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CHRIST REVIVING HIS CHURCH RIGHT UP TO THE END OF THE AGE

"Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the curses that are written in the book which they have read before the king of Judah: . . . Behold, I will gather thee to thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace, neither shall thine eyes see all the evil that I will bring upon this place, and upon the inhabitants of the same. So they brought the king word again," 2 Chronicles 34:24, 28.

In this age, there will be a final generation who will witness the return of Christ in power and great glory to the earth. Paul said: "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent (go before) them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord," 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17.

As it was with Noah and his family, so it will be again. Noah lived right through the final days of his age just prior to the flood. It is interesting to notice that seven days before the flood came, Noah was directed to enter the ark, he, his family and all the animals. "And Noah went in, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him, into the ark, because of the waters of the flood. Of clean beasts, and of beasts that are not clean, and of fowls, and of every thing that creepeth upon the earth, there went in two and two unto Noah into the ark, the male and the female, as God had commanded Noah. And it came to pass after seven days, that the waters of the flood were upon the earth," Genesis 7:7-10.

That number 'seven' appears in the Bible's narrative of the Antichrist's reign. "And he (the Antichrist) shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate," Daniel 9:27.

'Week' is a period of seven years

The 'week' is a period of seven years. The Hebrew word is 'heptad'. It refers to a period of seven 'times', a common term for years. This we state on the basis of what we read in Genesis 29:6-7. "And Laban said, It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. Fulfil her week, and we will give thee this also for the service which thou shalt serve with me yet seven other years." This 'week' was not a period of seven days but of seven years.

Therefore, in the midst of that period of seven years Antichrist will be revealed for who he is when he shall erect "the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, . . . in the holy place," Matthew 24:15. That event will then initiate the three and half years of terrible tribulation, directed chiefly against the Jewish people. See Matthew 24:21, Revelation 13:5.

As Noah had access to the shelter and protection of the ark in the seven days before the flood even so there is pictured for us the protection that the true believer will enjoy in the final seven years of this age which will end with the return of Christ to judge the rejectors of the gospel. So said Paul. "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day," 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10. 'Rest' will come for the troubled and afflicted saints at the coming of the Lord Jesus. I think that we should notice that it was His coming to take "vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." This clearly indicates that the saints had not been 'secretly raptured' to glory three and half years earlier. Their 'rest' came at the same times as the judgment of the rejectors of the gospel!



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So there will be believers alive on this earth at the coming of the Lord to judge the wicked and they shall have lived through the judgments which the Lord will have sent upon the kingdom of Antichrist in the closing years of this age, especially the final forty two months, the time of Antichrist's open rebellion against God. Note what is said in Revelation 13:4-8. "And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him? And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months. And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven. And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations. And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." The true believer will not worship the Beast as will those nations linked to him, the ten kingdoms referred to in Revelation 17:12-14. "And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast. These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful."

Illustration

There is a perfect illustration of those days given us in the experiences of Israel, prior to the Lord's deliverance of His people from Egypt. They were sorely persecuted and abused by Pharaoh and in like manner the people of God who reside within the territory of the ten kingdoms of Antichrist will feel his wrath and hatred. As Revelation 13:7 states: "And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them." So it was with Israel in Egypt. "Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel. And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour: and they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service, wherein they made them serve, was with rigour," Exodus 1:11-14.

However, when the Lord sent His judgments upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt they did not affect the people of Israel. They were specifically preserved from the heaven-sent judgments. When God hardened Pharaoh's heart and multiplied His signs and wonders in the land (Exodus 7:3), those judgments did not fall upon His people. We have that made clear when the plague of flies was sent of God. "And the LORD said unto Moses, Rise up early in the morning, and stand before Pharaoh; lo, he cometh forth to the water; and say unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Let my people go, that they may serve me. Else, if thou wilt not let my people go, behold, I will send swarms of flies upon thee, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people, and into thy houses: and the houses of the Egyptians shall be full of swarms of flies, and also the ground whereon they are. And I will sever in that day the land of Goshen, in which my people dwell, that no swarms of flies shall be there; to the end thou mayest know that I am the LORD in the midst of the earth. And I will put a division between my people and thy people," Exodus 8:20-23. I have no doubt that this was so with every plague. See Exodus 9:4, 26, 10:23, 11:5-7.

Passover

It is especially recorded of the last plague that God separated His people from it. "Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel, and said unto them, Draw out and take you a lamb according to your families, and kill the passover. And ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood that is in the bason, and strike the lintel and the two side posts with the blood that is in the bason; and none of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning. For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the LORD will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you," Exodus 12:21-23.

As the blood of the lamb sheltered the believing Israelite from this great judgment that fell upon Egypt even



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so shall the blood of Calvary's Lamb shelter God's people in the days of Antichrist from Heaven's judgments which will fall upon him and his territory and his supporters.

