

IF MY PEOPLE #4
Message 2
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INTO: We have been looking at 2 Chronicles 7:13-14. In verse 13 we learned that when God's people go astray, eventually He allows things to come into their lives that they can do nothing about. For Israel, a farming people, it meant such things as a drought or allowing locusts to cover the land. To add to that, it might be a time when they suffered severe health issues. Here are things they could do nothing about and in this way, God got their attention. The same can happen to an individual or a church. In the Babylonian captivity, many, many Jewish people died horrifying deaths and many others were deported to a strange land. It was at this time that Daniel was taken to Babylon.

But in verse 14 God says that if God's people, which are called by His name, humble themselves and pray and seek His face and turn from their wicked ways He will hear from heaven and heal their land. The rains would come, the grasshoppers would go away, and the pestilence would be over.

We talked about the people to whom this passage is directed. It was God's people. We talked about pride, which is the reason why humbling would be required. In the service which dealt with prayer we listened to Lou Sutera on Powerful Prayer. History tells us very clearly that revival comes only by prayer. But it only comes when prayer warriors pray effectively, fervently, and passionately. That is extra hard for Mennonites, right?

When we consider 2 Chronicles 7:14 we find that there is still more. It says if His people humble themselves and pray and what? Seek His face! Before we go on, let us note that humbling comes first. Nobody can ever pray effectively or experience revival as long as they are proud. It cannot happen. God resists the proud. If we try to pray when we are still proud, there can be no blessing. Humbling comes first. But when humbling comes, then prayer must come as well, or there will be no blessing. But once humbling and prayer come, now seeking God's face must come and our question is, just what does it mean to seek His face?

I. THE MEANING OF SEEKING GOD'S FACE

What is significant about the face? When we are speaking to someone, we usually look at their face. The face reveals the soul or the person. When we speak sternly to our children we might say, "Look at me." There is little use speaking to someone who is not really paying attention. And when we look into the face of that child, we may get insight into them and they into us. The question is, whether there is rebellion or if there is obedience; and one look in the face will tell us.

Part of the face are the eyes. The eyes have often been called the mirror of the soul. There we see a revelation of the inner person. Even the eyebrows can tell you a lot. The set of the mouth, the set of the jaw, the expressions they make can tell much of what is in the soul. Now about the nose, what can it tell you? What about flared nostrils? What about a high nose? In our language we call it hüachnätzich. We don't have an English adjective for that but it is to be high nosed, that is it reveals pride. Oh, what all is revealed in the face.

You can tell all kinds of things from the many different facial expressions there are. You can see anger, contempt, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, surprise, amusement, awe, concentration, confusion, contentment, desire, disappointment, doubt, elation, interest, pain and many more.

Sometimes we would not be able to put into words what we see on a face but we understand immediately what is going on in the other person. One can tell a lot of things from body language, but nowhere can we tell as much as we can from the face.

So our text says if God's people will humble themselves and pray and seek God's face. Now note the progression in our text; it is humility before prayer. If one prays with sin in one's heart, the Lord will not hear (Ps. 66:18). But 1 Peter 3:12 says the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are open to their prayers. If one prays in pride, one might just as well spare one's words. God resists the proud. He cannot hear them. So, the order is that humility must come before prayer.

When humility has brought us to prayer, our prayer turns our attention to God. But when our attention is turned to

God, now we must seek His face, and just what does that mean? We know that no one can visually see God's face and live. Not yet. That day is coming for the believer. But while we are living by faith, we cannot see Him. If we could, we would no longer be living by faith. That is why fallen angels cannot be saved. They have seen God. Faith is not possible for them.

So, we ask, just how do we seek God's face. First, we need to note that it is not His physical face we seek. God said to Moses in Exodus 33:20:

20 ...*"You cannot see My face; for **no man shall see** Me, and live."*

So, if we do not visually seek God's face, how do we seek His face? Well, we must seek Him in the ways in which we get to know Him. And how do we get to know Him? It is through His Word. The better we know God through His word, the better we will know how He feels about certain things.

The Psalmist encourages us to pray like this: "Search me O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me" (PS. 139:23-24). There must come a desire in us to be shown what is in us. We can only see ourselves in light of what we see in God.

