder if David, in Psalm 51:4, did not get a glimpse of what his sin had done to God. Listen to 1 Kings 15:4-5:

4 Nevertheless for David's sake the LORD his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, by setting up his son after him and by establishing Jerusalem;

5 because David did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, and had not turned aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.

You see, David had been snared by lust. Oh what a snare is lust. Then he had followed his own fallen nature, covered his own tracks and, and never before or after did he do such a thing. But in Psalm 51 David realized that though he had covered his tracks so very well, it was plain and open to God. God had night vision. And when Nathan the prophet discovered his sin to him he was smitten, and all he could see is the horrible crime he had committed against God. And when David was confronted with his sin, I have no doubt he went through untold agony before he repented, but he repented. You see, when something happens to man and his ears are opened to God and he humbles himself and turns to God, something happens to God as well. His ears are opened to hear such pleas. Psalm 34:15 says, *The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their cry.* You see, when we humble ourselves and pray and seek His face and turn from our wicked ways, we become righteous once more.

1 Peter 3:12 says, *For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil.* We have all seen a face that is turned against us or someone. That is how God's face is to those who do evil. But the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous. He takes note of them. And His ears are open to their to their prayers!

B. Forgive Them

But there is a second thing God does for those who humble themselves before Him and pray to Him and seek His face and turn from their wicked ways. First He hears them. You see, what He hears is a confession of sin which comes from a truly repentant heart. And when He has heard them, then He forgives them.

When I ponder the subject of forgiveness, words fail me to describe how huge forgiveness is. And though adequate words fail me to describe forgiveness, I want to seek to answer a few questions: 1 What is forgiveness? 2 What is forgiveness

from? 3 And third, what is the ground on which God forgives?

So, what is forgiveness? Well, let me first share what it is related to. It is related to sins that break relationships. Let me recommend our series of messages called, "Forgiveness: Will That Be One Goat Or Two." That title comes from the Israel's feast of the day of Atonement, the highest holiest day for God's OT people. The teaching of unconditional forgiveness is one goat forgiveness and is unbiblical and I cannot see but that it leads to a lax Christianity. In that series of messages, here is the definition I gave of forgiveness:

"Forgiveness is the sending away or bearing away of a sin or sins based on the death of Christ for that sin and the repentance of the offender, which relieves the anger of the offended and the guilt of the offender and provides everything needed to reconcile their relationship to wholeness."

When we have sinned against God, as we have seen in an earlier message, there is no human price that will ever satisfy God's anger. Augustus M. Toplady describes it like this in the hymn Rock of Ages:

- 1. Not the labor of my hands
Can fulfill Thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and Thou alone.**

Forgiveness! It is a subject that is very huge. But we need to take note of a matter that is not new to you. Before forgiveness can take place, humbling and repentance must take place. There are no exceptions. The teaching of unconditional forgiveness is, in my view, an unbiblical, and spiritually harmful teaching. It is amazing how

widespread this teaching is and yet how clear the Scripture is on this matter.

Just last Sunday one of our folk reminded me of what General William Booth had prophesied many years ago. He lived from 1829-1912. He said this, "The chief danger that confronts the coming century will be religion without the Holy Ghost, Christianity without Christ, forgiveness without repentance, salvation without regeneration, politics without God, heaven without hell." Now note within that list he gives forgiveness without repentance. How did he foresee that over 100 years ago?

Now I have not found those who hold the view of unconditional forgiveness to argue that with God there is no forgiveness without repentance. We are agreed there. But with man, they say, it is not so. And why is unconditional forgiveness taught when sin is related to man? Well, the chief argument I run into is this: If you don't forgive unconditionally, you will become bitter. As far as I know, that reason is not found anywhere in the Bible, it is an assumption.

Turn to Matthew 5. What does the Bible teach we should do when we have sinned against by another Christian? It teaches us to repent and confess our sins. But what when we are sinned against? Well, there are two different matters to be considered. First, what if I am sinned against personally by an unbeliever? Matthew 5:44, "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you..." Now notice carefully that it does not say to forgive them. Why? Because there is no repentance. If repentance takes place, forgiveness is immediately in order!

Now turn to Matthew 18. Our next question is, what if I am sinned against by a believer? Well, Matthew 18:15-18 says this:

15 *Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.*

16 *But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.'*

17 *And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.*

What is the instruction? If your brother sins against you. Forgiven him, right? No! Deal with it as the Bible instructs. It is our failure to deal with sin in the church that leads us to such teachings as unconditional forgiveness. I have had a number of people come to me over the years where they claimed they had been sinned against by another believer. And I asked if they had taken these steps. None ever had and none came back after being instructed to follow these steps. It is one of the most disobeyed passages in the NT.

