

Ezekiel 38:7-13

Second Baptist
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June 6, 2010

Living Amidst Evil

⁷ "Get ready; be prepared, you and all the hordes gathered about you, and take command of them.

⁸ After many days you will be called to arms. In future years you will invade a land that has recovered from war, whose people were gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate. They had been brought out from the nations, and now all of them live in safety.

⁹ You and all your troops and the many nations with you will go up, advancing like a storm; you will be like a cloud covering the land.

¹⁰ "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: On that day thoughts will come into your mind and you will devise an evil scheme.

¹¹ You will say, "I will invade a land of unwalled villages; I will attack a peaceful and unsuspecting people--all of them living without walls and without gates and bars.

¹² I will plunder and loot and turn my hand against the resettled ruins and the people gathered from the nations, rich in livestock and goods, living at the center of the land."

¹³ Sheba and Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish and all her villages will say to you, "Have you come to plunder? Have you gathered your hordes to loot, to carry off silver and gold, to take away livestock and goods and to seize much plunder?"

How many of you like watching the evening news? How many of you hate watching the evening news because there is no good news? It has been determined by analysts that over the course of the past 20-30 years, the media has gone from reporting the news to analyzing and even creating the events that shape our nation and the world. The media will second guess what decisions politicians make rather than simply reporting it. So to turn on the news – whether it be liberal or conservative media outlets – it is at best biased and at the worst -- dishonest. We have the option these days of choosing our media source so the message we receive is to our political liking. It is news, but not necessarily honest news reporting.

Nevertheless, there is little doubt after watching the news that we are people living amidst evil. Rulers and dictators similar to the ones described in Ezekiel 38 rule our world. It's as if modern day ambitious rulers are speaking the very words found in verses 11-12: "I will invade a land of unwalled villages; I will attack a peaceful and unsuspecting people--all of them living without walls and without gates and bars. ¹² I will plunder and loot and turn my hand against the resettled ruins and the people gathered from the nations, rich in livestock and goods, living at the center of the land."

In the time of Ezekiel, Gog and Magog are described as the nations sweeping down from the north to lay waste the nation of Israel. Even after the destruction of Jerusalem in about 587 BC described by Ezekiel and Jeremiah, we know that four centuries later, Antiochus IV swept down upon Jerusalem in 170-165 B.C. That all happened during the silent period of 400 years between the Old and New Testament. Many of the Biblical Scholars agree that chapter 38-39 of Ezekiel is prophesying that later period when Israel was invaded by Antiochus. He killed 80,000 Jews and sold that same number into slavery. He entered the temple and stole the sacred furniture. He entered the holy place and sacrificed a pig (a forbidden, unclean animal) on the holy altar.

Then shortly after that, Antiochus sent 22,000 troops under Apollonius to kill all the men in Jerusalem and enslave the women and children. I could describe gruesome acts of torture and execution that took place. It is certainly not good news.

We have evil people who do such things in our world today. Radical fundamentalist Muslims are blowing up aircraft, ramming airplanes into buildings, blowing up wedding parties and buses. We have Muslim clerics stirring up hatred among the youth so those young people can be recruited to become suicide bombers. Yet even in our American culture, we have heinous cases of child sexual and physical abuse. News reports of parents endangering their own children by cooking meth in their homes. I could spend more time defining evil in our society. But the question I want to ask is this: **IN THE PRESENCE OF ALL THIS EVIL IN OUR WORLD, WHAT IS THE CHRISTIAN RESPONSE?**

PRAYER: a discipline that leads to compassion.

One thing we don't do enough of is praying for our world, our nation and our leaders. The #1 Christian response to crisis should be prayer – and lots of it! But instead, we become fixated on our own life and interests. David Letterman was talking about the nuclear threat from Iran the other night on his show. He followed up by facetiously saying, “And I really need THAT to mess up my Weekend!” That's not far off from the way we think. Nearly nine years ago the World Trade Center was attacked. Has it changed people? Did it cause us to become people of prayer? Did it bring revival? Maybe for a month or two – but we are back to normal.

This past year has been a devastating year for the financial markets and the real estate market. Has it changed the way we think? Are we not still “trusting in uncertain riches”? (I Tim. 6:17) God had control of the world in Jeremiah and Ezekiel's time and God has control of the world today. Prayer is the approach we need to take in addressing the needs of our world.

WISDOM: God can provide us with wisdom to do something about it.

The number one thing we need to pray for is also the second point of my message: WISDOM. Looking back at the history of Israel from the Golden age of David and Solomon to the declining years of foolish and evil kings, we see a pattern. Wisdom and righteousness go hand

in hand. God gives our rulers the ability to choose rightly OR if they want to try and rule their own way – God allows them the free-will to fail and do it their way. We need to pray that our leaders from the President and congressmen down to our governor and mayor make right choices using Godly wisdom. We also have to exercise godly wisdom as we vote and as we discuss national and international issues. As believers, I think that sometimes we are caught up in our politics and are unable to see past partisan issues to really seek wisdom. I don't think God is a Democrat or Republican. I think God is the ULTIMATE Independent; meaning He doesn't need our advise on how to run the world.

BE LIKE JESUS: Being Christlike will change us and others.

Mostly, what we need to do in response to our crazy world is to “BE LIKE JESUS” (third point). Jesus was able to see through all the politics and socio-economic issues of his day. He could see through the outer beauty or ugliness of people. He could see a real person with real needs.

As followers of Christ, we need to put on “Jesus’ glasses” to see what is at the center of people’s needs. In the process, we can point them to the savior where they can find redemption and peace in their life. Listen to the testimonies of people who have come to Christ. They will almost always say that it was someone who loved them and represented Christ to them that really made an impact and opened the door for them to receive Christ. As Crazy as our world is, Jesus remains as the Prince of Peace and lover of souls. He is the place we can turn for contentment and grace.

Today as we come to the table, I can't help but to think how this table is an oasis of grace in a harsh and condemning world. This is a place where we can meet Jesus.

This table defines who we are and who Jesus is. It is an anchor. “As often as you do this, do it in remembrance of me.” (Jesus said). In this harsh and cruel world, we need this touch of God’s grace. We need this reminder that God remains in control. That remembrance takes us back to the same Grace the disciples experienced in that upper room with Christ. Let’s go to the table.