

IF MY PEOPLE #1

INTRO: In the next few messages I want us to briefly consider 2 Chronicles 7:13-14. In this message we'll look at verse 13 and 14a. I have mentioned these verses numerous times during my years of preaching. But I have never preached on this passage in several messages in English. I have had this interest since I did the messages in German many years ago.

In the context of those verses, you will remember that David wanted to build a house for God but God would not allow it because he was a man of war. And when Solomon came along, he built this house. David had left all the instructions for him on how to build it.

And when the temple was finished and it was dedicated to God, Solomon prayed and we'll begin by reading 1-16:

1 When Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the temple.

2 And the priests could not enter the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD had filled the LORD'S house.

3 When all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the LORD on the temple, they bowed their faces to the ground on the pavement, and worshiped and praised the LORD, saying: "For He is good, For His mercy endures forever."

4 Then the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the LORD.

5 King Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty-two thousand bulls and one hundred and twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the people dedicated the house of God.

6 And the priests attended to their services; the Levites also with instruments of the music of the LORD, which King David had made to praise the LORD, saying, "For His mercy endures forever," whenever David offered praise by their ministry. The priests sounded trumpets opposite them, while all Israel stood.

7 Furthermore Solomon consecrated the middle of the court that was in front of the house of the LORD; for there he offered burnt offerings and the fat of the peace offerings, because the

bronze altar which Solomon had made was not able to receive the burnt offerings, the grain offerings, and the fat.

8 At that time Solomon kept the feast seven days, and all Israel with him, a very great assembly from the entrance of Hamath to the Brook of Egypt.

9 And on the eighth day they held a sacred assembly, for they observed the dedication of the altar seven days, and the feast seven days.

10 On the twenty-third day of the seventh month he sent the people away 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.

11 Thus Solomon finished the house of the LORD and the king's house; and Solomon successfully accomplished all that came into his heart to make in the house of the LORD and in his own house.

12 Then the LORD appeared to Solomon by night, and said to him: "I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice.

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,

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

16 "For now I have chosen and sanctified this house, that My name may be there forever; and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually.

Now notice first verse 13 God says:

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,

Now why in the world would God do something like this in the promised land to His own people? Well, the answer is at least twofold. First in verse 14 it says:

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.

God's people had sinned. When sin had gone far enough God did things like those recorded in verse 13 this and much worse. Now this is written to God's nation, the nation of Israel. I propose these verses hold true for all of God's people of all times here on earth. We may need deliverance from one sin or many. The more we let wrong grow, the blinder we are to our own life. We may say, "I am not living in sin." But maybe there is resentment or bitterness or anger, and one will become blind to one's own heart.

Why would God shut up heaven so that it didn't rain, or why would He command the locusts to devour the land? Why would he send pestilence among His people? The first reason was sin. Here is the second reason. Until Christians, who are living in some disobedience to God are brought to where they have something they cannot control, they will not listen to God. Israel could not control the rain or the locusts or pestilence. When God brings on us things we cannot handle, then we may turn to Him. As long as we can handle our problems, we do not need to let ourselves low enough to repent or ask for help. Israelis lived off the land and when it does not rain there is nothing you can do.

When Israel had slowly slidden back and they were in need of discipline, do you think Israel said something like this: "I think we will just live in sin. We are God's people, and He won't mind if we live in sin. I know He said we shouldn't do worship false gods, but we'll do it anyway." Do you think they said that? No, most definitely not. Do you know why? Because people who have let things go do not even know where they are. They think they are OK. It is like parents who let their children go with things and soon they do not even notice disobedience. They have let many small things go already.

Does anyone know which of the seven churches was the first one the Lord addressed in Revelation 2? It was the church of Ephesus. What made Ephesus important was its harbor. And that harbor had been silting up for many years. Do you know how big or small a piece of silt is? I am told much of it is far smaller than sand. It is very small. But what happened is that through the years the harbor was being silted in with zillions of pieces silt. This went on until ships could no longer enter the harbor, and the prominence of the city fell until it ceased. It died from many small things.

