

Today's Quick Word Isaiah 64:8-9

By Bruce Christian

ISAIAH 64:8-9 *Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand. Do not be angry beyond measure, O LORD; do not remember our sins for ever. Oh, look upon us we pray, for we are all your people.*

Isaiah is writing from a desperate situation. Israel, God's covenant people, were clearly facing God's Judgement at a national level. They were undeniably responsible for this state of affairs because of the rampant sin and apostasy among them. "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; ..." (6a). The prophet is not crying out for justice; in fact there is no point in doing that, as it would only make things worse! But he is crying out for help - and so he addresses God, the LORD, as 'our Father'.

There is a wonderful balance and tension here. He is not trying to wriggle out of the reality that the disaster they face is their own fault - they accept full responsibility for it; it is the direct result of their disobedience and rebellion. Nevertheless, he realises, and openly acknowledges, that God is absolutely sovereign in all human affairs; that we are only and always 'clay' in the hands of the divine 'Potter'. They can do nothing to solve the problem. "How then can we be saved?", he asks (5). Their only hope is in God's intervention on their behalf; but, in the language he uses there is the overarching inference that all this is part of the outworking of a much bigger Plan of Salvation.

The Apostle Paul makes use of this as he struggles with the question of the future of God's dealings with Israel beyond the Cross of Christ (Romans 9-11, especially in 9:21 where he borrows this imagery of the Potter and the clay!). All this is what makes Isaiah's use of the term 'Father' so poignant. The Father who disciplines and punishes his children is the Father who loves and who is motivated by grace, mercy and compassion. He is the all-knowing, all-powerful, trustworthy Father who has everything in his enormous, safe, secure hands. He is the Father whose wrath we dread when we become aware of our sin, and from whom we want to flee and hide, but who quickly inspires us to see that our best option is not to run away but to rush into his open, loving arms. We know we have acted freely and irresponsibly in a way that deserves his wrath; but we also know that because we are clay in the Potter's hands, total submission to his will is the only place we will find true and lasting relief. "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died - more than that, who was raised to life - is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us." (Romans 8:31b-34).

Today's Quick Word Judges 3:1-2

By Bruce Christian

JUDGES 3:1-2 *These are the nations the LORD left to test all those Israelites who had not experienced any of the wars in Canaan (he did this only to teach warfare to the descendants of the Israelites who had not had previous battle experience) ...*

Why does our pilgrimage as the people of God so often seem plagued with obstacles and hardships that give the impression that Satan has the upper hand? We have the firm promise of the Lord Jesus Christ, the only King and Head of his Church: "On this rock [ie Peter's confession that he IS 'the Christ, the Son of the Living God'] I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." (Matthew 16:18), so we might wonder why we have to face battle after battle in the process of claiming God's promises? Israel's drawn out struggle in the conquest of Canaan gives us a picture of the spiritual conflict in which we will continue to be involved this side of heaven. God knows what he is doing, and he is sovereign ... so we can be confident that there is a good purpose behind every new challenge that confronts us. From our limited human perspective it might seem that we are losing the battle against the increasing troubles

that beset us today (the restrictions placed on our corporate worship and witness by the Corona Virus, and the way cultural Marxism throughout our society is undermining our traditional Christian values of family, sexual identity, marriage, etc, to name just a few), and it is easy for us to feel discouraged, and even to panic! But as we read God's word to ancient Israel (which is in the Scriptures "to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." - Romans 15:4), we see that what God requires of us, as he required of Israel, is to TRUST him, to persevere and not give up, and to allow him to use all our challenging circumstances as an opportunity to develop our spiritual muscles in order that we might be strengthened in our faith and therefore become more useful to him. "Crowns and thrones may perish, kingdoms rise and wane, but the Church of Jesus constant will remain; gates of hell can never 'gainst that Church prevail; we have Christ's own promise, and that CANNOT fail. Onward! Christian soldiers, marching as to war, with the cross of Jesus going on before." (Sabine Baring-Gould).

Today's Quick Word Acts 8:18-20

By Bruce Christian

ACTS 8:18-20 *When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money!"*

This event in the life of the Early Church has given rise to the term 'Simony' to describe any form of 'trafficking' in sacred things. Simon's 'interest' in the things of God was purely materialistic, putting him in the company of Balaam, son of Beor, and Elisha's servant, Gehazi, in the OT (Numbers 22 & 2 Kings 5:20-27), and, sadly, the Church has not been without such traffickers in the two millennia since then!

This ungodly attitude that, among other things, fails to recognise the very heart of the Gospel of God's grace, is strongly warned against in 1 Timothy 6:9-10, 2 Peter 2:15, Jude 1:11 and

Revelation 2:14.

The example of Jesus ought to be enough to keep us from falling into the Devil's trap of getting us to use our 'faith' as a means of personal gain. "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped [ie 'to be used to his own advantage'], but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:3-8).

Let us search our own hearts to make sure that we are not, in any way, using our many blessings in Christ to our own advantage.