

Seeking God's Face

2 Chron. 7:14

Series: "IF"

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If you are taking notes, the title of the message today is: **Turning Point**

I am a big fan of American history. It's probably after biography and World War 2, my favorite genre to read about.

I just finished a book on the American Revolution, and I was reminded once again of just how close the American Continental Army was to collapsing and ultimately the colonies that made up the United States surrendering to King George and the British Forces.

Most all historians will tell you that THE turning point in the American Revolution was the battle of Saratoga. This battle started on Sept. 19, 1777. The British forces were led by General John Burgoyne (Bur-Goine) and the goal was to take control of the Hudson River Valley.

The British forces are of course much more disciplined than the American army. They are better suited for war...better equipped for war...this is the world's superpower at the time.

The American Continental army is ragtag. They can barely pay their army. They don't have nice uniforms...many don't even have shoes! They have experienced numerous defeats up to this moment and morale is at an all-time low.

The Americans have sent Benjamin Franklin to France in order to secure some help and hopefully garner their support in the war – it is desperately needed, but for France to join in they need some proof that America can stand on its own two feet...that they can go head-to-head with the British army because up to this point, the record hasn't been that great!

The armies convene on a plot of land known as "Freeman's Farm". The Continental Army is being led under the direction of General Horatio Gates.

He is supported by General Benedict Arnold who would actually be the hero of this battle – amazing considering that he would betray his country just two years later.

The Americans also have around 500 riflemen from Virginia that have joined them for this battle under the leadership of Col. Daniel Morgan. With their long made for hunting rifles, they would engage from distances up to 300 yards and pick off officers first and then soldiers – it was true gorilla warfare.

By the time the battle ended on Oct. 7 and the British Forces surrendered – out of the 22,200 soldiers involved there were 1,465 casualties. 1,135 of those were British and over 6,200 of the British soldiers were missing or captured. For the American side, 90 were killed and zero missing or captured.

The victory was a turning point because it gave the Americans a MUCH needed victory at a MUCH needed time AND most of all it proved to France that England could be beat and they agree to join the fight – which means they are bringing their Navy with them!

And if you know your American history it is the French Navy that showed up at just the right time to help solidify and secure victory for the United States...the English were surrounded by land and by sea in Yorktown and on October 19, 1781, General Cornwallis surrenders and the war is all but over at that point.

The turning point was the Battle of Saratoga. Historians look at what took place there and they say that's when EVERYTHING changed.

I want to ask you a question as we begin this message today and that is, “Do you have a time in your life that you can look to that could be defined as your “turning point”?”

Is there a definitive moment that you are aware of when you made the decision to follow Jesus? You were going one way...you were walking in one direction, but then turned, submitted your life to the Lord and started following him?

This is what I want us to address today. We've been in this series called *IF: Our Responsibility/God's Response*. It's based off a Bible verse that is often quoted and many times taken out of context. The verse is:

2 Chron. 7:14 – “if my people who are called by my name 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.”

What we have talked about in this series and please, if you missed any of the messages, go back and listen. We have stressed that this verse is NOT a promise made to the United States, but within its context it's made specifically to the people of Israel – they were God's chosen people in a unique covenant relationship with him.

However, just because it is NOT a national promise directed to us does NOT mean that it is not a scriptural precept that IF implemented and acted upon can impact our nation for good!

And so, what we have called upon you to do over these last three weeks as the election was approaching and it's now over is to NOT get worked up over things we can't control!

- We can't control the outcome of the election! We participate and let our voice be heard, but we don't control it...
- We can't control the noise out there and the opinions of different people and pundits...

There's A LOT going into the election and coming out of the election that we have ZERO control over. What this series has been all about is fixating...concentrating...and spending our time focusing on what we can control!

And what we have said thus far in taking this verse (2 Chron. 7:14) is that as believers in Jesus – those of us that are now in a covenant with God through his son – we are “his people”!

And as his people we CAN control:

- Fostering an attitude of humility! This was what week one was all about!
- Seeking God's face – this was the last week and it was all about seeking intimacy with God! By the way, something I should have said last week, but didn't! You can't rush intimacy with God!

I've got a book on my bedside right now called *Three Mile an Hour God*. I'm not recommending it right now because I haven't read all of it, but it's written by a Japanese Christian theologian and the premise is the average person walks three miles per hour and therefore that's how fast the love of God is. In other words, we have to slow down to grow in intimacy with the Lord.

This week, the focus is on: Repentance! We can control as believers in Christ HOW MUCH and to WHAT EXTENT we repent!

The Bible calls for us in (v. 14) to “turn from our wicked ways”. In a nutshell, this is what the word “repentance” means. It's a turning point. It's the point that which just like the American victory at Saratoga, everything changes.

Now, for the Christian there is a one-time turning from sin that begins our relationship with God...this is a necessary part of our salvation. And then there is a consistent and continual repentance that comes once we are in a relationship with God – this is a necessary part of our sanctification.

