

Identity

I'd like to describe this particular Holy Day, the Day of Pentecost, as a day of identity. It is a day that provides the identity for the Church. The first dealings with the day of Pentecost are recorded for us in Exodus 19. Israel has come out of Egypt through the Red Sea and they have travelled in the intervening time to Mount Sinai:

Ex 19: 1 In the third month after the children of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on the same day, they came to the Wilderness of Sinai.

2 For they had departed from Rephidim, had come to the Wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness. So Israel camped there before the mountain.

3 And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel:

4 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself.

5 'Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine.

6 'And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."

- Two great promises made to the children of Israel. The offer of a covenant and a covenant relationship with God and a very special aspect as far as that was concerned. Secondly the fact that they would be God's particular treasure. They would be His people above all other people, because "all the earth is mine" He said.

God said He is the God of the entire earth. We accept that today. We never think otherwise. Yet to the people of those days, gods were restricted to a particular area of geography. As you moved from one area of geography to another, as you moved from Mesopotamia, into Canaan or into Egypt, you had to learn all about the local gods - because those were the ones you had to worship.

Yet here is the Eternal God saying "I am the over-ruling God. The entire earth is mine. I have chosen you for a particular purpose above all other people on the face of the earth."

These two elements - the concept of a covenant which was based upon the law of God, which follows the giving of the Ten Commandments, the entering into the covenant and then that opportunity of being a nation of God with the concept of a land which flowed with milk and honey - had become synonymous with the Day of Pentecost in terms of the Jewish people.

Oftentimes you wonder what it is that has enabled Judaism to survive the numerous millennia that it has existed for. Certainly the element of God's intervention of preserving it and preserving the truth that they had, and the knowledge of God's Word is a very essential element.

But if you were to ask a Jew what it is that provides for their identity, it is those two elements. The giving of God's law, as part of a covenant relationship, and the promise of the land. Most Jews who consider these matters will say those are the things that have identified both Judaism and a devout Jew.

It is rather interesting that if you lose one of those two elements, those two pillars of Judaism, you run into major problems. The problem we have in the land called Israel at this time is that having gotten the land they have forgotten about the Torah. They have forgotten about being God's covenant people. What brought about the land in Israel was the development of Zionism. Zionism was a desire to have the land come what may. They threw away one of the elements - the law of God - and said "Just give us the land, that's all we want."

Why do we have such incredible problems in that place? Largely because they have forgotten about the law of God and how to relate to one another as human beings.

Zionism arose during the 19th century, but prior to that another concept of Judaism arose - a Judaism which said "Forget the land, let's just have the Torah" That is called Reformed Judaism. Reformed Judaism is on the brink of extinction in some ways because the distilled Torah which they have developed for themselves, takes everything Jewish out of the Torah so they can be assimilated into the various nations of the world, and literally removes their cause for existence.

The Jews of the last two or three centuries have tried to change their identity, either by just focusing on the land in terms of Zionism, or just trying to focus on various elements of the law, in terms of Reformed Judaism. Both of those approaches have created major identity problems for them. Major identity problems.

The aspect of the land is very much tied into this aspect in terms of Leviticus 23, the chapter which recounts the festivals of the Eternal. The chapter starts by describing the weekly Sabbath. There is a reason for that.

Lev 23: 4 `These are the feasts of the LORD, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times.

5 `On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is the LORD'S Passover.

6 `And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; seven days you must eat unleavened bread.

9 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

10 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: `When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest.

Here was something they had to do once they were in the land. It was a preparation for keeping the Day of Pentecost. There is some confusion as to how to count the Day of Pentecost.

11 `He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.

15 `And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed.

16 `Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD.

The fifty days give us the word "Pentecost" - a Greek word which simply means "Count Fifty". To the Jews it was called "Shavuot" or the "Festival of Weeks" because of the seven weeks.

The Pharisaic Judaism counts those fifty days from the day after the First Day of Unleavened Bread. The Sadducees count it from the weekly Sabbath during the Days of Unleavened Bread. - Two distinct views.