The topic that I wish to emphasise is that right up until the return of Christ, even though the judgments of God are falling upon the rebellious and the unbelieving in Antichrist's kingdom, the saints of God can expect to enjoy the blessings of God's Holy Spirit reviving and strengthening them in the midst of that great trouble. Did not the Psalmist refer to this when he said: "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me: thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me," Psalm 138:7. Indeed, we can say that without such reviving, the saints would not survive the pressures and assaults upon them from the ungodly.

I believe that we have a picture of this in the divine narrative in 2 Chronicles 34-35. Here is the history of the last generation before the terrible judgment of God upon Jerusalem and Judah, warned of for many, many years by prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah and Zechariah. Josiah the king of Judah died when he was 39 years of age, 2 Chronicles 34:1. Some 23 years later Babylon besieged and destroyed Jerusalem and carried away many of the people of Judah into captivity, a captivity which lasted 70 years.

What we read of Josiah's good reign is set forth in chapters 34 and 35 of 2 Chronicles. At the beginning of this period we learn:

I JOSIAH CAME TO THE THRONE IN THE EVENTIDE OF JUDAH'S REBELLION AGAINST GOD

His father, Manasseh was most wicked for the most of his reign. Indeed, so wicked was he that he is 'credited' with being the cause of Judah's downfall!

"Manasseh seduced them (Judah) to do more evil than did the nations whom the LORD destroyed before the children of Israel. And the LORD spake by his servants the prophets, saying, because Manasseh king of Judah hath done these abominations, and hath done wickedly above all that the Amorites did, which were before him, and hath made Judah also to sin with his idols: therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Behold, I am bringing such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle. . . . Moreover Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another; beside his sin wherewith he made Judah to sin, in doing that which was evil in the sight of the LORD," 2 Kings 21:9-12, 16.

Marvellous grace

It must be stated that despite his dreadful wickedness, Manasseh found mercy! He really is one of the greatest examples of God's saving grace in the Bible's record. "So Manasseh made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen, whom the LORD had destroyed before the children of Israel. And the LORD spake to Manasseh, and to his people: but they would not hearken. Wherefore the LORD brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon. And when he was in affliction, he besought the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him: and he was intreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD he was God," 2 Chronicles 33:10-13.

Despite his conversion and his attempts to undo some of the dreadful harm he had done to the worship that God has instituted, there was little accomplished to check the dreadful tide of apostasy! That was especially seen in his son Amon. "So Manasseh slept with his fathers, and they buried him in his own house: and Amon his son reigned in his stead. Amon was two and twenty years old when he began to reign, and reigned two years in Jerusalem. But he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, as did Manasseh his father: for Amon sacrificed unto all the carved images which Manasseh his father had made, and served them; and humbled not himself before the LORD, as Manasseh his father had humbled himself; but Amon trespassed more and more," 2 Chronicles 33:20-23.



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It is so often the case that fathers present to their children an example of disobedience and defiance against the Lord for years and, even though they repent and are truly converted in their later years, the damage is done and the pattern the children were brought up under has so impressed itself upon them that it remains throughout their life and into eternity.

Grandson

However, the wonderful grace of God is seen in the grandson of Manasseh, Josiah. It is said of him that "he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the ways of David his father, and declined neither to the right hand, nor to the left," 2 Chronicles 34:2. The next verse tells us of when he sought the Lord and was converted. "For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father: and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images," verse 3. Surely his conversion was real for as a young man of 20 he inaugurated a reformation of his kingdom, not easy for a twenty-year-old surrounded by 'advisors and counsellors' who had lived under the influence of his corrupt father and grandfather's influences!

It is all the more remarkable when we note the many evidences of the darkness and sin that were deeply embedded in the nation at that time.

1. The proliferation of idols and idolatry in the nation. Please read verses 3-7 to obtain a picture of the desecration of the land and city by the abominations introduced by reprobate kings and priests in the past.

2. There was a gross ignorance of the Word of God. That is obvious from the discovery of the neglected copy of the Law of God lying somewhere in the temple and also the obvious lack of awareness of the judgment of God about to fall upon the nation. "Hilkiah the priest found a book of the law of the LORD given by Moses. And Hilkiah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiah delivered the book to Shaphan. . . . Then Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying, Hilkiah the priest hath given me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king. And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the law, that he rent his clothes," verses 15, 18-19.

It is a sad fact that our Royal family shows awful ignorance of the Law of God, without the obvious sincere piety that was found in Josiah. It can, of course, be no other way, given the generations of blinded clerics who have been the counsellors of the Royal family! I truly grieve for our Queen when I think of the whisperings in her ear by that ecclesiastical buffoon, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby!

