

“IF MY PEOPLE...”
Psalm 81:5b-16, Matthew 6:25-34, 2 Chronicles 7:12-22
July 1 & 2, 2023

“Houston pastor John Bisango describes a time when his daughter Melodye Jan, age five, came to him and asked for a doll house. John promptly nodded and promised to build her one, then he went back to reading his book. Soon he glanced out the study window and saw her arms filled with dishes, toys, and dolls, making trip after trip until she had a great pile of playthings in the yard. He asked his wife what Melodye Jan was doing.

“Oh, you promised to build her a doll house, and she believes you. She’s just getting ready for it.’

“You would have thought I’d been hit by a [lightning bolt],’ John later said. ‘I threw aside that book, raced to the lumber yard for supplies, and quickly built that little girl a doll house. Now why did I respond? Because I wanted to? No. Because she deserved it? No. It was because her daddy had given his word, and she believed it and acted upon it. When I saw her faith, nothing could keep me from carrying out my word.’”¹

What a great example of faith! Trusting in daddy’s word that he would do what he said he would do, enough to prepare for it far in advance of its completion. And you know, that’s exactly what God desires of us - to have that kind of faith in His Word and His promises that we step out in faith and believe that He will do exactly what He says He will do. Even before He provides it, we are to step out in faith, trusting in His promises.

Today, we heard most of Psalm 81, where the psalmist recounts how God answered the prayers of the people who called out to Him. God rescued the people from hardship and trial as they put their faith and trust in Him and called out for Him to help them in their struggles when they journeyed out of Egypt and made their way toward the land that God had promised to them. God had promised to guide

¹ (John Bisango, *the Power of Positive Praying* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1965] pg. 24, found in Robert J. Morgan’s, *Stories, Illustrations, & Quotes*, [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000] pg. 285-286)

them and provide for them, and they only had to step out in faith, and believe His Word, and follow His guidance. It took faith on their part to find all that God had promised.

But the psalmist also relates God's word to the people, how they failed to give God their full devotion. Verses 11-12 tell us, "*But My people would not listen to Me; Israel would not submit to Me. So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own devices.*"

God desires us to trust in Him and put our complete faith in Him so that He may direct our ways and provide for our needs. And God tells us, "*If my people would only listen to Me, if Israel would only follow My ways, how quickly I would subdue their enemies and turn My hand against their foes! Those who hate the Lord would cringe before Him, and their punishment would last forever. But you would be fed with the finest of wheat; with honey from the rock I would satisfy you*" (Ps. 81:13-16).

That's quite a promise of God to "His people" who trust in Him, and follow Him, and obey His commands, and diligently seek HIS ways. Great is the reward for those who let the Lord God be their God. And great is the demise and ruin of those who seek anything other than the Lord our God to be their god. With the Lord is great blessing and benefit; without the Lord is great hardship and difficulty.

Likewise, when Jesus talks to His disciples through Scripture, He calls us to faith in the Lord our God so that He may provide for us and walk with us. In Matthew 6:33-34, Jesus gives us instruction on how we can find the promises of the Lord in our own lives. Jesus tells us, "*But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*" We have to make the Lord God first in our lives and believe what He promises to be true, and then we will see the blessings of the Lord. And just like Melodye Jan, we must walk in faith of what our Daddy says is true

I'm working my way through the Bible this year, reading it sequentially from beginning to end. I'm in the book of Isaiah right now, and it is amazing to see how the people respond to God's invitation for Him to be their God. At times the leaders will step up and lead the people in the ways of the Lord and God looks upon them with blessing, and protection, and deliverance. As long as the people put the

Lord God first in their life, God goes with them, and marvelous things happen. Through the power of the Lord God working for them as they live as His children, following His ways and commands, God showers them with His blessings, removes the enemy from their land, and supplies all their needs.

But when the leadership of the people turn their backs on the Lord God, when they make and worship idols of their own design, or that of the other peoples around them, then God turns away from them and lets them fend for themselves. And it never failed then that the people are overrun by their enemies, and enslaved by foreign kings, and forced into great hardships, with crops failing, and plagues coming upon the land. Because of their hardness of hearts, God delivers them into the bondage of their enemies. Is this because He hates them? No. It is because He wants them to see the results of them only relying upon their own strength, their own wisdom, and their own resources - all of which will fail and bring ruin upon them. God desires that we love Him, and worship Him alone!

In 2 Chronicles 7, we hear God's promise to Solomon. He has just finished building the Temple of the Lord and God appears to Solomon with solemn promises. Listen to the Word of the Lord to Solomon, and see how it relates to us, even to today. This is 2 Chronicles 7:12-22. (READ 2 Chronicles 7:12-22).

