

KINGTON BAPTIST CHURCH ONLINE NOTICE BOARD - 12

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VE Day Celebrations?

Bunting, Vera Lynn, street parties, balloons and party-poppers, Glen Miller, replays of Mr Churchill's speeches – the stuff of VE Day celebrations! And that is how it ought to be for this 75th Anniversary.

But...

Amid the VE Day celebrations that are possible – and we should take to heart that the planned celebrations are *not* possible! – sadly the underlying message cannot be of unbridled joy but must be of a deeply serious tone. Such are the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

It isn't coincidence that we're repeatedly told that coronavirus is the most serious national crisis since World War II – since VE Day, 1945.

It was widely recognised that victory in 1945 was due above all to the grace, mercy and goodness of God. The nation as a whole understood this. Winston Churchill reminded the nation that it is Almighty God who '*shapes and designs the fortunes of nations*'.

This was the definite conviction of King George VI and Sir Winston Churchill.

The King began his VE Day speech with these words:

'Today we give thanks to Almighty God for a great deliverance. Speaking from our Empire's oldest capital city, war-battered but never for one moment daunted or dismayed - speaking from London, I ask you to join with me in that act of thanksgiving.'

He ended his speech:

'In the hour of danger we humbly committed our cause into the hand of God and he has been our strength and shield. Let us thank him for his mercies

and in this hour of victory commit ourselves and our new task to the guidance of that same strong hand.'

Winston Churchill concluded his VE Day speech to the House of Commons with these words:

'I recollect well at the end of the last war, more than a quarter of a century ago, that the House, when it heard the long list of the surrender terms, the armistice terms, which had been imposed upon the Germans, did not feel inclined for debate or business, but desired to offer thanks to Almighty God, to the Great Power which seems to shape and design the fortunes of nations and the destiny of man; and I therefore beg, Sir, with your permission to move:

That this House do now attend at the Church of St. Margaret, Westminster, to give humble and reverent thanks to Almighty God for our deliverance from the threat of German domination. This is the identical Motion which was moved in former times.'

We have to face the truth that as a nation we have turned our backs on the One who mercifully preserved our liberties and freedoms. Shamefully we have abused our freedoms, using them as an opportunity for the ungodliness that now mars our national life.

Scripture repeatedly warns nations that abuse with impunity the grace and mercy of God – nations that show no inclination to repent, that are blind to their wrongdoing – expose themselves to divine judgement. For our own nation it is true that *'God gave them what they asked for, but he sent a plague along with it'*. (Psalm 106.15) What the world considers prosperity may turn out to be divine judgement. This is what St Paul explains:

God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who push the truth away from themselves. For the truth about God is known instinctively. God has put this knowledge in our hearts. From the time the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky and all that God made. They can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse whatsoever for not knowing God. ... God let them go ahead and do whatever shameful things their hearts desired. As a result, they did vile and degrading things with each other's bodies. ... When they refused to acknowledge God, he abandoned them to their evil minds and let them do things that should never be done. Their lives became full of every kind of wickedness, sin, greed, hate, envy, murder, fighting, deception, malicious behaviour, and gossip. They are backstabbers, haters of God, insolent, proud, and boastful. They are forever inventing new ways of sinning and are disobedient to their parents. They refuse to understand, break their promises, and are heartless and unforgiving. (Romans 1.19-32)

Divine judgement is unpredictable in the way it affects nations. What is certain is that Divine judgement is inevitable and unavoidable when nations rebel against God. God shows great patience. But ungodliness draws down

Divine judgement. It is inevitable – **unless**, and this is the critical point, *unless* a nation **repents**: unless we stop, turn around, and begin to travel in a different direction – *towards* God and his ways – instead of walking further and further away from him.

In the book of Daniel is a prayer Daniel prayed on behalf of a nation in rebellion. It is a passionate prayer of repentance; a plea for God's mercy. Daniel was in exile in Babylon – together with the entire people of Israel. This exile was God's judgement because of their unfaithfulness. Not that God intended to destroy the nation, but to bring his people to their senses, to bring them back to himself. His judgements always have a merciful purpose – to call us back to the safety and security of his grace. These are the words of Daniel's prayer – oh, that God in grace would give us a heart to pray such a prayer!

I turned to the Lord God, to ask by prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.

I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession, saying:

'Ah, Lord, great and awesome God, keeping covenant and steadfast love with those who love you and keep your commandments, we have sinned and done wrong, acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and ordinances. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land. ... Open shame, O LORD, falls on us, our kings, our officials, and our ancestors, because we have sinned against you.

To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him, and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God by following his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice.

He has confirmed his words, which he spoke against us and against our rulers, by bringing upon us a calamity so great that what has been done against Jerusalem has never before been done under the whole heaven. We did not ask the favour of the LORD our God, turning from our iniquities and reflecting on his faithfulness.

The LORD our God is right in all that he has done; for we have disobeyed his voice. O Lord, let your anger and wrath, we pray, turn away from us. Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of your servant, and for your own sake, Lord, let your face shine upon your desolated sanctuary. Incline your ear, O my God, and hear. Open your eyes and look at our desolation. We do not present our supplication before you on the ground of our righteousness, but on the ground of your great mercies. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, listen and act and do not delay!'