In fact, there are even more views on when it was to be, especially if the first Holy Day was a Sabbath. "Which Sabbath do you count from?" The Church over the years has come to understand what we might describe as being the Sadducean view - of counting from the weekly Sabbath. The reason for that is as follows.

This chapter starts by defining the weekly Sabbath. It uses a particular term for the Sabbath in verse 3. This term "it is the Sabbath" is not then used of any of the Holy Days but it is used consistently in terms of when you do the things that relate to Pentecost. That is just an aside, but it is an aspect of one of the things that ties in with the way we count Pentecost. (If I'm not mistaken 1998 is one of those years when the 6th Sivan coincides with this Day of Pentecost. So today, the Jewish community are also keeping Shavuot.)

Following the Pharisaic way, we would end up with a fixed date on the calendar - 6th Sivan, whereas the way we count it, we always end up on a Sunday. But the important thing to note is that God tied this very much into the land. There were things they had to do once they went into the land. They were to take the wavesheaf offering. They were to make an offering with the wavesheaf and they were to create various breads to go with that.

Lev 23: 16 Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a

new meat offering unto the LORD.

17 Ye shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves of two tenth deals: they shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven; they are the firstfruits unto the LORD.

These two aspects are very much tied into this particular day, the Day of Pentecost. Let me read you a brief comment from a Rabbi on the aspect of Shavuot. He was writing to a community about ten years ago: "Dear Congregant. In this newsletter you will find some information about the Cinderella of contemporary Jewish calendar, Shavuot. Unlike Pesach (Passover) with its enduring and alluring mitzvah symbols, its strident and urgent themes of passion and freedom, Shavuot is seen as lacking in significance. It has neither the family attraction of Pesach (Passover), or the awesome power of a Rosh Hashanah (the Feast of Trumpets)."

It's a sad comment on the abysmal ignorance of our age and of our community. Shavuot was, after all, only the turning point in our history. After Sinai, the Jewish people and indeed the world, would never be the same. Shavuot marked the fulfillment of Pesach. Remember the cry of "Let my people go"? It's completed by "that they may serve me".

On Shavuot at Mount Sinai, we came of age. We received a moral code, an ethical imperative and a vision of how we were to make this world a better place. The challenge for them was to remember this and try to make the world a better place. A difficulty for them. As this Rabbi said, "We've lost what Shavuot is all about." That's a sad commentary on a group of people who had the opportunity of great revelation of God.

Shavuot is supposed to provide the identity for the Jewish people. But what about us? Isn't it the same for us? Doesn't this particular day provide the identity for who we are to be?

Acts 2: 1 And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

- They were all together keeping the Day of Pentecost. What happened? God's Holy Spirit was given and the physical method by which God provided the Holy Spirit, parallels the way in which He spoke with the ancestors of the children of Israel at Mount Sinai. We read about the noise, the tongues of fire, and the wind. Why that? Because that was the way in which God manifested Himself to His people at Mt. Sinai as well!

There was a difference though. On this occasion, people were prepared to be listen and to be receptive to what God had provided.

God's Holy Spirit was given on the Day of Pentecost. It wasn't only the covenant that was entered into on the Day of Pentecost and it was not only the promise of the land, of being a nation, it was also the giving of God's Holy Spirit that was provided. Christianity operates on what is known as a replacement theology: 'if something happens in the New Testament it dispenses with what happened in the Old Testament'. It has no place any more. In reality that is not a true theology. It is a theology that Christendom has developed over the last four to five hundred years.

In reality, if the New Testament mentions something it adds a new dimension. It adds to what is already there. Let's look at one of those 'difficult' scriptures in the New Testament. God gave His Law to the people of Israel. The end result of the nation of Israel being given His Law was that they ended up going into captivity because they never knew how to properly keep it. The ecstasy that David found in God's Law was not found amongst the entirety of the nation of Israel, or if it was, it was only short lived. It was never really comprehended.

The Jews - the southern kingdom - came back from the captivity and to avoid being taken into captivity again and losing their identity, they created what has been described as 'a fence around the Torah'. It was called the Talmud and was to stop them breaking it. They did not understand God's Law.

