

The Sermon on the Mount – Part 5

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Faithfulness of God

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Bible Text: Matthew 5:43-48
Preached On: Sunday, October 2, 2022

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For those of you that do not know, it is Miss Anastasia that is on this organ this evening and I want to not only recognize her, it's always a privilege to have her with us, but for those of you who do not know Miss Anastasia, she is a high school junior and if I understand correctly, you're actually going to graduate a year early, is that true, Miss Anastasia? Are you hiding back there, are you embarrassed? Yes. Aren't you graduating a year early, is that right? Yes. And so not only is she incredible on the organ, she's also pretty good in the classroom. So it is always a privilege to have her and if I understand correctly, her and Philip got together 48 hours ago and said, "Why don't we do 'Great is thy faithfulness'?" So what you had the privilege of hearing just began about 48 hours ago. So again, it's always a privilege to have both of them together but also Miss Anastasia. Thank you so much for lending your skills and your ability here at First Baptist, Opelika.

Well, tonight we're going to be in a little different place than we've been on Sunday evenings and I'll explain that in just a moment. We're going to be back in the Old Testament all the way in the book, and one of the Baptists favorite books of the Bible, 2 Chronicles. Yeah, we love that place, right? 2 Chronicles 7 is where we're going to spend our time tonight and as you're finding that place in scripture, or for those of you who like the electronic versions, as you're typing in the address let me pray for our study this evening.

Heavenly Father, tonight may we come in a posture that is proper for this passage. Lord, may you give us understanding, may you give us instruction, more than anything, Lord, may you allow the promises that are in your word not just to be something of 3,000 years ago but, Lord, can it be realized in our life even this very evening. Lord, as we read these very famous words, Lord, as we hear a very well-known challenge, may we see it in its proper context, more importantly may we see how you desire to take your living active word and apply it even to our very lives today. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

Tonight, I want to kind of deviate from our study in the book of Matthew. If you're not familiar, on Sunday evenings we've been walking through the book of Matthew very slowly, very strategically with kind of this purpose of understanding the totality of

scripture but over the last couple of weeks, whether it's been on Sunday evening, even through 1 Samuel on Sunday morning, and even particularly Wednesday night down in the 316 Center, there has just been an undergirding of thought among our people. I'm beginning to hear people speak of a term that is not often spoken of lately, the term or the concept is what we know as revival. Now by simple definition, revival means to take something that is not living or is barely living and to reinfuse life into it so that it again is what it was designed to be. We revive a heart that is cardiac arrest. In spiritual terms, we as individuals, we as churches, we as communities, even cultures, have at times past and hopefully days present and future experienced what we know as "revival."

Tonight, I want to go into 2 Chronicles 7:14 and I want to read one of the most famous and well-known passages in the Bible in regards to what we know as revival, and then I want to go back and I not only want to read it in its context but I want to address it from a historical perspective what was happening 3,000 years ago, from a doctrinal perspective the people of Israel and what was taking place in their lives, and probably more important for you and I today and this is where the outline is going to come in, is what does it mean for today, what does it mean for tomorrow, what does it mean for our lives.

Verse 14 of 2 Chronicles 7. It's one of those frame-worthy verses in the Bible that we often see decorated as such. It says,

14 If my people, which are called by my name, shall 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.

What a promise, right? I mean, it's so concise, it's so powerful. It's just right there before us. It's just it is what it is.

Now I want to go back and begin in verse 11 and I want to read verses 11 through 22, the entire context of the passage, and then kind of begin to look at the layers. It says,

11 Thus Solomon finished the house of the LORD, and the king's house: and all that came into Solomon's heart to make in the house of the LORD, and in his own house, he prosperously effected. 12 And the LORD appeared to Solomon by night, and said unto him, I have heard thy prayer, and have chosen this place to myself for an house of sacrifice. 13 If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people; 14 If my people, which are called by my name, shall 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 mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place. 16 For now have I chosen and sanctified this house, that my name may be there for ever: and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually. 17 And as for thee, if thou wilt walk before me, as David thy father walked, and do according to all that I have commanded thee, and shalt observe my statutes

and my judgments; 18 Then will I stablish the throne of thy kingdom, according as I have covenanted with David thy father, saying, There shall not fail thee a man to be ruler in Israel. 19 But if ye turn away, and forsake my statutes and my commandments, which I have set before you, and shall go and serve other gods, and worship them; 20 Then will I pluck them up by the roots out of my land which I have given them; and this house, which I have sanctified for my name, will I cast out of my sight, and will make it to be a proverb and a byword among all nations. 21 And this house, which is high, shall be an astonishment to every one that passeth by it; so that he shall say, Why hath the LORD done thus unto this land, and unto this house? 22 And it shall be answered, Because they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, and laid hold on other gods, and worshipped them, and served them: therefore hath he brought all this evil upon them.

