

The Mercy Judgment

16th September 2007

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Introduction

Since I'm standing here this morning you might hazard a guess that this is not going to be your traditional sermon spot. Indeed, if you know me you'll know that public speaking ranks right up there with getting teeth pulled.

So, why am I here? Well, because I have to be. Some of you know, some of you may not, that I'm part of St Augustine's Prophetic Listening Group. Part of that job, as far as we understand it, is to speak the word as watchmen on the walls. As it says in Ezekiel 33 v1-6:

1 The word of the LORD came to me: 2 "Son of man, speak to your countrymen and say to them: 'When I bring the sword against a land, and the people of the land choose one of their men and make him their watchman, 3 and he sees the sword coming against the land and blows the trumpet to warn the people, 4 then if anyone hears the trumpet but does not take warning and the sword comes and takes his life, his blood will be on his own head. 5 Since he heard the sound of the trumpet but did not take warning, his blood will be on his own head. If he had taken warning, he would have saved himself. 6 But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet to warn the people and the sword comes and takes the life of one of them, that man will be taken away because of his sin, but I will hold the watchman accountable for his blood.'

So please do listen to what I'm about to say and weigh it carefully. For I am blowing the trumpet as Ezekiel did – to warn the people!

The Mercy Judgment

Last September the Lord spoke into my heart; these were the words given:

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It is the twilight of the current age, and we bask in its fading gleams. Much that can be shaken, soon will be.

With apologies to those who are not Tolkien fans, this is what informed my hearts response:

"I wish it need not have happened in my time," said Frodo. "So do I, said Gandalf, and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us."

So, what is to happen, and what are we to do with the time that is given us? Probably the best explanation would be to read a word given to me at the turn of this year:

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A storm is coming

This is a word I must bring to you, a word for 2007. Indeed, this is something I have alluded to a number of times before, but the hour grows short, and the word more urgent.

Friends, a storm is coming.

The nature of this storm is not immediately important, although I could make some educated guesses. As a summer storm comes upon you, the air grows sultry, clouds gather, thunder is heard in the distance and lightening can be seen - so it is now.

I see this gathering storm, gathering to break upon us. Many go to and fro, and the old gods, now resurfaced in all their malice and ugliness, dominate our culture. The Lord is not mocked though, and His hand is at the ready.

What is judgment is also blessing, though we will need eyes to see it. As the security of the world is revealed as a false crutch, so will peoples' eyes be open to their true need. And that, friends, will be our opportunity. For, at present, there are many who have no 'need' of God, secure as they are in the wealth of the world. Until, that is, the whole pack of cards comes crashing down. Then the paths of despair or hope will open up before them.

And not just them, but us also. For we are just as entwined in the world. The cathartic action will be painful for us too, more or less, dependent on where we are with the Lord. This then is the counsel for the times: Trust not in what can be seen, but in what is unseen. Put your root down into the Rock of Ages. Then, when the topsoil is stripped away, you will not fall. Rather, you will have the opportunity to be a beacon, a lighthouse in perilous times.

Many will come to Him, if His Church is ready. That is what He is calling us to now. Be ready. Purchase oil that your lamps will not run out. See, the bridegroom is at the threshold even now! Therefore, put away your toys, your vanities, and gird yourself for the times to come. Then your light will indeed shine. Hear the Spirit of the Lord, He is crying amongst the churches! Wake up, wake up! A new day is dawning and you must be ready.

So, what kind of storm am I speaking of? Well, that is something that is not yet revealed. Perhaps we might see terrorist acts? An economic crash? Times of war? Earthquakes, or floods? Persecution within the Church? Or perhaps something else entirely? I don't know the details of what is to come.

Are we speaking of the second coming of Christ? In this context, no. Of course, you cannot unbind events from each other, but this is not what I am directly speaking of today.

Is it possible at this time we see some foreshocks of coming judgment? It is hard to say, but it is certainly necessary to be sober, alert and aware of the times. Ruthy mentioned back in her sermon on the 29th July the flooding that occurred in England and the statement by a number of Anglican bishops that this was God's judgment on that country. Such things should not be said lightly, though one might ask why God should not judge nations that appear to be moving far from Him and descending into wickedness?

Also, one might look at the current turbulent economy and wonder whether there is judgment there?

Or perhaps consequence would be a better word - the consequence of greed and living beyond our means?

As an illustration, consider whether we are just like the country of Grenada that Jen spoke about in church last week - “a nation that was not prepared for the storm – the hurricane – nobody expected it”. We saw the utter devastation of some buildings, including the churches.

Simply put, we do not know exactly what this storm will look like, or when it will occur. The reason this word is being given now is because of an increasing sense of urgency. How urgency translates to timing is less clear, especially as we serve a God for whom a day is a thousand years and a thousand years is a day. In His economy, timing and even the judgment itself is fluid – what concerns Him is our response. The only words I might be able to give you are 'near', 'soon', and 'at the threshold'.

