

## The God of Open Options

The city of Jerusalem has a long and tumultuous history, dating back some 3,000 years or so before Christ. Over the years it has been ruled by Assyrians, Babylonians, Romans, Persians, Arabs, Turks and even British troops.

Still, as you well know, Jerusalem has a special affinity to the Jews. God had Solomon build the first Temple there. To the Jews, the Temple was the place where God dwelt and visited them. Thus, Jerusalem, the home of the Temple, was a sacred and holy place.

Consequently, to speak against Jerusalem was to speak against the place where God dwelt. You can see why the people went into a tirade when Jesus, though He spoke of His own body, said, "*I will destroy this Temple and build it again in three days,*" (John 2:19).

The Jews, though they were chosen by God to proclaim His Word and to protect and defend it, mistakenly thought of themselves as above rebuke. In other words, as God's chosen people, they thought they were right with God no matter what they did or didn't do to honour their relationship with Him. In the course of their history they worshipped and served other gods, not openly and blatantly, of course, but, as a matter of the choices they made in life.

Jeremiah was given the dubious task of warning Israel about her waywardness and God's impending judgment. He preached his message of warning right up to the time of the Fall of the Jerusalem and the destruction of Solomon's Temple. He called Israel to repentance, but, she wouldn't listen. Instead, the people set their sights on him, the messenger who dared to speak against Jerusalem. Jeremiah ultimately fled to Egypt and nothing is known of what happened to him there.

Israel had Jerusalem, her Holy City. As Australians, one of our most valued possessions is our freedom, although we seem to be losing more and more of these freedoms as time goes on. However, in this country, for the time being, we still do have the right to free speech and religion.

In a recent article in *Christianity Today*, an author wrote the following. "During a recent Starbucks visit, I stood behind a customer who ordered a decaf grande sugar-free vanilla non-fat latte with extra foam and the milk heated to 140 degrees. As I stood in line, I actually started to think, maybe I want 140-degree coffee too. Maybe, I thought to myself, my choice of milk temperature up to this point has been catastrophically naive. Suddenly, his choices made me unhappier about my own. I began to covet. I wasn't sure what I wanted anymore. I became anxious and indecisive. I wasn't sure I was ready to commit - either to my kind of coffee or to his. Was this really freedom of choice, or, was it slavery to it?"

The point is, the author says, we worship the god of "open options." Commitment, it would seem, is a far too permanent a thing for our liking. And the problem is, the god of open options is killing us. He kills our relationships, because he tells us it's better not to become too involved. He kills our service to others because he tells us it may be better to keep our weekends to ourselves. He kills our giving because he tells us these are uncertain financial times and you never know when you may need that money. He kills our joy in Christ because he tells us it's better not to be thought of as too spiritual. And, perhaps most strikingly, he kills our commitment to the truth and to orthodox Christian teaching because he tells us that no one church can actually be right when it comes to the Bible.

Freedom is a gift from God, a gift fought for by brave men and women down through the ages. Freedom though, ought to afford us the right and the privilege to do the "right thing," not to do "nothing." As it turns out, a by-product of the god of "open options" is "apathy." In many ways we, as a people, suffer from the same disease that afflicted Israel. When times are good, when there aren't any immediate dangers to our person, or, to our way of life, we turn away from God and we don't see anything as immediately urgent, not even our repentance. God, in a sense, becomes a National hero to us, rather than a living, personal being who demands our devotion and our commitment. Grace is

cheapened and God weeps for our Nation, not as a new Israel, mind you, but as a blessed people who have used God's blessing as a license for evil.

When we repent of apathy, the fruit of that repentance is action. You and I are called to engage our culture with the truth of God's Word and with the love of Christ. Freedom is a good thing! But, even as Jesus has set us free "from" something, namely sin and death, He has also set us free "to" something, namely commitment to the truth, and commitment to one another and to our neighbour.

In the Gospel reading for this morning Jesus laments over Jerusalem because she refuses Him, the source of her hope and life. As Jesus longed for Jerusalem, so He longs for you. Hands pierced on the cross are held open wide to embrace you with love and forgiveness and to shelter you from sin and death. Even as God so loved you "that He gave His only-begotten Son (for you)," so He calls you to forsake the god of "open options" and to commit to Him in such a way that this Nation and your neighbour are blessed immeasurably by your action.