Paul, in Romans 7, said that God's Law is good.

Rom 7: 12 Wherefore the law is holy (something that God has sanctified - set apart - for His purpose), and the commandment holy, and just, and good.

It is a representation of the character of God. The word 'good' that Paul uses is a Greek word 'agathos'.

There are a number of Greek words translated 'good' in the New Testament. This one speaks of those things that are of God. When Paul talks about God's Law being good, he says "it is of God". - something of great value. Paul is talking about sin. He is talking about the problem that he as a human being has.

Rom 7: 8 But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead.

Why? Because the law defines sin. Sin is lawlessness - living contrary to the law.

9 I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died.

10 And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death.

His mind is reeling with these contrary expressions. Something that was supposed to provide life, in fact is providing for death.

11 For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me.

12 Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.

13 Has then what is good (that which is of God) become death to me? Certainly not! (There's another element that has to be brought in to comprehend). But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful.

God allowed His Law to be given to a group of people, who, as Paul was saying, had no ability to keep it - to highlight the problem that humanity faces - that it is on a collision course with death. There is no alternative to humanity by itself. God gave His law to a group of people to highlight that lesson for all humanity. Because the natural way that a human being lives is contrary to the law of God. There was something else that was needed so that humanity could fulfil God's intended purpose.

14 For we know that the law is spiritual (we've not talked about anything spiritual in terms of ancient Israel.), but I am carnal, sold under sin.

- I'm a human being. I was born into a world that is controlled by the prince of the power of the air. He had control over me. He has control over each and every human being who is born. It doesn't matter which part of the world in which they are born, the prince of the power of the air has control over them.

When we think of repentance we so often think of the things we might have done wrong. Repentance is not necessarily sorrow about what we have done wrong. It is sorrow and repentance for what we really *are*.

Sometimes I've counselled students who have grown up in the Church for baptism. They've led an exemplary life as far as this world is concerned. They haven't been into drugs or ended up stealing on the streets, or anything of that nature. The world looks at them and thinks 'wonderful'. The thing is, they are that way not because of themselves. They are that way perhaps because of the wisdom of their parents or because of circumstances that they had no control over. They could just as easily, if we'd changed the circumstances in their lives, have been on the street. They could have been some manic individual who went out and killed other individuals.

We are under the control of Satan. So often it's easy for us to look at ourselves and say "I'm good". There's only one situation in which we could ever be considered good, and that's what today is all about. The circumstances that we've had in life, the opportunities that my parents gave me in life, do not change the basic human nature that is within me. It may have channelled and directed it in a particular way, but I'm still human, and I'm still under the control of the god of this world - the prince of the power of the air - the spirit that works in the children of disobedience. Not all necessarily are going to end up as Pol Pots or some despot like that, but given the right opportunity and circumstances each one of us has the potential to be an individual like that - because of the god of this world.

Paul looked at himself and said he was sold under sin. This is a man who describes himself as being a Torah-observant Jew. A man who has this covenant relationship with God. A man who describes himself as excelling above everybody of his age group and interest in terms of his Pharisaism and his joy, his devoutness for God's Law.

15 *For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do.*

16 *If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good.*

(It tells me that God's Law is good. That it is the right standard.)

17 *But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.*

18 *For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells (there's nothing of God within us naturally speaking.) for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.*

19 *For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.*

He recognises the good, yet he is unable to accomplish it because of what he was.

Matt 19: 16 (Revised English Bible) A man came up and asked Him, "Teacher, what good must I do to gain eternal life?"

- The ultimate question!.

17 *"Good", said Jesus, "Why do you ask Me about good? One alone is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.*

- They are of God. They are what He has taught you to do. I used the word earlier "mitzvah" - good deeds. They are what the Jews love to do. "What little thing must I do that will gain me eternal life?" Jesus said "Why are you asking me about good? There is One who is good and He has already revealed what is required of you."

