

Righteousness and praise

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TODAY'S WORLD is one in which there is little regard for righteousness, nor for praise of the God of the universe. It is a world that has turned its back upon what we have come to know as traditional Christian values. It now pays homage to its twin idols of science and technology, in the mistaken belief that modern society is now liberated from Biblical constraints, and that man has become the captain and arbiter of his own destiny. This notion has captured the popular imagination in a world that is now almost totally secular in its outlook and aspirations.

God's wonderful plan of salvation, centred in His Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, is in the main ignored by people, who do not consider lives devoted to self-indulgence as being in any way sinful. This is an attitude that runs counter to the clear Scriptural principle expressed by the Apostle Paul in his Epistle to the believers at Rome, in which he says: "the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God . . . So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (8:7,8).

The result of all this wilful indifference to what God requires of man can be seen today in a society that is no less degraded and corrupt than that of Noah's day, when flagrant wickedness and disobedience of God's laws brought His judgement upon a generation that exhibited no respect or praise for the merciful Creator of heaven and earth Who sustained them with the breath of life. Nor did they seek to change their sinful ways. It was inevitable, therefore, that Divine judgement should come upon them, as the Genesis record reveals: "all in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land, died" (7:22). Only righteous Noah and his seven family members were spared, while the rest of that evil generation perished in the waters of the flood.

In all ages it has only been a comparative few who have turned to God in humility and faith, seeking to serve Him and live in harmony with His righteous laws, as Paul points out: "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace" (Rom. 11:5). During the ministry of Jesus upon the earth, most of the people chose to continue in unbelief, which

was a source of great grief to the Saviour, as we learn from the Gospel of John: "He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (1:11). Likewise in the Gospel of Matthew we read of the intense sorrow of Jesus, as he laments: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (23:37).

Paul, in his Epistle to the faithful flock at Philippi, draws attention to the close connection between righteousness and praise, saying: ". . . that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God" (1:10,11). Again, he says: "and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy . . . Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud Him, all ye people" (Rom. 15:9,11).

Israel's great King David never failed to praise and reverence the glorious Name of God as he walked humbly in the way of righteousness. He was a man of such faith that he was chosen by God to accomplish a special purpose; for, in rebuking the rejected Saul, Samuel said: "the LORD hath sought Him a man after His own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14). David was so single-minded in his praise of God and in his striving after righteousness that he felt impelled to declare: "Because Thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise Thee . . . my mouth shall praise Thee with joyful lips" (Ps. 63:3,5).

The Kingdom, when Christ will reign over all the earth, will be characterised by righteousness and praise of God, seen on every hand, as the prophet Isaiah so beautifully portrays: "For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations" (61:11). In the same prophecy it is written: "And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (2:3).