

## TO YOUR OLD AGE

### Introduction

There are some things we never expected to see. The destruction of the Twin Towers, for example. IT would never have crossed the minds of Jewish exiles in Babylon (536BC) that they would see the symbols of Babylonian power carried out of the capital city on the backs of pack animals. And these were no ordinary symbols – Bel and Nebo were the idols gods of Babylon, the very ‘gods’ who supposedly had given their oppressors such power.

What should the Christian say when the very things their persecutors depend on become useless and burdensome?

The only person who could foresee this was the prophet Isaiah as a result of divine revelation. Through his prophet God had spoken to his people about what would happen to them and their persecutors. And he has spoken to his people across the world about the challenges they face today, and the outcome they should expect. He speaks about: a HISTORY; a FUTURE; and a REASON FOR HOPE.

### History

His people he has ‘borne from the womb’. He says ‘I have made’ you. That is the reason we should be confident he ‘will carry and will save’.

God’s care was there at the beginning of the church and of each believer. The prophecy underlines the weakness of human gods, but the church and believer were both weak in their beginnings. There was a time when the church did not exist, only fallen humanity; all seemed lost, but God brought life where there was only death.

In Noah’s day there was only one family. Likewise, in the days of Abraham there was only one covenant family.

When Israel went into exile the Temple worship ceased as did the national life of the covenant people. They thought their hope had gone (Ezekiel 37:11). Yet God (in fulfilment of this prophecy) brought them back and restored both his worship and the life of the nation.

When the Kingdom of God began on earth it consisted of only 12 persons along with Jesus. When he was crucified they thought all was lost. And the sight of the risen Lord was followed by seeing him disappear into heaven. Yet within days 3000 people had been added to their number and it has grown ever since.

‘I have made, and I will bear.’

Today the church is being crushed between militant secularism and militant Islam. We need to heed God’s promise re the future.

What is true of the church is true of each believer. It was God who formed us in mysterious providence at our conception (Psalm 139).

Believer, he led you to a place where you heard his gospel, maybe in a godly family or in some other way. He preserved your life, and prevented you from succumbing to the world’s influence.

He awakened you to your need as a sinner, and to the wonderful Person of Jesus. It was he who overcame the darkness of your heart and mind to lead you to repentance and faith in Jesus. When trouble came he enabled you to persevere in the faith. You are part of his church, against all the odds.

‘You have been borne by me from birth.’

Like the church at large you have many challenges. Indwelling sin drags your spirit down so that some days there is no spirit of prayer or praise, and holy longings are unknown. The world that lies in darkness challenges on emotional and intellectual levels.

You see the prosperity of the wicked (as in Psalm 73). Sometimes you may feel you are almost letting go. You forget the scripture that explains such feelings as 'my weakness', and you forget to 'remember the years of the right hand of the Most High' (Psalm 77:10). The last thing you think about is the final defeat of all your enemies and the blessed arrival of Jesus again.

Think again about Isaiah's prophecy: 'Even to your old age I am he, and to grey hairs I will carry you. I have made and I will bear; I will carry and will save.'

### **Future**

Every yesterday was once a tomorrow. We look back on Pentecost and what has happened since. From the apostles' point of view that was still future. Jesus had said, 'I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it'. They believed it. He has kept his word big style.

We should look at the future as the apostles did. Our tomorrow will one day be our yesterday. Will it be filled with despondency, unbelief, and sin? Or will it be filled with faith, obedience, and fulfilment?

'The knowledge of the glory of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.' That is his promise. 'Other sheep I have who are not of this fold. **Them also I must bring.**' Note: it is the Lord who promises and it is he who will do it. We have our duties, but the success comes from him not from us – that is why believers can have confidence.

He has spoken of opposition and persecution. He has shown us the souls of those who were killed for the Word of God (Revelation 6:9), and has given us promise of final judgement (Daniel 7:23-27).

This gives assurance to every believer concerning their future.

It is 'to old age'. There are times of weakness as well as strength; he has promised to carry us in those times. That might be by preserving us from falling, or by restoring us when we do fall (Psalm 37:23-24). There are many examples of that in scripture; Job, King David, Asaph (Psalm 73), Peter. To Peter he said, 'I have prayed for you so that your faith will not fail'.

He keeps us by his power (1 Peter 1:5). He keeps us by making a way of escape in temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13). He keeps us by the instruction and comfort of his Word (Psalm 19). He keeps us through faith (1 Peter 1:5). He keeps us till his work in us is perfected (Philippians 1:9).

'Lord, keep me for I trust in you' (Psalm 16:1).

'I will bear.' He bears with our weaknesses. As maturing Christians we have a responsibility to grow. But we show weaknesses that would try anyone's patience. He bears with our weaknesses 'as a father pities his children'. He does not hold our sins against us, but continues to lead on to share his holiness. Every time we fall we should come back in childlike sorrow for sin and confidence in our Father's grace and faithfulness.

### **Reasons for hope**

One reason he gives us is that the Person who completes the work is the same Person who began it. 'I have made, and I will bear.'

When he called us in the gospel he had a purpose in mind – that we should be with Jesus and like Jesus. He is not going to abandon his work (Psalm 138:8).

He began that work in love. 'Love never fails' (1 Corinthians 13).

The work he began is to restore what is right. 'God is good and upright, therefore he will teach sinners the way' (Psalm 25:8). Surely he will complete that work.

He has given his word that he will complete it. So his honour is at stake and it is unthinkable that he will allow his name to be besmirched. 'He cannot deny himself' (2 Timothy 2:13).

We discover the second reason for hope when we realise who he is. 'To whom will you liken me and make me equal?'

If we doubt him we are treating him as if he had the same limitations that we have; but he does not. He is the Almighty. He is Faithful and True. He is God Only Wise.

It is unthinkable that a God like this would fail to complete what he has begun.

### **The call to us**

He tells us to 'remember' (verse 8).

When we fear for the future it is because we have forgotten that past. And we have forgotten who God our Saviour is. 'Remember' is one of the most important words in the Bible. Sometimes we have to choose between the way we feel and the memories we have.

He also calls us to 'listen'. It is no less than our God who is speaking to us here. The way we receive this word through the prophet will determine whether we are worshipping him today or not. Faith honours him; unbelief does the opposite.

The call seems to be for God's people alone. But it has a relevance for those who are not yet his people. To those who know they are still strangers to him he says, 'Listen!' and 'Remember!' The gospel is about God's gift – remember that. Salvation is not far away and inaccessible; it is very close – the word is in your memory and in your ears. Commit your way to him now; confess your sin, and receive his Saviour, praying for his promised mercy. Then you, too, will be able to take these promises as your own.