I've taken to calling this approaching storm the Mercy Judgment, in that what is Judgment will also be Mercy. What do I mean by this? Well, understand that what will be a difficult and chaotic time, a time where there will be suffering, will also have a redemptive and cathartic quality. Many things that are currently idols for us will no longer be idols – perhaps partly because they will no longer be present, partly because we will be able to see more clearly what is genuinely important. And if we have eyes to see and trust in our heavenly Father, we may be able to bring others currently enmeshed in the kingdom of this world, into the Kingdom of the world that is to come.

It should also be said that we do not see this to be cataclysmic destruction, but more of a severe judgment or judgments to chastise, simplify and ultimately purify. A genuine judgment, but one that will be ultimately to our mercy. Indeed, if God really wanted to destroy us, He would just leave us just as we are. We are doing, as a society, a pretty good job at self-destruction anyway. So, by His mercy He will not leave us just as we are. And through judgment and following persecution, we will get to bring the harvest home.

The Response of the Church

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So, the question that we need to ask in light of coming judgment is this: “what then do we do?”. If these things really are coming, how do we respond? How then shall we live?

Firstly – do not be afraid.

Fear is the weapon of our enemy, and nothing that I have spoken this morning is intended to cause fear. As it says in 1 John 4 v17-19:

17In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. 18There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. 19We love because he first loved us.

Indeed, as Romans 8 v14-16 also says:

14 Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. *15* For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." *16* The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

So, I repeat again – Do not be afraid. If you are found in Christ, the source of your salvation, then you cannot be shaken, because He cannot be shaken. Indeed, in the times to come Jesus Christ will be the only secure place that can be found.

So, we are being shown these things ahead of time not to cast a shadow of fear, but to forewarn and allow us to prepare.

Secondly, are you entangled in the world?

Drugs?
Drink?
Pornography?
Gambling?
Greed?
Sloth?
Adultery?
Fornication?

These things are quicksand to your soul. Divest of them, while you still have time.

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Many live for transitory gains, gambling in the stock market, finding security in shares, or setting up RRSPs and GICs to provide for themselves a security apart from God. Granted, these things are not evil in and of themselves – but what we do with them often is. Always, the question is asked, where is your heart? Could you also be a rich fool – desiring to give God everything but the idol you worship? God had some things to say about riches – listen to this from Luke 16 v13:

13 No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

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Who or what do you love more than Christ? Listen to Luke 14 v25-27:

25 Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: *26* "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. *27* And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

Hard words, do you think? We need to understand what they mean.

Do we love our brothers and sisters more than Christ? Then we are not worthy of Him.
Do we love our wives or husbands more than Christ? Then we are not worthy of Him.

Do we love our children more than Christ? Then we are not worthy of Him.

Your family is not your salvation. Only Christ is. If He is not Lord of your life: your whole life – then He is no Lord to you at all. Is it difficult to hear this? Yes, but better the pain now than pain later.

Only when our whole life is under His Lordship, only then will we have both feet upon the Rock. And – I tell you the truth – the only place that will be secure in the coming days is to have both feet on the Rock of Jesus Christ. As the Psalmist said:

40:2 He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and the mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.

Everything else but Christ will fade, all else will fall into ruin. And the secrets of all hearts will be laid bare.

Please listen to this word given in January 2005.

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What is hidden will be revealed

I saw the Holy Spirit, brooding over the earth and the seas covering it. I perceived His plans for us. I saw Him dry up all the seas, and as this was done, what was hidden under the seas was revealed – mountains, valleys, plains and trenches.

My understanding was that the seas represented the Lord's grace in the natural – that is, his physical provision for us. I saw that He will dry up this provision, and in doing so reveal the hidden natures of our hearts – both the highest heights, and the lowest depths.

I saw that this water – the Lord's grace in the supernatural – would still be available as a source to be drawn upon by those who are based and grounded in the Lord.

What will this mean, and how extensive will it be? I do not know. Only that a time of natural adversity with supernatural blessing will occur, with the intent of revealing what has been hidden under the Seas of Plenty for many years. Both the best and the worst will be laid bare for all to see.

Thirdly, we are called here at St Augustine's - both now and in the days ahead - to be a lighthouse

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- bringing light to an increasingly dark world. What is it that a lighthouse does? It warns of dangerous waters. It guides to safe harbours. It provides a community, a haven, a hope in the tumultuous seas of our world.

In this context, the Lord called this church to a service of corporate repentance during Good Friday this year where we could confess before Him the ways we have fallen short of Him, both individually and as a body. It was impressed upon us that this was very necessary before we could more forward into His inheritance for us.

The service itself, which took place on the Friday afternoon, was very powerful. We wrote down in a letter our personal and corporate sins, our hurts, and our forgiveness of those who had hurt us; then - literally - nailed those letters to the cross. There is something particularly moving and cathartic about a physical action like that. I do believe that many things were moved in the heavens that day!

