

Mar. 25, 2018

Lesson 4: Keep My Statutes and Ordinances

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7: 12-22

Context:

This is our last lesson in this series with the book of 2 Chronicles. As we have read about how Solomon acknowledged God in the dedication of the temple, we have explored the different ways human experience and also name God at work in day-to-day life. The lesson today continues that theme as we read of a conversation after Solomon has dedicated the temple.

In the passage, we pick up on a tone change in God's conversation with Solomon. Earlier, Solomon had asked God to respond to the prayers of the people directed towards the temple and its altar. The response is what we receive in 7:14: "if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked way, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land." The main focus is a consistent theme of the Chronicles: true repentance begins with humility.¹ Throughout Chronicles, the importance of humbling oneself before God is a consistent theme. The kings of Judah, the priests, and the people are to all be humble and acknowledge God.

The rest of the passage goes on to narrate how God will watch the people and the temple. If they turn away, God will make them a joke. The temple will fall and the answer for its demolished status will be that the people abandoned the Lord. Thus, they received disaster.

A little detour from the text and into the history of the Israelites reveals how the tone of the passage changed from a blessing God to a vengeful God. Most biblical writings did not occur at the time they were written. Today, we are so used to the idea of sitting down with a journal, a file on our laptop, or a notepad and writing down everything. The ancient world though functioned on oral history, passing down stories from generation to generation. There might have been scribes, but not even they could give every single detail of each account.

The same goes for the book of Chronicles. Many scholars believe that the book was written after the Israelites had been exiled and returned to the land to rebuild their cities and the temple.² Writing down this passage would have helped the Israelites cope and give them a potential reason for why the temple fell. They were unfaithful and they were not humble; both things that were a break in the covenant with God. Thus, this passage would have helped them make sense of what happened and something for them to discuss with their future generations.

Application:

I'll confess that I have not always been a fan of a verse in this passage, or perhaps how this verse is used today. The verse 2 Chronicles 7:14 "If my people who are called

¹ Steven S. Tuell, "First and Second Chronicles," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (John Knox Press: Louisville, KY 2001), 143.

² Ibid. 144.

by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land,” is a verse that has gotten a lot of mileage. People often quote this verse when desiring to make a point about the United States of America and how we will earn God’s blessing by following a list of rules that somehow will make us superior to the rest of the world. The response is often to something that some political party has done or some controversial issue where one group feels slighted. Often, people neglect to read the origins of the verse and how the passage to be read as an appeal for humility. It is ironic that a verse meant to stress humility becomes a battle line for political rhetoric and superiority over other countries.

If there is any application from today, it is to be humble before God and before others. Just the other day I read an excerpt from C.S. Lewis’ *Mere Christianity* in which he addresses the essential vices. For C.S. Lewis and countless Christian teachers, the upmost evil is pride. Why pride? According to Lewis, “pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man...it is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest.”³ Even in the case of our text, there was pride. The Israelites were proud of their temple and their designation as God’s chosen people. Solomon took pride in his reign and the kings after him took pride in the position as well as the riches. Out of pride came accumulated wealth that led to more idols that could be concocted. Before you know it, the holy places of Israel were no longer simple altars dedicated to God. They were fitted with golden calves and Asherah poles as the Israelites and their kings could not see what they were doing.

Pride blinded them and it blinds us as well. I have seen where my own pride has prevented me from seeing other peoples’ point of views or even my own privilege in the view I possess. I have experienced the same from the pride of others as they may attempt roll over my authority or even use their age or some other factor to say they “know more” than I could comprehend. The end result is that someone gets hurt. Someone is always the loser when pride is involved.

To acknowledge God according to this scripture passage is to be humble. We are to pray that God forgives us for our sins and ask for ways in which we may be more faithful and fruitful. We know that we cannot earn God’s love or blessing. We cannot do this journey through our life on our own. God is the one who sustains and loves us even when we are so full of pride that we cannot see in front of us. That is the constant good news of the covenant that God made us with Christ. We are reconciled to him as he gave his life for us, for all people. This passage from 2 Chronicles is not meant for us to sum up how God will work according to our political agenda. It is instead a call for us to look at ourselves, not our neighbor, and ask for God to forgive and guide us in the direction we are called to go.

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³ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (Harper Collins: New York, 2001), 122.

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