

God's Rescue
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When I began my time away, I wanted (needed) some encouragement. I needed some strength for my soul. I was feeling a little tired; a little fatigued. And I know we serve a God who is happy to provide that kind of grace. So, I did one of the only I know to do when I need that kind of encouragement: I turned to the scriptures. I peered into God's word to rediscover and reexamine what it looks like for God to meet with and to build up his children. I began a scripture-wide study on what it looks like to seek God; I'm not finished, but it's been helpful. Can I encourage you to make sure you do the same thing? Make sure that when you are looking for help, for strength, for guidance, turn to the Word of God. Diligent and disciplined study of God's word is a great antidote from following your own imagination (or as the bible puts it, following your own heart).

God's word is always a truthful, always a reliable, revelation of who he is and what he's done for you. It's also a revelation of you; God's word shows you who you are, what your hope is, what your problem is. Don't guess what God has for you; don't give in to wishful thinking... turn to him by turning to his word). I want to encourage you this morning with what God encouraged me with. And all of us can be encouraged by this word. Many of you here this morning are like me, in that you've been walking with God for a while now; maybe years, maybe decades. But here's the deal; you need God as much today as you needed him the first day you believed. We always need God. And you need to repent and turn to him as much today as you did the first day you turned. So, give attention to God's word today. But maybe some of you here today are searching; you've been giving church, and God, and the Bible a chance, but you're still seeking and you're not sure if you want to cross that line of faith where you give total allegiance to God. My prayer is that what you hear today will convince you that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is too good, too loving, too kind, too wonderful to walk away from and you have to give everything to him.

The passage I want to share with you comes from 2 Chronicles 6, but before I read those verse for us, let me tell you what's happening. Solomon, King of Israel, has just finished constructing the temple of the Lord. God told his father, David, "No! The temple is not for you to build." So, after David's death Solomon assumed this responsibility when he become king. I remember when our new building was finished in March, that first Sunday I had a prayer of dedication asking God to use this new facility and use us, his people, in ways that honor and serve him. That's what Solomon did about 3000 years ago. And something Solomon prayed was a great encouragement to me and I pray will be now to you (READ 2 Chronicles 6:36-40)

The first thing I'm struck by is how Solomon begins this last part of his prayer to God. He says, "If they [your people] sin against you." Solomon knows what's going to happen with his people. He knows they're going to miss God's mark. He knows they're going to fall short. It's not like he's saying it's ok; it's not like he's giving them a pass. He just knows that a time will come when the people of God will take the Lord for granted; he knows a time is coming when they'll

give into their human passions and worldly temptations and they will disobey God. He says, “If they sin against you.” But it’s not really an if. It’s a when. We know that because of what he says in the very next phrase - *for there is no one who does not sin*.

Well, this is me. At the beginning of my time away I was so acutely aware that I was a man who fell short of God’s ways. I was a man who sinned. My guilt, my shortcomings, my inadequacies were so apparent to me. And friends, you’re just like me. For there is no one who does not sin. Now, if you’re thinking, “But Brian, that’s an OT thing. NT believers don’t sin anymore.” Well, the NT says the same thing to us. In James 3 we are told “For we all stumble in many ways.” And 1 John 1 and 2 says, “If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” And then later in chapter 2 John writes, “Little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin....” I don’t want you to; in fact, you ought not to. With the Holy Spirit living inside of every person who trusts in the name of Jesus Christ and armed with the Word of God and living within a church family, you have all the resources and powers from on high to resist temptation. Praise God! And as we humbly live in the power of God’s Spirit and we believe in the promise of God found in his word instead of believing the lies of sin and temptation, and if we submit ourselves to the loving correction and accountability of the church we will be spared from sinning more and more. But you will sin.

And if you don’t believe the OT and you don’t believe the NT, just talk to someone who lives with you; talk to someone you work with and ask them, “Do I ever sin?” I think you know what the answer will be. If you asked my wife, my boys, “Does your husband, your dad sin?” They would laugh and laugh and say, “Uh, Yeah!”

Have you come to see this about yourself, my dear friends? Has God given you the eyes to recognize you are a sinner? And that this is indeed your biggest problem? It’s the biggest problem in your parenting, in your marriage, in your financial troubles, in your disappointments at work or school? There are many challenges in this world, no doubt, and sometimes we are victims to the sins of others or to the circumstances of a fallen world, but my biggest problem is my own sin, and your biggest problem is your own sin. If you read Solomon’s entire prayer to God in 2 Chronicles it’s all about that... their sin before God. Throughout the prayer Solomon prays, “If a man sins against his neighbor... If the heavens give no rain because they have sinned... If your people are defeated by an enemy because they have sinned against you... God, help them, forgive them, heal them.” That’s his concern. Not self-esteem. Not financial stability. Not better communication in marriage. Not success at work or on the playing field. Sin was their problem and it is our problem, too.

