

## ***The Bali Attack – a Meditation - 3***

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*Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and prosperous ease; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.*

*And they were haughty and committed abomination before Me; therefore I took them away as I saw fit.*

The transgressions of Sodom and their interrelatedness received a place in Scripture in Ezekiel 16. This chapter, like the whole book of Ezekiel, was addressed in first instance to the exiles of Israel in Babylon. In chapter 16 the Lord addressed these exiles on the sins of Jerusalem, the city from which these exiles had been forcibly removed some half a dozen years earlier. God foretold to these exiles that Jerusalem would shortly be totally destroyed, destroyed because Jerusalem was no better –in fact, worse!– than Sodom.

### **Jerusalem**

Jerusalem: this was God's people by covenant! More, this was the city where God had placed the preaching of the gospel through the sacrifices offered in the temple. How rich, how incredibly rich the city was! "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go into the house of the Lord.' Our feet have been standing Within your gates, O Jerusalem!" (Ps 122). Yet this privileged people in this privileged city committed worse abomination than "your sister Sodom"!

How so? Are we to understand that Jerusalem committed the identical offences Sodom did? No, that's not the case. *On the outside* Jerusalem's behavior was not near as repulsive as Sodom's was, if only because we read nowhere in Scripture that the men of Jerusalem demanded the strangers that came for the night that they might engage them in homosexual activity (Gen 19:5). But the Lord says that Jerusalem's sins were *worse*, and that is because the *root* of Sodom's sin was found also in Jerusalem. And that root was their *pride*, their setting themselves up as gods for themselves and so making their own rules for what was acceptable behavior. Cast your mind over Israel's history, how often the people of God served idols beside God. Isaiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk: so many of the prophets fulminated endlessly about Jerusalem's spiritual adultery. Instead of acknowledging that their material abundance and their peace were *God's gifts to them in His covenant love*, God's people used their prosperity and their ease to serve other gods. Result? Because they were busy with themselves, because they abused God's gifts for their own selfish pleasures, the people of Israel considered the poor in their midst a nuisance; how often do the prophets not fault Israel for neglecting the needy, robbing the poor?! Conclusion: *God's own people can be guilty of the same attitude that ripened so horribly in Sodom.*

### **Today**

Here, it seems to me, the matter cuts so close to home for *us*. The Lord God has made us so very, very rich in Jesus Christ. To be children of God by covenant, forgiven of sin through Jesus' blood, renewed through the Holy Spirit: there is no greater privilege in all the world! God has given us Bibles in our homes and the preaching of the gospel in church, has given us

the wealth of the confessions and the treasures of God-centered education. Talk about rich! That makes the question pressing: how do we use the abundant "fullness of food" and the "prosperous ease" that has characterized our land for the number of years? Have we used them for ourselves and our wishes *or* for the benefit of others? That, to my mind, is the critical question that arises for us as we reflect on Ezekiel 16 and the Bali blast: what *attitude* determines our approach to the prosperity and peace God has given? An attitude of self-denial, of humbly seeking how we could best use this prosperity and peace to benefit others less privileged than ourselves? Or an attitude of: we've worked for this, it's ours, and so we can stroke our desire for comfort, satisfy our urge for a fancier house, give ourselves and our children the latest of toys to excite our adrenalin in our free time? To put the question in terms of the text: have we made it our business to strengthen the hand of the needy –at home and aboard– *or* do we consider the poor a nuisance, a threat to our comforts and desires?

## **Interconnectedness**

The question, dear reader, is important, so critically important. For if we set our own standards for how to use our money, it's only a matter of time before we set our own standards for how we use our sexuality, and then we and our children will give ourselves to the same excesses as Sodom did – and the holiday makers in Kuta. The difference between the church and the world cannot lie in the *last* characteristic God mentioned in Ezekiel 16, the abominations, the sexuality (as in: we don't give ourselves to adultery and nightclubbing as the world does); no, the difference between the church and the world lies in *that first term* the Lord uses, the term 'pride', whether we claim for ourselves the 'right' to decide what is right or wrong *or* whether we place ourselves completely under God's instructions. It's a question of *faith*, of whether we accept that God is *God*. And the evidence of this faith, the evidence of whether *God* governs us *or* whether our pride governs the heart is how we treat prosperity and peace, that is, whether we use this prosperity and peace to "strengthen the hand of the poor and needy" *or* whether we consider the poor of our community –local and international– a nuisance.

## **New Jerusalem**

Wealth and fun, materialism and hedonism, are part and parcel of today's Australia. *But the child of God must be a sojourner*, a stranger in a strange land. Our heart is not *here*, but in the New Jerusalem that is coming down from above, the city of absolute "fullness of food" and perfect "prosperous ease". For Christ's sake we long for that city, and therefore direct all the abundance God gives us today in hastening the coming of that City of Glory. So we stretch ourselves to *give*, give of the abundance and the opportunity God grants, give so that the poor and needy of the world receive the help and the mercy that God in Christ has already given to us. Mission work, mission aid, assisting in the community at home and abroad: these need to be priorities for us *simply because God has emptied Himself for us in Jesus Christ* and He gives us the material abundance and political peace to show true love to the neighbor. Whatever we have collected for ourselves, built for ourselves, kept for ourselves over the years will be burnt in the fires of God's judgment on the day of Christ's return – and profit us nothing.

## **Conclusion**

The blasts in Bali have come from the God of heaven and earth, and form a loud call for Australians to repent. It's not only the Australian community as a whole that needs to engage in self-examination. You and I need to also. *What place have we given to pride?* Remember the proverb of Solomon: "Pride goes before destruction" (Prov 16:18).

May God grant that His work in Bali bears rich fruit in Australia, lest worse befall us.

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