

INTERCESSORS FOR BRITAIN



**SPECIAL 4-PAGE
PULLOUT**

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE CHURCH

We have written the letter below as leaders of Intercessors For Britain, in consultation with others, as a warning and exhortation to the body of Christ. We ask you to weigh it prayerfully, and to consider anyone that you might pass it on to. The letter can also be read and shared online at the following link: www.intercessorsforbritain.co.uk/ifb-open-letter

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

For some time now we have been extremely burdened for the church and nation of which we are a part. Our nation has been in steep moral and spiritual decline for many years, and has been under a measure of judgement as God has handed it over to its own rebellious desires. We see from Scripture¹ that God lets people and nations reap the consequences of their rebellion so that they may learn and come back to Him, and He mercifully gives prophetic warnings first² so that His judgements may be averted. Such prophecies have been given to our nation before³, but we have felt the Lord drawing our attention to them again recently. As we and others have listened, we believe God has given a weighty, pressing burden and highlighted relevant situations and Scriptures; our conviction is that He wants us to trumpet these publicly, and this is why we write. We have included various Bible references as footnotes, and ask you to consider them prayerfully alongside this letter.

Amongst other recent situations, the devastating surprise attack on Israel on 7th October 2023 was a sober reminder that the Lord sometimes allows a sharp, severe punishment to fall upon His people and upon nations so that they might wake up and repent.⁴ We are so grateful to live in an age of grace as believers, yet God has not changed in His dealings with nations⁵, and our nation's sins are now comparable to those of others in Scripture before they were judged. We are asleep, have been sleeping a long time, and desperately need to wake up or be woken up. A people that keep ignoring warnings and do not turn back to righteousness need divine

correction⁶, and this is true of the church⁷ as well as the nation generally. Can we still ask God to hold back judgement from us, or has He given us over to an imminent and potentially catastrophic national crisis?⁸ We believe that He has – that we have passed the point of His sparing us from further judgement⁹, and the focus of our prayers and attention must now be repentance and preparation rather than a potentially false expectation of imminent revival and deliverance.¹⁰

The need for repentance

There are always things we need to repent of as individuals and as Christ's corporate body, listening to the Holy Spirit as He seeks to make us a bride worthy of our coming Bridegroom.¹¹ We also recognise that the Lord will have different issues to point out in each church and individual believer. But as we've listened to the Lord and to brothers and sisters up and down the country, there are three overarching areas we believe God would have us consider in confession and repentance before Him and to one another:

ISRAEL

The church is not blameless when it comes to anti-Semitism. We have all seen the ugly attitudes recently shown towards God's covenant people¹² the Jews; the not-so-subtle hatred on our streets is a stain on our nation, and we should remember that those who curse Israel will be cursed.¹³ The church has not replaced the Jews but has rather been grafted¹⁴ into the covenant God still keeps with them, and some prophecies about the Jews and the land of Israel have yet to be fulfilled.¹⁵ Yet too often we teach the contrary, ignore them altogether, or downplay their significance. We must love them through spiritual,

Scriptural eyes, and pray and speak up for them.

THE SANCTITY OF LIFE

Over ten million precious and defenceless babies have been killed in the womb since 1967¹⁶, and we as believers (both individually and corporately) have often been deaf to their suffering and blind to how God sees them. Each one was divinely planned before the beginning of the world and overseen by God during his/her development¹⁷; children are a blessing from the Lord and precious in His sight¹⁸, but we have often rejected God's intentions and the value of human life in favour of our own convenience. How we think and speak about abortion – and about related matters such as family planning¹⁹, IVF²⁰, assisted suicide and the care of the elderly²¹ – is of great importance to the Lord.