God is promising Solomon great things **IF** he keeps the Lord God **First** in his life. He will deliver the people of Israel from drought, from pestilence, and from plague, but under the condition that he, Solomon, stays focused on serving the Lord God. If Solomon would remain faithful to the Lord as King of the whole nation of Israel, his faithfulness would bring blessings to all of the others because he would lead them in such a way as to encourage their faithfulness. But God goes on to make it specific to all of us.

God starts out, "*If My people...*" (7:14). God has claimed the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, those called Hebrews and then Israelites, as His people. He is focused on those who have made Him as their Lord, and have covenanted with Him to be His people. Though all the peoples of the world were created by God, it is this tribe of people who have become His favorite, the ones He has reached

out to and covenanted with and guided and nurtured and saved and instructed. These are the ones who have gained His special attention because they were willing to take Him at His word and follow His commands and do what He says.

But the next phrase elaborates beyond just the people of Israel. “*If My people, who are called by My Name...*” (7:14). This is now the people of God, those who seek His face, who desire a close relationship with Him, who diligently follow His ways, who make Him their God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength - these are the ones God puts His focus on and makes the promise to. It is no longer just to the people of Israel, but to all those who will claim the Lord God as their God and put their trust in Him and follow Him. These words that were recorded being said to Solomon are just as true for us today as it was for the people in Solomon’s day. God has now expanded “His People” to include all those who believe in, receive, and profess Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Savior of the World. Christians are also brought into the family of God, grafted into the family as a fruit branch grafted onto another fruit tree, to enjoy the benefits of the root and stump that sustains it.

But what about those who are called by the Name of God? Is that all that is necessary to have the blessings of God? No. God goes on, saying, “*If My people, who are called by My Name, will humble themselves and pray...*” (7:14). It’s not enough to just be one of God’s people, called by His name. We must demonstrate our profession of faith by submitting our lives to the One and Only True God, the Lord God Almighty.

In humbling ourselves, we recognize that we are not the all-in-all that is needed to live our lives. We are not the ones who can save ourselves. We are not the complete source of wisdom, strength and life. We are not our own gods. We recognize that we need more than what we have at our fingertips, and that it is the Lord God who is our All-In-All. We must come to realize that with God, we are able to do all things, but without God we are nothing. As we humble ourselves before God, we submit our whole life to His control, to follow all of His commands, and to do all that He instructs us to do. It is pride that makes us think we are more than what we really are. Pride makes us think we can live

without God, telling us that we've got everything under control and that our way is always best.

Humility is absolutely essential in recognizing God's superiority over us, enabling us to seek Him.

And it is vital that in humility, we pray to the Lord God Almighty, through Jesus Christ, in order that we make our needs known to the Lord. Now, God knows our needs, but He desires that we come to Him in humility with our requests. That implants it in our minds that He is the One who supplies us with all good things. Prayer enables us to evaluate ourselves and come to grips with the fact that we are limited beings, who are so easily led astray from the ways of the Lord, who depend upon God for our every breath. He is the One who has everything in control, and it is He who grants us our petitions as we submit ourselves into His loving care. Prayer opens our hearts and minds to the things of God, and enables us to see clearly all that God has for us to do and be. Prayer allows us to become connected with the Lord.

But God goes on, "*If My people, who are called by My Name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face...*" (7:14). This is putting into practice the words Jesus taught His disciples when praying, "*Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven...*" (Matt. 6:10). When we humble ourselves and pray and **Seek God's Face**, we are putting all of our agendas on hold and making the Lord God Almighty first in us. We are looking at everything around us and seeing God's hand in it all. We are seeing the struggles and trials that face us as opportunities to live for Him, and follow His ways as examples to the world.

When we seek the face of the Lord our God, we align ourselves to His Word, and diligently work to fulfill all of His commands. We put all the delights of the world and the favorite activities that captivate our minds and all those special things that we lift up and tend to worship, we put them away from us so that we are only making God first in our life. We give up anything - any practice, any thought, or any activity - that can so easily trap us and enslave us, and we trust in what the Lord says more than anything else. Seeking the face of the Lord is making all things in our life subjected to His Word and His command. We want to please the Lord more than anyone else. And God loves that!

And God takes it a bit further: *“If My people, who are called by My Name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face AND turn from their wicked ways...”* (2 Chron. 7:14). God is inviting movement here, away from the things of this world and toward Him. He is calling us to reject the things of this world and claim all of His ways and all of His will. He is calling us to exchange the evil and wicked practices in our lives with His perfect and holy will. He is calling us to recognize our sin, all those things that are against His commands, and repent of them, and call out to God for forgiveness. God is inviting us to grow so close to Him that everything that is evil within us is exposed so that we might ask forgiveness and be found new creatures in Christ Jesus our Lord.