Now in context, what's interesting is the great promise of verse 14 never actually came to fruition. This great verse that we so often use as this formula for revival never actually occurred because unfortunately verse 21 and 22 is what actually happened in the life of the Israelites historically.

Speaking of historically, let's look at this passage as where it is chronologically in the timeframe of not only the Old Testament story but God's story. We've been studying on Sunday morning what we know as 1 Samuel, this time period where we go from the judges unto the kings, and one of the things that I want to make note of when we speak about that is understand that the judges did not necessarily, their children did not necessarily follow in their footsteps. In other words, God called a respective judge to be the judge irrespectively as if their parents judged. You know, when we get to the kings, much like we've seen in our modern world today, who rules after the king? Whoever is in the succession, whoever is the lineage. That is why, and I know we see this in some areas of life, but generally speaking that's why in a local church the next pastor when the pastor leaves and/or dies is not necessarily their children. Why? Because it's more like the judges than it is the kings, but that's a whole other story and a whole other message for another day.

But point being what we see when we have the kings is we have Saul, whom we studied this morning, then we have David, then we have Solomon. Saul, if you'll allow me to just say it, it's Sunday night, I kind of get a little loose-lipped, Saul was just a train-wreck. There's no better word to describe him and every aspect of it. David comes along on the scene. He is a man after God's own heart and we'll discover in the next few weeks, yes, he had his failings, yes, he struggled, but at the same time he is the one that God purposed to lead his people. At the end of his life, there was one thing he desired to do more than anything else but the Lord said, "You are a man with bloody hands. You are not allowed to do so." He wanted to build a temple. He wanted a permanent structure for that famous ark of the covenant, the presence of God, the place of sacrifice, the altar of God. He wanted it to be stationary, no longer moving in and out of country, going into storage, coming back out, falling into the hands of the enemies. He wanted it to be

stationary. Whom we know as Solomon is the one whom the Lord would allow the privilege of erecting that very famous structure.

The first half of chapter 7 of 2 Chronicles is actually a parallel of 1 Kings 8. This is not only the finishing of but the dedication of this famous temple. You may remember that when that day when they came to celebrate that the Spirit of God was so thick in that place that the smoke filled the sanctuary and they actually had to worship out in the parking lot, to use our terminology. An incredible experience. God had shown up even in the midst of his people's rebellion. It was kind of a highlight of their life. I mean, after all, this was a time they had struggled and they had rebelled for so long. Finally they have a permanent place for the ark of the covenant. Finally the Spirit of God is among them and with them. And it is then that God gives a warning. He basically says, "If you do things my way it will all work out, but if you don't the locusts, the pestilence, etc."

If you aren't familiar with Old Testament history, Solomon will be the last of the great monarchs. Saul, David, Solomon. After that it divides. We have this big struggle between the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom, and essentially there is this slippery slope post-Solomon's death where the people of God in the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom began this multi-decade, multi-century descent into what we know as the exile into Babylon.

The reason that I bring that to your attention is this is one of those verses that we use for a formula for revival but in its historical context revival never actually occurred. In fact, it was much the opposite. Doctrinally speaking, when I speak doctrinally, what I mean is the passage was spoken to a specific people, at a specific time, for a specific purpose. In 2 Chronicles 7 we have the Jewish people, we have the Israelites, we have the people of the covenant. Remember all the way back in Genesis the Lord came to a man by the name of Abram off in Ur of the Chaldees, modern-day northern basically Iraq, that Babylonian area. He asked him, he said, "Do you believe that I am able even though you and your wife are way beyond the birthing years, do you believe I'm able to give you a child of promise that will begin the lineage of whom we know as the Messiah," Jesus Christ. He said, "I believe." The Bible says he went to a land that he knew not of. Over a series of heartaches and mistakes, eventually whom we know as Isaac was conceived and born. Isaac then had a son by the name of Jacob who had what we know as the famous 12 tribes and eventually over the course of time it would be these 12 tribes who would produce Jesus Christ the Messiah.

