

IF MY PEOPLE # 5

INTRO: We have been considering 2 Chronicles 7:13-14. This is the last message. Let me read those verses once more:

13 *"When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence 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 I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.*

These verses are directed at God's people, Israel. For the last 2,000 years the Church has been God's primary work on earth and I think we can rightly say that though this passage is meant for Israel, application may be made to us from these verses. The laws of bringing new life to believers apply today as they did during the time of the OT.

Verse 14 gives us the reason for verse 13. God's people have fallen into error. And when we refuse to hear God when He warns eventually, He lets those things come upon us that we cannot handle. We have just witnessed a huge earthquake in Turkey. Oh, how helpless we stand by in such times. So, it was for Israel when God shut off the rain, or when grasshoppers overtook the land, or when pestilences came. And sometimes we as believers may personally experience such a time. When we, those who name the name of Christ, slip off the path in some way, God may well let us go through things we are helpless to change until He gets our attention.

When we are going astray in some area, if God is able to get our attention, and we recognize something that needs to change, the first thing that has to happen is that we must humble ourselves. It seems to me that in human terms, the greatest risk God ever took was to make people with a free will. But the only way God can get true glory is if man chooses Him of his own free will. And when we err, we can only turn back to God by our own choice. I would say this, that God has made man with a drive for truth that is unrelenting. And when man truly becomes objective with truth, he will find God.

On the other side is an unrelenting force that will do all it can to destroy that drive for truth. That is a force that is pulling out all stops in our day and we are in a most ferocious battle, and that battle is not with flesh and blood. It is with

a fallen angel that knows no pity or compassion. Someone has said that the greatest battles have not been fought with guns and knives. The greatest battles ever fought have been fought on the knees.

The gravest threat the Devil faces is the Christian that wears the whole armor of God and is always praying with all prayer and supplication. I think the gravest danger the devil faces is not the preacher, it is the simple Christian on his or her knees. Leonard Ravenhill says no Christian is greater than his prayer life. I don't know who said this, but it goes like this: If you want to know how popular a church is, go to the Sunday morning service. If you want to know how popular the pastor is, go to the Sunday evening service. If you want to know how spiritual the church is, go to the prayer meeting.

I want you to listen to what Mark 1:35 says about Jesus Christ:

*35 Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.*

What a lesson that is for us! If He felt it necessary to go to His Father early in the morning to a solitary place, how much more is that needful for us.

Well, when we have erred in some way, God must get our attention if we are to survive and He may have to do so through devastating means. And if He gets our attention, the very first thing we must do is humble ourselves. We have looked at that. We will never humble ourselves until we see ourselves in-light of God. After we humble ourselves, we must give ourselves to prayer. When we are in prayer, we must then seek God's face. In His face we will get direction.

Now we can do all that, and it will avail nothing unless we come to the last thing, and that is to turn from our error or wicked ways; that is what our text says.

#### I. THE WORD "TO TURN"

I want to first introduce us to a very important doctrine in the Bible. Our verse instructs those of us who have strayed from some truth to humble ourselves. That has brought me to some very difficult days in my life. What that did is it revealed pride in my life. That is man's number one problem. Then our passage instructs us to pray.

This turns our attention to the only solution to pride, and that is a glimpse of God.

Listen to Isaiah 6:1-5:

*1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple.*

*2 Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.*

*3 And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!"*

*4 And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke.*

*5 So I said: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts."*

Oh, how the Church in general needs a fresh glimpse of our holy God. Holy, holy, holy! With God, nothing that even has an appearance to be evil is there! Nothing! That is our God. And what was this holy prophet's, response to what he saw? He said, "Woe is me, for I am undone!" Why? Because I am a man of unclean lips! When He got a glimpse of God, he got a glimpse of himself. And then he realized something else. The people among whom he dwelt were also a people with unclean lips! This realization only hit him when he saw the King, the LORD of hosts! Oh, for a fresh glimpse of God. The Apostle Peter saw this King when they caught some nets full of fish. And what did he say? "Depart from me Lord, for am a sinful man."