Turn now to Luke 17. The teaching of unconditional forgiveness is based mostly on one verse, Mark 11:25 which says, *And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.* Does Matthew 18:15-18 teach one thing and this verse another? Of course not! All throughout Scripture the order of forgiveness is described as it is given in Luke 17:3-4 which says:

3 *Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.*

4 *And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him.*

The order here is just like in 2 Chronicles; repentance and then forgiveness.

Now forgiveness is a big thing, very big. Every sin, no matter how small is bad; very bad. I have explained as best I could in an earlier message how bad sin is. It is like a man who burns your house with your family in it. And we ask, how much money could he give us to satisfy our loss? How long could he work for us to satisfy our loss? There is no price. And that is some idea of how bad sin is to God. You know the price God paid, that horrendous price that satisfied His wrath. It was a price we would not pay, but He did.

And now, when we have sinned, God requires of us only that we confess our sins and repent of them and trust God for forgiveness. But that requirement is non-negotiable. There has slipped into modern teaching the doctrine of unconditional forgiveness. It says that when we are wronged we must forgive unconditionally. It is one of those teachings that has subtly undermined the health of the Church.

Forgiveness always requires repentance first. It is so with God, and it is so with man. I am amazed at how repentance, that is true repentance, works. It does amazing things. I am also amazed at how we fight repentance when we have wronged another. It requires a sheer death of self to truly repent.

So, how does one deal with things that cannot be dealt with, for example, when an unbeliever sins against us? Well, we read Matthew 5:44 earlier. It says, "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you..."

Romans 12:19-21 goes a little further. It says,

19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.

20 Therefore *"If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head."*

21 *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

First, we are not to avenge ourselves. That is to take justice into our own hands. We are to give place to wrath. That is a difficult clause. I understand it to teach that we are to make room for God's wrath. When we avenge ourselves, we do not give God the privilege to do what He wants to do. He wants to deal with that wrong. So the reason we make room for His wrath is because He says, "Vengeance is mine says the Lord, I will repay." How do you stay from bitterness? If it is an unbeliever, do what Matthew 5 said. If it is a believer, do what Matthew 18 said. If that cannot be done, then hand this over to God and trust Him with it. He will take care of it in His own way.

When we have sinned against someone, or they have sinned against us, and some time goes by, sometimes maybe five or ten years; and then finally things are forgotten, or overlooked and things are resumed as though nothing ever happened, that is not forgiveness. One of our folk said, "All that has changed is the date." Some day somewhere that sin is coming up again. With God, every wrong must be made right. My view on where that happens I have dealt with this in the series, "Your First Day In Heaven."

What we must be clear on from 2 Chronicles 7:14 is that repentance and confession precedes forgiveness.

But what if we are sinned against by another believer, and they are in another church? Sometimes when matters like this cannot be dealt with, I believe we need to hand this over to God in the same way as described in Romans 12. To go on acting like nothing happened is only describable by the word hypocrisy.

Well, in this passage, when man has repented and confessed to God, God forgives. That is God! We saw this in wicked king Manasseh. God's mercy endures forever!

C. Heal Their Land - all the way back to verse 13.

Turn once more to 2 Chronicles 7. We have come to our last point in our passage. When man repents and returns to God in repentance and confession, God's ears open to their cries. Then He forgives them. And now third, He says He will heal their land. So turn to 2 Chronicles 7:13 and we'll read through verse 14.

13 "When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence 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 I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

Now notice that if God's people, who have strayed, come back to Him, He will heal their land. It will be well with them again. We are there in America. There is one hope. It is not in politics or reformation, it is in the repentance of the Church as a whole. Sin had caused God to close up heaven's blessings so that all there is, is a vast parched land. There are deep cracks in the earth, and the dust devils twirl in the dry heat, drawing the dust up. There is not a cloud in the sky. But when God's people return, they humble themselves and pray and seek His face and turn from their wicked ways, now there is a lush valley, with a river flowing through it, and vegetation that looks like it will burst with water if you should touch it. In our day, that is the picture of a spiritually vibrant Christian.

Psalm 1:1-3 says,

1 Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;

2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.

3 He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper.

Now notice verse 15 in 2 Chronicles 7:

15 Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to prayer made in this place.