Let me show you this in scripture. First of all, repentance was the message Jesus preached to begin his ministry. Repentance is essential to salvation!

Mark 1:14b-15 – “...Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God,¹⁵ and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

Jesus always called people to repentance. Remember the story of the woman caught in the act of adultery? She is brought before Jesus in John 8 by the Pharisees. The penalty for adultery was stoning and Jesus after telling those gathered that “the person who is without sin can cast the first stone” – they walk away one by one and what does he tell the woman when it is just them remaining? “Go and sin no more.” It was a message of repentance.

When Jesus meets with Zacchaeus...goes to his home and has dinner with him! Zacchaeus is convicted to the core.

**Luke 19:8-9 – “And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.”
9 And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.”**

Jesus was certain of this man’s salvation because of the repentance...the change...the turning point in his life.

Jesus in explaining to his disciples AFTER the resurrection what was written about him and his ministry in the Old Testament said in:

Luke 24:46b-48 – “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,⁴⁷ and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things.”

Repentance...a turning from sin was central to the teaching of Jesus and to the doctrine of salvation. You don’t receive Christ without turning from sin and your old way of life!

Read the first few messages that were preached by the disciples after the Holy Spirit came and filled them!

Acts 2:38a – “And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins...”

Acts 3:19-20a – “Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord...”

Repentance in the Greek is the combination of two words. The first word is the word “meta” – it means “after/with” and sometimes even translated as the word “beyond” – we call it the “metaverse” – beyond our universe.

The second word is the word “noeo” which means “to understand, to ponder, to think about”. Repentance has to do with the mind – we’ll work this out in just a moment, because it doesn’t ONLY have to do with the mind, but this is where it starts!

You put these words together and it is to “understand with or use the mind with”. In repentance, we are using our mind to understand our sin and to change...to turn specifically in the way we think about our sin.

We once thought sin was no big deal, but now because of what we know about Jesus, we understand sin is a big deal – we repent in the way we think about it!

That word “turn” in (Acts 3:19) – “turn back” – its where we get our English word “convert from! That’s actually how the KJV translates it!

So, we have a change in our thinking that leads to a change in our actions or our behavior – this is repentance! It's turning from our sin and turning to the Lord!

Listen to the note given about repentance in the **ESV Study Bible**:

“To repent, or “change one’s mind”, in the OT called for a change in a person’s attitude toward God that impacted one’s actions and life choices; it involved the idea of “turning,” that is, from one way of thinking and living to a different way.”

The Greek idea of “metanoia” comes from the Hebrew word or idea of “shuv”. This is the word “turn” in 2 Chron. 7:14. It's used over 1000x in the Old Testament and its primarily translated as the word “return” or “turn back”.

Gen. 3:19 – “By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

So, the word picture to “turn” “return” or “turn back” is incredible. Think about it in terms of the life and times of the Bible – predominately a nomadic people.

They didn't have apps! No maps! If they are walking in the country or desert and look up and nothing is familiar, what would they do? They turned! They went a different direction. They said to themselves, “This isn't it!” AND they turn and go a different direction or turn back and go in the direction in which they came.

THIS...is repentance! This is a picture of salvation. Sin takes us in a different direction from God. All of us were born with a sin nature and from the very beginning we are walking by nature and by choice AWAY from God.

In order to be saved, there MUST be repentance which by the way is NOT a “work” you muster up, but it is a gift from God! It's a part of what we call “prevenient grace” – which simply means before we ever start seeking the Lord, the Lord was first seeking us.

Salvation is a complete and total work of grace. John 6:44 – “no one can come to the Father, unless the Father who sent me draws him.”

God by his grace gives us the desire to repent and when we by faith turn from our sin and to him THAT IS repentance and THAT is when we experience biblical salvation.

We were once going this way AND now we are going in a new direction. It's a change of mind that leads to a change of action.

Now, it's a one-time decision that is essential...necessary for salvation. BUT...we don't just repent once and never have to again! The Christian life is a lifestyle of repentance. This is part of our sanctification – the process of becoming more and more holy involves a lifetime of repentance.

Jim Eliff - "The believer in Christ is a lifelong repenter. He begins with repentance, and ends with repentance."

Illus. Halloween – Halloween was the week before last. It's also "Reformation Day". This is the day Oct. 31, 1517 that the protestant Reformer, Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of Castle Church in Wittenberg.

I had a buddy that sent me this text...he transposed my face on Luther and asked if this is who I was going to be for Halloween (**show pic**)

If you've ever read his 95 Theses, most will say this sparked the Protestant Reformation (talk about turning point) and what Luther was doing was calling on the Catholic Church to repent for some of their teachings specifically about indulgences and the authority of the papistry.

Here is how it starts...this is the first three statements:

1. Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, when He said "Repent", willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance.

2. This word cannot be understood to mean sacramental penance, i.e. confession and satisfaction, which is administered by the priests.