RELATIONSHIPS AND SEX

Across our communities we are seeing increasing break-ups of relationships and families, as cultural

attitudes about marriage, parenting, sex and gender tear apart the millennia-old fabric we previously took for granted and relied upon. God's perfect plan for marriage (as a lifelong²² and complementary²³ relationship between one man and one woman) has been cast aside, as have His clear prohibitions of pre-marital sex²⁴ and homosexual unions²⁵, and His perfect plan for our gender.²⁶ Rather than stand as a lighthouse of refuge amidst the stormy waves, too often we have capitulated to the world out of fear or even approval. We may at times have been harsh and hypocritical rather than loving and gently steering those who were in pain; we have certainly hidden God's timeless truth and glorious saving gospel inside our cloaks by not warning people in wrong relationships, and we have often turned a blind eye to over one hundred thousand children in need of safe, loving homes that the church should have fostered or adopted. How does God see it all – and us?



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The need for preparation

We are so grateful to serve a God that prepares His people by giving them prophetic warnings. But we will gain nothing from the warnings if we think that they're a joke like Lot's sons-in-law did²⁷, or that they're for another time beyond us²⁸, or that God no longer speaks prophetically into the darkness and confusion of our world.²⁹ There comes a time when God can delay no longer, and we can be guilty of thinking we have more time to get ready than we do, whether for a situation like this or for the Lord's imminent return.³⁰ We want to warn you in love as our brothers and sisters in Christ to prepare for what is coming and to take up these four action points:

PRAY

While we must always be professing the name of Christ, and busy for the Kingdom, we believe that in this particular hour Christ urgently wants us to watch and pray with Him in the garden of the Great Intercession in Matthew 26³¹, even more than He wants us to be busy with the Great Commission of Matthew 28. How else can we know what He is saying to us in this moment, see what is coming, and ready ourselves for it, if we are too busy with work (even for His kingdom)? There is always a danger that we are taken up with apparently good activities like

Martha, rather than sacrificially prioritising time at Jesus' feet like Mary.³² Through recent shocks (most notably the pandemic), we believe God has been trying to bring us to an end of ourselves and cause us to stop. We naturally hate stopping our routines, but Joel told God's people to cancel everything in response to a plague and famine, and to call everyone instead into God's house to get right before Him.³³ Intercession should be our immediate priority, and there is no better route map than that of 2 Chronicles 7:14.

REPENT

We have already noted above some areas for repentance, and the Lord may highlight other issues to you and your church as you seek Him. We must all draw closer to the Lord now so that we can endure the trials to come, and repentance and obedience are a key step. If we are to minister to others in distress, we must first be sure our own house is in order and the log has been removed from our own eyes.³⁴ Isaiah offers us the choice between repentance and rest or rebellion and defeat.³⁵ Which will it be?

PREPARE

Preparation for trials is a wise and important Scriptural principle.³⁶ We believe we are moving into a time when fear will increase, as well as lawlessness and persecution.³⁷ How

will we stand firm if we haven't already learned to put on our spiritual armour, stay calm if we've not learned to trust God fully, and stay nourished if we've not put down spiritual roots?³⁸ And while spiritual preparation is significantly greater in importance, we would be wise to consider practical preparation too. How and where are we spending and saving our money? How are we looking after the physical body God has given us? Are we and those we care for ready for economic shocks or supply shortages? Have we told our friends, families and flocks what is coming for all true believers and for the world generally? Joseph prepared the nation for famine in response to God's warning; the church in Antioch prepared too when Agabus gave a prophetic word of a famine to come, and they made plans to support their brothers and sisters.³⁹ How would God have us prepare for ourselves, our households, our loved ones and our communities?

UNITE

Scripture, church history and the growing evidence in our day tell us that God's judgement in the form of national crises can significantly change how we 'do' church. Many believers who are wholeheartedly following the Lord and concerned about the situation we're facing are already moving closer to one another, drawn by the Spirit. As an apostate church becomes more easily identifiable and more closely aligned with the world, God's remnant must separate from those who persist in error, and align themselves instead with like-minded believers, whether in a traditional church context or in informal house churches. While we can only be united with those who are of the truth⁴⁰, we must be willing to lay aside secondary issues where appropriate⁴¹, not forsaking fellowship because of minor disagreements but pursuing it 'all the more' as the day of Christ's return draws near.⁴²

Finally, we believe the Lord recently gave us a direct word of prophecy (overleaf), which is a message from Him to those who have strayed from His word and are in danger of judgement. We invite you to weigh this word as others have done, to receive anything that's relevant for yourself or how you pray for others, and to consider passing it on to others along with this letter.