What happened to Israel in the OT is that little things came in until they arrived at the place where God could no longer let it

go. And then He allowed things to come on them they could not handle. Sometimes He allowed a foreign nation to come in and kill thousands upon thousands of the people, and many others were deported. One such deportation was to Babylon. Listen to Psalm 137:1-4:

*1 By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down, yea, we wept
When we remembered Zion.*

2 We hung our harps Upon the willows in the midst of it.

*3 For there those who carried us away captive asked of us a
song, And those who plundered us requested mirth, Saying, "Sing
us one of the songs of Zion!"*

4 How shall we sing the LORD'S song In a foreign land?

When God has to deal with us, singing wants to come to an end. Joy is gone. And when one begins to let little things go, one fails to recognize what is happening it becomes bigger and bigger. And when that happened in Israel they no longer recognized where they were and God allowed them to be brutally chastised and many were deported to Babylon. When God sends us to Babylon, the singing of the soul dies.

When we are in need of revival, the joy of the Lord leaves. This may happen for other reasons but it will certainly happen when we are in need of revival. Now when one is first in need of revival one may not be that far from the Lord yet, and if one acts soon enough one can avoid the need for great repentance. The longer one lets things pile up, the greater will be the need for revival.

Let me ask you, do we think we know in what kind of shape our own heart, or mind is? We do well to ask God from time to time to reveal to us if there is any wicked way in us. The Psalmist said in Psalm 139, "I cannot flee from you. If I go to heaven, there You are. If I make my bed in hell, even there you are."

Then in verses 23-24 he said:

*23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my
anxieties;*

*24 And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the
way everlasting.*

The Psalmist is saying, "I want to be clean. I cannot hide from You. I must meet You no matter where I go." We cannot hide from God, but our mind is so depraved that in it, we can hide from who we really are. When we are there, no one but God can expose us. We do well to pray this prayer from time to time.

When God exposes in us something that is not right, then we need to deal with it. We cannot deal with something we do not see. And we cannot deal with something others accuse us of if we do not see we are wrong. We can only rightly deal with something when God gets hold of our heart and exposes our heart to us, like Nathan exposed David's sin to him.

And when we are there, here is God's Word to us:

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.

What is God's first word to us when we have been exposed? We must humble ourselves. We cannot humble somebody else by demanding it of them. We might be able to humiliate them, but like the wrath of man, that will never accomplish the purposes of God.

Let me give a longer quote from what I said over 10 years ago in a message on Job. And in that message I quoted from another message I did, so some of you might be familiar with it but it fits right here. I said:

"A verse of Scripture that becomes common to almost every believer who attends church regularly for any amount of time is 2 Chronicles 7:14. It says, "...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 forgive their sin and heal their land." End quote.

"Now this is one of the greatest verses on revival there is in all the Bible. One could do a message on every phrase in this verse. I believe I need revival. I believe this church needs revival. I believe the Christians in this community need revival. And this verse speaks to the people of God, "...if My people..." These are God's people. And it is God's people that are in need here. These are God's people who are called by His name, "...if my people who are called by My name..."

"Now these people, who are God's people, stand in need. And the very first need they have is the need for humility. "...if my people which are called by My name shall humble themselves..." End quote.

"There is the great need of mankind. This past week, as I sat in my office, the power flicked off. As I sat there trying to figure out what to do, I made some phone calls I needed to make. And then my eyes fell on a book I had not yet finished written by Andrew Murray called, "Humility." I had been sent this book by a cousin from Manitoba but had not finished reading it in over a year, though I was almost done. So I picked it up and finished it. Now through the week I had worked on the first message of a number of messages I want to do on God. But through the week something else wanted to crowd into my mind. And as I put those thoughts together, this message began to formulate."