One day the disciples had fished all night and now they were washing their nets. It had been a bad night and they had caught nothing. Then Jesus spoke to the people from one of the boats and afterward He said to Peter to launch out into the deep and let down their nets. Peter was a fisherman and knew when to fish. So, he said, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing, nevertheless, if you say so, we'll go again."

Well, they now caught so many fish they had a hard time to keep their nets from breaking and when Peter saw it he fell down on his knees and said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8). All through the OT nobody carried a Bible like we do now. Through most of the time after Christ, most Christians did not have a Bible. They had to go by what they had learned by memory to seek God's face, and they did.

Today most of us have more than one copy of the Bible and we have a hard time seeking God's face. From the Word of

God, we can learn what pleases Him and what does not. Here we can learn to see His face. Here we can learn what pleases Him.

Listen to Psalm 27:

1 The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid?

2 When the wicked came against me To eat up my flesh, My enemies and foes, They stumbled and fell.

3 Though an army may encamp against me, My heart shall not fear; Though war should rise against me, In this I will be confident.

4 One thing I have desired of the LORD, That will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD All the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the LORD, And to inquire in His temple.

5 For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; In the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a rock.

6 And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me; Therefore I will offer sacrifices of joy in His tabernacle; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the LORD.

7 Hear, O LORD, when I cry with my voice! Have mercy also upon me, and answer me.

8 When You said, "Seek My face," My heart said to You, "Your face, LORD, I will seek."

9 Do not hide Your face from me; Do not turn Your servant away in anger; You have been my help; Do not leave me nor forsake me, O God of my salvation.

10 When my father and my mother forsake me, Then the LORD will take care of me.

11 Teach me Your way, O LORD, And lead me in a smooth path, because of my enemies.

12 Do not deliver me to the will of my adversaries; For false witnesses have risen against me, And such as breathe out violence.

13 I would have lost heart, unless I had believed That I would see the goodness of the LORD In the land of the living.

14 Wait on the LORD; Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the LORD!

I understand that the translation of verse 8 is very difficult. The NKJV translates it like this:

8 When You said, "Seek My face," My heart said to You, "Your face, LORD, I will seek."

I wonder, how well do we discern the face of the Lord? Do we understand Him well through the Word of God?

Listen to these verses from Matthew 16:1-4:

1 Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven.

2 He answered and said to them, "When it is evening you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red';

3 "and in the morning, 'It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Hypocrites! You know how to discern the **face** of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times.

4 "A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah." And He left them and departed.

We can discern the face of the sky too. We say the wind is coming from the east or north and we discern that it will likely be cold. Just like ancient times we can see when it will be fair or foul weather based on what we see in the clouds.

But can we discern what our actions are like by looking at the face of God? Our children might discern by the decibels in our voice how serious things are. They know if saying something once will be sufficient or if some pleading will probably get them what they want. We can discern many things, but can we discern the face of God?

II. THE REASON FOR SEEKING GOD'S FACE

Why are we to seek God's face? What is the reason? Let me suggest two possibilities. First, in the context of our text, Israel has gone astray and they are not even aware of it. And so, when God hid His face, they went their own way and because of this God hid His face and they got in trouble. Has He hidden His face from me, or you? I remember Billy Graham preaching a message years ago. The theology of evangelists isn't often the best, and I think it was that way here, but his point was worth listening to. Somebody has said, "Good message; wrong text." But he talked about the man who was cutting down trees and he lost axe head. This is a story in the OT. Well, Elisha the prophet was there and he asked, "Where did it fall?" And the man showed him. Does anybody know what Elisha did? He cut off a stick and threw it right there and the axe head floated to the top.

God does some very interesting things that go against every grain of our human nature, and why does He do that? So that when He is done, we have to say, "God was in it. We are totally powerless to do things like that." We find that over and over again in the Bible. I was reminded recently that at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, they ran out of wine. The mother of Jesus said to the servants, "Whatever Jesus tells you to do, do it." And Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." How foolish is that? They are not out of water, they are out of wine.

In John's Gospel we find an account of a man born blind. So Jesus spit on the ground, made some mud, and anointed the man's eyes with mud and told him to go wash it off. The man obeyed and he came back with sight. I was reminded that in the John 2 story Jesus mother said, "Whatever He says, do it."