All of us are weak, and it is only by the grace of God that we can continue to stand. We humbly submit this letter to you as a warning, an exhortation, an invitation, and hopefully an encouragement. Please do listen to

Footnotes

- ¹ Ps 81:11-14, Gal 6:7
- ² Amos 3:7, Jer 7:25-29
- ³ E.g. www.bit.ly/ifb-127; www.bit.ly/ifb-128
- ⁴ 2 Chr 12:1-8
- ⁵ Heb 13:8; for examples of New Testament judgement, see Acts 5:1-11, Rev 2:5,16,21-23
- ⁶ Isa 26:9, Ps 78:34, Luk 19v41-44
- ⁷ 1 Pet 4:17, Jer 7:12-14
- ⁸ Psa 81:11-12; Jer 20:4b-5
- ⁹ Jer 44:22, 2 Kgs 24:4, Gen 15:16
- ¹⁰ Jer 28:1-9
- ¹¹ Tit 2:14, Eph 5:25-27
- ¹² Gen 17:7-8, Jer 31:35-37, Rom 9-11
- ¹³ Gen 12:3, Num 24:9, Zech 2:8
- ¹⁴ Rom 11:1,15-27
- ¹⁵ Isa 2:1-4, Jer 31:31-34, Zech 14 etc.
- ¹⁶ www.bit.ly/ifb-130
- ¹⁷ Ps 139:13-16, Jer 1:5
- ¹⁸ Ps 127:3, Mrk 10:13-16
- ¹⁹ www.bit.ly/ifb-131
- ²⁰ www.bit.ly/ifb-131
- ²¹ Lev 19:32, Mat 15:4-6
- ²² Mar 10:2-12, Mal 2:16
- ²³ Eph 5:22-33, 1 Cor 11:11
- ²⁴ 1 Cor 7:2, Heb 13:4, 1 Cor 6:18 (the Greek word for 'fornication' or 'immorality' is porneia, which includes all forms of sex outside of marriage)
- ²⁵ Lev 18:22, Rom 1:26-27, 1 Cor 6:9-10, Matt 19:4-5
- ²⁶ Deut 22:5, Gen 1:27,31, 1 Cor 7:17-20
- ²⁷ Gen 19:14
- ²⁸ Eze 12:27-28
- ²⁹ 1 Thes 5:19-21, 1 Cor 13:8-13 (note that "perfect" and "face-to-face" knowledge hasn't come yet)
- ³⁰ Luk 12:42-48, Mat 25:10-13
- ³¹ Mat 26:36-41, Is 59:16, Ezek 22:30-31
- ³² Luk 10:38-42, Jhn 12:2-3
- ³³ Joel 1, 2
- ³⁴ Mat 7:3-5
- ³⁵ Isaiah 30:15-16
- ³⁶ Rev 2:10, Mat 24:24-26, Luk 21:14
- ³⁷ Luk 21:25-28, Mat 24:9-13
- ³⁸ Eph 6:13, Mt 24:6, Jer 17:7-8, Ps 1:2-3
- ³⁹ Gen 41, Acts 11:27-30
- ⁴⁰ 1 Cor 5:11-13, 2 Cor 6:14-18
- ⁴¹ Rom 14, 15:7
- ⁴² Heb 10:23-25

BECOME A MEMBER OF IFB

It's free to become a member of Intercessors For Britain. Members receive updates about our prayer days and other events, and a prayer bulletin six times a year (by post or email) covering recent and upcoming developments in the nation for prayer. There is also the option to get weekly emails of relevant news, to be part of our regular Zoom prayer meetings, and to link up with others for prayer locally.