I'll skip a bit and pick it up again like this:

"'...If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves...' I want to point out why the need for these words in Scripture. Very few people are as familiar with the verse before this one as they are with the verse I read. As a matter of fact, 2 Chronicles 7:14 starts in the middle of a sentence. The verse before this one, the first part of the sentence reads like this: 'When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people...' Then he goes on to say, '...if my people...'

"You see, the setting is a time that is one of drought and grasshoppers in the land; a time of blight and blasting. God has allowed a hard time to set in because of the hardness of the people. We find ourselves in such circumstances spiritually sometimes because the soul has grown hard and callous.

"John R. Rice writes of people, when their hearts are like this. In his writings he quotes B. H. Carroll 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."

"I wonder if you say this morning, "Pastor Phil, the picture those words painted describe how my heart feels. I am in a time of drought. I need God like that land needed rain." The very first thing God says we need to do is humble ourselves, and before we humble ourselves we must see our need for humility. We must come to desire humility.

"Andrew Murray writes, 'Is it any wonder that the Christian life is so often feeble and fruitless, when the very root of the Christ life (i.e. humility) is neglected or unknown? Is it any wonder that the joy of salvation is so little felt, when that in which Christ found it and brings it, is so little sought? Until a humility which will rest in nothing less than the end and death of self; which give up all honor of men as Jesus did, to seek the honor that comes from God alone; which absolutely makes and counts itself nothing, that God may be all that the Lord alone may be exalted, until such a humility be what we seek in Christ above our chief joy, and welcome at any price, there is little hope of a religion that will conquer the world" (10).

I skip a little more and go on:

"...Do you want rain? Let me continue this quote, 'I cannot too earnestly plead with my reader, if possibly his attention has never yet been specially directed (to) the lack of humility within him or around him, to pause to ask whether he sees much of the spirit of the meek and lowly Lamb of God in those who are called by His name. Let him consider how all want of love; all indifference to the needs, the feelings, the weakness of others; all sharp and hasty judgments and utterances, so often excused under the plea of being outright and honest; all manifestations of temper and touchiness and irritation; and all feelings of bitterness and estrangement have their roots in nothing but pride, that ever seeks itself, and his eyes will be opened to see how a dark, shall I not say a devilish pride creeps in almost everywhere, the assemblies of the saints not excepted. Let him begin to ask what would be the effect if in himself and around him, if towards fellow saints and the world, believers were really permanently guided by the humility of Jesus; and let

him say if the cry of our whole heart, night and day, ought not to be, Oh for the humility of Jesus in myself and all around me! let him honestly fix his heart on his own lack of the humility, which has been revealed in the likeness of Christ's life, and in the whole character of His redemption, and he will begin to feel as if he had never yet really known what Christ and His salvation are" end quote (11).

Here is another quote: "When we are dry and fruitless and loveless, what is likely the chief cause? Pride!"

"...Murray says, 'Let all teachers of holiness, whether in the pulpit or on the platform, and all seekers after holiness, whether in the closet or the convention, take warning. There is no pride so dangerous, because none is subtle and insidious, as the pride of holiness. It is not that a man ever says or even thinks, 'Stand by; I am holier than thou.' No, indeed, the thought would be regarded with abhorrence. But there grows up, all unconsciously, a hidden habit of soul, which feels complacency in its attainments, and cannot help seeing how far it is in advance of others.'" End quote(45).

So, 2 Chronicles 7:14 says:

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.

I want us to notice how this verse opens. It says, "If My people who are called by My name..." I want to ask you; when there is a need for revival, where is that need? Let me tell you where it is not. It is not in the lost. The lost do not need revival. To revive means to bring to life again. It is a bringing back to life. The lost have never had life. They need an awakening. It is Christians who need revival. I can tell you who does not want revival and will resist it. It is the proud. That is as certain as death and taxes. So, at the outset, let me ask you if you want revival. What price would you be willing to pay if God touched your heart and said, 'You have sinned. You need to repent.'