The reason this is so important is that this was the lineage leading up to the Messiah, not descending from. In other words, the ark of the covenant, that presence of the Lord was a picture, it was a foreshadowing of what Jesus Christ was to one day do in our lives. In other words, we're dealing with a physical temple, a physical ark of the covenant, and a physical geographical location. When somebody would come in 2 Chronicles 7 and they would go to the temple and they would offer their sacrifice, they would be in the presence of the Lord. When they would go back home, they would no longer be. That's important to the story. Why? Because the presence of God was located in a physical place, though it be stationary it was not in the hearts of the people.

So let's address this from a spiritual perspective. You and I today, aren't you grateful that we don't have to go all the way to the Middle East to get in the presence of God? Aren't you grateful that this morning when you woke up and you wanted to be in the presence of the Lord, you wanted to be in fellowship with his people you didn't have to get on an airplane and travel thousands of miles. You just had to drive down the street, proverbially speaking. Why? Because according to 1 Corinthians 6, when Jesus Christ shed his blood and raised from the grave and you believed upon him, your body became the temple of the Holy Ghost. That's why this verse is so important tonight. This verse, this is what's critical, this verse is not contextually, biblically applicable to a sovereign state on earth. Why? Because there's no country on this earth, including the one you live in, who has the ark of the covenant and the presence of God in a stationary temple. What is this passage applicable to? You and I as individuals and corporate believers.

So when we look at this famous passage, we've got to look at it not from a "sovereign state," not from a geopolitical perspective, we've got to look at this passage of what does this mean for my life? What does this mean for my family? What does this mean for my church? What does this mean for my community? What does this mean "for our culture"? That being said, if you'll allow me to go back into verse 14, we're just going to dissect this tonight what does this mean for our lives because it is a formula for revival, a revival that historically never occurred in the Jewish people's days. It is doctrinally for the Jewish people in their respective place and time but spiritually today it has great application.

The first thing I want to address is the perspective of this passage for you as an individual. "If," that's conditional, is it not? When you use the word "if" you're basically stating that if something occurs, then something else must necessarily follow. It's an if/then statement. It's conditional. Basically in this passage he says, "If my people," and then toward the end he says, "then this will occur." Again, it's one of those statements in life. We're familiar with this. How many times has a parent, maybe one of your children sang tonight and maybe they're kind of getting into that academic, you say, "If you do not study and you fail your test, then you will not go out this weekend." That is an if/then, correct? Alright, or on the negative side, "If you get one more ticket, we will have to put you in jail." I mean, we could use a lot of analogies, right? There are a lot of parallels of if and then. We understand that when somebody begins a statement by "if," there is a condition that's being applied, okay? There is an expectation. There are consequences. There are residuals that will occur based on us participating in and/or rejecting whatever that statement is.

However, tonight I want to introduce you to a term that you may or may not be familiar with. I became familiar with it some years ago and I find it absolutely frightening. The term is called recursion. You may or may not be familiar with it. It actually is a term that originated with computer programming way back in the day. Now I had a privilege years and years ago in my life, kind of those days when personal computers and such were kind of coming of age. I was of the age academically that I was kind of on the ground floor of some of those activities academically speaking. I joke with people I remember when computers didn't have pictures, they actually had words, alright? I remember when

computer monitors didn't have colors, it was just black and white. When you would write computer code, and hear me clearly, I am not a computer coder, I am not a computer programmer, however many many moons ago, I dabbled in it academically.

