

July 26, 2015

A TALE OF TWO CITIES --

Today let's take a look at what I will call "a tale of two cities", hopefully without heaping too much disrepute upon the 19th Century Charles Dickens' novel of the same name. Like that novel, one of my two cities is London. Also, a famous line from that novel – "it was the best of times, it was the worst of times" – could well apply to my two cities tale.

My first city is the United States of America. Now, I know you will quickly say the USA is a country, not a city! But I say to you calling America a "city" is not inappropriate, as that word "city" comes from the Latin word *civitas* which means citizenry. Moreover, I can use "city" metaphorically when discussing this country, such as President Reagan did in his address to the nation on the eve of the November, 1984 election when he called the USA the "shining city upon a hill."

America – city #1 -- is being destroyed before our very eyes. She is constantly and daily being afflicted in varying ways; we see it regularly on the news. While the 911 incident perhaps represents one of America's more traumatic experiences in recent years, she is continually being injured, demolished and ruined so much so that I have grown weary of preparing listings of all the ways this is happening. Others in this church have likewise done presentations (video news, media interviews, and the like) where summaries of the daily devastation of America have been provided. One of the better ones was recently presented by Brent in the form of what we call a "Video news", accompanied with many photographic supports. America's calamities virtually cascade, so much so that one is hard-pressed to keep up with them all. (That word "cascade" is very applicable in this context; one of its meanings is "a succession of actions, processes or operations" or "anything that resembles a waterfall, especially in seeming to flow or fall in abundance.")

I won't go through a litany of these woes today; you all are living them every day and know them well. Suffice to say the horses of Revelation Chapter 6 generically cover most of what we are seeing unfold. That would be the red horse (killings of all sorts and types, and wars), the black horse (economic collapse, drought and other so-called "natural disasters", poverty) and the pale horse (death, disease, sickness and starvation). I felt the force of this "horse" metaphor while watching American Pharoah win the Triple Crown at the Belmont Stakes a few weeks ago. The majesty, power, speed, grace and strength were palpable, and perfectly symbolize how America's demise is occurring; it's rapidly and powerfully unfolding before our eyes. If you want to get a good idea of what I'm talking about, watch this video the next time you sit down at a computer and when watching these horses think about how they compare to the death, devastation and destruction literally racing through this nation: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WyDcXtVb8_U (As an aside, you might also compare the cheering throngs on this video to the gleeful saints of God watching and reacting to all of His judgments beautifully unfold).

And yet, America's reaction is to grow worse. We see more worshiping of dead bodies; more boasting of military power; more pushing of political will across the globe; and, in a word, more pride! Her fall will be great and is imminent. **And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. * * * * Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her. * * * * And cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, What city is like unto this great city!** (Revelation 18:2, 8 and 18; and please note, the Bible calls this great nation a "city" as well).

Instead of her endless dead-body worship fests and constant breast-beating, this country should be seeing God in all these events and giving Him the glory.

Which brings me to the second of my two cities: Old England town.

That's precisely what happened in old England, after the great London fire of 1666, and we see a sample of that in Thomas Brooks' relatively brief but powerful sermon entitled "God's Tools and Instruments." Brooks lived from 1608 to 1680 so he would have been about 58 at the time of the fire. That 3-day fire in September, 1666 destroyed an estimated 13,200 houses, 90 church buildings, and most of the government buildings. The fire left about 80% of that city's residents homeless. The fire was aided by strong winds and hapless fire-fighting efforts. Historians agree this amazing fire created social and economic problems that were overwhelming.

Brooks' sermon entitled "God's Tools and Instruments", prepared and delivered in the wake of that great London burning, follows:

"I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things."
Isaiah 45:7

Let us see the hand of the Lord in this recent dreadful fire which has turned our once renowned London into a ruinous heap! London's sins were now so great, and God's wrath was now so hot—that there was no quenching of the furious flames. The decree for the burning of London was now gone forth, and nothing could reverse it. The time of London's fall was now come. The fire had now received its commission from God—to burn down the city and to turn it into a ruinous heap!

