

# Kington Baptist Church

## MESSAGE BOARD – 69

*So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. (Exodus 2.24)*

**P**rayer as groaning! Maybe you know what that is – praying from the depths of who you are – but not able to find the words. That's what we have here. A verse that tells us three things about prayer:

*i. God heard; ii. their groaning; iii. God remembered.*

### **1. God heard**

When God 'hears' he acts. That's how the word is used in the Bible when it describes God's response to our prayers. When we 'hear' we simply mean that some sound or other has come to our notice. We can hear and do nothing about what we hear. We walk down the street and hear all manner of sounds – voices, traffic, birds, wind and so on. And almost always we do nothing about what we hear. But when 'God hears' it's very different. Hearing for us is 'passive'; hearing with God is always 'active'. For God to hear is for God to respond.

### **2. Their groaning**

'Hands together, eyes closed.' I've never been quite sure where that bit of cerography came from, or why it was ever thought that was the 'proper' way to pray. I'm not saying we can't pray like that. Indeed I guess most of us do pray like that. But that wasn't how these people prayed. Their groaning wasn't formal or regimented. It was dynamic, personal, spontaneous: *'Prayer is the burden of a sigh, the falling of a tear; the upward glancing of an eye, when none but God is near'*.

Do you sometimes groan or sigh? This inarticulate pleading, this unformed prayer, erupting out of desperation, is a cry for God's help. Think of these people, slaves in Egypt – no 'hands together, eyes closed' here!

Paul says the Holy Spirit prays for us with 'groanings'. (Romans 8.26) John Bunyan used to say, 'The best prayers have often been more groans than words'. Oh, to groan for the glory of God! For the name of Jesus to be lifted high! For the Church to be the dynamic influence she is intended to be! For God to stop the mouths of those who belittle his name and glory!

These poor slaves had been groaning for years. No doubt they didn't understand why God didn't answer sooner. God may be silent but he sees, he cares; he helps and saves and rescues. We may be sure of that – because of his covenant with Abraham. He won't forget to keep his promise.

### **3. God remembered**

What God remembered was his covenant promise.

Our eternal security is rooted in God's promise to Abraham – given thousands of years ago. God promised – he remembers his promise. What did he promise? And why do we seem to be left so long before God acts? Has he forgotten? When we're told 'God remembered' it doesn't imply he'd forgotten. As when God 'hears' he acts, so when God 'remembers' he acts. But why so often do we have to wait? We're assured 'his ear is not deaf, nor his arm too short' to reach out to help us. But we are warned that our sins may create an obstacle. This may be one reason why God waits to answer. But God may be telling us, as he told Paul, that his 'grace is sufficient'. That already we have all we need to get through the difficulty we face. That he has already given 'grace sufficient' – as David knew in Psalm 23. Again, we're encouraged to, 'Ask, ask, ask and' – only then – 'shall it be given you'. Maybe we've been asking for the wrong thing, and once we get round to asking for the right thing the Lord responds.

There may be another reason: I believe when God answers, however long the delay, we always see that *his time is right!* That's how we learn to trust him and his ways – and to *wait* for him. There was need for a Moses before the people were set free; there was need for a Mary before the Saviour came – 'at the right time'. We don't know who or what God intends to bring into our lives and experience, to help us with our burden and renew our joy.

At this time surely our situation is similar to the children of Israel in Egypt! We're groaning and pleading with God for his name to be honoured, his Church to be transformed – for our nation and our town. We cannot organise or evangelise or parade our way out of this 'captivity' anymore than those poor Israelites could from their bondage in Egypt. It's this 'groaning' that God waits to hear. Why? This is why:

*The land that was desolate shall be tilled. And they will say, 'This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and ruined towns are now inhabited and fortified.' Then the people all around you shall know that I, the LORD, have rebuilt the ruined places, and replanted that which was barren. I, the LORD, have spoken, and I will do it. So says the Lord GOD: **I will be enquired of by the house of Israel to do this for them:** to increase their population like a flock. **Then** they shall know that I am the LORD. (Ezekiel 36.34-38)*

God will do what he has said – but *only* in response to the cries, groans and prayers of his people. That's what we *must* do. That's the most vital thing at this time – pray that God will honour his name and transform his Church!

Here it is: '*Hallowed be thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven!*' Plead for it. Long for it. Groan that God will do it! That is our Lord's priority in this prayer – and must be ours too.