Our only request is that members seek to pray regularly for the nation. If you'd like to become a member of IFB, just fill in the form below and return it to our office (14 Orchard Road, Moreton, Wirral, CH46 8TS), or complete it online at www.intercessorsforbritain.co.uk.

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*Please fill out all sections if possible, whichever your contact preference. An address helps us build up a picture of how our members are spread around the country, and an email address / phone number is helpful to save on postage if we need to contact you about anything.

anything the Lord may be saying through these words, and we pray that you will know the Lord's blessing and direction as you seek His face.

With love, in His greater love,

Ashley Thompson and Josh MacDonald
IFB Co-Directors



LEAVING THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND



The following is a transcript of a video we released at the end of November, which can be viewed on our YouTube channel along with other recent talks.

On Wednesday 15th November, all three houses of the Church of England's General Synod voted in favour of the bishops' proposals for implementing blessings of same-sex couples, and of an amendment requesting full services of blessing to be introduced in the coming months. For those of us (both outside and within the denomination) who have grieved over its departure from sound teaching, and over its dishonouring of our righteous and unchanging God, it was another blow. For some people it was a line in the sand, marking the point at which the sinking ship should be abandoned to its fate; for some, it has triggered soul-searching and anguish over whether to leave; and for others, it's just a setback in their quest to reform and revive the denomination.

Having watched the General Synod's proceedings with a heavy heart, I released a short video after the vote, trying to put into words something I felt the Lord wanted His true followers to hear. I was unable to give detailed reasons for my position in such a short video, and it made some question why I was speaking so strongly. I would therefore like to lay out a summary of those reasons here, and I ask you to weigh it prayerfully against Scripture (as the benchmark for all that we think, say and do) to see if it rings true.

With some people calling for a partial separation while remaining within the Church of England, and others saying that a complete departure is the only appropriate response, I want to start by asking how much separation the Lord requires from His people. We'll then consider the potential for God's judgement in this situation, before considering the cost of separation and some closing thoughts about caring for the flock.

"we should ask whether partial distinctions like these are enough in the eyes of our pure and holy God."

How separate must we be?

Various ideas have been put forward by conservatives over how a partial separation could take place, so that they could be distinct from liberals while remaining within the Church of England.

These ideas include delegated oversight (where ministers are allowed a like-minded bishop to oversee them spiritually), separate dioceses (local groupings of churches based on their beliefs about same-sex marriage), and separate provinces (a rearrangement of the provinces of Canterbury and York to cater for the two camps). Putting aside the question of whether the uninformed world would see or understand such distinctions, we should ask whether partial distinctions like these are enough in the eyes of our pure and holy God.

"we need to be very careful about the things we touch, partner with and bind ourselves together with."

Holiness is rarely spoken of in parts of the UK church, despite it being a central part of God's character and a biblical requirement for us as His children. When the need for holiness is recognised, it can be transformative for a person's walk with the Lord and for His pleasure in them. However, while we may have recognised the need for holiness, have we really grasped the infinite holiness of our God, and how strongly He desires this holiness within His bride the church? When we read in Psalm 104:2 that God "wraps Himself in light", do we realise how pure He is, and how much He cares for our purity?

The strength of God's feelings on this can be seen in many Scripture passages, including those where He warns of judgement on people for their sin. God never wants to judge His people though, and He often calls longingly to them, either to repent as a group (as with the Israelites before being exiled), or to come out as individuals from an entity which He is about to judge (as with Lot and his family).

Amongst other passages, we should consider the two which are often quoted in regards to being separate. One of these is 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, which deserves careful pondering. It speaks of not being "bound together" (or "unequally yoked") with unbelievers, conjuring up a picture of two animals yoked together – they are separate bodies, and yet there is something connecting the two of them. However much separation may occur within the Church of England (for example, with separate provinces or dioceses for conservatives and liberals), there will still be a connection between the two, in the eyes of both the uninformed world and the all-seeing God, because the Church of England will still be binding them together. The passage also asks what partnership righteousness and lawlessness can have, and what a believer can have in common with an unbeliever – even if there are different provinces, there would still be something of a partnership between

them in some ways, and much in common between them.