Certainly God is the great agent in all those dreadful judgments which befall people, cities, and kingdoms. Whoever or whatever be the rod—it is God's hand which gives the stroke! The power of bringing judgments upon cities, God takes to Himself, "When disaster comes to a city, has not the Lord caused it?" Amos 3:6. Whatever that judgment is, which falls

upon a city—God is the author of it; He acts in it and orders it according to His own good pleasure. There is no judgment which accidentally falls upon any person, city, or country. Every judgment is inflicted by a divine power and providence. God had given a commission to the fire—to burn with that force and violence as it did—until London was laid in ashes! Whoever kindled this fire—God blew the coal! And therefore no arts, counsels, or endeavors of men were able to quench it.

All judgments are at the beck of God, and under the command of God. Whatever judgment God commands to destroy a person, a city, or country—that judgment shall certainly and effectually accomplish the command of God—in spite of all that creatures can do. If God commissions the sword of war to walk abroad, and to glut itself with blood—who can command it into the scabbard (sheathe) again? No art, power, or policy can cause that sword to lie still!

God, as He is our Creator, Preserver, and sovereign Lord—has an absolute power both over our persons, lives, estates, and habitations: and when we have transgressed His righteous laws, He may do with us, and all we have—as He pleases. He may turn us out of house and home, and burn up all our comforts round about us—and yet do us no wrong. "Our God is in heaven; He does whatever pleases Him." Psalm 115:3. "The Lord does whatever pleases Him—in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths." Psalm 135:6

Those things which seem accidental and chance to us—are ordered by the wise counsel, power, and providence of God. Instruments can no more stir until God gives them a commission—than the axe

or the knife can cut by itself, without a hand. God makes use of whatever second causes He pleases, for the execution of His pleasure. And many times He makes the worst of men the rod of His indignation to chastise His people with! All inferior or subordinate causes—are but God's tools and instruments, which He rules and guides according to His own will, power, and providence.

Job eyed God in the fire which fell from heaven, and in all the fiery trials which befell him. And therefore, he does not say, "The Lord gave—and the devil took away!" Nor, "The Lord gave—and the Chaldeans and Sabeans took away!" But "The Lord gave—and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised!" Job 1:20-21

Certainly without the cognizance and concurrence of a wise, omniscient, and omnipotent God—no creatures can move. Without His foresight and permission—no event can befall any person, city or country. Whatever the means or instruments of our misery are—the hand is God's! It behooves us, in every judgment, to see the hand of the Lord, and to look through visible means to an invisible God! "The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me!" Ruth 1:21

"The Lord brings death and makes alive; He brings down to the grave and raises up. The Lord sends poverty and wealth; He humbles and He exalts!"
1 Samuel 2:6-7

Now I say to you my friends, I have looked and listened high and low in this nation for these types of sober and truthful words coming from anybody in reaction or relation to the ongoing judgments; they can't be found. Call the roll – preachers; teachers; professors; politicians; office-holders; journalists; opinion-

makers; authors – nobody is uttering these life-giving sentiments that would doubtless serve as an antidote to this nation’s ills. But they are blind and drunk. **He taketh away the heart of the chief of the people of the earth, and causeth them to wander in a wilderness where there is no way. They grope in the dark without light, and he maketh them to stagger like a drunken man.** (Job 12:24, 25).

So, back to my two-city approach, you can see from what I have said that we have two types at play here. Perhaps Dickens’ language from his great novel will capture the spirit of what I’m trying to convey: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.”

Truth used to be in the streets of old London and the early years of this country; it was the best of times, wisdom, believing in the Almighty and great light. Now we have fallen on the last, dark days; the worst of times, foolishness all around us, incredulity (“the inability or unwillingness to believe”) and utter darkness.

And, I must report to you that city #2 is now just as bad – if not worse – than city #1. After all, America has not (yet) barred us from stepping foot on her soil. By formal governmental action, London has done just that! Yet we have learned since that banning took place, you can keep the saints of God from walking on your soil, but you can’t keep the word of God from permeating your airwaves.

As the children of light, we are not surprised at what we see with any of these goings-on around us. The harvest is at hand, as we read in Matthew 13:

³⁶ Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field.

- 37 He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man;
- 38 The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked *one*;
- 39 The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.
- 40 As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world.
- 41 The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity;
- 42 And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.
- 43 Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.