

THE RESPONSE-

A SOLEMN ASSEMBLY

Sept. 25 2020

- A. In moments of national crisis, the church in any nation is called upon to play the leading role. Intercession is to be our first response. In the Bible, God has prescribed gatherings of corporate fasting and prayer as a means of national intercession.
- B. In the context of great wickedness in the land of Israel God sought mercy, not judgment, by looking for an advocate for broken humanity. *“So, I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one.”* -Ezek.22:30.
- C. Sin demands a just verdict. When a nation confesses its sins and turn from them *God is just to forgive* that nation (Jer.18:7-10; 1 Jn.1:9). When a nation persists in wickedness *ultimately* the sinner is judged with the sin. God desires both mercy *and* justice in this hour. Mercy is the undeserved expression of His kindness and justice is the righting of wrongs.
- D. God promises that when the church responds rightly to seasons of divine activity, He will answer national crisis as we cry out to Him (Mal.3:1-5).
- E. What constitutes a national crisis? Crisis can be both natural and spiritual. Crisis can take the form of natural disaster, military invasion, grave economic instability, civil and social strife, moral decay, rampant disease, governmental and political corruption, etc., etc.
- F. Is every national crisis God’s wrath against sin? No, it isn’t. Is God within His rights to openly judge the unrepentant sin of a nation? Absolutely. Crisis can happen to any nation and any people group as part of the course of normal life or the inherent sinfulness of humanity.
- G. Some crisis are ordained from God, some crisis are man-made, some are demonically inspired and some happen naturally. Do we always know which is which? No, we don’t. But, the responsibility for answering crisis, in particular, spiritual crisis is given firstly to the people of God. Jesus is looking for an advocate to stand with Him for the sake of broken humanity.

- H. Functioning as a prophetic people involves discerning the hour and the crisis. We may not have a crystal clarity regarding every spiritual detail of the hour [time-frame] in which we live but we are to seek to recognize when God is moving, when God is speaking and what He is saying.
- I. We may not have a crystal clarity regarding the nature of every national crisis, but we are to know how to respond as a praying people.
- J. Intercession is the other side of the prophetic coin. As we discern the movements of God in a particular season we are to respond in intercession.

“But if they are prophets, and if the word of the Lord is with them, let them now make intercession to the Lord of hosts.” -Jeremiah 27:18

- K. The solemn assembly culture is to be a regular part of church life. As long as crisis persists prayer must persist. Christians are not exempt from feeling the impact of our nation’s struggles. We do not live in a bubble. We are to cry out on behalf of our cities and nation.

Three Categories of Judgment -Wrath, Discipline, Favorable Judgments

God Disciplines Nations

-God gave Israel the king that they wanted in Saul though He warned them that they would not like it (8:4-22). Sometimes the discipline of God is giving a nation what they desire even if it is not what He desires for them. This principle is easily seen in the text of Rom.1:24-32. Three times Paul uses terms like, *“Therefore, God also gave them up to”*, *“For this reason God gave them up to”*, and, *“God gave them over to”*. This form of discipline is also at the heart of the parable of the prodigal son. Even this comes from the heart of a tender Father. *“Then He said: ‘A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.’ So, he divided to them his livelihood.”* -Lk.15:10-11. Even though the selfish request of the younger son recklessly and deliberately crashed through relational and cultural barriers, the Father realized the necessity of allowing his immature son to do as he pleased. There was no legislating the heart of *this* young man.

-God sent locust to create a national crisis in Israel by essentially erasing the food supply in the prophet Joel’s day so that the nation would return to Him by crying out in their need (Joel 1:2-16). God created a crisis for Israel both to reveal to them their own limitations without Him and to show Himself strong as the context for winning them back. In essence He says, “You can’t do this without

Me, but if you return to Me, I will open a door and help you.” (Joel 2:12-14). This is the same principle behind the giving of the Mosaic law. The law was given that trespass might abound, but where sin abounded grace abounded even more (Rom.5:19). Discipline comes from the heart of a good Father. *“And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: ‘My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.’”* -Heb.12:5-6 (NKJV). As students of the word of God is important to understand that not all discipline is severe and that, in terms of correction, God applies only as much pressure as is needed to bring us to our senses as it were. Because God loves us, He desires our good and His discipline, even His correction, is toward that end. Not all discipline is a correction for wrongdoing, so it is important that we understand the difference between that type of correction and the maturation processes of God that also fall under the heading of discipline. Sometimes, we can get lost in the language of a particular translation and assume that the way we understand a particular word is the way that the translator intended it to read. Some translations use words like *scourge* or *punish* when talking about the disciplines of God. To the modern ear this may evoke unpleasant images of abuse, overreaction and impulsive behavior. Our concept of judgment, often times, has been informed in the same way so that when we hear the word *judgment* used, we connect it with the idea of the angry intolerance of an authoritarian leader. This is certainly not an endearing image to be sure.

-God raised up a foreign army (the Babylonians) to heavily oppress His people as a last-resort type measure of discipline (Hab.1:5-11). This is an extreme example of Biblical discipline but certainly not without foundation. As part of covenant faithfulness God brought upon Israel the plagues that He had promised for their persistent trespass (Dt.28). Like a Father correcting a defiant and disobedient son, God brought upon Israel all of the negative dimensions of their selfish choices because He is a God of His word. But even this was done with the hopes that they would realize the error of their way and return to Him with all of their hearts. This principle of divine, restorative, love in the midst of discipline in the form of judgment is illustrated in Hosea 2:14-20. The above referenced passage in Habbakuk illustrates a *severe* chastening of the Lord. This is an extreme case of correction. This was not God’s first reaction to Israel’s sin. Prior, there had been generations of tender wooings from the prophets concerning God’s faithful love toward them. Because they refused to listen to His tenderness, He instead revealed His severity (Rom.11:22). Jesus echoes this principle when speaking of His own generation’s rejection of Him. *“And the Lord said, ‘To what then shall I liken the men of this generation, and what are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, saying: ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; We mourned to you, and you did not weep.’”* -Lk.7:31-32. In other words, God tried to entice you with revelations of His kindness, and you ignored that. God tried to warn you with revelation of His severity [consequences for unrepentant sin] and you ignored that as well. “So now what?”