God is a jealous God, and desires that all of His creation recognize only Him as GOD. He desires that we trust no one greater than Him. He desires that we have no other gods before Him. He wants us to revere Him and honor Him and love Him more than anything else. He is to be our All-In-All; our strength, our refuge, our hope, our joy, our Salvation, our life, and our love. Him and Him alone!

What would our life look like if we did all this? God tells us, *“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...”* (2 Chron. 7:14).

Why would God delight in blessing those who have turned their hearts away from Him? Why would God provide for and deliver a people who reject Him as God and turn and worship other things as god? So God gives us guidelines for us to follow before He will hear us. As long as we follow the ways of the world, as long as we put other things as more important than God as first in our lives, as long as we reject God’s Laws and commands to only do our own thing, He will not hear us! God’s hearing is selective only to those who *“humble themselves, pray, seek His face, and turn from their wicked ways.”* Only then will He hear us.

And God goes on, *“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 I will forgive*

their sins...” (2 Chron. 7:14). God is also conditional in His forgiving of sins. If people don’t humble themselves to God’s ways, if they don’t confess their sins, if they don’t change their wicked ways to follow God’s ways, God has no obligation to forgive their sins. Forgiveness comes to us as we seek God out, as we profess Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, and as we claim His work done on the cross as our atonement for our sins.

But we have to first recognize that our ways are not God’s ways and that our ways do not lead us toward God, but away from Him. The things of this world are heavily influenced by Satan, who desires our destruction. When our hearts and minds are focused on the things of this world, we are naturally lead away from the Lord our God and we end up doing great wickedness and evil. That is completely contrary to the things of God, and God hates it! So why would He forgive us of our sins unless we humble ourselves, and pray and seek the Lord and turn from our wicked ways? God is ready to forgive us, but forgiveness is conditional upon our turning to the Lord FIRST. Unless we turn to the Lord, we will find no forgiveness, and since God is perfect and holy, He cannot tolerate any sin in His presence, so we are out of luck when our time comes to face Him. Unless our sins are forgiven, we will be forever cast away from God and we will with Satan and all of his demons, destined only for the depths of Hell.

These are serious words from the Lord God to Solomon, **and to us**. These are His conditions by which He will either bless or curse the people of the earth. Remember this: God does not send anyone to Hell. No, we are the ones who make that choice ourselves if we reject God and follow anyone or anything else. Salvation comes to us only through professing our faith in Jesus Christ as Savior of our life, and making Him Lord in everything we do.

But God tells us plainly, *“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 I will forgive their sins, and I will heal their land”* (2 Chron. 7:14).

Brothers and sisters, we have great responsibility before us. If we follow these instructions of God, if we but humble ourselves and turn to Him and make Him our All-in-All, we’ve got to get on our

knees and seek the Lord's forgiveness. Our land is hurting so badly. Our country is imploding slowly and WE are the ones who are to be asking the Lord our God to fulfill His promises to us. If we but obey His words here, given to Solomon, If we but claim them as our own and begin doing the very thing that God is calling us to do, THEN He will hear us, and forgive us and bring sanity and peace and order and hope back into this land.

You see, the world is wondering why the United States of America is crumbling. It is crumbling because those of us with faith in Jesus Christ, with faith in the Lord God Almighty, are conforming to the ways of this world and not standing up for the ways of God. We need to stand strong for the Lord! We need to be courageous even in the face of persecution and oppression! But we need to maintain our faith in the Lord, and submit ourselves to Him.

Once more hear the promise of the Lord our God: *"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 I will forgive their sins, and I will heal their land"* (2 Chron. 7:14). Trust the promises of the Lord our God so that you may find life and love and protection. And start living with great expectation of Him fulfilling His promise. I guarantee you will not be disappointed.

Let's pray: Father, Your ways are not difficult, but they are radically different than the ways of the world. Yet, You invite us to humble ourselves before You, to seek Your face, to pray and to turn from the things of the world, trusting in Your promises. Give us the courage today to do Your will, follow Your Laws, and obey Your commands, so that we might find forgiveness and healing, not only here in this place, but in the world around us.

Father, give us such boldness to pour out our sins before You. Open our eyes to Your ways so that we might see the error of our ways and the beauty of Your ways. Then give us the mettle to wear our faith before everyone so that they can see the value of having Christ Jesus as Lord of their lives and Savior of their souls. Move us, Lord, out of our complacency into full action as Your servants, disciples of Jesus Christ so that all we do brings honor to Him and to You. This we pray in Jesus' Name. AMEN