

163 "To enquire of the Lord"

In Ezekiel Chapter 20.1 we read of a visit to the prophet Ezekiel of "certain of the elders of Israel". The date of this meeting is emphasised - always a pointer that what follows has great spiritual significance. The elders "came to enquire of the Lord, and sat before me" Ezekiel tells us (verse 1); they were obviously trying to find out why the people of Israel, God's covenant people no less, found themselves defeated and thrown into exile.

The Lord then instructs Ezekiel as to what he is to tell these elders (verse 2 and following). God's faithful dealings with His people are recounted - God's complete faithfulness towards His people is in marked contrast to the people's perpetual refusal to walk in His ways.

A short sample of God's message to His wayward people gives us the flavour - "But I said unto their children in the wilderness, Walk ye not in the statutes of your fathers, neither observe their judgements, nor defile yourselves with their idols: I am the Lord your God; walk in my statutes, and keep my judgements, and do them; and hallow my sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between me and you, that ye may know that I am the Lord your God" (Ezekiel 20.18-20).

We are shown in these words that, as far as God is concerned, there are very definite things for His people to avoid, and equally, very definite things for them to cling to. Crucially, they are told here to shun a great deal of what their "fathers" had been getting up to - their customs, assumptions, rulings, traditions and priorities. Instead - blindingly obvious but they kept ignoring this! - the people were to get back to God's law, His ways, instructions and expectations.

Now much of this teaching still applies to God's people of today, the people of the New Covenant. We have to admit that the state of God's Church today is none too rosy, at whatever level we may care to look. While there are certainly places of tremendous spiritual progress in various parts of the world, unfortunately the more common picture is one of decline, splintering, and downright feebleness in the face of the strong secularist tide flowing all around us. The Lord gave those elders of Israel (who at least had the sense to come and ask) a very clear message: "Get back to Me, and stay with Me!". What are such words to mean in practice for us, the people of God in Christ's Church today?

The answer is easily identified of course: We must cut through the ways of "our fathers" - the traditions, priorities and assumptions we may have unthinkingly

received from them - and concentrate on the pure Word of God as our guide. The best pattern of doctrine and practice for Christ's Church, which the Lord in His mercy has provided for us, remains in the Book of Acts and the Epistles. We see there clear preaching about the Person and Work of Christ, all underpinned by the fact of His Resurrection; clear instruction to produce effective discipleship; and simple, warm, heartfelt worship, prayer, love and fellowship, all blessed by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

Those are the things that our forebears concentrated upon, in times and places far tougher than most of us experience today. Other activities - how ever attractive or sensible these may have appeared - they left alone. In the world's eyes the first Christians were pathetically weak and beneath contempt. But see who prevailed!

So, like those elders of Israel with Ezekiel, we do well to "enquire of the Lord", to check that in our personal and shared spiritual lives we are getting things right. Consider for example your own local church fellowship: as the Lord surveys all that is going on there, is He content with what He sees? Are the important things being done effectively, and the not-important things being laid aside?

By concentrating on God's Word as our sole guide, we can avoid the mistakes and errors we may have unwittingly inherited from "our fathers", and so be freed up to focus on those things which truly matter as far as the Lord is concerned - those things which demand from us a firm, loud "Yes"!

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