

## Sunday 7 June 2008 Sermon - King's Centre Christian Church, Sheffield, UK

### A Christian response to the global financial crisis

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#### Intro

We've been thinking globally for the past week or so - Global Day of Prayer and 24/1 prayer in this building, and at this time together we are pledging through City Changers to invest towards God's future through the people & facilities of KC.

- So we're going to take a short while to look at something both global and financial – the current global financial situation surrounding us in 2009.

#### Readings:

On the twenty-first day of the seventh month, the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: <sup>2</sup> "Speak to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people. Ask them, <sup>3</sup> 'Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing?' <sup>4</sup> But now be strong, O Zerubbabel,' declares the LORD. 'Be strong, O Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land,' declares the LORD, 'and work. For I am with you,' declares the LORD Almighty. <sup>5</sup> 'This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.'

"In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD Almighty. 'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the LORD Almighty. (Haggai 2:1-8)

"See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain." (Hebrews 12:26-27)

"Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened. But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15)

#### A Christian response looks like this:

I'm not going to explain the background to the global situation in 10 minutes! I'm sure you are aware that it's going on, and as most of us here are Christians so I'm going to begin from the basis that we all agree on a few things.

- A snap-shot Christians response to the global financial situation is this:
  - Firstly, recognise that God is not surprised by this crisis. He knows, he's been forewarning the church about it for a while, and He is potentially shaking the nations through it
  - Secondly, we as Christians should carefully examine our own emotions and motivations in the face of this situation
  - Thirdly, we should seek to live out the Jesus' principles around money, generosity and the kingdom at all times, regardless of the present turmoil
  - Finally, we must start to bring in the harvest of souls which this crisis is bringing about

## Shaking the nations

### **A first response to this situation is to ask the question: is God shaking the nations?**

- The prophet Haggai proclaims this (2:6-8)
  - “In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the LORD Almighty. ‘The silver is mine and the gold is mine,’ declares the LORD Almighty.
- He was speaking on God’s behalf to the Jewish remnant of people left in Judah under foreign occupation. They had been trying to rebuild version 2 of God’s temple for about 20 years, and had a lot of opposition from their neighbours – basically objecting to planning permission!
  - **It’s a situation not unlike the church today.** The former glory has gone, we are a remnant ourselves in a foreign land – and largely Godless society, at best ignoring the Christian God, at worst trying to make Christian lifestyles illegal in some cases.
  - As we endeavour to live lives that match God’s best, God’s priorities, God’s agenda, we often feel that the rest of the world is objecting to our planning permission just for the sake of it!
  - Haggai speaks up and says – Be strong, all you people of the land,’ declares the LORD, ‘and work. For I am with you,’ declares the LORD Almighty. <sup>5</sup> ‘This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.’
  - He says, it might look like the chips are down, but never forget the awesome power of the living God, who created the world and who holds it in His hands.
  - Because “In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth...”
- The power and promise of God is that His spirit can move and break out in any situation – even those that look bad on the face of it.

Years later, in another context and time, the writer to the Hebrews picks up the same prophecy in Ch 12, saying that when God moves, we should listen! “See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. .... <sup>27</sup>The words “once more” indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.”

### **It seems to me that God is overseeing the shaking of the nations at present.**

Not necessarily by God’s intervention – I’m not suggesting he made the credit crunch happen, he **simply lets humankind get on** with their own usually un-Godly agendas, which bring about crisis on their own.

- The purpose of the shaking at present is to bring humanity, and perhaps the western nations in particular, to the point where they can **see their values for what they really are.**
- Much of the cause of the crisis has been greed and other un-Godly motivations.
- **As those values are increasingly recognised by people as false,** as NOT the most appropriate to answer life’s real issues and desires – **people will turn increasingly to spiritual answers for their woes**
- God is allowing people’s inclination towards, and their reliance upon *created things* to be shaken – so that what cannot be shaken may remain. (Heb 12:27)

God has been speaking prophetically to our wider church, and others, for about 2 years preparing us for a time like this. Saying – shaking times are coming. Saying – clear out your own house now, deal with the distractions and unholy living,

- so that you may stand and see the kingdom come even in the midst of shaking times.

So **secondly**, because this shaking applies just as much to Christians, we should **carefully examine our own emotions and motivations in the face of this situation.**

“See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks.” (Heb 12:26)

- Of course, the news headlines or the friends – in KC too - around us facing job cuts will massively grab our attention. The issue is this, to quote the Hitchhiker’s Guide, “Don’t panic!”
- Allans – watching Ireland crumble and panic at present – increasingly secular society built on a bubble of credit which has burst.
- Perhaps **our immediate human reaction** to this global situation **is fear...**
- Fear of the future, fear of where our own money will come from, fear of forces seemingly beyond our control.
  - The Christian response needs to be the words we hear often in the bible: “**Do not be afraid**” (Gen 1:15; Is. 41:13-14; Luke 12:32).
  - **Fear isn’t supposed to be part of the Christian agenda.**
  - God promises to provide for his children who seek, above all else, his kingdom values and lifestyle. (Matt. 6:33)
  - The character of God has not changed. He promises to provide for all our needs, according to His riches. (Phil. 4:19).
  - **God is not in recession!**

You’ll know as Christians that we’re called to be ‘in this world, but not of it’.