Now Billy Graham asked what the results would have been if that man kept chopping with his axe handle with no head on the handle? If I remember right, Billy Graham's point was that we are as useless in our work for God if the Holy Spirit is not there as a tree feller without a head on the axe handle, and he is right.

Now let me apply that in another way: We are as hopeless in bringing about revival unless God steps in, as that man

would have been at cutting down a tree with only an axe handle. To have revival we must pray. Listen to Samuel Chadwick, "The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless works, and prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray."

We pray for revival, but I wonder, do we truly mean that? If we knew the cost, I wonder if we would truly want revival? If you would rate yourself 1-10, 10 meaning you groan and travail at night and maybe other times, saying to God, "Oh God, come down and visit us or I die?" And if 0 means I couldn't care less, where am I?

If we want revival in the church, why should we be on our knees? If we truly wanted revival, there is one church meeting we would not miss. Somebody tell me which one it is? I ask us, do we truly want revival? When God hides His face from us and withholds His favor, then we must humble ourselves and pray and seek His face.

Think of Job for a moment. Here was a most godly man but unbeknown to him, Satan had caught him unawares. And how did Satan do that. That shameless devil used Job's godliness as a beachhead into his life. But God, in His lovingkindness let Satan do anything he wanted except take his life.

You can read through Job and see how right he thought he was. Now listen to Job 23:2-3:

2 "Even today my complaint is bitter; My hand is listless because of my groaning.

3 Oh, that I knew where I might find Him, That I might come to His seat!

God's face was hidden from Job and Job could not find him.

In 30:20 he says:

20 "I cry out to You, but You do not answer me; I stand up, and You regard me not.

I added the word "not." That is what the KJV has and I think it is right. God's face was hidden from Job. The only way to save Job is if he will recognize his need. When we

have gone our own way, we will never come on track again unless we recognize our need. And when Job finally gets to see God here is what he says in chapter 40:

1 *Then Job answered the LORD and said:*

2 *"I know that You can do everything, And that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You.*

3 *You asked, 'Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.*

4 *Listen, please, and let me speak; You said, 'I will question you, and you shall answer Me.'*

5 *"I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, But now my eye sees You.*

What did he say? Now, my eye sees you. When Job repented, wow! There he sees God's face! Oh, when we go astray God has to afflict us and He may have to leave us for some time before we are willing to see ourselves. And when we get to see God for who He truly is we get to see ourselves, and here was the result in this very righteous man:

6 *Therefore I abhor myself, And repent in dust and ashes."*

Why should we seek His face? It may be because God has hidden His face from us, and it may be because there is something in us that will destroy us if we do not get to see it.

There may be another reason why we need to seek God's face. We may need to seek His face because when we see His face, we may see what He wants from us. In Deuteronomy 32:20 it says this:

20 *And He said: 'I will hide **My face** from them, I will see what their end will be, For they are a perverse generation, Children in whom is no faith.*

Then in Deuteronomy 31:17 the Lord says:

17 *"Then My anger shall be aroused against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide **My face** from them, and they shall be devoured. And many evils and*

troubles shall befall them, so that they will say in that day, 'Have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?'

Finally, finally, they recognized God's face was hidden from them. Here is what happens when God hides His face from us for a while. When we go our own way and we do our own thing in our own way, then we must be afflicted. The Psalmist said, "Before I was afflicted I went astray. But now I keep Your Word" (Ps. 119:67).

Jeremiah 33:5 says:

*5 'They come to fight with the Chaldeans, but only to fill their places with the dead bodies of men whom I will slay in My anger and My fury, all for whose wickedness I have hidden **My face** from this city.*

There is only one "this city." It is the apple of God's eye, Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 39:24 says:

*24 "According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions I have dealt with them, and hidden **My face** from them."*

Ezekiel 39:23 says this:

*23 "The Gentiles shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity; because they were unfaithful to Me, therefore I hid **My face** from them. I gave them into the hand of their enemies, and they all fell by the sword.*

So, our text says: If my people shall humble themselves and pray and seek My face. Why do we have to seek His face when we have sinned and then humbled ourselves and we have begun to pray? Because His face was hidden from us and we are going our own way. And now we need to seek His face in order to be guided in the right way.