18 *He said to Him, "Which ones?" Jesus said, "'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,'*

19 *'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"*

20 *The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?"*

- "I'm a good devout Jew. I've always done those things." But Jesus said there was one thing he lacked:

21 *Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."*

22 *But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. (of great wealth)*

Jesus Christ allowed him to be led to the point of seeing that there was a spiritual dimension to God's Law, that a physical person without God's Spirit does not see. To them it's just a list of things to do or not do. They don't see the end of God's Law. What sort of attitude it was supposed to convey. What sort of relationship to other people it was supposed to build within us. The young man did not appreciate that in any shape or form.

Bearing that in mind:

Rom 12: 1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

We are to be living sacrifices!

2 *And do not be conformed to this world ...*

- That is what we are supposed to be coming away from. This world does not set the standard for us. It does not provide the blueprint for us as to how we should live.

Rom 12: 2 (Revised English Bible) Conform no longer to the pattern of the present world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds ...

Jews (of which Paul was a great one), Jews who had God's Law, who at that time inhabited the land that God promised to them, needed to have their minds renewed. They needed to be transformed by the

renewing of their minds. For what purpose? To what end?

2 ... then you will be able to discern the will of God and to know what is good (what is of God), acceptable and perfect.

It's only by the renewing of the mind, by being transformed and having that mind renewed that we can ever come to understand what God's law is all about. Without God's Spirit people don't accomplish what God intends us to accomplish. We are still held captive under the god of this world. Humanity is still in Egypt. It hasn't come out.

As the Rabbi said in this note to the congregation, Shavuot is seen as lacking significance because it only takes on its real significance when you understand that God not only gave the covenant and the promise of the land, but He also gave His Spirit so that you really can become the people of God. That is what makes the identity for you and me. That's what makes the identity for a Christian. Many people would claim to have God's Spirit yet they have no understanding of God's law. The keeping of God's law means absolutely nothing to them. God's law oftentimes is seen as being something evil, yet Paul describes it in Romans 7 as being something holy, something that is sanctified by God, something that is good. It is of God and it is the place to which one goes to find that which is of God - that which is good.

Rom 12: 9 (Revised English Bible) Love in all sincerity, loathing evil, and holding fast to the good (to the agathos).

Love and goodness end up being tied together. Because godly love is something which is good, right and proper in God's sight.

Romans 8, verses 9 and 16 show that unless we have the Spirit of God and of Christ we are none of His. That is the Christian identity.

In Titus 2 Paul has been instructing Titus about how various groups within the congregation were to relate to one another, whether they be the aged men or women, the young men, the servants - all the various elements that made up a congregation.

Titus 2: 11 For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,

- It's not restricted to any particular group of the community. It is all people.

12 Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;

13 Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;
14 Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

Is there something there that strikes you about Pentecost? We have been redeemed to be a peculiar people just as ancient Israel were called to be a peculiar people. They were to be God's nation. We are to be God's people as well. There's an end result of what God has given to us It is not given for the here and now alone. It is given so that we can accomplish something, so that we can lead our lives to a particular conclusion and we can accomplish that which God desires us to accomplish.

God chose Israel to be His peculiar treasure (Ex 19, 1 Pet 2:9-10). Paul also identifies that calling, of being a peculiar treasure to God. Something that is for His purpose, for His end. Christ has given Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity.

The book of Ruth deals a lot with redemption. Boaz was the redeemer of Ruth. He was a type of Christ. The reference for the verb 'redeem' (Hebrew 'gaal') appears more times within the book of Ruth than probably any other section of the Old Testament. It appears about 24 times! It is just dripping with the concept of a person being redeemed. Ruth was being redeemed by Boaz as a type of what Christ was going to do to you and me. He is committed to it. And not just for you and me as the firstfruits, but ultimately for all humanity so that this blindness can be removed from them.

He gave Himself so that He might redeem us from all iniquity - from the Pharaoh of this world - from Satan.

Titus: 2: 14 Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

- Red hot for good works. (This is not 'agathos' - this is another Greek word that's translated 'good'. This word 'kalos' has a slightly different meaning. He said we've been called to be zealous of good works.

