

Stand in the Gap before God

And I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach (gap) before me for the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found none. (Ezek 22:30)

The Beginning of Israel and the Church

This sounds, in part, like a very sad situation, but there is also something wonderful about God's searching and calling here. The book of Ezekiel is about God's relationship with Israel. God set his love upon Israel, and chose Israel to be his people. The reason was not they were more in number than other peoples. Rather they were the smallest in terms of numbers.

God chose them because he loves them, and because of his promises to the patriarchs. Likewise God has set his love on his church, and chosen his church. Not because of the great numbers, but because of his love, his mercy, and his steadfast word.

The prophet Ezekiel tells us about the beginnings of Israel. He likens Israel to a woman. When Israel was born, no one cut off her cord, or washed her clean. No one wrapped her in clothes. No one had compassion with her, but she was cast out on the open field. For she was despised on the day she was born. But then the Lord passed by and saw her as she struggled in her blood, and he said to her: "Live!" He took care of her and blessed her. Eventually when she had grown up she became the Lord's wife.

The start of the church of Christ is also based on an act of God's mercy. We were all lost people, we were blind in a spiritual sense, going astray, but the Lord saw us. He took care of us, he saved us and gave us life. He washed and cleansed his church, and we became his bride. Now we are betrothed with Christ, and we have been so richly blessed. We have received such wonderful gifts. All our sins have been forgiven. We have been given spiritual sight, now we see. We are no longer lost, but have found peace. We have received God's spirit. We are inheriting the kingdom of God.

The Lord clothed Israel with embroidered clothes, fine linen, and silk. He gave her shoes of leather, as well as jewelry, gold and silver. She became very, very beautiful, she became royal. God blessed the people of Israel throughout history. He gave them a rich land. Her fame reached to other nations.

The Apostasy

Now Israel started to trust in her beauty, and started to be unfaithful to her husband. She started to serve as a prostitute, and played the whore with any passerby, with the Egyptians, with the Assyrians, and with the land of Chaldea. This is an image for how the people

started to commit idolatry. They started to worship strange gods, gods of wood and stone, they started to worship the sun. They started to disobey the commandments of the Lord.

This can also happen to the church of Christ. We may start to trust our beauty, our good deeds, our great blessings, both spiritual and material, perhaps our position in society. Strangely enough, we may stop to treasure the salvation, the grace, God's word, his revelations, the prophecies and the miracles, these wonderful gifts of God. We may become proud and arrogant, and start to desire the things of the world. The church of God may even start to worship idols, and to commit the most awful sins. We know that it has happened throughout history.

Now we get reports that congregations in Sweden open up for Buddhistic meditation and mindfulness, or Hinduistic yoga, or Islamic worship. Those who confess themselves to be Christians reject Jesus' own words in their own heart. Instead they look for other gods and powers, and this affects the whole society. In Sweden today you sometimes get the feeling that any belief, any worldview, any value system is ok, but not the Christian one – the Christian faith which has had such an important role in this nation. The church also seems to have a desire to be like the rest of the society.

Apostasy among the Leadership

The Lord said to Ezekiel:

Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the dark, each in his room of pictures? For they say, "The LORD does not see us, the LORD has forsaken the land." (Ezek 8:12)

The crisis in Israel was indeed also a crisis of the leadership. Ezekiel is probably referring to a room in which images of idols were set up. What are some so called Christian leaders doing in the dark in this nation? Are they worshipping idols? Are they seeking answers from the dead? Have they given in to strange powers and teachings? Some probably have. We know that many have not, thank God! The elders of Israel thought that the Lord does not see us. He has forsaken us, we need to find help from other powers, and the Lord does not see the wrong things that we are doing. But God sees, God cares. He is a jealous God, and his wrath will be kindled.

The prophet Ezekiel was sent to the people of Israel, to warn them through many words, and signs, that judgement was coming, but they would not listen. They even had a proverb that they used: "The days grow long, and every vision comes to nothing." So they thought they could continue to stray away from the Lord.

Also the prophets in Israel had started to prophesy from their own heart. They followed their own spirit, and prophesied even though they did not have a vision from the Lord. But the Lord said through Ezekiel: "I will speak a word and it will be performed and

no longer be delayed.” Judgment was coming. The cities and the land would be laid waste. And at least some of people would be taken captives and brought to Babylon.

Standing in the Gap

Ezekiel continues to criticize the way of the prophets of Israel:

You have not gone up into the breaches (gaps), or built up a wall for the house of Israel, that it might stand in battle in the day of the LORD. (Ezek 13:4-5)

The image is that of a wall that would protect the house of Israel from enemies, but there were gaps in the wall, so that it could not stand an attack. They should have built up the wall. Or else they should have taken their position in the gap, to defend the city with their own person. They should have prophesied truthfully, they should have warned the people about the judgment. They should have brought the people to repentance, and not tried to get away, and save themselves somehow, or even profit from the situation.