Why is that important? Because back in "decades ago" there was a computer language that we programmed computers with that used if/then clauses. For example, you could do a simple math formula, okay? You could write a program that said if the answer to the question is an even number, then this would produce a result. It's very simple. I mean, just think of it as elementary mathematics, etc. It's just an if/then. Recursion – listen to this – is when an if/then statement calls itself. Now for example, let's just say for the sake of simplicity tonight that we have written a computer program that is mathematically based, okay? And in this program it's simply a program to where a user is going to take two very simple numbers and add them together on the computer and get the answer, okay? Now one of the things with recursion, the way it works is, if the user gets the right answer, then give them another problem. If they get the right answer, give them another problem. If they get the right answer, give them... Do you see where that stops? It doesn't. In fact, one of the great fears of early days of computer programming and I was there on the very elementary level, so to speak, is if you had a program that involved recursion, you not only sweated, fasted and prayed before you hit return, you did a whole lot of things because as soon as you hit return on that program and it implemented itself, as long as the answer was the proper answer that the program called for, it would continue to run indefinitely. If by chance you put in wrong code, guess what would happen? It's called a computer crash because it would call itself so many times over and over with wrong data that eventually the whole system would shut down.

Why is that important? Because 2 Chronicles 7:14 isn't a one-time Sunday evening worship service kind of verse. It's not an, "If my people get together one time and do the right thing then we're done." In other words, what we see with this verse is when we do as the Lord has called us to do, then he calls us back and he continues to call. It is recursive in nature and so is the detrimental side as well. When he calls us to himself and we reject him, he continues to call, we continue to reject, and do you see what happened? 2 Chronicles 7:14, I want you to hear this perspective: it is either a verse that completely unashamedly blesses us with the favor of God or much the opposite. This isn't one of those passages where you can go, "Well, we had a bad day. We had a bad month." It's recursive in its nature.

"If my people, then this will occur." Speaking of "my people," it's very personal. "If my people who are called by my name." Now again, 3,000 years ago that would have been the Jewish people and the Abrahamic covenant looking forward to whom we know as the Messiah, but put that in today's context. Basically what 2 Chronicles 7:14 is saying is if the people who have cried out to Jesus to save them, the "biblical Christians," if they. Notice he did not say the world. Those who are believers, the church, his body, the bride of Christ.

You know, I'm reminded in John 17 when Jesus is in the garden of Gethsemane. Now when we talk about the garden of Gethsemane and Jesus the night before his crucifixion,

we naturally gravitate to Matthew 26, the famous three statements, "Not my will but yours be done," rightfully so, but John 17 we call the high priestly prayer where for the entirety of the chapter Jesus Christ is just pouring his soul out to the Father. In John 17, there's only one thing that Jesus asked for himself, he says that he would receive the glory that was his before the world began. Everything else is about you, it's about me, it's about those early disciples, that we would walk in truth, that we would be unified etc. One of the most fascinating things that you see in John 17 is Jesus makes this statement in the garden of Gethsemane in his prayer, "I pray not for the world but those whom you've given unto me." In other words, Jesus Christ's prayer in the garden of Gethsemane that the world would be changed would not be with the thousands that were on their way to persecute him and to lead him to the cross, it would be with those 11, remember Judas has gone sideways. It would be those 11 plus Matthias and plus the early believers. He made the statement, Jesus Christ, that if things were going to change, it had to start with his people, those who would bear his name.

I referenced 1 Peter 4:17 this morning. It makes the statement that judgment must begin at the house of God, and the reason that this personalization of the passage is important and I cannot overstate this enough, 2 Chronicles 7:14 biblically speaking has nothing to do with a respective country, sovereign state, or continent. It has everything to do with the body of Christ in today's context. So again, if I could read it in that way, "If the biblical Christians who are called by my name." Not those living in rebellion, though Christians can live in rebellion. Not those that are in authority, though Christians can be in positions of authority. It's very personal that the Bible is calling on the people of God, not the lost world to enact this.

What is the position? To humble themselves. That's an interesting position because the world tells us to do just the opposite, does it not? The world teaches us to get all we can get as quick as we can get it and promote ourselves as best that we can. In fact, you've probably seen the studies that over half of those individuals seeking new positions and jobs fabricate information on their resumes. Why? Because we try to present ourselves better than we actually are. But when we're humble, we're actually presenting ourselves in a position submitting to the authority that is before us, not taking any accolades for ourselves.

