

## May 21 Tough Questions – How can you tell when someone is misquoting the Bible?

Hey, Tim Perry here, pastor of Spiritual Discovery at Christ Community Church. Thanks for joining me for Week 20 of Tough Questions.

The question bugging me this week is this: How can you tell if somebody is misquoting scripture? You hear stuff all the time that people claim comes from the Bible and you wonder does it even say that? Or is that what that means in the Bible? Let's talk about that for a couple of minutes today.

You might be like little Daisy here. Daisy, the eight-year old writes a letter to God:

*"Dear God, my teacher, Mrs. Davies (and I hope this isn't Nancy Davies, Director of our Children's Ministry here at Christ Community) says if I'm bad, I'll go to Hell. But I want to because Grandpa lives there and it will be fun." Well, kids can say the darnedest things. Well, did this kid actually hear his teacher, Mrs. Davies, say that and where did Mrs. Davies get that principle from? Does that even come from the Bible?*

Well, here's a more sophisticated example that comes straight out of the pages of our Project 4:4 reading this week. It's a promise that Christians often claim when praying for revival. Let's take a quick look at it and we'll investigate how Christians tend to use this verse and whether or not they're maybe bending scripture in doing so. Well here's the verse that gets quoted all the time on National Day of Prayer, whenever our churches are praying for a revival:

*"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 I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and I will heal their land."(2 Chron. 7:14 NIV)*

Sounds like a great promise, doesn't it? And well-meaning Christians and myself included in this often times are on our knees praying this on the National Day of Prayer every year. Well, what principles guide our selection of passages like that and how we use them? Is it true that Christians can claim this verse as a promise for national revival? Can we really pray that way based on what this passage is talking about?

Well, I want to take you over to my whiteboard for a minute and help you get a grip on some terminology that will help us as we explore how do we interpret Bible passages like this one? – then we'll revisit this text at the end of the video.

Head over to my whiteboard with me for a quick minute. Reading, understanding and applying the Bible is a matter of two processes. I'm going to define those for you on the board here real quick.

“Exegesis” and “Hermeneutics” – wouldn’t it be great if we could just open up our Bible, read it and know exactly what it means for us and how to live it out. But the first step in understanding scripture is to understand the *“author’s intended meaning”*. The writer is trying to say something and is trying to say something to a literary audience that he is writing to. We’re not that audience for a second thing that we have to consider in doing good exegesis is – who is the original audience? It’s not you and me. The writer is using a different language than we use, and he’s speaking to a culture very different from our culture. So in this very first step that we call “exegesis” – this concept of context is really, really important. We have to understand the history and times of when this author was writing, and we have to resist the temptation to say, “Well, here’s what it means to me so that’s what I’m going to go with.” The author who originally wrote it has a very definite intended meaning – even if it’s difficult for us to get a grip on.

Well, the second part of reading, understanding and interpreting the Bible is what we call “hermeneutics” and if I could relate the two ideas, I would relate them like a target or bulls eye. “Exegesis” is a foundational process we need to begin with so that we’re listening to the original author and what he’s saying, but that becomes a part of a larger process that we call “hermeneutics”. Hermeneutics is just a word that means interpretation and it includes everything from reading the Bible and doing good exegesis to get at what the original author meant to take that into contemporary time frames in which we live. So it embraces the “author’s intended meaning” (AIM) – aim at the author’s intended meaning first, but then ask the question of contemporary significance. What’s that mean for God’s people today? What does that mean in our culture and in our time?

The other question that hermeneutics ultimately answers is: What does this passage mean today? Now you can see why it’s important not to start with this part of the process (contemporary significance) because that’s the conclusion – that’s the end point. If we don’t do our homework in exegesis (understanding where the author’s coming from), we may be reading into the Bible a meaning that’s not even there at all. One author has put it this way: “The Bible never means something that it never meant.” It has to start with what the original author meant to say to his original audience and then we transpose that into our cultural times.

So what does that mean for our passage in 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles? Let’s take a minute to revisit that and think about doing good exegesis and good hermeneutics on that passage. Can we rightfully claim 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 7 as a promise from God that if believers pray hard enough, we’re going to experience revival in our culture?

Let’s take a look at it a little bit closer. So what do we make of this promise that if God’s people call on Him, He’ll bring revival and healing to their land? Well, this comes from 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 7 and step #1 in doing good exegesis on a Bible passage is to read a little bit more of what’s happening in the text. So let’s do that first and then I’ve got a couple of comments about the exegesis of this text.

So the Lord is saying this to Solomon on the very day that Solomon dedicates the temple – the brand new temple:

“I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a temple for sacrifices.

<sup>13</sup>“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, (so that’s the condition) <sup>14</sup>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 I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land. <sup>15</sup>Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place. <sup>16</sup>I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my Name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there.”

So God is giving lots of reassurance – lots of promise, but He’s mixing that promise with things that sound like a warning as well. Let’s read a little bit more:

<sup>19</sup>“But if you (and he’s talking to Solomon) turn away and forsake the decrees and commands I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them, <sup>20</sup>then I will uproot Israel from my land, (that’s a really big warning!) which I have given them, and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name. I will make it a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples. <sup>21</sup>This temple will become a heap of rubble. All who pass by will be appalled and say, ‘Why has the LORD done such a thing to this land and to this temple?’ <sup>22</sup>People will answer, ‘Because they have forsaken the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who brought them out of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, worshiping and serving them —that is why he brought all this disaster on them.’”

