

Followers of the Way

Why there can be no deliverance without repentance

Lynda Rose, 04-09-22

Exodus 32:1-14; Jeremiah 46:25-28

It hardly needs saying perhaps that we live in evil times. Only around a century ago, God was revered as the moral foundation and cornerstone of our society. Obviously, that didn't mean things were perfect. From the beginning of history there have always been problems of poverty and social inequality, and there's always been exploitation and problems of aggression, but by and large, in the UK, Christ was acknowledged and worshipped as the incarnate Son of God – the Way, the Truth and the Life – and down the centuries that belief has provided the basis for our laws and culture. But over the last hundred years, men and women have increasingly rejected God, preferring what they saw as the power of science, and as a society we've become morally corrupt and decadent, insisting on our absolute right to do whatever we want, whenever we want, pretty well without regard for others, and without consequence. We've made a god of 'self' and, in the process, we've become degenerate.

But in our hubris, things have moved even beyond that state of affairs. The alleged freedom promised by science is increasingly metamorphosing into the attempt by an elite to impose absolute control – into a kind of vicious totalitarianism, in fact, that won't allow any kind of dissent. So more and more the government – backed to the hilt by the media, which has its own liberalising agenda – tells us what to do, what we're allowed to think and say, how we live our lives ... and, unbelievably perhaps, we go along with it. The frightening truth is that we are no longer a society built on freedom and respect for others as made in the image of God. Rather we're increasingly becoming a totalitarian state, governed by culturally approved rules and regulations that go against God ... but imposed, we're told, for our own good, because the State knows best.

This is a world in rebellion against God. It's a 21st century attempt to assert control and rebuild the tower of Babel, and God will not allow it. Small wonder that we are seeing the descent into chaos, lawlessness, and violence that increasingly seems to be a hallmark of the world today. The hard truth is, in our rebellion and rejection of God, we have written our own judgement. This doesn't mean that what we're currently experiencing *is* judgment. Rather, it's the forerunner, because what we're undergoing at the moment is the result of God withdrawing His protection, allowing us to experience the fruits of our choices. Now I don't know if Christ's return is imminent or not, but let's make no mistake, God is very near, and judgment is close. And whether that's final or an interim process of purification, that judgment, when it comes, will be terrible, because good and evil cannot co-exist. For those who persist in rebellion and reject God, there can only be damnation, because by our choices we decide whether or not we can live in the presence of God. And when final judgment comes, there will be no appeal.

So what does this mean for us, as believers, in the world today? Without any doubt, we too are going to be caught by the great shaking – the tribulation – that lies ahead. We won't be spared – but God has promised that, as we remain faithful, He'll be with us, so that we don't need to be afraid, and He promises us life. But that's not the end of the story. We are here for a purpose. It's absolutely true that the times are terrible – everything is changing and the dross is being stripped away. But, bad as it seems, we're actually living in a time of grace. Our God is a God who hears, who listens to our prayers, and who responds. As we've seen in our reading this morning from Exodus, the sin of the Israelites, who had forgotten their deliverance so quickly and wanted to go back to the way things were, when they were in bondage, inevitably provoked God's wrath and brought down judgment. But God listened and responded to the prayer of Moses.

At the moment we're going through a period of enforced sifting, that is actually a dispensation – a God-given period of opportunity, and we have a divinely-ordained task, because God is reaching out, even now, to save those who might be saved. So our call, as ever, is to bear witness to the truth and seek after the lost. At the very least, don't forget that it was Jeremiah's declaration of judgment ahead of Jerusalem's fall that provided the basis for the nation's restoration. Through Jeremiah's witness, the Israelites came to understand just how far, and how badly, they'd sinned, and why God had brought the Babylonians against them. As result of Jeremiah's faithfulness, once the people were restored to Israel, they never again gave way to idolatry. They fell into other errors, but idolatry wasn't one of them.