In connection with this warning, Paul refers back to the Old Testament and the Mosaic law, as he reminds the Corinthians not to touch what is unclean. In connection with this, we might remember the words of Haggai 2, where the Lord got a point across about His people's uncleanness. The Lord asked the priests for a ruling in verse 11, and they acknowledged that anything which in any way touched something unclean would also become unclean. The Lord was and is very strict on this – merely touching something unclean in the Old Testament would make that person unclean – and if this is how the Lord sees things, and how Paul applied the principle in the New Testament, we need to be very careful about things we touch, partner with and bind ourselves together with. If we knowingly continue to touch something unclean, isn't there a danger that the Lord may also count us as in some way unclean?

We could also consider 1 Corinthians 5:9-13, which makes clear that while we are not expected to avoid unbelievers in

daily life, we are expected to completely separate ourselves from "any so-called brother" who persists in error, not even eating with them, although we should still keep calling them to repent (as 2 Thessalonians 3:15 makes clear).

Is God's judgement on its way?

The second passage which is often quoted regarding separation is Revelation 18:4, where God highlights wicked Babylon, describes how He will have to judge her, and says: "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues; for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities."

However we interpret this passage, there is a principle here – that if God is going to bring judgement because of sin, and His people don't heed His call to come out, they could end up being caught up in the judgement. Lot had tried to be a righteous influence in Sodom, but there came a point where enough was enough for the Lord, and if Lot had refused to heed the warning and leave Sodom, he too would have perished.

MY SHEEP - HEAR MY VOICE!

A prophetic word received on 3/11/2023 by Josh MacDonald. (Linked scriptures: Isaiah 5v1-6 and John 10, esp. vv14-16, 27)

We invite you to weigh this word, which we believe is from the Lord for the church in the UK, and is especially intended as a merciful warning and tender exhortation to those spiritual sheep who have – some knowingly, and some unknowingly – been led astray from the safety of God's truth to a place of great eternal danger by lying wolves in sheep's clothing, who do not submit to the authority of scripture and have come to destroy.

"My sheep - hear My voice.

I placed you in a field, a pleasant pasture, that was good. It was the place you were supposed to be. It was walled, it was boundaried, and in that field was the food of My word and the protection of My presence. It was high, and well-appointed, and you had need of nothing. But one or two of you opened the gate, and now so many of you are gone.

That gate was your protection. That gate is your defence. The lines for you had fallen in pleasant places, but My Word and My presence were not enough and you lifted the latch, and now you are gone. My sheep, oh so many sheep, are My sheep no more. You have entered someone else's field; you have run easily, and willingly, down the hill and into the pasture of another, and you are gone. You cannot hear My voice and the gate stands open, a steady stream of My sheep passing on their

way to the stranger's field. They hear another shepherd's voice, someone who is not Me, and who does not speak My words.

You must now learn that the pasture you have chosen is not safe, and full of wolves. You must now learn that the grass you have chosen could not last forever, and it will shrivel up and dry, and you will hunger and thirst. You will no longer find any shepherd there – they will all abandon you. You did not notice that there were no walls, but you will realise, and you will tremble.

My sheep. Look up. My field remains, with its strong walls and green pasture, and the gate is open. See those sheep that still remain with Me, and join them again under the sound of My voice and the safe blessing of My protection. Turn, follow Me, come back and let Me close the gate behind you before it is too late. In My field you will be safe. You will find food, you will bear fruit, and there – and only there – will you weather the storm that is coming on the whole earth.

Hear My voice, and live!"



This may seem a very strong thing to say in connection with the Church of England – but there is a biblical precedent for God judging His people (or those who claim to be His people), even when they're trusting in their relationship with Him. God twice destroyed the temple where He was worshipped and where His Name dwelt, shocking those who thought they were safe because of their outward religion and their devotion to their place of worship. He also said in Malachi 1:10 that He wished someone would shut the doors of His temple, preferring this to being insulted by the tainted offerings that were being made to Him there.