3. There was no spiritual leadership. How sad and vexing to read the apparent indifference and carelessness of both Shaphan the scribe and Hilkiah the high priest when the Book of the Law was found forsaken in the depths of the temple. They certainly did not show the interest in its contents that Josiah showed, verses 18-21.

4. There seemed to be little of the reforms that Hezekiah had instituted still in place when Josiah came to the throne. This is recorded of the reforms that he inaugurated. "And also the burnt offerings were in abundance, with the fat of the peace offerings, and the drink offerings for every burnt offering. So the service of the house of the LORD was set in order. And Hezekiah rejoiced, and all the people, that God had prepared the people: for the thing was done suddenly," 2 Chronicles 29:35-36. "And the children of Israel that were present at Jerusalem kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with great gladness: and the Levites and the priests praised the LORD day by day, singing with loud instruments unto the LORD. And Hezekiah spake comfortably unto all the Levites that taught the good knowledge of the LORD: and they did eat throughout the feast seven days, offering peace offerings, and making confession to the LORD God of their fathers. And the whole assembly took counsel to keep other seven days: and they kept other seven days with gladness. For Hezekiah king of Judah did give to the congregation a thousand bullocks and seven thousand sheep; and the princes gave to the congregation a thousand bullocks and ten thousand sheep: and a great number of priests sanctified themselves. And all the congregation of Judah, with the priests and



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the Levites, and all the congregation that came out of Israel, and the strangers that came out of the land of Israel, and that dwelt in Judah, rejoiced. So there was great joy in Jerusalem: for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem. Then the priests the Levites arose and blessed the people: and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to his holy dwelling place, even unto heaven," 2 Chronicles 30:21-27.

II DESPITE BEING ON THE VERY VERGE OF NATIONAL DESTRUCTION, THE ACTIONS OF JOSIAH GAVE THE NATION A BRIEF PERIOD OF BLESSING

Here is teaching for God's people today. While I believe there can be no reversing of the national decline into apostasy and its consequent judgment, I believe that we can take hope from the experiences of Josiah. Note his reaction to God's announcement of imminent judgment upon his kingdom. Josiah, upon hearing the words of the Law, sent messengers unto a prophetess that he might know the mind of God. "Go, enquire of the LORD for me, and for them that are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD, to do after all that is written in this book," 2 Chronicles 34:21.

1. Josiah believed God's Word. He did not dismiss the declaration of God's Word, which seemed to be the prevailing attitude amongst the priests, but rather he sought the Lord regarding what he had heard read from the Law.

2. Josiah personally prayed and wept before God. This is evident in the reply sent to the king via the prophetess, Huldah. "And Hilkiah, and they that the king had appointed, went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvath, the son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college:) and they spake to her to that effect. And she answered them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Tell ye the man that sent you to me, thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the curses that are written in the book which they have read before the king of Judah: because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be poured out upon this place, and shall not be quenched. And as for the king of Judah, who sent you to enquire of the LORD, so shall ye say unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel concerning the words which thou hast heard; because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest his words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbledst thyself before me, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before me; I have even heard thee also, saith the LORD," 2 Chronicles 34:22-27.

What a profound impact the humility and prayers of Josiah had upon the affairs of the nation! As long as he lived the nation would be spared from the judgment that was coming. During his lifetime, there was a time of spiritual awakening and renewal.

Truly, the people of God are to be the 'salt of the earth', acting as a preservative. But if the 'salt' has lost its savour, its saltiness, as is the case with so many backslidden and worldly-minded believers today, then little preserving will be accomplished. The backslidden state of the 'Church' today accounts for the recent rapid advance of immorality in the land. That wonderful text in Proverbs encapsulates this truth. "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people," 14:34. The nation has been brought into reproach partly by the backslidden and careless state of the majority of God's people!

3. The benefits the nation enjoyed under Josiah sprang from the revival of the preaching of the Word of God. "Then the king sent and gathered together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. And the king went up into the house of the LORD, and all the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the priests, and the Levites, and all the people, great and small: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant that was found in the house of the LORD," 34:29-30. There can never be a revival of holiness, a return of heaven's blessing and a fresh enjoyment of the power of the Holy Ghost amongst God's people other than by receiving and obeying the instructions of the Bible!



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That is what is needed today. The pointed, forceful, unapologetic preaching of God's Word against the sins and compromises that have entered the Church of God and the bold calling of the people to repentance and obedience!

What a shake-up that would bring amongst God's people who have grown casual and indifferent to the standards and laws of God and, because their slackness has not been challenged from the pulpits, believe that such carelessness is acceptable with God!