It says, "If my people who are called by my name," the first thing is "humble themselves," not turn, not seek. If we don't have a position of humility, if we don't have a position recognizing that God is in charge not ourselves, then the rest of this doesn't matter. The rest of this verse is just an argumentation between you and God. But when one is humble before God, they are prostrate before God, they are in a position that makes them vulnerable and one where they cannot physically resist with an aggressive manner; whoever they are humble before becomes the one who is in charge of the scenario or the situation.

You know, one of the great scriptures of the Bible, Luke 9:23 says, "If any man come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me." I know I've got the analogy on the screen but the only way to grow a great structured tree is to have the seed

and/or the nut die in the ground. That is the picture of humility, that whatever I am can never be what God has designed me or us to be until I am willing to humble myself, die to myself, and allow God to do with me what I cannot do in my own strength. I mean, can you imagine it? I know this is a futile illustration but just hopefully work with me and laugh with me. Can you imagine just an acorn saying, "Do you know what? I don't need to go in the ground. I don't need to be broken open. If you'll just leave me in the green grass, I promise I can grow into a big old tree. I can do it. I know I can. I've got this." You look at that acorn and say, "Oh, Mr. Acorn, do you know that no other acorn has done this. I don't know if you can pull this off." "But I'm different than any other acorn." Do you see the analogy? How many times do we look at our respective lives, we look at our context, we look at our culture, we look at biblical history and go, "I know that's what happened back then but we've got this. We've got means they didn't have. We've got ways they didn't have. We've got resources they didn't have."

But look at God's formula, "If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves." It's very personal and there's a position of humility. So what's the posture? "They must pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways." You know, I think the order of those statements is critical because if you desire to seek God's face without praying you will not see him for who he truly is in your life.

The first thing we do is we pray. We fall upon our face. We seek him. You know, last time we gathered in a context like this, I got a wonderful amount of feedback from what I shared in some stories and such, and those of you that were not here, I apologize for a brief moment, I'll summarize. I spoke of the one and only "local revival" that I ever saw with my own personal eyes some years ago. I spoke about a small community. Remember the story where the town mayor and the town drunk both got saved the same night and everybody started rejoicing and celebrating? Tonight, can I tell you the "rest of the story"? Remember that famous phrase? That little place where I was up in the panhandle of the state of Texas. It was a long drive from any metropolitan area particularly where I lived, and what we know as those services were going to begin on Sunday morning. It wasn't a place where I could drive up early Sunday morning. I had to get there on Saturday evening just because of the length of drive and the location and its remoteness.

I'll never forget that the pastor, we'd been in contact, said, "When you get here on Saturday night," and we'd arranged a certain time to do so, he said, "the church should be unlocked." He said, "I'll meet you there. Just go on in." Now remember I didn't know anybody, okay? I didn't know who they were, what they drove, where they lived etc. That Saturday night, I drove into that small little community in the panhandle of Texas, drove up to the little church where we were going to have the meetings, and guess what? Just as I suspected, there was a car out front. There was a vehicle. I just presumed it was his. I did exactly as he instructed. I walked into the church. It was completely open just like he told me. The lights were on, the problem is I couldn't find him. I was like, "Pastor! Pastor!" I began to walk through the sanctuary. I began to walk through the kitchen. It was a small little, you know, area, and I began to go room to room and I didn't know, I mean, there was a car outside but I couldn't find him.

Finally I made my way around kind of the Sunday school room area and I saw a room, I thought it was odd, it was on Saturday evening, there was a room and you could tell the light was on because it was coming through and the door was closed. It wasn't his office because of where it was located because it was just in a series of Sunday school rooms. I didn't quite understand so I began to approach it not knowing what or whom I was going to run into. When I got about 4-5 feet away from the door, I heard some really strange noises. In fact, it was kind of like a groaning, a moaning. It sounded like somebody was in trouble. I mean, it really did. So what did I do? I got nervous so I would naturally respond and though I did it quietly, I did it quickly, I went and I opened the door and there on the floor of that old Sunday school room was a young lady prostrate on her face, tears hitting the carpet, praying for God to move.