Now, you might be thinking at this point, “Brian, I thought you said you were going to encourage us. Are you ever going to get there?” Yeah, good question; let’s do that now. When I first read this passage this summer, this phrase jumped out at me: “so that they are carried away captive to a land far or near.” I somewhat felt like I was captive in a far away land. I mean, again, remember what I shared with you earlier. I was really tired, spent, and fatigued. I could relate to the imagery found in Solomon’s prayer. I felt like Solomon was praying for me. God, when Brian

sins against you - and, of course, he will - and when he's captive in a land far away." "He's praying for me!" I thought. He's asking God to help me. And what did he ultimately pray for? The answer to that is found in vs. 39 when he says, "hear... their prayer and their pleas, and maintain their cause and forgive your people who have sinned against you."

"Hear their prayers and pleas, maintain their cause, forgive their sins." God, would you hear my plea, too? Would you maintain my cause? Would you establish my feet, Oh Lord? Would you take my tired, weary soul and encourage it? Would you help me stand on the solid ground of your grace God and enable me to be the man, the husband, the father, the pastor you've called me to be? And God, would you forgive my sins? Would you forgive my neglect of you? Would you forgive my self-sufficiency? Would you forgive my impure thoughts? Would you cover my hopeless heart with the strength of your forgiving grace?

Well, will God? Is this a prayer God will answer? To that question and I can answer an emphatic "Yes!" God has answered Solomon's prayer by sending the Lord Jesus Christ to die on a cross to forgive us of our sins. Earlier, I read for you 1 John 2:1, but let me finish that verse and add vs. 2 to the mix. It says, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation [the atoning sacrifice] for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."

I don't want to get too deep into the minutiae of the details, but God's word teaches us that Jesus Christ, God incarnate, came to this earth to fulfill, to guarantee, every promise God made. To answer every prayer for forgiveness and mercy his people offered. Jesus Christ willingly died on the cross to pay the penalty of our sin, to break the power of sin's hold on you and me. And then three days after he died, Jesus was resurrected from the dead proving that what he accomplished on the cross worked; that God's plan took. God answered Solomon's prayer for forgiveness for your sins, for my sins by having Jesus be the sacrificial offering for sins in our place.

That's ultimately why I was encouraged when I read 2 Chronicles 6. My mind didn't camp on my fatigue and sin too long; it didn't dwell on the reality of my filth before God. God mercifully redirected my attention, my sight, my thoughts on what he has done for me. I was reminded that no matter how far away, how lost I got myself from God, he would come to me; he would hear my prayer. That he would forgive my sin - in fact, that he already had forgiven my sin on the cross where he died for me.

Now, I have to tell you one more thing; in fact, if I wrapped up the sermon now, it would be incomplete. Because this passage tells us that there is a condition, there's a response of faith that we need to exercise to receive this gift of forgiveness and rescue. Let me read for you the key verses and see if you can pick up on it (READ vs. 37-39a).

Did you hear it? Did you hear those common references and themes? “God, If they turn their heart... if they repent and plead with you... if they repent with all their mind and with all their heart... then hear from heaven, maintain their cause, and forgive their sin.”

Repentance means to turn; it means to change your mind, your posture, the way you're facing. And to be rescued, we need to repent. Mark, the Gospel writer, summed up Jesus' entire message to a lost world as, “Repent, and believe the gospel!”

You see, here's why repentance is so important. Repentance is the way we recognize and communicate our need and desire for God. By not repenting we are saying, “You know, I really don't need to be rescued; I'm not in that bad of a place; I'm not totally captive and guilty in my sin; I really don't want to give up this world for God and his grace.” Refusing to repent is basically saying, “I really don't want all of God in all of me.”

And that's what's required. Did you catch it? If they repent with all of their mind and with all of their heart. So, this is an important message about our faith in God: there's no halfway with God. There's no part time faith; there's no “I'll meet you halfway, God.” It's all or nothing with God.

I have a maxim, a motto, in life that goes like this: when in doubt, repent. When you're unsure of what to do next, find something you need to turn from. So, as I sat both discouraged in my fatigue, but hopeful and glad in God's grace, I told myself, “Brian, there's stuff you need to turn from. What are those things? What are those besetting sins you haven't fully repented from? What are those bad habits, those unhelpful routines that you need to change your mind about so you can experience the full life of God?” I need to do that and so do you to experience the grace God has for us.

If you're like me, you need motivation to repent. Repenting, changing directions, is hard. I don't always want to do it. So, I have to tell myself truth to motivate me towards repentance. Truth is found in the Bible and here's one truth from scripture that motivates me: repentance brings life. Life is found on the other side of turning. And I want life. Life with God. New life from God. I don't want to be stuck in a place of death. So, turn and find life.

My aim was to encourage you today. To encourage you in the way I was encouraged. My soul needed to be told (again) that God will find me and rescue me whether I'm in a near or far away land. And even though my sin is what got me there, he will still find me. But I need to turn to him. I can't keep facing the same direction, I can't have the same mindset and think I'll get rescued. I need to repent and plead to God. I need to turn to him with all my mind and heart. And he will come with lavish, merciful grace.

How about you? Do you know God will hear you, that he will maintain your cause, that he will forgive you? Don't you want that? Maybe more importantly, do you see that you need that? I know I do. And I'm so glad, I'm so happy, that God will do this for me. And he will do it for you.