

February 15, 2009

Title: **Harnessing God's Stimulus Package**
Text: **2 Chronicles 7:13-15**

Introduction:

Before I go to work each morning, I grab the newspaper in front of my house and glance at the headlines before I toss it toward the door. For almost a year now, the number one story besides the election has been the **ECONOMY**. In the last twelve months, we have seen:

- 1) Gas prices fluctuate to over \$4.00/gallon,
- 2) ARM loans once hailed as the key to get families into a new home are now a noose around one's neck,
- 3) Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac are now household names,
- 4) Government bailout of the banks and the auto makers,
- 5) Plummeting of house prices have made foreclosures and short-sale common terms in our vernacular.

Signs of the times are everywhere. Unemployment is up. Foreclosures on homes continue. The stock market tanks. Banks find themselves on the brink of survival. Even with low interest rates, no one wants to loan money. Business like Mervyn's and Circuit City close their doors. People walking away from their homes. Our leaders in Washington debate the components of an Economic Stimulus Package costing roughly 900 billion dollars. In California, we face cutbacks in services and increase in taxes to make up the budget deficit. Certainly, these are challenging times.

All this is certainly affected the church. People in our own congregation have been laid off or are wondering how to avoid the next round of cut-backs. Some are taking reductions in pay to keep their job. In our school, we are receiving record numbers of requests for scholarship assistance. Enrollment for next year is on pace for the high school but behind at the elementary level. Giving in the church is behind

what it was last year. In order to save money, we have implemented a freeze in spending, eliminated all unnecessary travel and cut back the 4th of July celebration. I am working with Pastor Eric right now to try to salvage the Easter Egg event. As John Moran and I gather our teams to make a budget for the church and school, we will base it on this years income minus 5% and perhaps 10% and see where that puts us. Certainly, that means tough choices are before us.

I am sure you can add your own stories to my synopsis. **Though the economic situation we face may be unique for many of us, the remedy for the people of God is still the same.** Throughout the ages, difficult times have challenged God's people and in each situation, it is when the church collectively gathers and cries out for divine intervention.

Folks, it is time we allow the headlines of our day to become the headline of the church. It is time we place before our Heavenly Father the burdens and concerns of our lives. It is time come together as a church and make known both our shortcomings and our needs. It is time to pray.

This morning we have designed a service that allows you to express your concerns before God. As we gather together in His house today, I encourage you to share openly and honestly before our Lord your feelings and your needs. Both our homes and our land today are in need of a divine touch. If we cry out to Him, He promises to hear and intervene.

I understand this may not be your typical service, but what we face together is not typical. May I remind you that Jesus called His House a "House of Prayer for All Nations." Today, we are simply walking into that picture.

If you are new to Valley Christian, you are free to participate or to observe. Watch how Christ-followers open us their hearts before God. You will see that

Christians are not exempt from the world's issues. They simply face it differently. Rather than run away from their problems, they run to God.

My friends, our hope is not found in Washington, but from on high. So many words have been printed, so many radio talk shows aired, so much news time on the economy, **it is time we make the headline of our day, the headline in heaven though our prayers.**

Like so many saints before us, we turn to a familiar passage to guide us. It is the words spoken by God to Solomon at the dedication of the Temple. These verses form what is probably the best known and most loved verse in all Chronicles. It expresses, as does no other passage in the Bible, **the stipulations that God lays down for a nation to experience His blessing, whether that nation be Solomon's, Ezra's, or our own. Those who have been chosen to be His people must cease from their sins, turn from living lives of proud self-centeredness, pray to the Lord, and yield their desires to his Word and his will. Then, and only then, will he grant heaven-sent revival (v.15). Turn with me to 2 Chronicles 7.**

2Chr. 7:13 "When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people,

2Chr. 7:14 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.

2Chr. 7:15 Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.

CONSEQUENCES:

2Chr. 7:13 “When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people,

In the Old Testament there is a connection between the choices of God’s people and the circumstances of the day. The covenant between Yahweh and Israel on Mount Sinai was established with **SANCTIONS**. If you obey My word and the terms of this covenant, I will bless you. If you disobey, consequences will come your way. When God’s people became wayward, He would raise up prophets or “covenant enforcers” who would remind God’s people, often times quite vividly and passionately, God’s desire for His people to return back to Him. If they would not heed, consequences would remove His hand of blessings and allow consequences to come through your way either through neighboring nations, drought, or worse yet, silence. Certainly, Solomon felt that way. 7x in 2 Chronicles 6, we see this “When...Then” formula.

In a similar vein, we find ourselves in the midst of numerous consequences both physical and spiritually. Concerning the physical, our country is in a predicament it is not seen in our lifetime. Our financial system is unstable and with it our economy, our jobs and our livelihood. Spiritually, fear, worry, anxiety and despair have covered our land like clouds on a rainy day. By fact and by feelings our lives are unsettled.

This text tells us that the God who created this world holds in His hand the resources to sustain it. When those resources run dry, we are to seek Him for answers.

CONFESSION

2Chr. 7:14a if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways,

The text before us has a very critical condition. If it is not met, then God's grace remained on the sidelines. **The single word "IF" is an invitation to the will of God and the promises of God.** While Washington and Sacramento debate what to do, there should be no doubt what we, the church, must do. "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray..." As the Psalmist writes:

Psa. 121:1 ¶ I lift up my eyes to the hills – where does my help come from?
Psa. 121:2 My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.

Have no doubt that we do in this room, in a few minutes is as important, if not more so, than what our leaders do in Washington or Sacramento.