So what sounds like a breezy kind of promise for believers of all times is, in fact, a very stern warning. Now here’s a couple of other things we have to pay attention to in the exegesis of this passage. Exegesis is getting the intended meaning from the original author to the original audience. What’s happening in this context is that the covenant is being renewed between God and the king – between God and the nation of Israel. So this is Solomon being spoken to by God and being reaffirmed or encouraged that, “Yes – I have an agreement with Israel, my people.” The year here is circa 960 BC. This is right after David’s reign and we’re located here in Jerusalem, the capital city of the nation of Israel. The nation of Israel constitutes what we would call a theocratic monarchy. It’s a kingdom – Solomon is the king, but Yahweh is their God – He’s the ultimate ruler so it’s theocratic in that sense, but monarchical in the sense that Solomon is in charge as their king.

Well, that helps us see what the context is of what’s been spoken in the Bible. So to think more broadly now of the hermeneutics of this text, we’ve got to ask some bigger questions. We can just reach in that passage and pull out our favorite verse and claim that and say here’s what we’re going to do as Christians here and now today.

The first question we have to ask is: "How do the cultural contexts compare?" We don't live in a theocratic monarchy in the United States of America or in any country where Christians may find themselves. We live in a democracy – in a secular democracy. So it's a large claim for Christians to say that we're going to claim this promise that God will heal our whole land as long as we all repent. That is comparing apples and oranges in terms of the context in the first place so it can't be exactly like that today.

A second question we've got to ask is: "What is the rest of the meta-narrative?" and I use that word meta-narrative to talk about the Bible's big story line. Remember that? Creation, fall, redemption, fulfillment. We can't just reach into the Old Testament and claim a verse or two and put that in action today without any regard for the whole story of what's taking place. In fact, in this story in 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 7, God says that if you drift away from me – if you start worshipping other gods, I have something to say about that. I am going to bring judgment upon you through other nations. So as you track with the whole rest of the Biblical meta-narrative, you see that that very temple that Solomon is dedicating gets destroyed – not once but twice. One time it gets destroyed way back in 587 BC by Nebuchadnezzar II. The Babylonians come in, they completely siege the city and they destroy the temple. Exactly what God warned about in 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles takes place. And then that temple gets rebuilt and later on when Jesus comes, Jesus and the disciples are walking along – and the disciples say, "Look at that impressive temple." And do you remember what Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth – not too long from now there's not going to be one stone left on another." So in AD 70, the emperor Titus comes through, wipes out the whole city of Jerusalem and the temple never gets rebuilt after that.

So what we take initially as some kind of a promise from God's word that we can claim as Christians today – if we repent and confess God's going to heal our land – we actually need to read it through a lens of a warning as well. Maybe the principle for us today is to take warning about our spiritual compromise more than to say, "Here's a tool for national revival. Here's something you can pray for – I'll come on the scene and save your country."

Well the last question then we have to ask when we're doing good hermeneutics – the broader process here of interpreting and applying the Bible – is to ask the question, "Is there a trans-cultural principle?" Is there something that transcends the culture and times of what are being talked about here in 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 7? And I think there are several things that we can say are trans-cultural principles out of this passage that falls short of being a promise for national revival.

First of all, we have to say that repentance is a trans-cultural idea. When Christians repent, God responds with mercy and forgiveness and healing. Now the context may not be that God heals the whole country, but it could be that 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 7 is teaching us a principle about living humbly before God – about getting rid of all

other idols in our life. About repenting and turning back to God, and that God will bring mercy and healing to us.

Well, is the trans-cultural principle then, at the end of the day a promise for national revival? I don't think so when we look at the overall hermeneutics of 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 7.

So to get back to the question of why is it that the Bible get misquoted or how can I tell if the Bible is being quoted right or applied correctly – think about these two processes – exegesis and hermeneutics. Usually when it's just hermeneutics – when people are skipping to the bottom line without any consideration of the exegetical issues, you can count on the Bible being misquoted, distorted, stretched or something. Usually in your gut you are sitting there going – is that valid for God's people today the way that that preacher claims that is or that speaker on the radio is talking about. We have to be very careful about how we lift trans-cultural meaning out of scripture and apply it to the church today.

Other things that could happen is when we jump to the end of the story and we say – here's what God's people need to do today and we don't give any credence whatever to what God did then – there can be a disconnect between the God of back then and the God of today, but He's the same God. So we have to ask careful questions about the nature of God and human nature and what is the grand meta-narrative of scripture that we are a part of before we jump in and say that this part of the Bible means this for us today. It doesn't mean that it doesn't have any bearing on us today, but to work hard and find the trans-cultural principles that apply is pretty important and we need to do our exegetical homework in the process.

Well if any of this resonates with you and you just want to leave a comment, hit on the comment link. I'd love to talk to you more. Thanks for being with me. This is Tim Perry, pastor of Spiritual Discovery at Christ Community Church.