What is that but a picture of reconciliation? I don't think anyone will argue that unconditional forgiveness, when it is practiced as it is taught today, without repentance having taken place, brings about true reconciliation. Nor do those of this view practice unconditional forgiveness in order to bring about reconciliation. They do it to avoid bitterness, at least as far as I can find. But sins must be dealt with in the biblical way in order to bring about true reconciliation. If repentance does not take place, nor is the relationship truly healed no matter how much one seeks to unconditionally forgive.

Furthermore, when true repentance takes place, and forgiveness is extended, reconciliation takes place. Why? Because this is what is right. God prescribed this way because it is right. And when God and His people were reconciled, they always prospered, just as God promised here.

Turn to Psalm 126 where this is so very clearly shown. Psalm 120-134 are called the Psalms of ascent. Three times a year all Jewish males were to appear in Jerusalem for the three festival seasons. And as they came, thousands upon thousands of foot travelers, often with wife and children with them, they would sing the ascent Psalms. And one of these Psalms they sang was Psalm 126. This is song seven of

the fifteen. It is a late Psalm, of which we do not know the writer, but it is thought likely to have been Ezra who led some of the Jews back from the Babylonian captivity to Jerusalem. Or it might have been written by Zechariah or Haggai, prophets of that time.

One of the things that always accompanies a return or coming back to God after having strayed is restoration to God and that restoration brings joy. So look at verse 1 and the first part of verse 2:

1 When the LORD brought back the captivity of Zion, We were like those who dream. 2 Then our mouth was filled with laughter, And our tongue with singing.

John Calvin gives an interesting insight to the word 'captivity' in verse one. He says the word is *shibath* and could mean a bringing back, or a coming back. That is fitting for the title of these messages. Whenever we give in to sin, we are taken captive. Paul says to Timothy, as a pastor, in 2 Timothy 2:25-26:

25 In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;

26 And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.

The devil is good at trapping or snaring Christians with sin. And when we enter his snares, when he comes to check his snares, and when we are caught he holds us captive at his will. The way out of this snare is singular; humility, confession and turning from our wicked ways.

And in Psalm 126:1, we find such poor wretched sinners delivered from the snare. In this case it was Israel's deliverance from Babylon. And we might read verse one like this: When the LORD released us from the snare of Babylon, We were like those who dream. Clark comments about these

dreamers like this: "The news was so unexpected that we doubted for a time the truth of it. We believed it was too good news to be true, and thought ourselves in a dream or illusion." Poole says, "We were like them that dream; we were so surprised and astonished with the report of such a favour, that we could not believe our own eyes and ears, but thought it to be but a dream or delusion of our own fancies; as is usual in matters of great joy..."

John Trapp says their deliverance was like Peter who was released from prison by an angel and he thought he was dreaming. Such is the experience of true revival, when sinners are released from the captivity of sin.

We have talked about leaving God and coming back to Him. When we leave God, we enter a spiritual captivity. To one who has tasted the goodness of God, spiritual captivity is a dreadful place. To be delivered from that captivity is what is described in this Psalm. God said that if those who left Him would humble themselves and pray and turn from their wicked ways, he would hear from heaven, forgive their sin and heal their land. And in this Psalm they have returned after leaving.

True revival always deals with sin and always brings joy and singing. Now let us read all of verses 1-2:

1 When the LORD brought back the captivity of Zion, We were like those who dream.

2 Then our mouth was filled with laughter, And our tongue with singing. Then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."

Here is a second thing that invariably happens. The world sits up to take notice. The heathen, the nations, the lost say, "The LORD," that is Jehovah God, "has done great things for them!" When Christians truly get revived it affects the lost around them. Why is the Church so powerless today? There is sin in the Church. If we had a

true revival, the power would return and the world would take notice. If one reads about revivals, this is what happens.

So, the heathen say, "Wow! The LORD has done great things for them!" And the Christian says, verse 3:

3 The LORD has done great things for us, And we are glad.

Now verses 4-6 are somewhat puzzling. Verse 4 says:

4 Bring back our captivity, O LORD, As the streams in the South.

In the previous verses the deliverance seems to have been accomplished, but in this verse it sounds as if the request is made again to be delivered. I think the majority of commentators are right when they suggest that those who arrived first, say those who arrived with Ezra, are singing with joy. And now they are requesting that the rest of the captivity would come back as well. Now notice that it says, "Bring back..." Our subject is coming back to God.