There's a popular view within parts of the church which says that God doesn't judge today as He did in the Old Testament now we're in an age of grace. Some things certainly have changed since the Old Testament period, but our God hasn't, and judgement features enough in the New Testament to make clear that we should still take it seriously – from Jesus's own teachings, to the death of Ananias and Sapphira, to the warnings in the epistles, through to Revelation, where the Lord warns of judgement not just on the wicked world, but on apparently healthy churches amongst the seven churches of Asia.

"...no cost can be too great for us to pay in the light of His selfless sacrifice for us..."

Earlier this year, after the initial vote to approve same-sex blessings, two prominent Anglicans outside the Church of England spoke of their fear that the Lord was going to remove its lampstand as a result. That was a very real possibility for the church of Ephesus in Revelation 2:5, despite its impressive list of good qualities; how much more of a possibility could it be for a church denomination which has voted to cast His law behind their backs? And would any true believer want to remain in a church whose lampstand was in danger of being removed, when it's clear that the church and its leadership is determined not to heed the Lord's call to repent?

Our increasing conviction within IFB, and the conviction of other prayer leaders we are connected with, is that we have now passed the point of God withholding His judgement on His rebellious house, just as He reached that point with the Israelites when He told Jeremiah on three occasions not to pray for their welfare any more. The Lord is always willing to show mercy to individuals, but we believe the Lord has given over the denomination as a whole to its desires, and is going to judge her further. We can't be sure what this may look like or when it may occur, but we are convinced that this is not a time to linger in Sodom as Lot did, but to escape and bring others with us to safety.

What about the cost?

I wouldn't wish to minimise the very real cost that there will be for those who

come out from a denomination or church which they have grown up in, poured themselves into, or come to depend on. It can be easy to speak as an outsider who won't pay such a cost, and only those on the inside will be fully aware of what it may mean for them. The list of potential negative consequences for leaving is long: the loss of church buildings and finance; the loss of a minister's salary, house and position; the loss of a church's online presence and its position in the community; the potential for ridicule, arguments and acrimony; the potential lack of fellowship elsewhere; and concerns for a flock being divided and sheep being left behind.

However, while these concerns are right to be considered, if the Lord ever calls us to do something, no cost can be too great for us to pay in the light of His selfless sacrifice for us at Calvary. Concerns for earthly situations (as we see them with our fleshly eyes) can hinder us from hearing and obeying the Lord's call – but if we faithfully follow His perfect and sometimes counter-intuitive plan for our lives, we can be sure He will take care of all our concerns as we cast them upon Him in prayer.

In 2 Chronicles 25, a key event is described in the life of King Amaziah. He assembles Judah to go out to war, and he also hires thousands of warriors from the northern kingdom of Israel for one hundred talents of silver. But in verse 7, a man of God comes to him and says: "O king, do not let the army of Israel go with you, for the LORD is not with Israel nor with any of the sons of Ephraim. But if you do go, do it, be strong for the battle; yet God will bring you down before the enemy, for God has power to help and to bring down." King Amaziah then protests about the cost, pointing out that he had paid lots of money to hire the extra soldiers, but the prophet simply responds: "The LORD has much more to give you than this." Thankfully, the king takes this to heart, accepts the cost, dismisses the soldiers he had hired, and goes on to win a mighty victory without them.

We can note two things from this passage. Firstly, God said that no matter how righteous Judah was, He wouldn't be with them if they were partners with the wicked kingdom of Israel – they had to be separate and not touch what was unclean, so that He would accept and help them. But secondly, the Lord is able to repay us richly when we make sacrifices for Him, as 2 Corinthians 9:7-9 also makes clear. Right now, you may be understandably counting the cost – you may be asking like King Amaziah: "What shall we do for the buildings? What shall we do for the finance? What shall we do for the gospel opportunities we have?" But I'm sure God would say to you in this moment: "I have much more to give you than this" – possibly in material things, but certainly in spiritual blessings for your obedience and sacrifice. Whatever your head or heart may be saying, if the Lord is calling you to a costly path, that cost must be paid - and the question

NEW YEAR CONFERENCE REPORT

In our conference over the New Year period, we felt led to devote the majority of our prayer sessions to interceding for the church. This reflects our increasing feeling that, while there are many other issues worthy of prayer at this time, the biggest need of the hour is for the church to get right with the Lord and become more of the bride He desires her to be.