- As I’ve said before, **Christians should be wary of the global financial system**, because to my mind it’s what the apostle Paul describes (Eph 6:12) as a ‘power’ - a system, or perhaps a belief system, that operates almost beyond itself. It almost has a personality, a way of operating.
- **The bible doesn’t say that Money in and of itself is wrong or bad.** But the bible does say that “*The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.*” (1 Tim 6:10)

So Christians must be **careful not to be subsumed by the prevailing operating system of ‘the world’** – which is almost to see the financial system **as our saviour**, our way out of trouble and into a prosperous life.

- **Don’t be defined by the system. And don’t let the system define you.**
- Of course, as that system, as that power, is shaken – those holding onto it will be shaken too.
- So Christians must instead resolve not to fear, because the truth is that our security lies elsewhere. (Matt. 6:19-20; Eph 1:3).
  - Eg. Heaven series

So my third point is that Christians should seek to live out, **not worldly principles, but Jesus’ principles** around money, generosity and the kingdom **at all times, regardless** of the present turmoil

- Jesus said, (Matt 6:30-34) “*..O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after*

*all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

- Christians are called to a lifestyle of generosity – in response to the generous love of God in us. “Freely you have received, freely give” (Matt. 10:8)
- Generosity in time, money, volunteering, attitude, resources and more. Generosity because we are not afraid of lacking anything. Because the material issues of this world are not the most vital, and God has promised to provide what we need, if we seek after him.

One of the prophetic words shared to the UK last year mentioned what Isaac (Abraham’s son) did when his land (in modern day Israel) was under a famine. The Lord told him not to flee to Egypt where the land was better, but to stick it out amongst the Philistines.

- He said "Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live. <sup>3</sup> Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you." (Gen 26:2-3). And as Isaac **kept the covenant and relationship with God strong**, as he **honoured God and obeyed him, God provided for Isaac in an astonishing way.**
- “Isaac planted crops in that land and the same year reaped a hundredfold, because the LORD blessed him. The man became rich, and his wealth continued to grow until he became very wealthy.” (Gen 26:12-13)

In a land under a famine, the Lord’s friend was bold and obedient. He planted a crop in the land of famine, and in the same year he saw a hundredfold harvest. Defying nature and the ways of the world.

- Even more, God’s hand was on him and he became rich even amongst the Philistines who ruled the land over time

I’m not saying that God is going to make you rich this year!

But this is a **season to be sowing for the Lord – last Sunday in KC is an example** (3 commitments/re-commitments, and one person travelled 200 mile round trip)

And a season as we sow, of **keeping firm to his values and his promises over our lives**. And in it, I believe Christians will defy the direction that others are dragged into, and we’ll reap a large harvest in an apparent time of famine

- Whatever that looks like:
  - Financially – provision of jobs (like we’ve heard about today)
  - In our families
  - In our homes
  - Signs, wonders, healings etc
  - Harvest of new Christians – that’s already started

**So in the face of a global financial crisis, Christians should never stop being a generous giver into the things of the Kingdom. Give away portions of your money to church, to others, to charities – even when the pressure is on.**

Last week was officially City Changers Pledge Day – Give back to God, out of the riches and blessings he has given you

- Hold your resources lightly, and don’t be defined by fear.
- Instead, be defined by the unlimited resources of the king of heaven, who knows what you need. And pray for them.

- **Live FOR the kingdom with eyes of faith** – the power, possibilities, promise, provision, peace which is our inheritance NOW in Christ Jesus!
  - **AMEN!**

**Finally**, a Christian **response to this situation is to lift** up our eyes and look at the fields. They are ripe for harvest (John 4:35).

- **As people feel shaken, they are already turning to God for answers.** We've seen people coming in off the streets without an invitation, or to Alpha, since September - hungry for truth and something wholesome in life.
- I'm sure that there is a potentially huge harvest for all Christians to gather in during the coming season, if they have eyes and ears for it.
  - The Apostle Peter summarises our response well: (we read it at the start)
  - "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened. But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15)
    - **Holding onto Christian hope, living without fear, setting Christ's agenda as primary to us, and sharing the good news with others is the appropriate Christian response to the global financial situation.**
- Speaking out the hope that we have could be on a personal level with people we know or meet. It should be on a corporate level, as the church nationally speaks up for Godly values and calls the nation back to God at a time of crisis.

### Conclusion

This is a time of uncertainly not known for 2 generations. It's a time of shaking, in which many are questioning their foundation of values, security and motivations.

- Christians should do the same, and be careful to live without fear, 'in this world', but not defined by it.
- Instead, we can navigate by Jesus' radical principles of generosity and living lightly by faith. Seeking the kingdom first, above all else.
- As we do, there is a tremendous harvest to be prepared for and gathered in.
- So let's lift our eyes up to the opportunities ahead, and open our ears to what God is saying to each of us at this time.