Titus 2: 15 These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority.

(that is to be the goal, the vision - that is to be the identity of the people of God.) *Let no man despise thee* (as a result of that).

Titus 3: 1 Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work (agathos work),

We are to be ready for godly works!

2 To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men.

3 For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.

4 But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared,

5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done ...

As Jesus Christ told His disciples, unless their righteousness exceeded that of the scribes and Pharisees, they would not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. There's another form of righteousness which is higher than that:

5 ... but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy (Spirit);

For us to be able to become godly, for us to become this peculiar people that God really seeks, we need to have the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit which He has shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour. We have this wonderful privilege of being able to have our minds renewed! How is our mind renewed? By God's Holy Spirit dwelling in us. Jesus Christ told the disciples the way in which God's Spirit would work with their minds.

John 16: 7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient (appropriate) for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you ...

- The Comforter has a particular purpose to fulfill.

8 And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:

- It will make a person's mind alert as to what is sin - of what is righteousness and what is godly judgment.

9 Of sin, because they believe not on me;

- They don't see God in the picture. They just see themselves. Their minds are focused upon themselves and they seek to use God's Law to their own intents and purposes.

10 Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more;

- Now you can learn and be aware of the righteous way which God requires us to live. You have that through the indwelling of God's Spirit.

11 Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.

It's very easy in this world to become discouraged. You see sin abounding around us so prolifically. It's so

easy to lose sight of what it is that we've been called to. Jesus said the Holy Spirit is going to convict us of judgment. It's going to help us see the end that is going to be brought upon Satan's system. If we wish to avoid that judgment we have to live in accordance with God's righteousness. So we have that great privilege of having God's Holy Spirit as being an identifier of our lives - together with the law of God, because the two do not operate separately. God intended for them to operate together so that we could accomplish the righteousness of God as opposed to our own righteousness.

Above all else, because of those two, we really can become the peculiar people. That concept of the land that has formed so much of the Jewish identity can be part of our identity as well. But is it just a physical land or a physical nation that we look forward to? No it's greater than that. It's the establishment of the Kingdom of God, with all the righteousness and all the greatness that exists.

What are we to look forward to? The instructions in Lev 23:10 looked forward to a future time. We keep this day as well, looking forward to a future time. We are looking forward to the next holy day - the Feast of Trumpets and the return of Jesus Christ. Here, relating to the time of the Feast of Trumpets:

Rev 11: 15 And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.

It's not a physical kingdom that we're necessarily looking forward to. It is the reign of Jesus Christ over this entire earth, where all kingdoms and all principalities are placed under His feet.

16 And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God,

17 Saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned.

We look forward to that. We ache for that period of time to be established because we know what it will do for the rest of humanity. We see the change that it will bring about upon this earth.

18 And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth.

19 And the temple of God was opened in heaven ...

The temple of God was opened in heaven in a remarkable manner.

Luke 4 recounts Jesus Christ going into the synagogue in Nazareth on the Sabbath day. He was given the scroll of Isaiah to read to the people. One of the identities of that particular day in Luke 4, of it being the Day of Pentecost, is the fact that in the time of Jesus Christ the Torah was read in what they called the triennial reading. Over a period of three years the entire law was read in the synagogue on the Sabbath. With that, various sections of the prophets were read, and also various psalms as well. Isaiah 42 from verse 5 onwards was one of those prophetic readings for the day of Pentecost. It was read in the first year of the cycle.

Isa 42: 5 Thus saith God the LORD, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein:

6 I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles;

-We are to be a light to this world. That is why Israel was described to be God's peculiar people - not for their own benefit but for the rest of humanity. For those that God is still to call. But they lacked something. They lacked the ingredient of God's Holy Spirit. God has given us His Holy Spirit so that we can fulfill that.

7 To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.

What is the blindness He talks about? What is the prison? Is it not exactly the same thing that the apostle

Paul found himself wrestling with in Romans chapter 7? People are bound unto sin. He said "I have called you for a purpose. I have given you all of these ingredients for a purpose - so that you can be a benefit to the rest of humanity. You can set an example. You can live a life so you can provide something for the rest of humanity.

