

316 “Arise O Lord”

Though this New Year has hardly started, that season of “peace on earth and good will toward men”, briefly trotted out each Christmastime in the media, has quickly returned to a continuing season of “turbulence on earth and bad will among men”.

In one sense this turbulence wherever we look is “nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1.9), for man’s nature in its natural state remains as sinful as it has always been since the Fall in the Garden of Eden. But what is new today is a potent mix of influences now at work which are unprecedented in their scale.

First is the continuing erosion of Christian influence within western societies. While this has been wilfully going on for decades, it has now reached a point where the average man, woman or child has hardly an inkling of, let alone any interest in, biblical standards of behaviour, either towards Almighty God or towards one another. Western societies have largely exhausted the “Christian capital” that had been accumulated over the centuries and which, by God’s grace, has provided guidance, stability and restraint. As a result we see anti-biblical laws passed, and anti-biblical behaviour now common place, particularly with regard to marriage and the family, those vital building-blocks which God has placed at the heart of any stable society. Truly, “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Psalm 11.3).

Second is our unprecedented ability to cause deep damage to one another. This applies between nations, with not only appalling weapons of mass destruction stacked up around the world, but now also with fearful opportunities for massive damage to be done via cyberspace and outer space. At a more local level, with the need for people simply to co-exist with one another in a civilised way, we see how devastating can be the effects of social media in its various forms in bringing misery, friction or worse, all caused by hasty, ill-tempered words and the click of “Send”.

Thirdly we now have powerful trans-global media companies which give instant, constant coverage, which thrive on sensationalism, and which thereby make careful reflection among the decision-takers that much harder to achieve. We should also mention here films, video games and TV “soaps” and dramas: these depend on increasingly lurid content in their fight for success and attract millions of followers as a result – a truly dangerous diet that is spread constantly throughout society.

With these three powerful influences on the loose – the virtual disappearance of Christian restraint, the ability to hurt each other very easily, and the dominance of an all-powerful media and its fellow-travellers – the turbulence we see all around us is inevitable, and is set to increase.

“Arise, O Lord”, cried David under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit – “let not man prevail, let the heathen be judged in thy sight. Put them in fear, O Lord: that the nations may know themselves to be but men” (Psalm 9.19-20, KJV). Then in Psalm 10 we are reminded of the ways of the wicked: pride, persecuting the poor, boasting, “God is not in all his thoughts (v.4b), grievous ways, puffing at his enemies, a sense of indestructibility, devious speech, secret plotting, and “God hath forgotten” (v.11). Such words ring a good many bells for us today!

In response we read again, “Arise, O Lord”; and then, “O God, lift up thine hand: forget not the humble” (10.12). In contrast to the notions of the wicked, God does indeed see (v.14); He will seek out and punish where necessary (vv.14-15); it is the Lord, not the wicked, who is King for ever and ever (v.16); God hears the desire of the humble (v.17), and will indeed bring the day when “the man of the earth may no more oppress” (v.18).

So we “take to the Lord in prayer” the growing turbulence of today with its many causes, and especially in these critical days we pray for God’s sovereign hand over the whole Brexit situation. We take fresh comfort in all the blessings we enjoy by our being, by God’s grace, “in Christ” (egs., Romans 5.1-8 & 8.15-18, 26-39). In our own lives we abide in the Christ-Vine (John 15.1-8), showing as we do so a loving, urgent concern for “those who are without” (egs., Philippians 2.14-16 / Colossians 4.5-6 / I Thessalonians 4.12). We express the peace that is found in the Lord Jesus Christ, the “Prince of Peace”, remembering the great promise that follows this title – “Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this” (from Isaiah 9.7).

Praise God, man’s turbulence will cease, and God’s peace in Christ will prevail.

So with thankful hearts we lift our cry of faith, hope and love, “Arise O Lord!”

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