

"An Astonishing and Horrible Thing"

"An astonishing and horrible thing has been committed in the land: The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own power; and my people love to have it so. But what will you do in the end?" – Jeremiah 5:30,31 NKJV

God's people were on the brink of a "great destruction" from the north (6:1) brought upon them because of their spiritual decay. God, being a righteous God, said, "Shall I not avenge myself on such a nation as this?" (5:29). Judah was so corrupt that God could not any longer tolerate her. God, through Jeremiah, reminds her of her corruption and warns of its consequences in the first few chapters of this book.

God will not indefinitely tolerate corruption among his chosen people. The fleshly Israelites are no longer God's chosen people – but Christians are. His nation is no longer an earthly kingdom, but a spiritual nation – the church. Spiritual Israel can profit from God's dealing with fleshly Israel (cf. 1 Cor. 10:1-13). Do you think that God would be any more tolerant of such corruption as described in Jeremiah if it is found in His church today? Is it any less astonishing and horrible for the thing to be committed in the church than for it to be committed in the land? What was this horrible thing? It was a two-fold problem:

Political Preachers

It was the duty of a prophet to bring God's revelations to the people. It was the duty of the priest to teach the people concerning God's will. They had other functions to be sure but these functions are emphasized by the text. They were the preachers in Israel. Instead of telling the people what God had revealed, the prophets prophesied falsely. But instead of ruling (leading) by God's power or authority the priests ruled by their own power. Why? A strong hint is given in the statement, "My people love to have it so."

The priests and prophets were acting more like politicians than prophets and priests. They 'put their finger to wind' to see which way it was blowing before speaking. They were more concerned with what the people thought and wanted than what God said and willed. Like good politicians they spoke the will of the people and acted in harmony with the desires of the people rather than the will of God.

This evil presents a grave threat to the people of God this very hour. How easy it is for those who preach to be more interested in pleasing, or at least pacifying, those in the pews than declaring to them the whole counsel of God! How many formulate and express their convictions and/or govern their conduct by what the brethren will tolerate rather than what God will tolerate? God's people are in trouble when public proclaimers of the word do not have the courage to form their convictions upon an investigation of God's book and then have the courage to stand by those convictions – regardless of what the people want. They do themselves, their God, and the people they are trying to serve and save a terrible injustice.

Pampered People

The people "just loved" those prophets and priests. Why? Because they told them what they wanted to hear rather than what they needed to hear. The prophets and priests were to be blamed for Judah's destruction because of their unfaithfulness – but the people were to be blamed because they wanted it that way. They should have demanded that prophets speak the truth without fear or favor – even if that truth hurts at times.

Brethren need to be careful and examine themselves to determine what they want in preaching. They need to try to bring their conduct into harmony with strong, sound, and scriptural preaching rather than demanding that the work of preachers be reduced to an effort to pet and pamper them by "ratifying" their cherished conduct. We must demand and support preachers who demonstrate that they are more interested in people's eternal salvation than they are in courting their favor. Demand and support preachers who will not only exhort and comfort, but will reprove and rebuke when necessary.

"But what will you do in the end?"

- by Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

Pardon My Intrusion

Please pardon my intrusion into your life. I cannot honestly regard it as an intrusion at all, but that you so consider it is painfully obvious. My object is not to waste your time, or rob your pleasures, or thwart your plans, or interrupt your schedule or interfere with your life - as you think - BUT TO SAVE YOUR IMMORTAL SOUL. And you do have a soul - an inward man, a spirit made in God's image, never ending, destined to spend eternity in hell or heaven.

Your life tells me that you have time for other matters - your job, your family, your body, your pleasures - but none for your soul. Your schedule tells me that you are interested in other realms - business, family, education, civic, social - but not in the spiritual. Then when I try to visit with you and to talk with you about God, Christ, the Bible, and your salvation, when I try to get you interested in your own soul, you seek to make me feel like I am imposing. Your conduct and your attitude speak clearly: "Leave me alone. Stop bothering me. I wish you wouldn't come to my house. Get out of my life and get off my back." But I can't do that until I have exhausted all efforts and am convinced that it's hopeless. If your soul isn't on your conscience, it is on mine. God wants me to care - and to try.

- by Bill Crews

Greet One Another

"Greet one another with a holy kiss." So instructed the apostles Peter and Paul (1 Peter 5:14; 1 Corinthians 16:20). We wonder if we are, in this post-COVID time, still doing this effectively.

Mask wearing and social distancing have brought about some significant changes in personal conduct. People have been afraid to 'greet one another' in any meaningful way. Certainly a 'holy kiss' would be inconceivable to most folks at this time. Even giving a "right hand of fellowship" (Galatians 2:9) has been diligently avoided by lots of people during the height of the pandemic. With faces covered in surgical fashion, it's hard to even see a friendly smile. Unfortunately all of this has led to heads lowered, eye contact avoided, and personal interaction brought to a near standstill.

We are not criticizing those who are at risk for taking reasonable precautions. Certainly not. But at the same time, we all must remember our obligation to demonstrate our love and affection for our brethren. COVID or not, we are a spiritual family and we need to express our devotion to one another.

Paul never failed to greet his brethren, often by name, in his epistles. Even in some of his so-called 'prison epistles' he sent his salutations. Think of that: any such open communication might have been used against him in his impending trial. But, never mind that, Paul reached out to his brothers and sisters.

How you greet others may be modified by the times we are now experiencing, but the obligation to do so still remains. We have a special relationship and bond. Show that you value this. "Greet one another." Find a way! Think!

- by Greg Gwin