The same is true for the prophets of the church of Christ. Are they still lifting up their voices? Or have they adapted their message to the spirit of the time? Is it still revelations from the Lord, or have some started to share their own thoughts? We all have the chance to prophesy, and we need to look to ourselves first. What about me? Am I hearing the Lord? Do I take a stand against the idolatry? Do I at least sigh and groan over the abominations? – for the Lord notices if we do that.

In Ezekiel, chapter 22, the many sins of Israel are mentioned. She is a city that sheds blood in her midst. Father and mother are treated with contempt. Visitors are extorted in her. The fatherless and the widows are treated wrongly. The Levitical priests do violence to God’s law. The rulers destroy lives to get dishonest gain. The prophets are like robbers. **In this context we hear that the Lord is looking for someone among the people to build up the wall and to stand in the gap before him.**

The Calling

This is a holy calling. Can you hear it also today? Maybe you have already obeyed the calling. It is about choosing to live in the righteousness of God, to abstain from worshipping idols, and from living a sinful life. It is about serving God despite opposition, and standing up for the truth. It may be about teaching God’s people and preparing them for the battle against the devil. It is about praying to God for his people and for others. It may be about spreading the Gospel and being an example in this world. The purpose is for the salvation of people, that they get saved from judgment and destruction.

Moses is a great example of this. Remember that the people of Israel made a calf and worshipped it, after God had brought them out of Egypt, through great wonders and awesome acts. They forgot God, their savior.

Therefore [God] said he would destroy them – had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach (in the gap) before him, to turn away his wrath from destroying them. (Ps 106:23)

The Lord planned to destroy the people that time, but Moses pleaded with the Lord that he would not destroy them. And the Lord relented and abstained from the punishment. We can see many other examples in the Bible. Abraham pleaded for Sodom. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, pleaded for his fellow Jews that stoned him to death.

Jesus Christ

Of course the most important example is God's own son, Jesus Christ. As he was hanging on the cross, though he was innocent, he pleaded to his heavenly father: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." (Luk 23:34)

We can read more about the work of Jesus Christ:

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:1-2)

Jesus is the one who stood in the gap for all humankind. He went before God on our behalf and prayed for us, but he also went before God with his own precious blood. Jesus abstained from all unrighteousness, and committed no sin whatsoever. Through his own pure blood he could win an eternal redemption for humankind, and save anyone who believes, from the wrath of God. Because of what Jesus did, God will not punish us for our sins. He will hold back his wrath. We are reconciled with God when we confess ourselves to Jesus.

Jesus was building up the wall for the people of God through his ministry. He taught the people about God, and about a genuine repentance, about how to live a holy life pleasing to God. He also opposed the enemy, he resisted the devil. He cast out the demons, and he rejected the false teachings of the false prophets.

Conclusion

To stand in the gap is to be in an exposed or a vulnerable position. Our body or soul may be at risk, but when we give ourselves fully for the Lord, then he is with us, and helps us.

Two summers ago I was particularly troubled about the so called Pride parade in Helsingborg. Some so called churches even participated and supported it. We know, however, that it is about pride over sexual immorality. I felt that the Lord put this burden

on me, to do something. So I wrote a letter to the press, but it was rejected. Then I wrote another letter that was more difficult to turn down I think, because of its minority perspective. It was published on September 9, 2014, in Helsingborgs dagblad. (The letter in Swedish is found below.)

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MIN MENING C7

Sexualetiska proklamationer i stadens namn

Hur långt är Helsingborgs stad beredd att gå för att tillgodose en enskild intressegrupps önskemål? Regnbågsflaggor på Gröningen, regnbågsmålat övergångsställe på Södergatan och planer på HBT-certifiering av stadens verksamheter är tecken på starka sexualetiska ställningstaganden i stadens namn.

Men det finns många stadsinvånare, till exempel religiösa minoriteter, som inte delar RFSL:s sexualetiska ställningstaganden, som hoppas på att få fortsätta vara en del av staden och känna sig välkomna i den. Dessa

kan säkert se ett behov av certifiering av stadens verksamheter utifrån deras särskilda livssyn och skulle kanske också uppskatta flaggor på till exempel Gröningen.

Är det viktigt för stadens politiker att religiösa minoriteter och andra med en annan mer restriktiv sexualetisk övertygelse, till exempel väckelsekristna som gett ett så betydande bidrag till att bygga upp det svenska samhället, känner sig välkomna i staden?

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Helsingborg
pingstvän, doktorand i nya
testamentets exegetik och
civilingenjör

As far as I know, no one replied to this message. The only reaction I got was from one or perhaps two preachers, both positive. I worried a lot that I would get in trouble in different ways from this, but nothing like that happened. God was with me. If God calls you to stand in the gap before him in order that the people may be saved: Take courage! Don't fear! God will be with you, and fight for you.