



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

A Biblical Diagnosis of Ulster's Present Troubles



The fourth of a series of special messages based upon Ezekiel 22:30-31 preached in Kilskeery Free Presbyterian Church on 1st March 1998 by Rev. Ivan Foster

And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none.

Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath: their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord GOD, Ezekiel 22:30-31.

In our last sermon we examined just what it was that God required Israel to do in order to be delivered from the coming judgment. It was a turning unto Himself amongst the wayward and wicked people of the land. That very familiar verse in 2 Chronicles is but another form of the same truth as is expressed here in verse 30. *If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land, 2 Chronicles 7:14.*

The history of the Free Presbyterian Church is illustrative of our text. I recall men whose stand for God, in company with others, initiated a time of blessing in their own areas. Hugh J Adams (Crossgar), Sandy McAuley (Cabra, Ballymoney), Samuel Logan (Rasharkin), Andy Evans (Limavady), Abraham Nelson (Armagh & Dungannon), William Foster (Lisbellaw). These men have all gone to be with the Lord and so I feel free to mention them. There are others I could mention (the list is too long to fully recite) who have taken a similar stand and who yet serve the Lord in the congregations their witness helped to form. Not least among them are the men and women in this area, who, in the late '60s, stepped out of ecumenical churches in submission to God and in dedication to His service and saw the beginning of this congregation. Such a stepping out is what we should be looking and praying for again. It was not a mere leaving of an apostate denomination but a yielding to God's rule which, among other things, necessitated a separation from apostasy and an open stand for the truth of God. Tonight, we come to the solemn consideration of what happens when there is no one willing to step out. I found none. Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath: their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord GOD. First of all consider

I. HOW EVIL IS ANY RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE WHICH HINDERS A TURNING FROM SIN

Woe to those who blur the distinctions between good and evil, between righteousness and unrighteousness. Today, such activity abounds. Modern evangelicalism and its adherents are anxious to meet sin halfway and to accommodate the wicked. Such activities are an



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

attempt to remove the reproach of the cross and negates the preaching of repentance and thus frustrates the purifying and preserving work of the gospel in society. Modern views of just what behaviour is acceptable in a Christian are far removed from what was once the norm amongst God's people. The changes have come about by the diminishing of the lines of demarcation between the church and the world. It has been rightly said, and that over 100 years ago, that one finds the world in the church and the church in the world. Modern Christianity would marry Christ to the devil and reconcile wickedness and holiness. Sin has been sanitised and piety has been censored and despised. *Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!* Isaiah 5:20. Today, there is no call to repentance from the pulpits of the nation and men and women make sport of sin. *It is time for thee, LORD, to work: for they have made void thy law,* Psalm 119:126. In the light of our text, I must condemn in the name of the Lord those activities which would reconcile worldliness with Christian discipleship. It will have the most dire consequences upon our Province.

II. THE ABSENCE OF A TURNING FROM SIN SPELLS DOOM FOR A PEOPLE

I found none. Therefore have I poured out mine indignation . . . How dreadful is the conclusion to the present course of the nation!

1. Ought this not to spur us on? It is our duty to seek to promote a turning unto God, especially since the time is short. *Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it,* Jeremiah 5:1. There is a need for zeal and urgency in our Christian service today.

2. We should weep as did the Saviour over unrepentant sinners. Luke 19:41-44. The sin of those over whom Christ wept is the sin that this generation seems bent on committing. *And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes,* Luke 19:41-42. If only the people of Jerusalem had gained a knowledge of the way to true peace with God, but they had rejected the message of the prophets again and again and now they faced the sad consequences. This is a day for weeping by those who are of Christ.

3. This is a day for prayer. Watchmen are needed. *I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the LORD, keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth ,* Isaiah 62:6-7. How far removed from what marks a person, who is exercised by a burden for the land, are those Christians who rarely attend a prayer meeting and, even more rarely, lift up their voice in supplication!

III. THE ALTERNATIVE TO THE POURING OUT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE POURING OUT OF WRATH

1. What a dreadful thing is God's wrath! It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God , Hebrews 10:31.



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

*The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? Isaiah 33:14. Thou, even thou, art to be feared: and who may stand in thy sight when once thou art angry? Psalm 76:7. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him, Luke 12:5. Few today have any conception of God's wrath. Modern theology has robbed God of His Holiness, His Justice and His Wrath. But God is a God of Wrath. *God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies,* Nahum 1:2.*

2. God's judgment was just. *I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath: their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, verse 31. It was but their own ways returning upon them. When mercy is rejected, wrath is what follows. Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap, Galatians 6:7. Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same, Job 4:8. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices, Proverbs 1:31.*

IV. SADLY, THE NATION WAS WARNED.

1. They were warned in the past. The writings of Moses contained clear examples of God's judgment falling upon their forefathers when they defied God. In like manner, we in Ulster have a history filled with the price our forefathers paid when they disobeyed God. What fools we would be to ignore these lessons!

2. They were warned by the prophets. They had Isaiah, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Habakkuk and Ezekiel, all sounding out the warning. All of these men had witnessed to the danger to which they were heading and they had urged upon the people the path of true peace. *Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein, Jeremiah 6:16.*

3. They were warned by the political events of recent times. The people of Judah, the southern kingdom, had seen God's judgments beginning on His disobedient people in the northern kingdom of Israel, some 150 years earlier, 2 Kings 17:6-18. They had also felt their own weakness before their enemies over the previous 20-odd years, 2 Chron 36:1-8. These events had been warnings of the darkening days that their disobedience was taking them into. I need not spell out the application of these events. We have evil, lying voices today, telling us that we will have peace if we reject the preachers of hatred and bigotry, which is today's name for the servants of God. Men such as the leaders of the Church of Ireland, the Methodist Church and the Presbyterian Church have proclaimed an ecumenical message which is an utter denial of the true message of God for today. Their counter-parts were at work in the days in which our study is set.

Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Harken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the LORD. They say still unto them that despise me, The LORD hath said, Ye shall have peace; and they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of his



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

own heart, No evil shall come upon you, Jeremiah 23:16-17. And it came to pass the same year, in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the fourth year, and in the fifth month, that Hananiah the son of Azur the prophet, which was of Gibeon, spake unto me in the house of the LORD, in the presence of the priests and of all the people, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, saying, I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two full years will I bring again into this place all the vessels of the LORD'S house, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from this place, and carried them to Babylon: and I will bring again to this place Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, with all the captives of Judah, that went into Babylon, saith the LORD: for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon, Jeremiah 28:1-4. Then said the prophet Jeremiah unto Hananiah the prophet, Hear now, Hananiah; The LORD hath not sent thee; but thou makest this people to trust in a lie. Therefore thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will cast thee from off the face of the earth: this year thou shalt die, because thou hast taught rebellion against the LORD. So Hananiah the prophet died the same year in the seventh month, Jeremiah 28:15-17. Is this not the same confrontation that is taking place in Ulster today? The false prophets and politicians are promising peace while the true servants of God warn of judgment coming upon those who will give heed to their ungodly and unscriptural message. A day of decision is coming. A choice will have to be made between the ecumenical liars and the truth of God's word.

Sinner, heed not the lie. There is a need for you to flee to the wounds of Christ to seek shelter from wrath to come. You must repent and receive Christ as your Saviour.

Christian, is it not time to stand up again for Christ and His Holy Word and unashamedly associate ourselves with Him *without the camp, bearing his reproach*, Hebrews 13:13?