

"Great things for thyself"

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In the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, the state of things in Judah and Jerusalem was rapidly deteriorating. Jeremiah was the prophet, raised up of God and commissioned to proclaim the word of the Lord, and courageously expose the state of things that was leading to the final disaster. Baruch was the scribe that was employed to write in a book the solemn words that Jeremiah had to utter. This we learn when Jeremiah 45 is read.

The masses of the people were indifferent, if not hostile, to all that Jeremiah had to say: but not so Baruch. He not only wrote down the prophecies of judgment, but he felt the weight and sorrow of them, as we see in verse 3 of that short chapter. Woe had been pronounced upon the people, but he felt it for himself, saying, "Woe is me now!" Moreover he accepted it from God. He might well have spoken of Nebuchadnezzar, the great Babylonian monarch, as bringing the misery upon them; but no, for what he cried was, "**The Lord** hath added grief to my sorrow." He at least believed the things he had written, and he knew that the final crash was still to come, and near at hand.

Let us each challenge our hearts as to how we should have reacted to such a situation. If endowed with some energy and initiative, would not our tendency haste been to say that times of national disaster present great opportunities to the courageous individual for advancement and great profit? It would seem that the temptation to think in this way was present with Baruch, and hence the word to him, "Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not." Self-aggrandisement was definitely to be ruled out. He was simply told that his life would be given to him as a "prey" or "spoil" wherever he might be carried. God would preserve his life and that was the only profit he was to expect.

This little episode has been recorded in the Scriptures for our instruction. Let us seek to profit by it. From the moment that Solomon began to seek great things for himself and pile up riches, decline set in with the nation and its kings. Self-seeking in a day of prosperity is ruinous and even more so in a day of declension and disaster. This was true of Israel who were under the law. It is equally true, if not more so, for the people of God today, since we are not under the law but under grace.

But, alas! self-seeking has been a very prominent evil in the sad history of Christendom. It began very early, for the Apostle Paul in his imprisonment had to write, "All seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's" (Phil. 2: 21). A few centuries passed, and the awful evils of the clericalism, which reached its culmination in the Papacy, came to pass, in which self-seeking was pursued without a trace of shame.

Still further the centuries have rolled on, and we find ourselves, as we believe, in the closing days of Christendom, and of the character of those days we get a glimpse in the Lord's words to the Laodicean church, recorded in Revelation 3. The outstanding feature of that church is its **self-satisfaction**, which is the natural outcome of a **self-seeking** course, crowned with success. There is indeed a striking affinity between the "success" of Solomon and of the Laodiceans. In Ecclesiastes 2 we read how Solomon became "rich and increased with goods," until he had "need of nothing." Laodicea was in just that state, though the "goods" in which they gloried, were of a different sort to those of Solomon. At the finish, Solomon found his to be only "vanity and vexation of spirit;" and the end of the Laodiceans is to be spued utterly out of the mouth of the Lord.

The seeking of great things for self is, of all the tendencies of fallen human nature, the deepest

died. The world-system has been evolved according to the principles of fallen men. It has come under the searching analysis of the Spirit of God and the verdict is, "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life is not of the Father" (1 John 2: 16). And what are these three component parts of the world but different forms of self-seeking?

In the cross of Christ the world has been judged, as we read in John 2: 31. In that same cross "sin in the flesh" has been condemned, as stated in Romans 8: 3; that is our fallen nature is condemned, and thereby "self" is judged and set aside. At no time is it to dominate the thoughts and desires of the Christian.

Hence the word to us is, "**Seek** those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God" (Col. 3: 1). This is as important for us, whose lot is cast in the twentieth century, as it was for the saints of the first century. Obeying this injunction we shall be delivered from seeking great things for ourselves.

And, what is more, we shall be seeking the great things of God. A devoted servant of God, who a century and a half ago was a pioneer in missionary work, had as a motto something like this, "Attempt great things **for God**: expect great things **from God**." Carey, the Northamptonshire cobbler, spake thus, and he laboured on, in spite of opposition and sometimes ridicule, particularly at the translation of the Scriptures into native tongues. No spectacular results were visible during his lifetime, but great things **from God** have sprung from what he attempted **for God**.

So let us remind ourselves that as with Baruch, so with us, only in a far deeper and more wonderful sense, our life has been given to us as our "spoil". It was prophetically declared of our risen Lord that, "He shall divide the spoil with the strong" (Isa. 53: 12) and we are brought into the eternal life which is His, for we have it in Him.

The eternal life which is ours is not centred in self but in Him. As Christians, let us leave the world to seek for itself the great things after which it lusts. We have the life which is life indeed and seeks only the things of God's kingdom and of Christ. So let us obey Paul's instruction to Timothy to "lay hold on eternal life" (1 Tim. 6: 12), to which we have been called by the grace of God.