Now in our text the Lord said, "If My people humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways." That can only happen after we see His face in some way. Nothing will drive us from sin, or help us recognize sin like a fresh glimpse of God. Now note the word, "turn." This particular word occurs almost 1,000 times in the OT. Let me give you the first time it occurs in the OT and it is in Genesis 3:19 which says:

19 *In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you **return** to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you are, And to dust you shall **return**."*

The word, "return," which is used twice is our word. What It means that when we die, we do a 180. It means to turn around, to do an about face. Man comes out of the ground, and at death, he does an about face and returns to the ground. And this word is used in a spiritual sense in our text to turn from sin to God. And who can tell me the name of the doctrine that comes from this word, to turn? It is the doctrine of conversion. In our passage God is saying that if His people have fallen into sin they needed to be converted. They needed to do an about face. This is what revival is all about. One does not clean up first and then get revived. Revival cleans us up.

Let me just mention this about revival. You can have hyped up meetings and cause a lot of emotion and it may appear to be a revival, but that is not revival. When I speak of revival I mean such an event as causes people to see their sin and it brings about repentance, and it brings Christian joy back into their lives. But first there must come pain. You cannot have this kind of revival without pain.

Now in the doctrine of conversion, there are two other doctrines. The first is repentance, that is turning away from sin; and the second is faith, and that is turning to God. That is a spiritual 180.

Now you might say, "Well, I thought conversion was like getting saved." Yes, it is, but saved people need to experience conversion whenever they have erred. Listen to what Jesus said to Peter long after he was saved:

32 *"But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me (or as the KJV says, when you are converted), strengthen your brethren."*

33 *But he said to Him, "Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death."*

34 *Then He said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me."*

This happened just before Jesus was crucified. And the Lord said to Peter, "When you have returned to Me." The indication is that Peter is not spiritually with Jesus at this point. Literally it says, "...when you convert to Me..." Peter was a believer but he needed to be converted. Now let me point out something about Peter here. Peter did not know at this point he was not on the right path, but Jesus did. It is even worse. At this point Peter was a tool of Satan. And Jesus knew he would need to be turned around.

Well, shortly thereafter Peter denied Jesus three times and when the rooster crowed, he wept bitterly. He was broken and it was in brokenness that he returned. He was converted. This is what must happen to all of us who are Christians when we have sinned. When we sin and repent, and return, we are converted from some wrong. When we sin and do not repent, we are on the path to destruction. Only conversion will put us back on track.

Let each one of us ask ourselves, are we dabbling in some sin, or maybe like Peter, we have inadvertently slipped off the path somewhere? Maybe we don't see it as sin. Maybe it is anger or bitterness or resentment or any other thing that is against God. Let us ask ourselves, what do we allow ourselves on the internet? If my phone or my computer could talk, what stories would it tell? What pictures do I allow myself to look at? How do I handle my finances? How am I on the job? What liberties do I take? Does the Lord send warnings every once in a while, and then it goes away, and I do it one more time?

So, Jesus said to Peter, "When you are converted strengthen my brethren." Do you know what that is saying? "Peter, right at this point you are in no shape to strengthen your brethren. Right now, you are Satan's tool." When we allow ourselves things that are not kosher, we are in need of conversion. Conversion requires repentance and faith. This is doing a 180 from sin.

Let us look at some illustrations of what is involved in returning to God.

## II. ILLUSTRATIONS OF TURNING

### A. From the Book of Judges

Let me give as an example, the book of Judges. This book gives seven cycles God's people went through. What a blessing it was to enter the land, but it did not take long until they began to backslide. So here is how the cycles go: It begins with blessing, which after some time may give way to backsliding, which then leads into bondage which, when it gets bad enough brings about brokenness and then once more blessing comes. And one would think mankind would learn after one cycle, but not so.

Revived people tend to go through the same cycle. There are not many people who maintain a revived life. Our town experienced a revival years before we moved here. By the time we arrived there were not many signs of that revival left.

When we do not maintain our spiritual life, we may go through the same cycle, that is if we turn from error. Usually, after some time spiritual fervor begins to ebb, and that will likely begin with such small steps that we do not notice. From the time we begin to backslide until we are in bondage to some thing may take some time, but here is the most concerning thing: we usually don't recognize our departure from God. So, when we begin to backslide eventually we come into bondage to something. The problem is that generally, if not always, we fail to see our need. When Israel prospered, they left God but they insisted all was well. Then God sent prophets and they warned the people and the people began to despise the prophets. What happened? They ended up killing the very voice that was meant for their good. And like Israel, when we as Christians enter some bondage, God must allow affliction to increase until we are broken and we cry out to God.