III. THE DANGER OF NOT SEEKING GOD'S FACE

Now let me say that there is a danger in not seeking God's face. When we think we know what is right and we do God's work in our way God will withdraw His face from us and

leave us in affliction and misery. And the ultimate danger is that His face will turn against us.

Jeremiah 44:11 says:

11 *"Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: 'Behold, I will set **My face** against you for catastrophe and for cutting off all Judah.*

Oh, what disastrous words are those! Oh, how horrible when God not only hides His face from us but He sets His face against us. Listen to Ezekiel 15:6-7:

6 *"Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: 'Like the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so I will give up the inhabitants of Jerusalem;*

7 *'and I will set **My face** against them. They will go out from one fire, but another fire shall devour them. Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I set **My face** against them.*

Oh, may we never go this far. I can tell you that some of the godliest of men have not repented when God hid His face from them, and they came to a day when He set His face against them. Verses 1-6 say this:

1 *Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,*

2 *"Again, you shall say to the children of Israel: 'Whoever of the children of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell in Israel, who gives any of his descendants to Molech, he shall surely be put to death. The people of the land shall stone him with stones.*

3 *'I will set My face against that man, and will cut him off from his people, because he has given some of his descendants to Molech, to defile My sanctuary and profane My holy name.*

4 *'And if the people of the land should in any way hide their eyes from the man, when he gives some of his descendants to Molech, and they do not kill him,*

5 *'then I will set My face against that man and against his family; and I will cut him off from his people, and all who prostitute themselves with him to commit harlotry with Molech.*

6 *'And the person who turns to mediums and familiar spirits, to prostitute himself with them, I will set My face against that person and cut him off from his people.*

7 *'Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am the LORD your God.*

When we go astray and we do not seek God the time may come when He sets His face against us. It is amazing how we can manipulate our circumstances and try to convey to our friends how righteous we are, just like Job did. But in the end, we will hurt ourselves.

Oh, never stoop to protect yourself. Are there people here who say, "My problem is this or that other person?" But have I considered the problem with me is most likely me? Am I blaming somebody else for my lack of victory? Am I saying, "But so and so did this or is doing this. It has to quit and I won't bend"?

Now if we humble ourselves and say, "I wonder if I could be the problem," then we are beginning on the right path. The church used to let us go once a year to some place where we thought we might be encouraged spiritually. And we had heard that the Sutura twins, revival preachers, were in a town in Ontario and we went there and observed. And at some point in the meetings they said to us, "We think the pastor is the main problem." The leaders in the church can, and often are the problem. I hope it is not so here but that is why we have been encouraged to pray, "Search ME O God, and know MY heart: try ME and see if there is any wicked way in ME."

I do not know what happened in the end, but if the pastor was the problem and he did not break, he would have been in the danger of God setting His face against him. And there are such pastors who are now selling cars or some other such work. There are those who have led thousands to the Lord who have become atheists. It is not just because they decided they did not believe any more. It is because they did not break over some issue in their lives and God set His face against them.

Someone has said if we are pointing our finger at another, three fingers point back at us. If we think of someone else

when we pray that prayer, we are not serious about wanting revival.

VI. THE RESULT OF SEEKING GOD'S FACE

But there is good news. If we have erred and we humble ourselves and we are praying and seeking God's face and we turn from our wicked ways, something will happen. It is something wonderful.

Listen to Psalm 31:16:

*16 Make Your **face shine** upon Your servant; Save me for Your mercies' sake.*

We might ask ourselves, do I want God's face to shine upon me? This whole of Psalm 31 is such a blessing. You might wish to read it for yourselves. But listen to this now: "Make Your face shine upon your servant." He could have said, "Make Your face shine upon me." But he asked for it to shine upon His servant. He put himself under the mighty hand of God. That is the place of blessing. One thing that happens in true revival is people see God with a shining face. All of a sudden, they have a new God, as they see it. But God did not change, they did! And then when they see God like that, their faces begin to shine. I have seen some of the most glorious faces in revival. I am sad that I have seen so few in my life. Oh God, make your face shine upon us. For that to happen, we will have to seek His face and turn from our wicked ways.

