

229 Two Interwoven Strands

We can see, from God's Word and current global events, that the re-birth of the Jewish nation in 1948 is a significant step in the Lord's steadily unfolding purposes for this world, a step which should keep us alert and watchful.

We know also that those divine purposes reflect two deep, interwoven strands of God's character. The first strand is God's total love for this fallen creation, fully expressed in Christ at such appalling cost. God means us well, He wants to bless, and even now, because of His love, the path through that narrow gate into salvation still remains open for any to pass through (eg., Matthew 7.13-14).

The second strand - much less spoken of these days but just as real – is God's utter righteousness, which necessitates the eventual passing of His righteous judgement upon all UN-righteousness within His creation. This divine righteousness prompts us to action! – first, by our acknowledgement of this gulf between the righteous God and His sinful, un-righteous creation, which includes us; and second, by our grateful acceptance of Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Lord and Saviour of our own lives. (Putting it very briefly, our acceptance of Christ by faith means Christ's righteousness is "imputed" upon us, His followers, so the righteousness-gulf is closed through Christ and through no merit of our own; eg., Romans 4.20-25 / Ephesians 2.8-9). Those who refuse this single, wonderful, God-given escape-route are "without excuse" (Romans 1.20), and remain in line for God's judgement (egs., John 3.14-18, 36 / Luke 21.36 / Acts 4.10-12 / II Thessalonians 1.1-10 / etc ...).

So we see how important it is for us to keep both of these divine strands interwoven, with equal attention given to them both. Strand One by itself - "God is love" (I John 4.8b), with its common offshoots such as "God loves you", and "God loves everybody" – risks making God sound like a big softie. Strand Two by itself – "God is going to judge you" – risks making Him sound like a heartless tyrant.

By way of example, an imbalance of these two strands is frequently seen at funerals, where the basic spiritual message (if there is one at all) too often comes down to "God loves the deceased, and all of us, and everyone else, so everything is fine". The congregation members, most of whom perhaps rarely attend church, leave none-the-wiser regarding either the need for their own response of personal faith in Christ, or the reality of divine judgement hanging over them.

Such folk are at risk of living and dying assuming there is "peace, peace" between God and themselves because they have only taken in Strand One, God's love. But without Strand Two, God's righteousness, with its need for the response of a living faith in Christ to bridge that righteousness-gulf, the reality remains stark – ".... there is no peace" (Jeremiah 6.14). Judgement awaits them, and that judgement is very serious: it will be based on their reaction to Christ now, in this stage of their lives, and its outcome will determine where they

themselves will spend eternity in the next stage of their lives (eg., most graphically, Revelation Chapter 20). This is clearly not a game.

We see throughout Scripture that God has no wish to judge unless and until His holy righteousness compels Him to do so. In His Word He has made abundantly clear Who He is, who we are, why He has created us, and what our lives are to consist of. As people or nations go astray, He repeatedly warns, with His mild judgements gradually leading to greater ones, as He gives time and opportunity for repentance and a turning-back to Himself. Finally His full judgement falls, (yet even then still preserving a “faithful remnant”), as with the Flood of Genesis 6-8, the exile of Israel and Judah, and the scattering of the Jews after AD 70 because of their rejection of Christ their Messiah, a rejection we gather from Israel’s re-birth is drawing to a close.

Today, right now, divine judgements as yet in the future are clearly promised for individuals and nations. Many shrug at these promises, but what about us? If we really believe them, surely we can only thank God afresh for His amazing mercies in Christ, and make known to those around us, as we are able, those two precious, interwoven strands of God’s character - His love and His righteousness – and why each of those two strands matters so much.

Psalm 96.

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