

Saturday March 6

Isaiah 24:1-8 – spoiling creation

1 See, the LORD is going to lay waste the earth and devastate it; he will ruin its face and scatter its inhabitants—

2 it will be the same for priest as for people, for master as for servant, for mistress as for maid, for seller as for buyer, for borrower as for lender, for debtor as for creditor.

3 The earth will be completely laid waste and totally plundered. The LORD has spoken this word.

4 The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers, the exalted of the earth languish.

5 The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant.

6 Therefore a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt. Therefore earth's inhabitants are burned up, and very few are left.

7 The new wine dries up and the vine withers; all the merrymakers groan.

8 The gaiety of the tambourines is stilled, the noise of the revelers has stopped, the joyful harp is silent.

“When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” Yesterday we thought about those words of God to King Solomon. In a word: repent! But again the question we explored yesterday: what exactly does REPENTANCE mean?

Part of God's promise here is the healing of the land. But in a stark vision that the Old Testament prophet Isaiah paints in chapter 24, the earth lies devastated as a result of people's sin. Now fast forward to the present day: massive floods in Bangladesh, to out-of-control forest fires in California and increasingly frequent droughts in Africa. The results of global warming are there for us all to see on the TV news. Tragically, most of the human suffering that results is borne by the world's poorest people. We've heard less talk of climate change recently, because this pandemic faces us with a much more immediate threat. Yet there are scientists warning us that there is a possible link between climate change and a raging virus.

Because of climate change, many species of birds and animals are on the move. That brings some of them closer than ever to towns and cities, with the increasing threat of diseases they carry jumping into the human population. That has already happened in the 20th century with Ebola and HIV. Is this how the Coronavirus pandemic started? Possibly, although by no means certain; experts from the World Health Organisation were recently in the Chinese city of Wuhan, where it all seems to have started, and they have not discounted this. The city certainly has a huge market where many wild animals such as pangolins are being traded on a daily basis.

Strangely, there are people who believe the pandemic is a hoax; there are plenty who will say the same thing about global warming. We can bury our heads in the sand if we wish, but from teenagers such as Greta Thunberg to 90 year-olds such as Sir David Attenborough, the warning voices will continue to alert us about failing to switch to a more thoughtful and responsible use of the precious resources that Planet Earth provides us with. And that means that the REPENTANCE God challenged people to in the days of King Solomon apply equally to us. We have power as never before to render large expanses of this planet uninhabitable by selfish and careless use of resources; but with more responsible and thoughtful lifestyles, we still have time to repair the enormous damage we have done.