

GREAT AWAKENING; "HUMBLE YOURSELF"

Historians refer to what we now call the Reformation Period as the 1st Great Awakening. It began in the UK in the 1700's by calling for churches to repent of empty ritual and tradition as each member developed a personal relationship with Christ. Later, in 19th century America, what is now called the 2nd Great Awakening arose_ with an emphasis on the Holy Spirit's work in convicting sinners and empowering their transformation. In both instances, revival spread throughout the land and thousands of people came to God through Jesus Christ. What I long for today another such revival_ so much so, in fact, that I am beginning this year by asking you to join me in **Praying for Great Awakening**.

My text for this series is found in **2nd Chronicles 7:11-16**. You may find **verse 14** particularly familiar as it has often been associated with the National Day of Prayer in November_ but I have felt compelled to use it as the foundation for our New Year's challenge.

11 When Solomon had finished the temple of the LORD and the royal palace, and had succeeded in carrying out all he had in mind to do in the temple of the LORD and in his own palace, 12 the LORD appeared to him at night and said: "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for Myself as a temple for sacrifices. 13 When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among My people, 14 if My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. 15 Now My eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place. 16 I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that My Name may be there forever. My eyes and My heart will always be there."

Solomon had just dedicated the temple_ and God promised to display His presence there and to bless those who pray to Him there. He even pledges to keep the doors open if they get into trouble - even if the calamity that they are in is their own fault as a result of willful disobedience. He says He will listen when they call_ providing certain criteria are met. Hold onto that thought...

God promises forgiveness for His people and healing for their land. This promise was to Israel, but in principle, it can be applied to us today...that is, **if** we are His people. I'm not sure that America qualifies, but it most definitely could appropriately refer to the Church.

Forgiveness is something we all need. There is not a one of us who has not sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Thankfully, He is always ready and willing to forgive. Yet, like it or not, the consequences of our sin, especially continued rebellion, can be very real_ not only as far as our eternal destiny is concerned, but in the here and now. According to **Hebrews 12**, God does discipline His children. Sometimes He delivers direct punishment. Other times, He withholds blessings we might otherwise enjoy. His discipline is always instructive and corrective. He does not delight in dealing it out_ but since He loves us and wants the best for us, He rebukes and chastises and disciplines as is necessary for our good.

But after the discipline, there is always the promise of healing. I'm not talking about for our bodies, but for our land. What kind of healing? In context, blight and infestation are removed and fertility and fruitfulness are granted. Still with every material truth, there is a spiritual lesson to be learned. We want physical health and material wealth, But God wants spiritual health and eternal treasure for us. So, the first thing to be healed is our relationship with God_ and I am going to be very frank here. It is **God's people who need to wake up**.

Last year was yet another period of drought for the church in America. Oh, there was a lot of moving around, but little true growth. Some churches have died as members moved to other churches or stopped assembling altogether. I'm not so sure many Christians grew spiritually all that much either. It seems most are busy, but seeing little to no real fruit. We may not like to think this way, but the context of **2nd Chronicles 7** says the sad condition of Israel would be their own fault. She couldn't blame the world for her blight. It was her own broken relationship with the Father. So, what of the church in America? If our *"fields are barren"*, do we not also bear the bulk, if not all, of the responsibility? Could it be that we are **unfruitful because we're unfaithful**?

Let's really bring it home. Is Calvary's lack of growth been my fault? Is there something inherently wrong with me or my ministry? Or do we share collective responsibility? Are we being as evangelistic as we should be? Is there sin in the camp that is keeping us from being fertile? I suspect we'd all like to think that God has just pushed the pause button for some reason that has nothing to do with us, but I doubt seriously that He's to blame for our dry spell. In fact, our text suggests we must stop blaming others – be it our culture or our circumstances - and start accepting some personal responsibility.

And what of you and me individually? Are we closer to God than a year ago at this time? Are we any more loving and kind; compassionate and caring? Are we any more like Jesus? Do we have a better handle on His word? Are our families stronger? Has our faith increased? Have we learned to be more trusting and content with our circumstances? Are we more patient? More disciplined? If not, than I have a deeper question. Why should we expect the world to be?

The first step here is for us is in the opening phrase of **verse 14**: ¹⁴ **if My people** (*not America or the world, but those*), **who are called by My name, will humble themselves.**" This is not an option_ and it cannot be skipped in a hurry to get to the next step. And believe me, we need to get to the next step. But, nothing we do_ even kneeling in prayer_ will have any power to change anything if we don't get this first. We have **to humble ourselves** and admit we are the problem. And not just part of the problem. As God's people, this is all on us.

Yet, though we are the problem, we are not the solution_ at least not in and of ourselves. No self-help course or self-improvement class is going to turn things around. No seminar on church growth or marketing is going to bring the kind of help and healing we need. Only God can do it. So I'm asking you to join me first and foremost in *"waking up"* to that reality. Too many are sleepy eyed_ dreaming and hoping things will just change without requiring any change from them. What will it take for a wakeup call? In His book AHA, Kyle Idleman asks how loud, obnoxious, and annoying the alarm has to be before we pay attention. I'm afraid many of us need a *"rude awakening."*

I'm praying for such an awakening of all of God's people, but it's got to start with us. We need forgiveness and healing in this land, but it will not come just because we need it. We're going to have to acknowledge our own sin_ be it neglect or idolatry, complacency or willful disobedience. If God's kingdom is to again be fruitful, we need revival.

James 4:2-10 says: ² **"You don't have, because you don't ask God.** ³ **When you ask, you don't receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.** ⁴ **You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.** ⁵ **Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit He caused to live in us envies intensely?** ⁶ **But He gives us more grace.**

That's why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."⁷ Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he'll flee from you.⁸ Come near to God and He'll come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.⁹ Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom.¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He'll lift you up.

We'll revisit this text in the weeks to come, but for now just let this single truth sink in. **Praying won't change anything, if it isn't clothed in genuine humility.** I think we'd agree that things are in a mess. It's time for us to come awake_ and then to do our part to awaken others.