

THE CONTEMPORARY COUNTDOWN TO CHAOS - The Ten Years Since 9/11

6. CONCLUSION and RESPONSE

It is clear for all to see that the last decade in the modern western world has been one in which events have plainly spelt decline, decadence and even catastrophe. We can see human failure written large all over the decade. There can be no denial of the salient facts.

One response might well be to say that there is nothing unique about such disastrous events; they are the normal stuff of history, and have been seen before. So, before Iraq, the U.S. had the war in Viet Nam; before Bush and Cheney it had Nixon's Watergate scandal; before 9/11 it had Pearl Harbour etc. These were arguably worse than the events we have witnessed in the 21stC. They are, therefore, events to put behind us, and we should not allow them to get out of perspective, but press on. Things will straighten out. This is precisely the sort of response that Israel might well have made to the political and economic distress that followed the warnings of Amos. But, as the Israelites learned to their cost, it can be a mistaken response. On that occasion the events were a prelude to devastating catastrophe. The problem with such a response is that it breeds a sense of complacency or, even worse, of bravado. It ignores the fact that we might not just be witnessing a catalogue of human error that will eventually end, but a warning of continued divine displeasure that is leading in the direction of cataclysm. It makes light of the fact that God is intimately involved in the process of history, and that man is not the master of his own destiny or history. If it is true that we are under an "Amos" word in our generation then what we have witnessed over the last ten years can only be seen as severe warning signs for the future.

How then should we respond to those warning signs? We need to ask ourselves such questions as, "What is going to be required of me in order to live and show light in an age of growing darkness?"; "Is this insidious atmosphere of the modern world affecting me, or do I have sufficient light to push it back?"; "Have I the courage for real godly discipleship?"; "Is there anything I can do for a nation under severe judgement?" At least three requirements are highlighted by these questions.

1. The Need for Stronger and Deeper Faith in God.

Since the atmosphere we breathe is so full of unbelief and indifference toward the very idea of God, the first call on us is to make sure that our faith is thoroughly grounded in genuine testimony of the reality of God's presence in our own lives. The evidence of the supernatural God that the world denies must be big in our own lives. In other words we must have genuine personal "revelation", a spiritual awareness of the Creator God actively at work in our lives. Our faith must be living. There must be real intercourse with God, a real love of Jesus and a real experience of the Holy Spirit. That means time spent with God. Our light is only as bright as the reality and genuineness of our testimony. God must be God and top priority in our lives.

If there is a special challenge for our times, it is the challenge to recognise fully that our God is indeed a God of judgement. This must be faced squarely, not avoided or played down. In our times it has simply been ignored for the most part. The bible is not afraid of using the sharp word, "wrath", "anger" in relation to God. It is an anger directed remorselessly toward evil. He is a God to be "feared", in the sense that his anger is real and must be taken into account in life (and death). It is a vital antidote to the worldly spirit of self indulgence and consumerism which has invaded the ethos of modern Christianity and made God into someone who is there primarily for our benefit. It is for that very reason that the teaching of judgement has not been very acceptable or palatable in today's world. This needs to change.

A clear and strong grasp of judgement is fundamental for a true grasp of the gospel. How otherwise can the appalling death of Jesus be properly understood, a death which speaks very loudly

of the dire consequence of evil? Moreover, it is only against the background of Jesus' sacrificial death for our forgiveness that the full extent of the love of the Father can be properly comprehended. Of course he loves us, but that only reaches us on account of Jesus' death for sin. We need to remember also that God's greatest gift to Christians, the presence of His Spirit living within us, is one that is in danger of being withdrawn, quenched or grieved when sinful behaviour is treated lightly – a judgement that David in his adultery so desperately wanted to avoid.

2. The Need to Emphasise Godly Living

A heightened grasp of the fact that God is a God of judgment is a very necessary spur to godly living in a lax age. It is a vital complement to the more positive motivation that comes to us when we grasp the fact that godliness is a beautiful thing and hugely desirable. The pressures against such godly living in the modern world are huge. This is especially so for young people who are the victims of a collectivism that pushes them like a herd toward everything that is unclean and pleasure seeking. But it is equally true in the work place, where the abandonment of integrity and principle has been increasingly relentless in the pursuit for money and where taking a stand is very hard. There has never been a greater need for the basic standards of the Ten Commandments to be taught again and again, and to be listened to again and again. They need to be a constant and major part of the diet fed by the church.

The fellowship of Christians among themselves has always been a vital factor in Christian discipleship. It certainly is so today. A fellowship of living faith, prayer and testimony is an enormous antidote to the stifling pressure of the world. Yet pleasure seeking and consumer choice has considerably lessened the sense of "responsibility" and "commitment", even to Sunday fellowship. That very much needs strengthening.

3. The Need of Active Prayer and Witness for the Nation

For any turning back of the judgement that faces the west there needs to be widespread national repentance, such as Jonah witnessed at Nineveh. The prayer of Christians that we might be spared despite our sin is not an option. We have one category of prayer alone that we can engage in, and that is encapsulated in the cry of Habakkuk, "*Lord in your wrath, remember mercy*". Those mercies can encompass the salvation of individuals or a widespread move of revival for larger numbers. Both of these are what we are called to pray for and work for. There is great need for prayer of this kind. No matter how dark the clouds are, our age remains a time for sowing and reaping. The times are not times for a hanging of hands but a time for earnest prayer for mercy and for witness. The very bleakness of the outlook should be a strong spur to such action. And God will respond.