And now the request is for the LORD to bring back the rest of the captivity. Why did they not come back with the first wave or two? They were caught in bondage. They had been there so long they could not let go of friends and family and possessions. They had grown into Babylon. Someone has said of Israel that when they came out of Egypt that first it was hard to get Israel out of Egypt, and then it was hard to get Egypt out of Israel. Here Israel against every wish and in the most horrible of circumstances was forcefully taken to Babylon, and now it was hard to get them out of Babylon.

And I think verses 4-6 speak of those who have left Babylon, have left all that was familiar to them behind, are calling for those who are still there to come home. You see, there were people there who were 65 years old and they

had never seen Israel. They had just heard of it. They had been born in Babylon and that is all they knew. And knowing that it will be hard for them to leave everything, verse 5 says:

5 Those who sow in tears Shall reap in joy.

So it is when we have grown used to living in some sin. We find it hard to leave all. It may cost us friends. It may cost us our wardrobe, It may cost us family. It may cost us financially. But those who sow in tears will reap in joy. So verse 6 says:

6 He who continually goes forth weeping, Bearing seed for sowing, Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, Bringing his sheaves with him.

Those who are already in Israel are calling to those who are still captive in Babylon. You see, now they are free to leave Babylon, but they are captive by their own will. But here is what is puzzling. If they go forth with weeping, bearing seed for sowing, they shall doubtless come rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them. How can they return with sheaves?

I recommend that as they leave they are continually sowing precious seed, and that seed is the seed of tears sowed in leaving Babylon. I also recommend that leaving the land of captivity costs tears, precious tears. It is amazing what God can accomplish in us when we come to the place of tears. So they go forth from Babylon weeping, but they come to Jerusalem rejoicing. They have come sowing tears, they arrive bearing sheaves. What are the sheaves? The fruit of their tears! The joy of being home!

Take the prodigal son. He left his father of his own volition. He ended up feeding pigs, truly he ended up in a spiritual pigpen. Can you imagine what torture of soul he went through to consider going back to his father and

saying, "I was wrong"? Can you imagine what a trail of tears he left going home? But when he came and repented, of all the bad things he imagined could happen, none did. Instead, sheaves of joy!

I suppose he said something like this: *When the LORD brought me to my senses and I came home to my father, I was like those who dream. Then my mouth was filled with laughter, And my tongue with singing. Then they said among the neighbors, "The LORD has done great things for him." The LORD has done great things for me, And I am so glad.*

CONCL: So we conclude these messages on coming back to God. Today we have churches with many who are either not saved, or who are living a life which is far from God. It looks almost impossible that things can be turned around. But we saw in king Manasseh that the impossible is possible.

I have recommended that when man leaves God, God sometimes has to remain silent for a long time before man is ready to hear Him. And when man is ready, God speaks, not in words, but in action. And when man has an ear to hear, the very first thing he must do is humble himself. Oh, how hard this is. And then he must pray, not a general prayer, but a prayer of repentance and confession dealing with specific sin. He must seek God's face. We have said that our whole life is determined by our view of God. When we see God for who He is we will see ourselves for who we are. And then we must turn from our wicked ways.

When we do those things, God says He will hear and He will forgive their sins, and reconciliation will take place. You see, true repentance and forgiveness brings about reconciliation. And when man and God are reconciled, God says He will heal their land.

Psalm 126 speaks of such a return to God. Israel had deeply sinned, and after 70 years they were brought back to the land. Spurgeon sums up Psalm 126 with a poem. It comes from a book called, "The Hebrew Psalter. A New Metrical Translation", which

was done in 1882. Let me go slowly. It is old and a bit hard to follow.

When, her sons from bonds redeeming,
God to Zion led the way,
We were like to people dreaming
Thoughts of bliss too bright to stay.
Fill'd with laughter, stood we gazing,
Loud our tongues in rapture sang;
Quickly with the news amazing
All the startled nations rang.

"See Jehovah's works of glory!
Mark what love for them he had!"
"Yes, FOR US! Go tell the story.
This was done, and we are glad."

Lord! thy work of grace completing
All our exiled hosts restore,
As in thirsty channels meeting
Southern streams refreshing pour.

They that now in sorrow weeping
Tears and seed commingled sow,
Soon, the fruitful harvest reaping,
Shall with joyful bosoms glow.

Tho' the sower's heart is breaking,
Bearing forth the seed to shed,
He shall come, the echoes waking,
Laden with his sheaves instead.

The key to remember after coming back to God is that it is so much better to never leave. If we walk humbly with our God, and pray to Him regularly in confession when sin takes place, and seek His face continually, and turn from all sin, we will never leave God. And it is possible to live just such a life.