The prayer times inevitably required our own confession and repentance over areas we had fallen short personally, and our pleas for the Lord to give us and other believers a new love for Him, respect for His word, and desire for His Spirit. We also prayed about the rise of Islam in our nation, and two current consultations (on transgender school guidance and age verification for pornographic websites).

The conference talks focused on how the Lord cares for His Name versus how we care for it, and on how we should be inspired and challenged by the book of Hebrews for the days to come. You can hear the talks on our YouTube channel (www.bit.ly/ifb-videos), and find out about upcoming prayer gatherings on our website (www.intercessorsforbritain.co.uk).

one must ask in such a situation should never be "What is the least costly option?", but "What is the most holy option, that will please God most?"

We could also consider the painful and costly separation which the Israelite remnant had to walk through when they returned from Babylon. In Ezra 10, in response to Ezra's mourning before the Lord over their mixed marriages, his repentant countrymen acknowledged their sin and resolved to take drastic action in order to be clean again in the Lord's sight. These men didn't say they would just have a partial separation from their loved ones – they didn't say they would spend less time with them, or live in a separate part of the house from them – they committed to sending their precious wives and children away permanently. I can't begin to imagine how painful that cost must have been for them to pay, but they were willing by God's grace to pay it, and that must have been such a fragrant aroma to the Lord as a sacrifice for Him.

(We might also note in passing that while these men were willing to pay the cost, they recognised it would require co-ordination and leadership – they told Ezra it was his responsibility to direct, but that they would be with him – and how we need leaders at this time who will lead the way, as an inspiration to others who are afraid to walk out into the unknown.)

"I'm sure God would say to you in this moment: 'I have much more to give you than this.'"

What about the flock?

Having spoken generally about the cost of leaving, I would like to finish by addressing one particular cost which deserves special attention. Some within the Church of England have a serious and understandable concern about what could happen to some of the sheep if the righteous shepherds depart, potentially taking half of the flock with them while leaving others behind. Should such a concern override any discomfort over remaining within the Church of England at this time?

As church leaders, we certainly do have a responsibility to watch over our flocks. We are called as under-shepherds to love and tend those under our care, seeking to emulate our great Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep. However, leaving a denomination and caring for one's flock aren't necessarily mutually exclusive – indeed, part of a shepherd's role (as seen in Psalm 23) is to lead the flock to suitable pastures, while protecting them from attack – and if a flock needs to relocate to better and safer ground, the shepherd's most caring action would be to lead it there, and to trust God with the rest.

Additionally, at the risk of being misunderstood or misquoted, I would suggest the Bible teaches that our highest loyalty isn't to our sheep, and our highest priority isn't the gospel. These are absolutely fundamental priorities for us of course, but our first and ultimate priority must always be to love, serve and glorify our precious and holy Lord. When asked what the greatest commandment was, Jesus said it was to love God with all one's heart, then added that the second commandment was to love one's neighbour. In His pattern prayer, Jesus put "Hallowed be Thy Name" as the very first request, followed by others.

In this and every other situation we face, we must ask first and foremost: "How is God's Name and glory being affected, and what path will bring the greatest honour to His Name?" With God's word being cast aside and His Name being associated with a false gospel, how must the Lord feel, and what action on our part will best address this if the church at large won't repent? May God give us all the zeal of Phinehas in Numbers 25, so that our love for the Lord and the honour of His Name will eclipse everything else, and will give us the courage to take whatever costly action is necessary to tell a watching world what it really means to serve our righteous and holy God.

Ashley Thompson, 27 November 2023
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