Now can I tell you the rest of the story? Remember I told you about the two men? One of them was her husband. When we humble ourselves and we pray, it's after we pray that we then see God's face, and when we see God's face, we will naturally turn from our wicked ways. I can give you evidence of this and I don't want to pick on us as adults, so let's go back to our childhood. Did you ever, and I know you probably didn't because you're good Baptists, I know, but did you ever in your upbringing ever participate in something at school and/or home that you should have never been participating in, and as soon as you heard the door open you hid whatever it was? You know you did. Do you know why you know you did? Because your kids did and all your kid is doing is acting just like you did. But nonetheless, when a person of authority... Okay, I'll make it simple. I'll make it personal. Why is it when you're going down the highway and all of a sudden you see a police officer on the side of the road, why do you slam on your brakes no matter how fast you're going? Why? Because your instinct is, "I'm doing something wrong. I can't be caught." Right?

You know, one of the problems with verse 14 is I think that we get these backwards. I think we think, "Well, if I turn from my wicked ways, then I'll want to pray and I'll see God." The problem is when we turn from our wicked ways, in and of themselves all we're doing is a futile exercise in carnality. If you don't believe me, try to quit doing something you can't stop doing in your own strength and power. Why? Because it's got us and we can quit for a while or a season. You want proof of this? How many people in three months are going to go on a diet? The beginning of the year, right, you go on a diet and you say, "I'm going to lose this amount of weight. I'm going to get in shape. I'm going to buy a membership at a gym." That all goes south by Valentine's Day, right? Why? Because you're doing it in your strength. You get tired of getting up early. You get tired of being sore. You get tired of all those things.

What does it says here? "Pray, seek my face, turn from your wicked ways." You know, I used the illustration of an acorn falling on the ground and burying the fruit of a great tree. Our turning from our wicked ways is the fruit of us being in the presence of God which happens when we seek his face and pray. I cannot tell you how many people I've spoken to over the years who struggled with all kinds of temptations and difficulties and whatever it may be, that when they just sought the presence of the Lord, when they

prayed, when they sought his face, they say, "You know, it was really weird, I didn't want to do it anymore. It was strange, it wasn't something I desired anymore. I don't know what happened, it just went away." Why? Because of this formula that we have here in verse 14.

And finally, there is a promise. It says, "If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves, pray, seek my face, turn from their wicked ways," here's the "then." Remember the if/then? "Then I will hear from heaven, I will forgive their sin, I will heal their land." Now doctrinally speaking, remember the Israelites, they're fighting with the Philistines, the Israelites, it's always about the possession of a land, there's a king by the name of David, now it is Solomon, but let's put that in our context today. You cannot think in terms of earthly prosperous blessings, okay? And I know that the older one gets, the more mature and the more wise one gets, it is the non-material things of life that are a greater blessing than the material. Why? Because the material all fade away, they all rust, and they all break, but the non-material are the most vital and the most important.

That being said, he will hear from heaven. I've got news for you: did you know that all of our energies and our endeavors don't impress God? I mean, seriously, it's almost like he's like, "That's all you've got?" He hears from us, he desires us when we humble ourselves, when we pray and seek his face, when we turn from our wicked ways. Notice it says he will forgive. We talked about this this morning, how many of us just want out of the consequences of whatever problem we've concocted for ourselves, how many of us just want the environment changed, we want the world changed, we want our surroundings changed. He said, "I will hear and I will forgive."

Now what's interesting is in this passage he doesn't use the word "restoration." He doesn't use the concept of taking that which is now broken and return it to a state prior to its brokenness. He uses the word "heal." Now obviously this is a term we use in the medical world a whole lot so let me apply this medically speaking and then we're going to take it to an agricultural model. If you've ever had a wound in your life, if you've ever had a struggle in your life that required healing, let me ask you a very rhetorical honest question: did it always get better before it got worse or worse before it got better? If you've never been through surgery, you always have to go through a worse experience for the healing, correct? If you've ever had a surgical procedure, you know that when something is not right it typically involves some kind of incision, some type of procedure that causes bruising, it causes pain, it causes agony, it causes all kinds of difficulty but if you will allow it – listen – to heal over time, what do you discover? You're stronger on the backside than you were on the frontside, you're able to move on the backside things that could not move on the frontside. In other words, when he said, "I will hear, I will forgive and I will heal," he does not say, "I'll just make it like it never happened." In other words, one of the biggest difficulties that we have for revival is seeking the face of God and things actually get worse and we say, "Well, this must not have been worth it. Shouldn't have gone down this path. I thought God was going to make everything great." He said, "I'll heal." Well, healing oftentimes involves painful experiences prior to new movement or whatever it may be.