I do not know how accurately I see things, but I see a need of revival in our church. We need revival. And, there will be those who are listening online who need revival. I do not know of a good revival preacher we could get and I am not a revival preacher but I will do what I can.

I want us to bow our heads and talk to God. Young people, you need to pray too. Say something like this to Him, "I think I am quite all right Lord. I do not know of anything I need to take care of." Or say, "Lord, I don't know of anything wrong, but if there is, will You show me what it is." Or you might say, "Lord, I have a problem. I am bitter." Or, "I envy so and so." Or I talk about others in such a way as to run them down." Or, "I am jealous. And it is causing problems in my life." Or, "It seems there is something I need to change. Would you speak to me and bring me to where I know what it is and I will do what needs to be done." Or you may say, "Lord, I am just very discouraged." Or you may pray anything on your heart. Let's pray.

Then let me ask you if you want revival whether you can see a need or not. If there is a need, do you want it? Before you answer that question, let me ask you, if revival for you would mean you need to repent to the very last person you would want to go to, do you still want revival?

Why does an individual or a church or a country need revival? Because there is a person, or a church, or a country that needs to deal with some sin or a lot of sin. Most likely they are not aware of what is wrong or they won't admit it and have talked themselves into being OK. And life begins to move away from God. I remember of husband and wife, a couple who were of our own background. Their last name was Thiessen. They were either on the brink of or making moves toward divorce. And then the Suterera Twins, revival preachers, came to town. This couple had nothing to lose. They went. I ask, was all their bickering and fighting the problem? No, that was the fruit. The root went deeper. Things could not get worse, and so they went to listen. The marriage was totally turned around and they were a brand-new couple. Their testimony went around the world and helped many others.

Maybe you say, "Well, I am not living in sin." Let me ask you, is there resentment towards others? Is there bitterness? Is there envy? Is there jealousy? Is there anger towards others?

In 1972 the Sutereras came to Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. They started in a smaller church and had to move to larger and larger facilities. Revival had begun. So many experienced renewal that after some time they were sending out small teams of lay people who had been revived to go and share in other churches in Canada and revivals started all over our land.

Well, in those revival meetings people heard a divine language. Many people were revived. Then these teams went to the United States and soon they were going overseas. And people were getting right with God all over.

It is not the lost that need revival. It is the saved. The word "revive" means to bring to life again. They had life once, but like the heads of grain that begin to hang down, not from weight of seed, but from lack of water, they needed a shower of blessing. And the first thing that will need to be dealt with is self. It will put self back on the cross again by calling for repentance. But before repentance can come, there must come a revelation from God, an internal revelation, that points the finger at us like Nathan pointed to David and said, "You are the man." Or it might be, "You are the woman." Our young people need to see life in us, the ones who profess to be Christians. Some of our young people, if they are truly born again, need revival. "If My people, which are called by My name..." These are the ones who need revival.

I have told you about a young lady in the Sutera Twin revival meetings. She was the princess of the youth group. Everybody looked to her. She had no interest in revival until the older people of the church began to open up their hearts and she saw reality. Maybe our young people need to see something that is real in us before they are ready to deal with their own sin.

The one who needs revival will never experience it until they first get to see their own heart. God can do that for young people through older people who get real. Only God can show us our own heart. We are well aware that our heart, and we'll call it what it is, our mind; that our mind is desperately wicked and deceitful above all things. I am not known to do this, but I want you to repeat this in your mind: "My mind is desperately wicked." Now say this: "My mind is deceitful and worse than anything I know about any politician." We know that is true but we have a hard time believing it.

Second, none of us will ever experience revival unless we first bend our neck in repentance by our own free will and we humbly bow before God and confess and then deal with whatever sin God reveals to us. It may be going to someone else and confessing, and asking for forgiveness. Let me tell you what has happened to me. Sometimes I watched some movie or read a book. It may not even be a true story but something given in that story spoke to my heart and said, "That is what you are like." God can speak through a donkey if need be.

