

457 O Lord, hear, O Lord, forgive

In Daniel Chapter 9 Verse 2, we read how Daniel “understood by books the number of years, whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem” (KJV / Jeremiah 25.8-11). Those “desolations” – clear divine judgments caused by Judah’s sinfulness and refusal to repent - had begun in 3546 AM (606 BC) with the horrific conquest of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and the exile to Babylon by many of the city’s survivors (II Chronicles 36.11-21). Daniel then “did his sums” and realised that those seventy years were nearly finished. So, as was his habit, he turned to the Lord in prayer, the record of which we are blessed with in Daniel 9.3-19. This is surely one of the most heartfelt prayers within the Bible, awash with lessons for all who have come after, and of great relevance to our own nation in our own day.

“I set my face unto the Lord God” for earnest prayer, in a mood of fasting, sackcloth and ashes, and confession (vv.3-4a). Daniel was all too conscious of the character and deeds of the Lord God before whom he was pleading: “great and dreadful”, faithful to His covenant, and merciful to the obedient (v.4); righteous, the possessor of “mercies and forgivenesses”, and the giver of warnings “by his servants the prophets”, and, in His finally judging the disobedient, the “confirmer of his words” (vv.7, 9-10, 12, 16).

Daniel fully “owned up” on behalf of his people, hiding nothing and confessing everything: their sin, iniquity, wickedness, rebellion, with ears deaf to the prophets’ warnings (vv.5-6); and now “confusion of faces” because of constant trespassing, disobedience and refusal to repent (vv.7-10, 13). He acknowledged that the Lord God’s judgments upon Jerusalem and Judah were just – “therefore the curse is poured upon us ... a great evil ... all this evil is come upon us ... the Lord watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us” (vv.11-14).

Finally, after Daniel’s recognition of the Lord’s sovereignty and the people’s sinfulness, he came to his requests before the Lord: “I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city, Jerusalem, thy holy mountain ... cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary (the temple) which is desolate ... incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes” (from vv.16-18; and those words about God’s ownership of Jerusalem remain vital today). Then Daniel humbly stated the grounds he had for lifting this earnest prayer – “for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great

mercies” (v.18end). He finished – “O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name” (v.19).

That divine judgment, of 70 years of exile upon Judah, is a sharp reminder that the Lord God is no feeble Namby-Pamby, tut-tutting over the sinfulness before Him yet being too weak or too scared to exert His authority. We read from the Holy Spirit in Hebrews “[It is] a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (10.31): true then and still true now, and what a difference there would be if that basic truth was taken seriously by leaders and peoples today.

But we also hear from the Holy Spirit shortly afterwards another truth about the Lord God - “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today and for ever” (Hebrews 13.8). In these two brief statements in Hebrews we are shown so much about the character of Almighty God - His holiness and righteousness, and His love and mercy in Christ. There is obvious danger in our saying to individuals, albeit with the best of intentions, only that “God will judge you”, or that “God loves you”. Yet both of these statements must go hand in hand: spoken together they open the way for the glorious Gospel of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, but if either is spoken only singly, they give the sinner either no hope of God’s loving forgiveness in Christ, or no warning of God’s righteous judgment of sinners.

These principles of Daniel’s experience, of divine judgments and divine mercies, still stand. In Britain, despite our Christian Protestant constitution embodied in the Coronation Oath, the parallels with sinful Judah need not be rehearsed here in any detail: all can be summed up in there being well over 200,000 abortions in our nation each year – the mass-murder of the unborn that is somehow deemed normal and civilised. In line with the Lord’s revealed character and revealed Word, unless there is Daniel-type repentance His judgments are surely drawing nigh.

We are therefore the Daniels of today, earnest in prayers of repentance for our nation, and clear in both warnings and pointings to the gracious Christ-Solution. “For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Thessalonians 5.9, KJV).

It is as simple, and gracious, and stark, as that.

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