3. Yet it means not inward repentance only; nay, there is no inward repentance which does not outwardly work diverse mortifications of the flesh.

So, take note. Luther was saying that repentance is a lifelong endeavor AND there is no such thing as inward repentance only, but instead a change of mind, leads to a change of life AND until that happens, it's not true repentance!

At salvation, when we have that turning point with the Lord, he saves us...we turn FROM our sin and to him in faith and our life is changed forever. As we progressively grow IN him (this is sanctification) we continually turn from sin day by day in a lifestyle of repentance.

See, repentance is MORE than remorse. Remorse is a deep feeling of sadness or grief over sin. You can be remorseful and NOT repentant.

Repentance is MORE than regret. Regret is a sorrow over sin and perhaps even a disgust at the consequences you may be experiencing.

Repentance is MORE than remorse...it's MORE than regret. Judas would be an example of someone who experienced deep remorse and regret over what he did in selling Jesus out and betraying him, but Judas didn't repent!

Feeling sorry for your sin and the consequences it brings is not the same thing as repenting of your sin.

- True repentance is seeing sin for what it is and thinking differently about it – that’s the mind.
- True repentance is seeing sin and feeling different about it – that’s the emotion – there is a hatred of sin...a denouncing of it!
- True repentance is seeing sin and walking in the opposite direction of it – that’s the will. It’s a volitional decision to turn to the Lord...return to the Lord and not to that specific sin.

In the context of 2 Chron. 7:14, God tells Solomon if the people rebel and sin against him, then it’s not going to work out for them. Blessing follows living in obedience...and by the way, it’s the same today.

When God says, “Don’t”, what he is saying is, “Don’t hurt yourself!” Blessing comes from walking in the way that God designed.

For Israel, he warned them. There will be famine and pestilence and sickness and no rain if you choose to walk in rebellion. HOWEVER,...

“IF my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray, and seek my face and TURN from their wicked ways...”

“Return to me” the Lord says...with your mind...with your emotions...with your will – let your change of thinking influence your change of behavior! Turn back to me and God will see it AND bring help, healing and hope.

We’re going to talk about that help, healing and hope next week when we unpack God’s response to his people. This recipe for revival – THIS is what we can control:

- Fostering humility...
- Seeking intimacy...
- Turning back to him with our whole heart...

Important to note WHEN we do this...when we repent...and are serious about it, we ALWAYS see God waiting with open arms! ALWAYS.

He says in (2 Chron. 7:14) – you do this and “I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and heal their land.

Is. 55:7 – “let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”

Ez. 18:30-32 – “Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord God.

Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin.³¹ Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? ³² For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God; so, turn, and live.”

Hosea 14:1-2, 4 – “Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. ² Take with your words and return to the Lord; say to him, “Take away all iniquity; accept what is good, and we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips...I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them.”

I could give you so many examples of this. God speaking to his people, Israel, if you return to me, I'll be waiting on you and will return you to your land...return your land to you.

For those of us in a relationship with Jesus, the greatest example of his waiting on us is Luke 15 in the story of the prodigal. You remember this story (tell story).

It culminates in **Luke 15:17-24 – “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! ¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”’ ²⁰ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’²² But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. ²³ And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. ²⁴ For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.”**

Some of you may think, “I’ve made a mess of my life and if I go to God now, he’s going to give me a spiritual spanking...a lecture...he’ll be stern.”

NO WAY...this picture shows us a God who is waiting on us to return...to repent...to get to a turning point and from that moment on everything changes.

I want to close this message out by asking some questions regarding repentance. These are personal questions that I want you to think deeply about as we wind this down.

These come from a workbook that I did years ago called, *Seeking Him: Experiencing the Joy of Personal Revival*.

Knowing I was talking about repentance, pulled it off my shelf and read through it again... these will be some questions that will help you know where you are as it relates to repentance.

1. Have I ever experienced the repentance that characterizes genuine salvation?

2. Does sin in my life bother me?
3. Do I have an attitude that says, “Lord, everything I know to be sin, and everything You show me in the future to be sin, I am willing to forsake”?
4. Am I willing to call my wrong actions “sin,” rather than viewing them as merely weakness, struggles, or personality traits?
5. Am I more concerned about grieving God than about the consequences of my sin?
6. Am I willing to accept personal responsibility for my actions without pointing the finger of blame at anyone?
7. Am I willing to take whatever steps may be necessary to make restitution for my sin?
8. When is the last time I can remember experiencing genuine repentance, resulting in a change of attitude and/or behavior?
9. Has God convinced me of any specific sins that I have never truly repented of? If so, and I willing to repent of those sins here and now?
10. Am I willing to be accountable to another believer in those areas where I have experienced past failure and to get help developing new patterns of victory?

When God calls us to repentance...and he is...it's time to act. We have a change of mind...a change of the heart...and a change of the will. And IF we do this...God by his grace might just hear and respond.

Make today a turning point. Let's pray together.

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.