

400 “Fighting the good fight of faith”

God’s world, our world, is in great turmoil. Jesus’ words come to mind, in His referring to “the latter times” (as described later on in I Timothy 4.1a) – “distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring” (we can understand those words politically as well as literally, for often in Scripture “the sea” refers to the Gentile nations); “men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth ...” (from Luke 21.25b-26a, KJV). How very true.

As we try to make sense of what is going on, we keep in mind that this world has been fouled up by human sin since the Fall of Genesis 3: the ground itself is under God’s curse (3.17b), life is generally hard work (3.18-19), and spiritual and physical death prevail (egs., Genesis 3 / Ecclesiastes 9.3b / Romans 5.12, 17a, 19a; 6.23a / I Corinthians 15.21a, 22a (very selective texts at this stage, avoiding for the moment the Good News that follows). Man, when left in his natural, severed-from-God state, is incapable of beating off sin, of drawing close to our holy Creator and of building a better world, even if at times he may try hard.

Added to this bleak spiritual situation is the existence of fierce spiritual warfare being fought “in the heaventies”, the effects of which spill over onto this earth. We are told of - “the prince of this world ... the god of this world ... the prince of the power of the air ... the wiles of the devil ... against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places ... the power of darkness ... principalities and powers ... your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion ...” (from John 12.31 / II Corinthians 4.4 / Ephesians 2.2; 6.11-12 / Colossians 1.13; 2.15 / I Peter 5.8, KJV). This is no party game.

Now, praise God, we can come to the Good News in Christ. The grip of Satan, the devil, the adversary, has indeed been smashed by the shedding of Jesus’ sinless blood on Calvary’s tree (eg., Hebrews 2.14b), and his doom is clearly spelt out (eg., Revelation 20.1-3, 7-10). Christ, having reversed the sorrows of Genesis 3, is now in the place of supreme authority and power (egs., Ephesians 1.19-23 / Philippians 2.9-11 / Colossians 1.12-18; 2.9-15 / I Peter 3.22). But meanwhile we can all see that Satan has far from given up.

In our response to our God-given mercies in Christ, we too are to “fight the good fight of faith [and] lay hold on eternal life” (from I Timothy 6.12),

putting on and using that “armour of God” as we do so (Ephesians 6.10-18). These are strong words which demand strong, practical action from us, for God’s Truth in Christ is being challenged “in the heavenlies” and on earth as never before.

One topical example of the need for this “good fight of faith” arises from the sentencing of a so-called “white supremacist” for his murder of 51 people in a mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand. This was a wicked, sinful deed and nothing to be said here dilutes that fact one jot. But notice first the media term “white”, suggesting that this was a racial attack: it wasn’t, because Islam has nothing to do with “race”, and its adherents straddle all ethnic groups. Notice the term “supremacist”, yet the attacker’s protest, so wickedly and wrongly expressed, sprang in no small measure from his reaction against what is termed “Islamocrep”, a phenomenon we are seeing throughout the world.

Notice also how this wicked deed was 100% counter-productive, for it allows the narrative to be spun that when it comes to violent, terrorist-type attacks, Muslims and non-Muslims are “all the same”. Yes indeed, the wickedness on each foul occasion will be much the same no matter who is the perpetrator, but of course the number of attacks against Muslims is miniscule compared with those perpetrated by Muslims – a fact that government and media people choose not to acknowledge. They are understandably desperate to “keep the lid on” for peaceful community relations, but their silence can so easily allow “Islamocrep” quietly to continue.

So this example from New Zealand illustrates our need as Christ’s people to have our eyes and ears wide open as to what is going on across the battlefield, and our mouths wide open too in prayer. In our reacting to Islam, while most Muslim people in our localities may well be pleasant, law-abiding citizens, “they all need Jesus”, and meanwhile they are members of a Faith which is far from being a benign fellow-traveller with Judeo-Christianity and which clearly sits uncomfortably in western society. These are the facts, whether we like them or not, and as part of our own “fighting the good fight” may we address them when appropriate, courteously and clearly in Gospel terms - for Jesus’ sake, and for the benefit of all.