Consider king David. He fell into deep sin and did not realize what was happening to him until Nathan the prophet pointed his finger and said, "You are the man." But when David heard God's voice say, "Turn, David, turn," he turned. He was converted and it came with great pain. Pain is what all revival brings first.

The word to us this morning is this: the most devastating thing that begins to happen when we begin

to backslide is blindness, blindness to our own problem. We may well blame others for our problems. It may then happen that we despise the very thing that God is trying to get our attention with to some matter in our own lives.

Listen carefully; you cannot clean up first and then be revived. Once we are cleaned up we do not need revival. When we say we need revival we are confessing that somewhere we have gone off the path. It is this that makes revival necessary. We all face the dangers of falling into some failure. The pilgrim's journey is filled with dangerous places.

Here is the process: We are living in blessing, then backsliding begins which, if not dealt with, leads to bondage. God then will allow some affliction until we are broken and we cry out to God. Here we must humble ourselves and pray and seek God's face and then turn from whatever we fell into that caused us to backslide. This is brokenness. And when we turn, when we are converted, that is we repent and put our trust in God. Then once more blessing comes. If we turn, blessing will come again.

## B. From Modern Times

### 1. Negatively

We have asked what is involved in returning to God? Let us look at some modern examples of men who failed because of how difficult returning is. We will look at what happens when we fail to return when God has spoken to us. What happens when we come to the place where we should turn and we refuse to turn? Because we have a free will, we can refuse to return. I searched for preachers or Bible teachers who fell and refused to return. One site listed a number of such people. Ted Haggard was born in 1956. He was called a "powerhouse preacher" and then he fell into sin. He had a mega church. One article said this: "Evangelical pastor Ted Haggard ranted against the evils of (fornication, my words) ~~premarital sex~~, adultery, and gay marriage. That is, until he was caught in a gay scandal in 2006."

<https://www.ranker.com/list/pastors-that-fell-from-grace/genevieve-carlton>

Now let me ask you, from when he started his ministry and he became a powerhouse preacher, until he fell into sin, what happened? He spoke out against the evils surrounding us, which any good preacher should do. I ask you, what happened? If he was truly a believer, somewhere he began to backslide. From the time backsliding began until he was in full-blown bondage, what happened? No doubt God spoke to him numerous times but he hardened his heart.

How many of you remember Jim Bakker? Oh, the sad story. He went from being a very popular TV preacher, to doing almost 5 years in prison! Tell me, how does that happen? Somewhere he let one thing go. What we have before us are two men who should be a great warning to any professing believer.

Let each one of us ask this question of ourselves: What do I think my spiritual strong point is? Right there we must be on guard the most. If we fall it will very possibly come right from there. Many years ago, I heard a Bible teacher say that most biblical men that fell, fell on their strong point. With a heart like mankind has, any of us could become bitter or become an atheist or a host of other things in not too long a time. It is possible. And if that should happen, between the time of God's blessing until bondage, many things will happen.

I have mentioned Bill Gothard to you in other messages. Oh, what a sad story. If you had seen him do his seminars all over the world, had heard his strong teaching on such subjects as divorce and family life, you might have said, "What a godly man." He stressed submission for women and modest clothing. In 2014, one article said, he was accused of molesting more than 30 women, physical harassment, inappropriate touching and even rape. How many times do you think he said, "I won't do it again"?



Tony Alamo, who claimed the Lord had called him to preach the second coming of Christ in the 1970's was sentenced to 175 years in prison in 2009.

Bob Coy, of Florida, with a mega church of more than 25,000 members has an ongoing case from 2014. The article listed Fred Phelps, Doug Phillips, Jimmy Swaggart and others. The Encyclopedia Britannica says: "...Swaggart publicly accused fellow televangelist Jim Bakker of immoral sexual behaviour. This denunciation, which some saw as a move by Swaggart to take over Bakker's empire, precipitated a closer look at Swaggart's own life, leading to the revelation..." and I won't mention more other than that he was also guilty. He was removed from his church by his own denomination.

More recently we have Mark Driscoll, Joshua Duggar, and others. You will be familiar with Joshua Harris, who wrote the book, "I Kissed Dating Goodbye." He later kissed his wife goodbye, and then kissed God Himself goodbye.

