

406 Ifs, Whens and Thens

With a second wave of Covid-19 now flowing up the proverbial beach, globally, nationally and locally, come fear, confusion, discord, weariness.

Scripturally we realise that the Lord is allowing these Covid travails for His own gracious purposes. Man is being shown very clearly that he is not “Mr Independent-of-God” after all, and that it is high time for our leaders to call for national prayers of repentance to “the God of our fathers” (II Chronicles 20.6 / Acts 3.13; 5.30; 22.14), that is, to Almighty God, who has revealed Himself to us in His Word, the Holy Bible.

In His mercy, such a prayerful return is of course wide open from God’s side. Last week we saw the recurring pattern through the Old Testament of God’s covenant people deeply sinning, getting into trouble as a result, eventually returning to the Lord in repentance, and being forgiven and restored. We see a precise summary of this pattern in I Kings 8, where King Solomon, in his great prayer of supplication after the dedication of the temple, brings some “Ifs” and “Whens” before the Lord, followed crucially by the “Thens” (KJV).

The “Ifs” and “Whens” are found in Chapter 8 verses 31, 33, 35, 37 (with reference to a pestilence, very timely for us), 42, 44, 46 and 47. Here we concentrate on the “Thens”, the point being that they are all much the same! “Then hear, do, judge, justify” (v.32); “Then hear, forgive, bring them again” (v.34); “Then hear, forgive, teach, give” (v.36); “Then hear, forgive, do, give” (v.39); “Hear, do” (v.43); “Hear, maintain” (v.45); “Hear, maintain, forgive, give” (vv.49-50).

Beside the obvious lessons here, one or two other points are notable. The purpose of these “Then” prayers is that the people may fear the Lord, and know His name, and know also that the new temple is called by the Lord’s name (vv.40, 43). The justification for these prayers is that the pray-ers are the Lord’s own covenant people (“thy people”, “thine inheritance”, “thy servant”, vv.33a, 51-53).

Furthermore, we note that these prayers are also lifted by Solomon for “a stranger, that [is] not of thy people Israel, but cometh out of a far country for thy name’s sake” (v.41). Now clearly Britain can make no claim to being “God’s people, inheritance or servant”. Yet because of our Christian heritage and Protestant constitution, and because there are millions of Christ-redeemed souls in this land, we can see that in a sense the welcome for that “stranger out of a far country” can indeed be

applied to our nation. The condition for the stranger to be blessed by the Lord is achieved very simply: “when he shall come and pray toward this house” (v.42b), being adapted for us today to read, “when he shall come and pray towards Almighty God through Jesus Christ our Lord”.

By the grace of God our Father, His Christ-redeemed people are counted as “the righteous” in His sight, by the blood of Jesus (egs., Romans 3.21-26 / 5.18-19 / ...). This brings to mind that precious scene in Genesis 18, with Abraham “standing yet before the Lord, drawing near” (from vv.22b-23a), and then “chancing his arm” over the imminent judgment of Sodom. The outcome was that the Lord told Abraham that He would not destroy Sodom if there were even ten righteous found within it (v.32).

That is a real encouragement, and commissioning, for all of us in these storm-cloud days. The sizeable Christian presence in our nation – the Christ-made righteous – means that God’s judgments, wholly just and entirely deserved, are held back from full expression in our nation until, as with Lot’s removal from Sodom, the Christ-righteous have been removed from the scene of judgment (I Thessalonians 4.13-18; we note that this event is entirely different from the Lord’s public, visible return in glory at the end of the tribulation years, Matthew 24.30-31 and parallels).

Until that removal occurs we courteously make known, first, the stark spiritual facts facing sinful humanity, for the long-promised divine judgments are clearly coming (eg., Revelation Chapters 5-19); and second, in the light of these approaching judgments, the glories of the Gospel of Christ. While there is yet time, may those among whom we live, who have not yet claimed the forgiveness of their sins by the shed blood of Jesus (eg., I John 1.7), respond to Christ’s call to enter in at that “strait, narrow gate that leads to life”, for which, tragically, “few there be that find it” (from Matthew 7.13-14).

That entering-in is to follow the old, well-trodden path - returning, repenting and confessing; then believing, accepting and serving God the Father, through His Son Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

We pray for and work for a great harvest of souls in these trying days, a harvest whose souls will all be drawn, in Christ, praise God, from both God’s original covenant people and from the Gentiles too, those “strangers who come out of a far country” (Galatians 26-29 / Ephesians 2.11-22) .

