

GREAT AWAKENING #4 - "MAKING A U-TURN"

Once more, my text for this series on praying for Great Awakening is found in 2nd Chronicles 7:14: Let's see if you can say it with me with a few prompts on the screen. 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.** This week, we're considering the last rung in this ladder to revival. God tells His people to humble themselves, pray, seek His face, **and turn from their wicked ways**. That's one way of saying God's people need to repent.

This is the final and perhaps most difficult phase in our text. It goes far beyond asking God to change our circumstances. It is changing our hearts and committing to a process for God to change our lives. We want forgiveness and healing, as long as it is dumped in our lap without any obligation on our part. God wants to grant us forgiveness and healing, but requires us to return to Him to receive it. This is what the Bible calls **true repentance**. But, what does that really mean?

For one thing, true repentance is **not merely reporting** what we've done. Confession can be good for the soul, but many people who get caught are forced to allocute to their crimes as part of a plea bargain. Children are sometimes forced to say "I'm sorry" when they really aren't.

Repentance is **not just regret** over what we've done. It's more than an apology. Feeling sorry for what we've done is foundational, but repentance is more than that. We can be sorry for the consequences, without being convicted to change.

Repentance **is real remorse resulting in redirection**. As the Apostle Paul once put it: **"Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret..."** (2nd Corinthians 7:10) I'm afraid there aren't many who get that. When I submitted this week's lesson title for the bulletin, my secretary asked me to spell it out. Did I want it to say making "**U-Turn**" or a "**You-Turn**"? Though she's never claimed to be a prophetess, at that moment God seemed to speak to me through her. For what God is calling for is not even just a change in behavior, but a change in our attitude and our character.

We're talking about doing a **180** here. Too often, we want major changes to take place, but personally are unwilling to make other than incremental changes for it to happen. But we are not talking about just a **45°** or even a **90°** turn. We must make a complete turnaround. Jesus tells us that if we are ever going to experience all that God has in store for us, major change on our part is required. Remember, in **Matthew 18:3** He said: **"Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."** That, my friends, is radical transformation. And that's what we need.

Because **change does not happen without change**. Now, I think many of us have done our **180's** before...but before long they become **360°** turns. We're right back where we started from_ or at least headed in that direction. Matter of fact, some have gone through this **"revolving door of repentance"** so many times, we're convinced coming out on the other side is nothing more than a pipedream. It seems like we keep getting sucked right back into our old ways...almost as if that revolving door is going so fast, centrifugal force pulls us right back in.

We want healing and forgiveness, but it seems out of reach. What, if anything, can be done? Well, I certainly don't want to oversimplify things, but maybe the answer has been right in front of us all the while. Look at our text once more. Remember that it is Jehovah God who is speaking here...

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...** Stop right there. It's not then "we"...but it's then "He." It's not that we resolve to rehabilitate ourselves, but that we resolve to let Him renew us. Consider this admonition from **Acts 3:19**. **"You must change your hearts and lives! Come back to God, and He will forgive your sins. Then the Lord will send the time of rest."** [NCV] Rest from what? From struggling to change? From feelings of failure? From guilt and condemnation? From self-loathing? Other translations say that when we repent by returning to God, **"a time of refreshing will come from the presence of the Lord."** That is *"a revelation for a resolution"* if I ever heard one.

I wrote in this week's bulletin about how much I appreciate the "delete" and "backspace" and "control + z" keys when I'm typing. I also like the "refresh" or "reload" when a page options on my web browser is unresponsive. But I am most thankful for the endless opportunities God provides me for a fresh start. Lord knows how many times I get stuck_ having started in a direction only to get bogged down for one reason or another. Could it be that something else is running in the background of my life?

A few years ago, I resolved to read through the Bible again. I read from it a lot, but I recognized it had been a while since I'd started in **Genesis 1** and read right through **Revelation 22**. Sounded like a noble plan, but I found that I had all these other books on my shelf I'd also intended to read. I had the daily newspaper, some weekly periodicals and magazines, and tons of newsletters flooding my inbox as well. By the time I waded through them, I had little time to spend in God's word. Don't get me wrong, many of the other publications quoted or commented on God's word, but there were a lot more words of men than His words on each page. So, in order to keep my resolution, I had to shut the door on the other stuff. And I do not regret for one moment that I did.

What might be keeping you from fulfilling your resolution? What has you stuck in the revolving door of repentance? What keeps you from returning to God and then turning it over to Him? **It's time for making a "You-Turn"**_ and by that, I mean turning yourself around and turning yourself over to the One who can refresh you, renew you and give you rest from your struggle.

Listen now to **James 4:6-10**, a text we considered in the very first lesson in this series. ⁶ **"God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."** ⁷ **Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.** ⁸ **Come near to God and he will 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 will lift you up.**

The concept of washing our hands is one of repentance. We wash our hands when we finish a dirty job, cleansing the grime and filth from our hands. We're done with whatever we were doing. We may also wash our hands before starting something new and important. Surgeons scrub up before operations. Cooks wash their hands before preparing a meal. The idea, once more of starting something with hands that are clean and fresh. James is telling God's people that they need to be done with sin, return to God, fir for His works of righteousness. It's about repentance.

And when we do this, humbling ourselves and drawing near to God, we find healing and forgiveness.