8 I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.

9 Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them.

He goes on to talk about the way in which He is going to deal with humanity and the way in which the whole earth is going to rejoice before the Eternal God:

13 The LORD shall go forth as a mighty man, he shall stir up jealousy like a man of war: he shall cry, yea, roar; he shall prevail against his enemies.

- He is going to prevail against Satan.

14 I have long time holden my peace; I have been still, and refrained myself: now will I cry like a travailing woman (like a woman in labour); I will destroy and devour at once.

15 I will make waste mountains and hills (I will destroy the governments of this world that are under the influence of Satan), and dry up all their herbs; and I will make the rivers islands, and I will dry up the pools.

16 And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them.

He's talking about a future event. But in reality you and I are able to participate in that now because we have God's Holy Spirit. We can identify ourselves with what God identifies Himself with and that which Jesus Christ identifies Himself with. We can live that life which He says is good and right and upright.

Let's pull these elements together. Paul, in talking to Jews who felt that they had everything that was needed:

Rom 2: 4 Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

- It's not something of our own doing. At times God has to put a noose around our neck and yank us and say "I want you somewhere and I want you to listen to what I am going to say." Eventually after much kicking and struggling we can come to the point of saying "Yes Lord, what do you want me to do?" He says "I want you to live a certain way of life."

It's God's goodness that brings us to the point of repentance - of seeing our fundamental deficiency. That without the Spirit of God within us we amount to absolutely nothing. We cannot fulfill that which God desires. We can live a productive life in terms of human effort. We can do good things in terms of the human society. But ultimately speaking, in terms of the ultimate good of fulfilling God's desires, we can't. We can't do that without God's Holy Spirit. That's why it is so essential.

4 ... not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

5 But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,

6 who "will render to each one according to his deeds":

You can live that way if you like - and you're going to get it in the neck. You are going to receive God's judgment at some point along the line - if you don't see God involved in it. On the other hand, he provides a contrast:

7 To them who by patient continuance in well doing ('agathos') seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life:

- To those who by patient continuance in 'good' (well doing) That patient continuance in what is godly. We seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life. We become like Abraham. The kingdom and city we look for does not have foundations. It's not a physical land with physical borders that motivates us.

Part of the great debate in the Middle East at the present time is over those physical borders and where they should be. The religious say "It's got to be here". The Zionists say "Where can we defend?" They go at one another, amongst themselves. They don't need the Arabs as enemies! (As one Jewish whit said, if you've got two Jews - you've got three opinions. You can have any sort of argument you like. Jews even have it with themselves!)

But we're looking for something that is not physical. We're looking for something that *is* going to be placed on this earth, but it is not something that is defined by a physical border here and there. It is something that is going to incorporate and encompass all of humanity. That which is the physical part of it is eventually going to be purged, cleansed and recreated! There's going to be a new heaven and a new earth.

You can't do that unless you have God's Spirit to open your eyes, so you are no longer spiritually blind. We can't do that unless we have God's Spirit to free us from the Egypt of this world. We can't do that unless we have God's Spirit to provide the light as to what God's plan and intention is.

Today is a day of identity for us. It identifies for us what makes us unique in God's sight. We seek that which is godly. We seek God's law, not just on the physical surface of it, but we seek what the spirit and intention of God's law really is. We delve into it. We seek to understand what really it is that God wants to teach us - the type of people that He wants us to be - the transformed people. That comes about by the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit. We are able to have that. And as a result of the Holy Spirit, we are able to look forward to the purpose that God and Jesus Christ look forward to, and that all of the heavenly host look forward to - the time when Satan will be bound, thrown into a bottomless pit - and the rule of God will be established upon this earth!

You and I are the firstfruits. That's our part in that. Looking forward to that and preparing at this time so we can then rule with Jesus Christ and help the rest of humanity come to understand those things and learn the lessons we have learned in our lives - come to understand God's purposes and God's law in a way that God desires.

Hasten the day!

... *Peter Nathan*
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Basingstoke