Many of these men stood for things we would agree with. We might say, "Well, they probably weren't believers to begin with." Here is what happened to at least some of them as I see it: Because of their strengths they entered Satan's most wanted list and he brought them down. Satan may well see our strong points as a place to get us. It is not our strong points that cause Satan to tremble. If anything does it is a healthy prayer life.

Now I am asking you, is it possible for me or you to enter that list of fallen Christians? No doubt we would say it could happen to us. If that is true, that means we must always be on our toes. If our lives are a threat to the devil at all, he will be out to get us. If we are effective in any way in God's work, he is out to get us.

It is most probable that for every person of prominence who fell, many of lesser prominence fell. And they fell for various kinds of reasons. It may have been business, finances, divorce, envy, anger, hate. Oh, how powerful hate is. These and

many more can be the starting point that lead to a fall. When true revival comes it delivers all those who are revived from possible doom.

We have stressed in these days Psalm 139:23-24 which says:

*23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties;*

*24 And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.*

I have listened to the preaching of one of the men we listed before. I have been familiar with Bill Gothard, though not personally, from when I was a young Christian. For those men we have listed, if they truly walked with God, and no doubt a number of them did; beyond all doubt, somewhere they let one thing go. At the beginning their departure was probably not visible, nor did it seem like they were straying. And no doubt, somewhere after they began to leave the true path God spoke to them. They may even have come to where they humbled themselves. They may have even prayed, and maybe even sought God's face. And if it was not there then at some place they came to these words, "turn from your wicked ways." And there they stood. But they were in bondage and then they thought, "Just this one more time."

Think for a moment of Ravi Zacharias. What a brain! What a voice for God! But I do not think intellect causes the devil to tremble. If such a man was a man of prayer, now it might. I do not know how long he was off the path, but like Bill Gothard, I suspect it was for years. What I do know is that somewhere he let something in he should not have. And from his story, I would say God was extremely patient. But despite that, he got into bondage and he refused to break with it. I can hardly see otherwise than that he came to some points where God said, "Ravi, Ravi, turn." And then the sin he had allowed himself into so many times took over again and he said to himself, "Just one more time."

And then cancer paid him a visit. Would you not think this affliction would cause him to repent? Oh, the deceitfulness of sin! Well, he died of cancer and never confessed. And after his death, his story came out. How can a Christian do that to his family? That is about the worst thing a man can do to his family. If, after living in sin, he had confessed, even if it was on his deathbed, he would have done the biggest thing for them he could do.

I ask us, who of us thinks we are beyond that? Right now, like Peter, we may already be on that path without realizing it. You see, when we come to the place in our text where it says, "turn" we have come to the last place. We do not have to turn. We have had abundant evidence of that in those we looked at, but oh, the disastrous consequences!

Let me add one point here. In the last weeks I have listened to great men of God on prayer. One said this: The disciples never asked Jesus to teach them to preach; they asked Him to teach them to pray. I am not familiar with a whole lot of men of prayer, both in the past or in the present but I know a number. I have not yet heard of a man of prayer to be taken down by the devil. Prayer is the one thing that causes Satan to tremble, and it is the one thing he will keep us from doing if he can. Try it and see if that is not so.

## 2. Positively

But there is a better story. There are many that truly turned. We could start with King David. Oh, how he fell. But when God said turn, he did. Let me begin with a story from the OT. There was a very wicked king in Judah. His name was Manasseh. Let me introduce him from 1 Chronicles 32:1-3. It says this:

*1 Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem.*

*2 But he did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel.*

*3 For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down; he raised up altars for the Baals, and made wooden images; and he worshiped all the host of heaven and served them.*

What a wicked man! But that was not all, he later caused some of his baby sons to be offered as sacrifices to false gods in the valley of Hinnom. They died, screaming as the fire consumed their little bodies. He reigned for 55 years, and made no change until he was old. Can you imagine the list of sins that were recorded in God's book in heaven under the name Manasseh?

Now listen to verses 11-13:

*11 Therefore the LORD brought upon them the captains of the army of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh with hooks, bound him with bronze fetters, and carried him off to Babylon.*

God has not given up. He sent him affliction. Verse 12:

*12 Now when he was in affliction, he implored the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers,*

*13 and prayed to Him; and He received his entreaty, heard his supplication, and brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God.*

Here was a man that God took to the school of affliction. Imagine this great regal king who was brought to Babylon with hooks. That is humiliation to the extreme! He is fettered and taken where he did not want to go. And in his affliction, he humbled himself and prayed and sought God's face; and there he learned to know the LORD God of Israel. And when he repented, he was restored to Jerusalem and to his kingship.