One of the most common misconceptions today regarding the judgment of God comes from equating all judgment with anger and wrath. If we understand the judgments of God to fall under the category of His legal or judicial decisions, then we can understand that God does not have to be unrighteously angry to render a such a decision. The judgments, or the decisions that God makes, may be motivated by holy anger or they may not be. God has the right to feel as He feels. He, Himself is truth. His emotions are always a perfect reflection of how he views and responds to any given situation. He is never wrong in His understandings nor His responses to mankind. A perfect and profound illustration of a favorable judgment is found in Daniel 7:22. In this text the last-days anti-Christ is waging a global war against God's people, both the nation of Israel and the church. With precision-like timing God the Father renders a legal decision [judgment] in favor of the saints. This is good! The judgments of God are *for* the saints! What a wonderful reality that God makes high-level executive decisions that benefit and bless His people! These too fall under the banner of Biblical judgments.

Of course, there is the dimension of judgments and wrath working together. It is a clear and historic biblical doctrine that God does indeed ultimately and finally reveal His wrath against unrepentant sin (Rom.12:19, Eph.5:6, Col.3:6). Thankfully, God is incredibly patient, not willing that any should perish but that all should repent and come to a saving knowledge of His Son. The legal nature of judgment requires that God answer the sin of mankind by ultimately condemning it. When one takes refuge in Christ, then the work of the punishment for sin that was upon Jesus is applied to that one. There is then no punishment for sin that has been repented of (Rom.1:18, 2:4-10,5:9, 1 Thess.5:9). But when one refuses to accept Christ's atonement for sin one must ultimately bear the punishment for one's own sin.

God's first response is not the application of the punishment of sin to a person or a nation. Far from it. Though that person or nation may be rightly deserving of punishment God is longsuffering. He is willing to wait and give ample time so that as many as would be saved will be saved. This creates a bit of a paradox for those who understand that God hates sin and is sympathetic to human suffering. *"But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."* -2 Pt.3:7-9 The promises that Peter is referring to include God's promise that He will one day judge sin in sinful man, but what keeps Him from doing that fully now is His great desire that men would turn from their sin and embrace His leadership and love. Consider this statement from the book of Ecclesiastes. *"Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil."* - Ecc.8:11

Paradoxical Prophecy-

Sometimes truth seems paradoxical. Certain statements by God can seem self-contradictory. One can be sent by God to prophesy to a nation regarding the penalty for its sin while another can be sent simultaneously by God to prophesy of God's tender affections for humanity and His willingness to extend mercy to that same nation. Why? Because both things are true at the same time. God has no confusion over the way that His attributes and desires overlap. It is us that have this confusion. Unrepentant sin will incur ultimate retribution, so God warns a people to turn. Repentance brings restoration and blessing, so God calls a people to repent (Joel 2:12-32, Ac.3:19). Many times, the confusion is a result of a prophet's misunderstanding of the timing, process and application of God's retribution for sin, or likewise a prophet's misunderstanding regarding God's gracious nature and willingness to actually judge sin. Often, for prophetic voices the idea or message that God is emphasizing in the moment seems quite present tense. That's why one can receive revelation about God's displeasure over a nation's unrighteousness and warranted punishment and conclude that this is what God is planning to do *this moment*. Similarly, one can receive revelation about a God who weeps and longs to be gracious to a people who do not know Him, and, being so consumed with that particular face of God, conclude that God could *never* be angry with a nation who persists in wickedness much less punish a people for their sin. This is why Peter said in the above prophecy, *"That with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day"*. When God emphasizes a truth, it does not mean that the full manifestation of that truth is immediate. God speaks the truth in love. He speaks both sides of the truth in love. He says, *"I love you, I love you, I love you. I long to be gracious, to cover your sin, to have mercy on you."* He also says, *"Get out of that sin immediately! Don't you know the punishment that awaits those who practice such things? Get out today, don't wait, this is not good!"*

Unfortunately, as a whole, there is still a great immaturity in those that would emphasize either dimension of God's prophetic voice. Many different streams composed of those who genuinely love God and sincerely desire to be found loyal to His word are actively resisting one another (1 Cor.3:1-17). One has a revelation of God's nature as a judge while the other has a revelation of God's nature as a patient, tender Father. One revels in the grace of God that relates to broken humanity and is compassionate with their lowly estate while another lauds the holiness of God in which sin cannot dwell. One emphasizes God as being for man and desiring to reform culture and society while another sees the dream in God's heart to eradicate sin and replace the foundations of broken systems with those of His own. The truth is that God is not divided. Though there are many relevant emphasis' coming from the throne of God, it is important to remember they are all coming from the same throne. A prophetic people are to be a people of understanding. And this includes comprehending the full scope of God's truth and being able to reckon the way in which the seemingly paradoxical things of God actually find great harmony in Him.

The task before us as a prophetic people responding in intercession is to embrace the tensions included in these seeming paradoxes. We must appeal for mercy while we proclaim the truth about righteousness, sin and judgment (Jn.16:8). We appeal to God based on what we know to be true about His nature and His desires and while we proclaim the mercies of God, we do not withhold the truth about the devastation of sin and God's ultimate condemnation of it.