4. Josiah exercised a powerful personal influence as king. "And the king stood in his place, and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep his commandments, and his testimonies, and his statutes, with all his heart, and with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant which are written in this book. And he caused all that were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand to it. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers. And Josiah took away all the abominations out of all the countries that pertained to the children of Israel, and made all that were present in Israel to serve, even to serve the LORD their God. And all his days they departed not from following the LORD, the God of their fathers," 34:31-33. The king led from the front.

Sadly, as is often the case when such a strong personality is engaged in such a work, many were not sincere in their professions of obedience! Jeremiah, who prophesied in the days of Josiah said this: "And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the LORD. And the LORD said unto me, The backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah," Jeremiah 3:10-11.

Despite the many changes for good that came about in Josiah's reign, much of it was in the form of a mere false profession on the part of the people. They conformed to the commands of the king but not truly to the Law of God. The temple services were crowded and the feasts wonderfully attended but it was all largely a sham!

Little wonder we read: "And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah," 2 Chronicles 35:25. Jeremiah knew what was coming upon the nation now that Josiah and his holy influence were gone! There was nothing holding back the flood-tide of judgment now.

III THERE IS A PARALLEL HERE WITH TODAY'S CIRCUMSTANCES

Today, there are churches with their crowds and their professions of conversion but I dare say that much of it is all a sham. There's no change of lifestyle following these 'professions' of faith in Christ! That which God says marks a true conversion is not seen. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new," 2 Corinthians 5:17. What the Lord Jesus demanded of His disciples has no part in modern 'Christianity'! "And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it," Luke 9:23-24.

The attire of many attending these supposedly thriving 'churches' is one of worldliness and unfitted for attendance upon the worship of the God of Heaven! The services are light and casual with the 'worshippers' entering and exiting at will, drinking coffee etc. I have no doubt that the whole scene would warrant the use of 'a scourge of small cords'!

The Lord saw it

This mere religious pretence by many in the days of Josiah God observed, as is evident in the words of Jeremiah, but it may be also seen in how quickly the land came under judgment upon Josiah's death. "Moreover the workers with familiar spirits, and the wizards, and the images, and the idols, and all the abominations that were spied in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, did Josiah put away, that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the LORD. And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul,



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and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him. Notwithstanding the LORD turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal. And the LORD said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there," 2 Kings 23:24-27. Nothing had truly changed with regards to the hearts of the people. It was just the pleadings and intercessions and work of Josiah that withheld the judgment. When he died, then the final slide into judgment quickly took place. The first 21 verses of 2 Chronicles 36 tell that sad tale!

We may learn that a faithful remnant may, by the grace of God, so intercede as to stop the prophetic clock of judgment for a short time, but the inevitable harvest of apostasy will ripen and be harvested in God's time.

Today, no heed is taken to the witness of the few, not even by those who profess to be Christians. There is little hope of the nation generally ceasing from its wickedness when so many professing Christians are careless and indifferent toward what is required of them in God's Word. The Bible to so many is a neglected book, lying, not in the depths of the temple, but upon the parcel shelf of the car where it is retrieved the next time its owner enters church!

What lies between its pages is unread, unstudied, unknown! Those who seek to cry out a warning are sneered at, not merely by the worldling but by all too many of God's professing people.

How solemn are the words of 2 Chronicles 36:14-16. "Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the LORD which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place: but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy."

That is what is approaching us here in Ulster. NO REMEDY! All too many Christians are prepared to ignore the shenanigans of the DUP and its embracing of the sodomite and its abandonment of God's Word and remain within its ranks, aiding and contributing to its shameful departure from God and His truth. There is no fear of how the Lord may look on such happenings! No, those who express concern are mocked and declared to be 'dividers and disturbers of the brethren'!

Well, the restraint exercised by godly Josiah came to an end and judgment fell on Jerusalem.

How soon will that event be repeated here in Ulster?

At the morning Sabbath service on November 10th in Kilskeery, Mr David Burke, missionary to Guinea, brought a powerful message on the two verses in Luke 9:23-24 that I quoted previously. How refreshing it was to hear what we used to hear so often in former times.

He closed the morning meeting with the hymn 215 in Our Hymnbook. Its verses 2 and 3 were most appropriate.

By God's Word at last my sin I learned;
Then I trembled at the law I'd spurned,
Till my guilty soul imploring turned
To Calvary.

Now I've giv'n to Jesus everything,
Now I gladly own Him as my King,
Now my raptured soul can only sing
Of Calvary.

Mercy there was great, and grace was free;
Pardon there was multiplied to me;
There my burdened soul found liberty,
At Calvary.



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Only those who live out the sentiments of these words can have an impact, a curtailing influence upon the events in our nation.

May the Lord be pleased to give us something of the spirit of Josiah that we may see our children and loved ones brought into God's Ark before the gathering storm breaks upon their heads.

Ivan Foster.

14th November 2019.