

The Big "IF" | 2 Chronicles 7:14

Have you noticed how scripture often tells us that the small things can have a real big impact on our lives? It talks about a small rudder steering a ship, or a bridle moving a horse, or a small flame leading to a forest fire. Of course, the most famous might be the tongue, small as it is, that can do a world of damage.

Today I want to suggest to you that the smallest word in our passage is likely the most important word. 2 Chronicles 7:14 is well known by God's people, and I suspect many of you have even committed this one to memory:

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. ¹

The context of this verse is the dedication of the temple just completed by King Solomon. There has been quite the celebration as the long-awaited temple is dedicated to the Lord. God appears to Solomon in the night and speaks to Him of his grace and mercy. God says he will accept the sacrifices offered in that place, but more important, he will listen to the prayers of the people offered there. As we read verse 13 we might be tempted to ask, "Where is our temple?" for in that verse God promises to turn back the pestilence and drought when the people come to him in prayer.

I know that this verse contains a promise given to the Jewish people gathered at a newly dedicated temple, but it still speaks of the character and nature of God today, for He is the same yesterday, today and forever. 2 Corinthians 1:20 says:

For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God.

"Amen" literally means, "So be it!" or "May it be so!" When God made a promise to Israel, its fulfilment will be found in Jesus. This is great news for us today.

So return with me to 2 Chronicles 7:14. This amazing verse filled with promise for a nation, starts with a very small, yet very powerful word: "IF."

Apply that word to each of the phrases in this verse with me this morning....

IF MY PEOPLE WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME...

To whom is God speaking? Those who are his people, who are called by his name. In the Old Testament that would be the Israelites who called on the name of Yahweh. They were the people of Yahweh, a chosen nation.

Who would be God's people today? Though God has never given up on Israel or cast her aside, the new covenant people of God are the Christians, the followers of Jesus. At what we call the

¹ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (2 Ch 7:14). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Last Supper Jesus offered the cup of wine to his disciples, saying this was the new covenant in his blood. The Book of Hebrews goes to great lengths to tell us how much better the new covenant is from the old covenant.

If my people who are called by my name....

Christians are God's people today, called by His name. So the question is, are you a Christian? I am not asking if you attend church. I am not asking if you read the Bible or pray. I am not asking if you were baptised or Christened or confirmed. You can do all these things and still not be a Christian.

The real question is, what have you done with Jesus? Do you realize that he died on the cross because of your sin, and have you repented and asked his forgiveness? Have you dedicated your life to following Him, to living after His standards as revealed in the Holy Scripture? This is what makes you a Christian – a faith that makes Jesus Saviour and Lord of your life.

That is the first big "IF."

The next big "IF" is this...

"IF YOU WILL HUMBLE YOURSELF AND PRAY..."

It appears that praying and humility are closely related. But that makes sense, does it not?

When we pray we are coming to God to say, "I need your help!" In prayer, we acknowledge that we are not the controllers of our own destiny. In prayer we confess that we are not God, but Jesus is. In prayer we confess we do not know everything, but we know the God who does. In prayer we say, "Not my will, but your will, be done."

We even assume postures of humility in prayer. We sometimes kneel with our head bowed. I heard this was the posture of someone surrendering before their enemy, exposing their neck to the sword of their foe. It was a posture that said, "My life is in your hands." Is that not the right posture for prayer?

Some will even lay flat on the floor to pray – a sign of total humility. Yes, we can also stand or sit as we pray, but it is interesting to note these postures of humility in prayer. This must be the attitude in our hearts as we pray. Jesus looked up into heaven at times when he prayed, as if looking for the face of His Heavenly Father. Paul spoke of lifting up hands as one prayed, possibly a sign of surrender, or accepting from God what he would put in your hands.

But the proud do not look for God, or even acknowledge Him. As **Psalm 10:4** says, **"In his pride the wicked man does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God."**

We want to see more people in church. We want to see less people living on the streets. We want to see more families united and less families torn apart by divorce. We want to see safe communities and less crime. We want to see people rescued from human trafficking and we want to see peace in our world. We want to see COVID-19 disappear.

