

Kington Baptist Church

MESSAGE BOARD – 63

This is an extraordinary time. We are in a most serious situation. I'm not now referring to viruses, or vaccines, or economics or environmental concerns. The serious situation we are confronting is the most serious any people or nation could face – it is that God has closed up his Word and the preaching of the gospel has almost been silenced in this country.

We hear much about 'religion' – but little of the Word of God. It is very clear in the Bible, but not always recognised, that the Holy Spirit most often uses the public worship of God to bring to people the Word of God. It is to public worship that God has promised his special presence – *when two or three gather together...* While God isn't confined to times or places of public worship it is true that his greatest work is achieved there and it is in this way that God most builds-up his people, through the Word and fellowship. This is why we are told never to neglect meeting together – *neglect not to assemble together, as some do...* And we're told this is even more important as we see 'the day approaching'. (Hebrews 10.25; Matthew 18.20)

The restriction, removable or prevention of public worship is a most serious loss for any people and any nation. To lose the privilege of singing praise, of meeting together, of the blessing of Holy Communion, of eye-to-eye preaching of the gospel are the among the greatest losses to God's people or to any nation. This loss can only occur as an act of divine judgement. It's not simply a matter of government policy or a politician's decision. It's deeper. It's God's response to high-handed sin.

And now, at a time when the Word of God is so desperately needed, with its message of sin and salvation, of hopelessness and hope, God's Word is almost silent. This is an act of judgment. We are warned of such a time: *The time is surely coming, says the Lord God, when I will send a famine on the land—not a famine of bread or water but of hearing the word of the Lord. People will stagger everywhere from sea to sea, searching for the word of the Lord, running here and going there, but they will not find it.* (Amos 8.11-12)

We are told what it is that brings this 'famine': *'...though they knew God, they did not honour him as God ... but became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools ... Therefore God gave them up'*. (Romans 1.21-24) Three times in these few verses Paul insists on this terrible reality: *God gave them up!*

They didn't want God or his Word, so God gave them what they wanted: *'the lusts of their hearts in impurity, degrading their bodies among themselves ... exchanging the truth of God for a lie they worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator. This is why God gave them up to degrading passions.*

There are two sides to this situation. On the one hand, the devil wants to silence God's Word, to isolate and deprive believers of the Word that is their light and comfort. From the very beginning this has been his tactic, to corrupt God's Word or to isolate believers from God's Word.

On the other hand, this situation is the judgement of God. He *sends* this 'famine' of the Word. He lets his Word be silenced and restrains the vital work of the Holy Spirit. When this happens, with inevitable chaos and disorder, we are seeing the judgement of God.

Just this week we've seen another example of the very thing that brings God's judgment and deprives us of God's blessing – treating the poor unjustly: *Those who support the poor will know God's blessing; the LORD will deliver them when trouble comes. The LORD will protect them and keep them alive; everyone will see that they are blessed. The LORD supports them when illness comes; in their distress he heals them.* (Psalm 41.1)

Amos tells us that when God's Word is silenced people rush around looking for an answer to their problems and the world's problems. But they find no answer. It's been said, when people stop believing in God, they don't believe in nothing but they'll believe in anything! This is the case in our country at this time. We hear so many 'answers', ideas, 'solutions', 'remedies'; so many philosophies, so many 'faiths'. We're subjected to the ideas of an endless stream of professors, scientists and experts. But no longer do we hear the truth and invitation of the gospel.

Satan uses all power, signs, lying wonders, and every kind of wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion, leading them to believe the lie; all who have not believed the truth but took pleasure in unrighteousness will be condemned. (2 Thessalonians 2.9-12)

When do we hear people pleading, 'What must I do to be saved?' Not 'saved' from the virus, or global warming or whatever else. But from '*the wrath of God revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth*'. (Romans 1.18) The great and overwhelming concern people have is about this present life, with hardly a thought about the life to come. This used not to be the case. We have become a nation indifferent to God and immune to the Gospel.

When they heard Peter preach they were cut to the quick, and cried out to Peter and the other apostles, 'What shall we do?' Peter told them, 'You must repent and every one of you must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, so that you may have your sins forgiven and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For this promise is for you and your children—and for all who are far away, for as many as the Lord our God shall call to himself!' Peter said much more than this as he gave his testimony and implored them, saying, Save yourselves from this perverse generation!' (Acts 2.37-40)