In fact, later on that day I received a further vision. I saw the lighthouse; it was as if the light rays were shining out into the darkness. Then, it was as if I was inside the lighthouse itself, another layer being unveiled to the vision.

The light source was at the centre of the lighthouse, I became aware of who this Light represented - Jesus Himself. Perhaps that is a little obvious, but I saw it deeper than I had before.

We, as the church, are represented by the panes of glass that make up the lighthouse reflectors. When we are dirty and grubby, the light does not shine through us well. When we are cleaned, the light can shine through us and out into the world much more brightly.

This cleaning was the purpose of the Good Friday service; that we might be cleaner, more transparent, and hence more able to be that which we are called to be - a reflector of Christ.

Indeed, if we are reflecting Christ in His fullness we may be able, in the times to come, to save those who have lost everything they once held dear. This may be our great opportunity, if we are alive in Christ enough to see it. As Jude says in verse 22:

Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear – hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

I also saw that the Light of Christ is the centre of the Church, without His Light we are nothing, worse than nothing - a counterfeit - a building that pretends to be something that it is most evidently not as darkness falls. If the light in you be darkness, how great is that darkness - as our Lord said in Matthew 6 v23.

It seems to me that the sin of the Church has to be heinous and protracted before this happens - before the lampstand is removed from its place.

The grace of the Lord is deep, He is long-suffering and desires all to repent....indeed far more than we can imagine.

But yet, there comes a time when the lampstand is removed and then, well then, a dark lighthouse is a horrible thing indeed - the spirit of the antichrist.

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So we come back to the question – “what then do we do?”. Be assured that this is Gods primary concern. He is eager, with the heart of love itself, to know how we will respond to His call. Are we to be indifferent? Disbelieving? Letting the more immediate things of this world take precedence? Or will we seek Him with our whole heart, wanting to know Him with a passion, wanting to know His will for our life and in this time, and earnestly desiring to put to death all that stands between us and Him?

This is the most important thing that we can do. For sure, we may listen to Him, and ask if there is anything in particular He would have us do in preparation. But what we do is very much secondary to what we are. Are we the Lords? Or are we play-acting? Going though the motions, if you like? Are we serious about the Lord whom we say we serve? This is the most important, the most urgent question before us now. By His grace, we have a window, a short window of time, to decide where our hearts priorities lie.

The truth is this – there is only one place where there is light, life, salvation and security. Only one place that can never be shaken -and that is in Christ. This place is free, but not cheap. It will cost you nothing, and will cost you everything. It offers you life abundantly, joyfully and eternally – and to enter it you must die. Indeed, there is no other way. If you have not entered this life – this Kingdom life, or you were once in the Kingdom and now find yourself once again on the grey plain of the world, then please – turn to Jesus Christ while you still can.

Please listen to this final word, **The heart of winter**, given to me October 2004:

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Grey clouds scurry across a twilight sky.

A cool wind blows from the North.

The last of the leaves are blown from the trees.

Dead leaves make patterns in the swirl of the wind.

Will you not come home to Me, my children? Will you still tarry outside?

Winter will be upon you soon, and the heart of winter, winter’s heart, will fall upon you.

I have all things prepared.

The lights are on, the fire stoked, the feast is laid.

Will you not come home?

I am here, to welcome you.

How long will you tarry?

Will you wait until it is too late?

Until the heart of winter is upon you?

Until the snow is thick upon the ground,

Until a shroud of ice is upon everything?

Until winter’s heart claws at your own heart?

Until there is no life, no love, no peace and no purpose?

Until the heart of winter will claim you as its own?

*There is still time.
Come home to Me – there is still time.
Before the heart of winter grips you forever.
Before it is too late.
Come home to Me.*

Come home to the one who loves you dearly, and has loved you from before the foundations of the world. Come home to the only sure foundation in the coming storm.

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Let Christ be before us,
Let Christ be behind us,
Let Christ be below us,
Let Christ be above us,
Let Christ be within us,
And let Christ be without us.

This is the only place to be, the only place that will endure. This is His call to us now, and in the coming times.

Other Voices

This is an appendix to the sermon for those reading the hard-copy. There are a number of watchmen from different traditions and in different places seeing the same kind of thing. David Wilkerson, the pastor of Times Square Church, who coauthored 'The Cross and the Switchblade' that some may have read, recently preached a sermon entitled 'In one hour everything is going to change'. The link for this and other words of interest are included below:

David Wilkerson: <http://www.timeforrenewal.com/wmedia/2070805s1.aspx>

Other words of interest: <http://faithwalk.wordpress.com/vision-of-the-dam/>,

<http://www.markmallett.com/blog/?p=500> and <http://www.markmallett.com/blog/?p=506> (from a Catholic perspective, plenty of Marian content that I do not support, however it does show a pattern across denominations).