



FOURTH WEEK OF LENT 2006

2 Chron. 36: 14-16, 19-23, Ephesians 2: 4-10 John 3: 14-21

The story, from the second book of the Chronicles, is part of a history which runs from the reign of Saul to the return of the remnant from exile. The chronicler was less interested in the power of the kings, but rather focussed on the temple and its influence.

Chapter thirty-six is a terse account of the last days of the southern Kingdom. It reads like a genealogy of despair.

Jehahaz was twenty-three when he inherited the throne, he reigned three months, he was deposed by Egypt.

Jehoiakim was twenty-five when he inherited the throne, he reigned eleven years, he was exiled.

Jehoiachin was eighteen when he inherited the throne, he reigned three months, he was deposed by Nebuchadnezzar.

Zedekiah was twenty-one when he inherited the throne, he was taken into captivity.

What was happening?

Like the litany of Kings there is also a litany of sins. From unspecified abominations, infidelity, lack of humility, hard-heartedness, to the pollution of the temple. In Jewish terms the whole concept of Kingship had been brought into disrepute. A poignant note comes in verse 15, "Early and often did the Lord, the God of their fathers, send his messengers to them, for he had compassion on his people and his dwelling place"

The depressing tale of infidelity ends on a high note. A good person, a pagan, rises who does the will of God. He, though a foreigner and an enemy, saves the people and restores them to their homeland. Most surprising of all, Cyrus says that God has commissioned him to build a temple in Jerusalem.

The Kings were to be mediators of the presence of God. Psalm 72 gives an idealised picture of the King.

"Give the king your justice, O God,
and your righteousness to a king's son.

May he judge your people with righteousness,
and your poor with justice."

We can see now why the actions of the Kings recorded in Chronicles were seen to contain the seeds of their own destruction.

From John comes the meditation on the new and definitive saviour whom the church will also call King.

“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,”
God the true King, hands on his righteousness to the Son. The Son was not to be judge but saviour.

Then follows the picture of the saviour expressed as Light. Humans have a choice between Light and Darkness. To choose darkness is to choose the actions that can't stand up to scrutiny.

It's a simple measure. If we are afraid that our actions will come to light, then we have some examining of our conscience to do.

If truth is our standard then we will not be afraid, even if our actions appear questionable, or if people do not understand our motives. Truth is the God-light by which we live.

The message from Ephesians is comforting. We have all been guilty of actions that were negative. Our God is rich in mercy, it comes from an excess of love. Both with Christ and in Christ we have experienced resurrection. This is pure gift, not earned. As the handwork of God we were created to do justice.

The Kings were condemned by the prophets because they did not mediate the presence of God to their people. This is a good time to reflect on how we show forth the presence of God in our homes, communities, and workplaces.

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