So at every level, our witness today is vital. But we are also to give hope, and we're on a rescue mission. To enter into life, people have to be convicted of sin, to repent and to acknowledge the lordship of Christ. That is the only way of salvation.

The UK will shortly have a new Prime Minister, and there's all sorts of talk about measures to help ease the cost of living crisis. They've already started to roll out boosters too to combat further waves of Covid. Let's not be fooled. None of these things are going to make everything alright. They're no more than an inadequate attempt at band-aid. But God, if He wishes, can change our situation in a heartbeat. The amazing truth is that God actually *wants* people to be saved. He wants to help. All we need do is ask. But goodness *cannot* co-exist with evil. We have brought ourselves under judgment by our choices, and while we persist in our worship of sin, God won't help.

Yet our God is a God who hears and who responds. We know this from the Bible. Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel ... all cried out to the Lord on behalf of the people, and the Lord responded. But this isn't just something that happened in Scripture a long time ago ... our God is a God of power, who is Sovereign, and who still responds today.

In the last world war, for example, as we stood alone in a battle for survival, six times the King called the nation to prayer. Churches and cathedrals throughout the land were reportedly packed. And on each occasion, against all the odds, the UK was miraculously delivered. At Dunkirk, for instance, where 400,000 troops were stranded on the beaches, Churchill was told that we'd be lucky if 30,000 could be rescued and brought

home. It looked like the fight was over. But, not accepting defeat, the king called the nation to pray, while the Prime Minister issued a call to ordinary men and women to help. Over 800 small boats, that could get close to the beach to pick up the stranded troops, responded – and miraculously an unbelievable calm descended on the Channel, allowing them to cross in safety, while at the same time a storm in France grounded the German planes, so that they could no longer strafe the beaches. As result, 338,000 troops were brought home, enabling us to continue the fight, and ultimately win.

Can you intercede and pray for the deliverance of a nation? Yes, you can. In our reading, Moses begged the Lord not to wipe out the people for their sin - and God relented – though He still punished them, of course, because they had to learn. Repentance wasn't what the people had in mind at all, yet Moses still prayed for them, and God heard.

Similarly, Daniel, a righteous and blameless man, prayed for mercy for his people when they were in exile in Babylon. Ch 9:18 “...O Lord, to us *belongs* shame of face ... because we have sinned against You ... all Israel has transgressed Your law, and has departed so as not to obey Your voice; therefore the curse and the oath written in the Law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against Him ... O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay.”

We know from the example of the prophets that it's entirely right we *representationally* confess and repent the sins of the people. And that confession and repentance is vital, because it establishes a line of connection with God, while also opening the door for Him to act without in any way violating our freedom.

What do I mean by that? Well, we know we're in a spiritual battle between good and evil. God could actually either just ignore what we've done wrong – turn a blind eye and say it doesn't matter – or force our compliance and take back total control. But if He did either of these things, we would no longer be autonomous beings with the right to choose. Which would mean we'd be less than He made us to be, with no possibility of restoration, and the devil would have won. This is why, where we're under bondage to sin, or under oppression, we first need to confess and repent the behaviours and choices that have enabled the devil to gain a hold, because it allows God to come in, in power, and break that hold without violating our freedom. The one thing God won't do is just replace one type of control or bondage with another. This indeed is why Christ came, by his death and resurrection setting us free, in a way that nothing and no one else could.

We can't make people change their behaviours, of course, and that, thankfully, isn't our responsibility, but by our confession and representational repentance, we invite God to come in – we open the door –and we give Him permission to act. And as we pray – standing in the gap – so the light, God's light, shines brighter, allowing men and women greater freedom to see for themselves. To reject evil, and choose life.

We face difficult and challenging times ahead.

With the Call to the National Day of Prayer on 16th September, we're asking the Lord to intervene and help us in a time of peril – to deliver us. But in calling for repentance we

are also making known to the nation how far we have sinned, and the urgent need for a change of direction, in order for us to receive the Lord's help. That is why this day is so important. God goes before us. Expect great things.