Oh, the great mercy of God when we turn! But when we come to the place where God tells us to turn, and we do not heed His voice, there comes a time when there is no more hope for mercy. God turns His face against us.

When I did the "Wine & the Bible" messages in Mexico, a man came to hear the messages and he came all the way from Ontario. He had been an alcoholic, had gotten saved and dropped his alcohol. Then he was with some Christian friends and they laughed and said it would not hurt him to drink a little and he became an alcoholic all over again. A pastor encouraged him to listen to the messages from our church on alcohol and once more he turned! And when he heard I was giving those messages in German he came all the way to Mexico to hear them. He had turned from his wicked way again.

Some day we will have eternity to listen to millions upon millions of stories of those who turned. We have listened recently to Lou Sutura and Pastor Bill MacLeod and heard story after story of people who turned. We heard of marriages that were about to break up and then they were restored in revival. If we should listen to J. Edwin Orr, Watchman Nee, the Suterases, Bill MacLeod, Charles Finney and many other revivalists we would hear story after story of Christians who turned at the voice of God. Oh, thank God for so many who came to this word, "Turn!" and they turned and they were spared the heartaches we saw earlier. Today that door stands wide open.

CONCL: So, let me conclude like this. We only need revival when we have fallen somewhere. If we are not sliding back somewhere, we personally do not need revival. Few if any see their need from the time backsliding begins until they are in deep bondage. I doubt very many ever see their departure, nor recognize the danger they are in until the affliction becomes almost unbearable. The most devastating thing of all is this: chances are very small that in that time from where backsliding begins until I am in deep bondage, like Peter, I have no idea I am off the path. When it becomes obvious to others, I can no longer see the obvious. And like the failures we looked at, if I do see or I am warned, I may still find some way of justifying myself.

I have medical condition called hypertension. That is when one's blood pressure is too high. It has been called the silent killer because it is so hard to detect. That is what backsliding is from the time it begins until God gets one's attention. It is spiritual hypertension. Can that happen even to a godly man? Study Job. And if God gets one's attention, the very first thing

that must happen is one must humble oneself. It is I that am the problem. Then one must turn one's attention to God in prayer. There is no other way. And when one begins to pray, there one must seek the face of God to get direction for life. And when God gives direction, it will be this, "Turn!" "Repent!" He will call for our conversion! It will be to do a 180 on some or several particular matters.

And there one will stand with a very big decision in hand. Will I turn, or will I justify myself one more time? Will I turn, will I break up the fallow ground, or will I harden my heart? When I look at Ravi Zacharias or Joshua Harris or a number of others, it seems to me beyond doubt they hardened their hearts on more than one occasion. And if I see it right, God was patient with them for a long time. And then there came a day when God turned His face against them.

In verse 14 God said that if they turned, then He would hear from heaven. Think of that wicked king Manasseh who had heard the screams of his babies as the fire consumed their little bodies. But later when God got a hold of him in his affliction, he turned and God, Almighty God, forgave him! His sins were blotted out of the books. God promised that if they turned, He would hear from heaven and then He would heal their land. God took Manasseh back to Jerusalem and he was king again! How incredible is that!

The very same thing holds true for us. We can dig in our heels and be very adamant that we are right, only to be hardened a little more. We might humble ourselves, but that is not the end. We might even pray, but that is not the end. Beyond that, we might seek God's face, but not even that is the end. When God finally reveals in His face what He wants of us, then we must turn! In the lives of all such men as we have been reminded of there was one thing they all had in common. There was one undealt with sin that started it all. Just like an alcoholic starts with one drink, so these all started with one sin they did not deal with. And then it led to another, and another, and finally these men abandoned God.

But there is a brighter picture. How many have been caught in some thing, and then they met God and then they turned and the joy of their Christianity was restored? This can happen to an individual at any time. It happens to a greater number of people when true revival comes. Revival is a rare and divine moment. I have never read of a revival that came without prayer, and such

prayer must be serious, agonizing prayer. May such a moment come  
and to our church, to our town, and to our country.