Let's talk about this from an agricultural perspective and I put this on the outline. Sometimes the best way to heal land is just to torch it. It really is. Sometimes the best way to make a piece of property fertile again is to burn it off, and when you burn it and all that thatch and all the rudiments get torched and the nutrients can return again.

That's what I want to close on tonight. Why is it that 2 Chronicles 7:14 is rarely realized in our lives? Because most of the time we make it about a sovereign state or a political entity and not about the bride of Christ in today's context. Secondly, is because most of us down deep don't want to go through the potential hardships that it takes to get to the place where God really brings revival to our lives, our family's lives, our community and our culture's lives. I know for better or for worse that I'm a sports fan and we're getting into one of those championship seasons for the sport of baseball. Obviously, over time the respective sports of football, basketball will come along. But have you ever noticed that when a championship team is interviewed with the trophy the commentary that the coaches and the players give? Can I tell you what they never say? Alright, now just allow me for a second just a little bit of grace. Here you've got a championship trophy in the hands of the team and the coach and those who are on tv and they come in the interview and they say, "Alright, coach, how did this all come to fruition?" They never say, "Woo, man, it was easy. We just glided into the championship." What do they always say? "We had to overcome injuries, personal hardships. We had to persevere." You do realize the same people that hoist the trophy are the same people that were in training camp? The same people whose names are written on a trophy that will last through the ages are the same ones that showed up the first day of practice? You say, "What's the difference?" They were willing to persevere. They were willing to go through the hardships. They were willing to give the attention and the time that maybe others were not willing to do so. We've heard stories time and time again of less talented teams who won against more talented teams because they were willing to put into it what it required to get where they were.

Why is that important? Because he says, "If you do this, I will hear you, I will forgive you and I will heal you." Healing does not always mean instant, immediate, contextual gratification. Sometimes the healing takes time. Sometimes the healing can be extremely painful to the point and some of you have had this conversation with God, "Why did I even do the procedure in the first place?" But on the backside, you're able to look back and go, "Ah, I'm so grateful I went through the agony. I'm so grateful I went through it. I'm so grateful because the final product is now what I always longed for."

So here's the essence: why is it that we don't see revival in our lives? Is it that we don't know how to pray? Probably not. Is it that we don't want to seek God's face? Probably not. At the end of the day really the main reason that we don't see it is because we don't want to do it God's way because it doesn't often look, sound, and feel the way we wish that it would. We want instant gratification. We want instant restoration. And God tells Solomon, "If you do this, I will heal your land." The sad story is that 2 Chronicles 7:14 did not come to fruition in a positive way in the Jewish people's lives, in Solomon's life, and rarely does it ever happen in our lives. But the promise is there. We have the

opportunity, if we do it God's way, we can see God move even if it doesn't look or sound the way that we hoped it to in our lives.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Maybe tonight when we come to this time of decision, maybe tonight is a time where you personally need to call upon the name of Jesus to save you, and maybe tonight's the night where a decision needs to be rendered in some type of formal manner, and that's great and that's wonderful, we would love the opportunity to celebrate that, but maybe tonight is one of those nights where you have what I like to call one of those personal gut-checks with the Lord where you say, "How bad do I truly want revival in my life? How bad do I truly want it in my home? How bad do I truly want it in my community and in our culture? Am I willing to do what scripture says? Am I willing to hang in there with God when everybody says to give up? Am I willing to persevere when I don't feel like I can go another moment, much less another day?"

Tonight as we come to a time of decision, in a moment I'm going to pray over us and we're going to stand and sing and any and all that need to step out and step forward, we would love the privilege of praying with you, praying for you, whatever that decision is, but I would presume for a whole bunch of us the decision we need to render tonight isn't about stepping out and stepping forward, it's about stepping out of here in a few moments desiring revival in our lives more than anything else.

Heavenly Father, as we hear the tune being played behind us, we'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold, we'd rather have you than riches untold. God, today I simply pray that this song, this invitation, would not just be a wonderful piece of music that we dearly love but, God, it would be the cry of our heart would we tonight say we'd rather have Jesus than anything this world can afford? It's in his name we pray. Amen.