You say, "Now, just what kind of wicked ways are you talking about? As far as I know I am not living in any wicked sin." But I see manipulation. That is a wicked way. I see some drawn faces and they discourage others. Maybe we are avoiding some others. I see some faces I cannot look into. I mean, I see their faces but the curtains are drawn. They have said, "You can't look here. That is not your business. You can't look here, this is mine." One of the things on our suggested prayer list says this: "That God would bring loving unity and deep harmony in my church and in my family." All of that is detrimental to the church.

Do you know those with shining faces? I know there are those who are like that naturally, but I am talking about those whose faces have taken on a godly shine. They aren't hurt all to pieces because somebody said this or that about

them. They aren't hurt all to pieces because somebody disregarded them or crossed their wishes. They aren't worried when they think others may be whispering about them. Oh no, it is not that they are not human and that those things are not a concern but it does not wreck their life. When they are treated like this, they may go to the throne of grace and then lift those very people up to their Father in heaven. They are content to let the Lord have His way with them. There are times when things need to be dealt with. There are times when we need to lift others up in prayer over some matter. They may say, "Oh Lord, I am burdened for so and so. There seems to be something there that is not right. Oh, Lord, would you be gracious to them and reveal whatever it is to them so they can deal with it?" It seems they are unaware of whatever it is, so touch them, Lord."

When we were in Mexico years ago, I spoke on some of this same passage and I gave a message called, "Det Glausnet Hus," "The Glass House." Some have called that *transparent Christianity*. You don't sense any hidden motivations. You know what you see is what you get. Many people are hidden behind walls. They only let you see a little of themselves, and it is that which they want you to see. I know there are such things in our lives that don't belong to others. But there can be many dishonest things in the face we put on. It is called hypocrisy. It is a masked face.

I wrote a little ditty to go with the glass house message. It went like this in PD:

DET DAK ES RAUF

Det Dak es rauf un de Wenj zen' döl,
Nü es doa aules too zeenn.
Det Dak es rauf un de Weng zen' döl,
Fon Zind es mien Hoat nü rein.
Det Dak es rauf, de Weng zen' döl,
Nu jeit mie aules zoo sheen.

In English it is called:

THE ROOF IS OFF

The roof is off and the walls are down,
Now all may clearly be seen.

The roof is off and the walls are down,
From sin my heart is now clean.
The roof is off, the walls are down,
Now life is filled with joy.

If the Lord's face is to shine upon us, the roof must come off and the walls removed. If we are very selfish, we will have a thick roof and thick walls all around, and we will only display the few things that we approve of. Nothing will take the roof off and tear down walls like revival. And when that happens God's face will certainly shine upon us.

You will surely have heard this passage from Numbers 6:

22 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

23 "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, 'This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. Say to them:

24 "The LORD bless you and keep you;

25 The LORD make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you;

26 The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace."

27 "So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them."

And do you know what will be the final result of seeing God's face in the here and now? You understand that we cannot see God's face literally today. We see His face through His Word. And if we come close to God and we see His face, we will be very sensitive to His every expression. Revived people are the most sensitive to God's face of all people.

But there is something even greater that awaits those who learn to read the expression on God's face in this life through His Word. They are in for a most blessed surprise. We have to wait until the last chapter of the Bible to find out what it is and here is what it says:

1 And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

2 In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

3 And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him.

4 They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads.

Do you know of whom the pronoun *they* speaks, when it says, "...they shall see His face"? It is found in the previous chapter. It refers to all those whose names are found written in the Lamb's book of life. That is not you, if you do not personally know Him. And if we personally know Him, we really should get a little Pentecostal. I will see His face, glory, hallelujah! His name will be on my forehead, glory, hallelujah!

CONCL: "If My people, which are called by My name shall humble themselves and pray and seek My face..." Here is what Jesus said, "Ask and it shall be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock and it shall be opened to you." Seek His face, and you will find His face!

Oh, what a day when God hides His face from us. But a worse day comes when He turns His face against us; but oh, what a day when we see His face while we are yet here in the thick of the battle. But that pales in comparison to when we will see Him in all His glory.

If My people will humble themselves and pray and seek My face, then:

24 "The LORD bless you and keep you;

25 The LORD make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you;

26 The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace."

27 "So they shall put My name on the children of Maranatha Evangelical Church, and I will bless them."