The second part of this text is also very critical: **"and turn from their wicked ways..."** There must be **A TURNING, A REPENTING, A MOMENT OF CONFESSION.** I have two thoughts on this before we enter a time of corporate time of confession to God:

1. If there is no confession, there is no intervention.

If there is no crying out to God, there is no response from heaven. If there is no acknowledgment of our errors, there is no grace for our situation. If there is no admission that we are in a mess and in need of help, there is no response from God. God wants to help. In Scripture, He is always eager to move, but He waits first for a people to begin crying out to heaven.

2. The people of God confess both their own sins and the sins of their land.

Whether that is Abraham over Sodom, Daniel over the sins that brought his people into exile or Nehemiah over the exiles, God is looking for intercessors who confess the sins of the land. Daniel in particular inspires me. He confesses before God sins he did

not commit. They were sins of his forefather that put him in exile always using the pronoun “we”. I believe we must confess these and other sins before God. We are not petitioning for our needs yet. We will do that in a moment. We are confessing our sins before God. Turn with me to Daniel 9.

Dan. 9:1 ¶ In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom –

Dan. 9:2 in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years.

Dan. 9:3 So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.

Dan. 9:4 ¶ I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed: ¶ “O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands,

Dan. 9:5 **WE** have sinned and done wrong. **WE** have been wicked and have rebelled; **we** have turned away from your commands and laws.

Dan. 9:6 **WE** have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.

Dan. 9:7 ¶ “Lord, you are righteous, but this day **WE** are covered with shame – the men of Judah and people of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you.

Dan. 9:8 O LORD, **WE** and our kings, our princes and our fathers are covered with shame because **WE** have sinned against you.

Dan. 9:9 The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though **WE** have rebelled against him;

Dan. 9:10 **WE** have not obeyed the LORD our God or kept the laws he gave us through his servants the prophets.

Dan. 9:11 All Israel has transgressed your law and turned away, refusing to obey you.

¶ “Therefore the curses and sworn judgments written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out on us, because **WE** have sinned against you.

Dan. 9:12 You have fulfilled the words spoken against us and against our rulers by bringing upon us great disaster. Under the whole heaven nothing has ever been done like what has been done to Jerusalem.

Dan. 9:13 Just as it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come upon us, yet **WE** have not sought the favor of the LORD our God by turning from our sins and giving attention to your truth.

Dan. 9:14 The LORD did not hesitate to bring the disaster upon us, for the LORD our God is righteous in everything he does; yet **WE** have not obeyed him.

Dan. 9:15 ¶ “Now, O Lord our God, who brought your people out of Egypt with a mighty hand and who made for yourself a name that endures to this day, **WE** have sinned, **WE** have done wrong.

Dan. 9:16 O Lord, in keeping with all your righteous acts, turn away your anger and your wrath from Jerusalem, your city, your holy hill. Our sins and the iniquities of our fathers have made Jerusalem and your people an object of scorn to all those around us.

Dan. 9:17 ¶ “Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, O Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary.

Dan. 9:18 Give ear, O God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name. **WE** do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy.

Dan. 9:19 O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name.”

Remarkably, no one is to blame for the mess we find our selves. Home owners point to the banks, the banks the regulatory system, the regulatory system the Federal Reserve, the Federal Reserve to Congress for passing laws without enough oversight, Congress for trying to make the American Dream a reality. This week Time magazine posted 25 people to blame for the financial mess we are all dealing with.

Now I cannot stand here before you today and say definitively what brought us here, but I can give you a few observations.

1. Some have taken on debt than they can handle.
2. Others have walked away from responsibilities and contracts like it is no big deal. I am not saying that you had no other choice, but what I am saying is that there should be confession before God.
3. Fear rather than faith is driving many decisions

Now I point out these failures not to embarrass any individual or institution, but to identify a few issues we need to lift before God facilitate grace in our hour of need.

He is willing to heal our land if we confess our failures.

INTERCESSION

2Chr. 7:14a if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways,

Now that we have confessed sin, I want us to now petition our God for the needs of our lands. Let me give you a few examples:

1. Our leaders in Washington and Sacramento and the decisions they are making that will affect generations
2. Our employers for the budgets they create
3. Ability to stay in one's home
4. Keep one's job
5. Church and School Finances
6. Debt management
7. Wisdom and provision as we press forward with our new sanctuary

One question the leadership of the church was what to do with our building campaign. Many of you know we have a very successful first campaign that raised two and half million dollars. Some say that given such economic realities, we should suspend our need for a new building until some later date. The leadership has deliberated hard about this and felt that such a time to build can be to our advantage. Construction costs are down, people are looking for work and our each week the need in this room becomes more obvious.

8. Stress of marriages and homes
9. Freedom from stuff
10. Deliverance from fear, worry and anxiety
11. People to come to God for help

Ironically, bad business in the world is good business in the church. People are awakening to the reality that life can unravel like a loose seam. Their finances and their careers are not as stable as they once thought. Everyone is seeking for security and stability. They yearn for peace and only God can give it.

ADORATION

Without going to the mics, I simply want you to proclaim the name of our God.
One at a time all over this room.

Now I remember:

- 1) the gas lines in the early 70's (odd and even days),
- 2) the high inflation of the late 70's and the early Reagan years,
- 3) the fall of the Berlin Wall and how that affected spending,
- 4) the economic issues of the derailed the first Bush White House,

This is the greatest economic challenge of my lifetime, perhaps since the Great Depression.