Let me read a few Scriptures on help us understand revival. You will remember the story of Jacob and his 12 sons and how those sons wickedly sold their younger brother into slavery. It is amazing how cruel we can be towards one another without recognizing where we are ourselves. Well, this about took Jacob's life. And year after year went by and then famine struck and Jacob's sons had to go to Egypt to buy grain. You know the story. They were buying grain from their own brother, whom they did not recognize.

You can read through that story and say, "Well, you know, Joseph shouldn't have tattled on his brothers. He shouldn't have told them his dreams. He was just asking for trouble." But listen carefully. If his brothers had been right with God, would that have bothered them? No! If they had been right with God, God would not have needed to give Joseph dreams like that in the first place. Because of Joseph's life of obedience, he qualified to reveal these brother's hearts to them. Humility knows no jealousy or envy. A truly revived life does not resent like that. They were in great need of a work of God, but they did not know it. But Joseph, who qualified to do this exposure, experienced persecution from his own brothers. Jesus, who qualified to expose people's hearts died for doing so. This exposure business is a dangerous business.

You know the story. Joseph finally revealed himself to his brothers. He did give them a lot of time to think things over and their conscience told them that their problems were because of how they had treated their brother. Well, when they went back home, they told their dad that Joseph was alive.

Now let me read Genesis 45:27 for you, which tells us what Joseph's brothers said to their dad when they got home:

*27 But when they told him all the words which Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the carts which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father **revived**.*

Literally it says, "the spirit of Jacob their father lived." His spirit had shriveled up. There was no ambition to live. He would have liked to die. But when the good news of Joseph came, his spirit came to life again! He was revived!

Do you remember the account of Elijah when he was fed by ravens? The Lord told him to go to Zarephath, in Sidon. Here he came to a certain woman's house and he asked for some bread and water

and she said she did not have any bread, only a little flour and a little oil, and she was just going to make this last bread for her and her son and then they would die. But he said, "Don't be afraid to make the bread, and bring me the first piece, and afterward you shall make for you and your son.

1 Kings 17:14 says:

14 "For thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the LORD sends rain on the earth.'"

Well, she did that and the flour was never used up, nor the oil.

Now let me read verses 17-21:

17 Now it happened after these things that the son of the woman who owned the house became sick. And his sickness was so serious that there was no breath left in him.

18 So she said to Elijah, "What have I to do with you, O man of God? Have you come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to kill my son?"

19 And he said to her, "Give me your son." So he took him out of her arms and carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his own bed.

20 Then he cried out to the LORD and said, "O LORD my God, have You also brought tragedy on the widow with whom I lodge, by killing her son?"

21 And he stretched himself out on the child three times, and cried out to the LORD and said, "O LORD my God, I pray, let this child's soul come back to him."

Again, literally it says, "And the soul of the child came back to him, and he lived." Well, he lived again! He revived! That is revival. I could give you story after story in the OT like this.

Do you know what happens to shy people when they are revived? They suddenly become, "unshy." I have seen it here in our own town from an older lady whom I would have seen as one who would never go in front of a church and share. She shared. God had dealt with her.

Now listen to Psalms 71:20 on the word revival in the OT,:

20 You, who have shown me great and severe troubles,
Shall **revive** me again, And bring me up again from the depths of
the earth.

When we become prideful, it is not until we have been shown great troubles that we are willing to look at ourselves and to bend our stiff neck. We seem to have to go to the depths of the earth, a grave for the soul, before we become willing to repent. And I can tell you there are people who have been squeezed almost to death by conviction, and they never repented. I have seen what one preacher called slop bucket repentance. And this repentance was done to make things look good while trying to cover over sin by making it look like repentance. Do not play around with God. He won't have it.