But do we ever get on our knees and pray? We come up with new programs and ministries and events, all of which are good, but they are ineffectual in changing our culture and our nation. I read an ironic stat this week that said that while we were doing more church growth conferences the church was actually shrinking in North America.

God is telling us, **IF** you want to see change, humble yourself and pray...

But God is not done with us yet. Next He says,

“IF YOU SEEK MY FACE AND TURN FROM YOUR WICKED WAYS...”

It was so easy to wag a finger at Israel in Solomon’s day and say, “You idol worshipping, two-timing, unfaithful people - turn from your wicked ways...”

It is also easy to point fingers today at politicians and hardened criminals, at industries more concerned with profits than people, at courts that are legal but not just, at abusers of government aid programs or tax evaders, and on it goes.

But notice who God is talking to in this verse: “If MY people, who are called by my name...”

What? Christians need to turn from their wicked ways? The simple answer is “yes.” Christians also need to repent and turn back to God in so many ways. Sometimes we are blind and we head down a path that is not honouring God not realizing it. We need to turn from our wicked way.

All too often idols are set up in our lives, something that takes the place of God: our jobs, position, people, possessions. John Ortberg, in his book “Soul Care” gave the following thoughts to test if Christians have idols in their lives:

- I think of money a lot, as in getting more of it. I fantasize about winning the lottery and all the things I will do with that money...
- I wish I had more power and control over others – people just don’t respect me enough.
- I have missed important family events in order to pursue my career, saying this is what it takes to be a good provider. Some day later I will have more time...
- I consider myself a good, honest person but I would set aside these values to pursue something important to me if I knew no one would know about it.
- I have desires I don’t want my spouse to know about, and I become defensive if you mention them.
- I have secrets I am willing to lie to protect.
- I have argued often over wanting something my spouse did not want.
- There are some possessions that if I lost them I would be devastated.
- If my doctor told me to give up sugar, chocolate, coffee, alcohol, cigarettes, red meat or anything else for my health’s sake I would find it almost impossible to do so.
- If you asked my family what was most important to me they would say my job, my hobby, my money, my health, my looks... but not likely them.

- I love God but there is one thing that always gets in the way of getting close to him....²

Ortberg suggests that if any of those statements sound familiar in your life then there is an idol set up there. And God says, if you will turn from your wicked ways, Christian, there is a promise for you.

What is the promise?

If you are God's people, and if you will humble yourself and pray, and if you will seek God's face and turn from your wicked ways, **THEN God will hear from heaven and forgive our sin and heal our land.**

What a promise. It is bigger than any one person, for it speaks of healing a nation. Does Canada need healing today? Are there things happening that make you fear for your children, grandchildren and great grandchildren? Do you see where people have turned away from God to serve self, wealth or pleasure? Are Christian values upheld in our country so that, as our founding fathers desired, "God would have dominion from sea to sea"?

We need God to heal our land, to turn the hearts of thousands upon thousands of people back to Him. We need a revival that would sweep through the country, bringing people to repentance and restoration with God. We need the churches to wake up and remember the battle is not about getting to assemble, but reaching our neighbours with the Gospel message of love and hope and life eternal through faith in Jesus Christ.

Does Canada need to be healed? It certainly does. Does God want to see our nation whole, turning to Him and falling down in humble, obedient worship of Him? Most certainly.

So what is holding it back?

"IF".

That one small word. If we, the church, those called by the name of Christ, are not willing to humble ourselves and pray and seek God's face, turning from our wicked ways, there can be no revival. Revival always starts in the household of God.

The challenge is before us – will we pray, really pray, on our knees for hours praying, for God to heal our land? Or is it a passing thought, one you will forget as soon as I say "Amen" to this service?

"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray... I will heal their land," says the Lord. Do you believe this today? What then will you do?

² John Ortberg, "Soul Care: Caring for the Most Important Part of You" (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014) 83-84.