**HOPE IN DESPERATE TIMES**

**PROLOGUE: THE ISAIAH APOCALYPSE**

***Isaiah 24***

*1 Behold, the Lord makes the earth empty, and makes it waste, and turns it upside down, and scatters abroad the inhabitants thereof.*

***2****And it shall be, as with the people, so with the priest; as with the servant, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress; as with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the lender, so with the borrower; as with the taker of usury, so with the giver of usury to him.*

***3****The land shall be utterly emptied, and utterly spoiled: for the Lord hath spoken this word.*

***4****The earth mourned and faded away, the world languished and faded away, the haughty people of the earth do languish.*

***5****The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant.*

***6****Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the inhabitants of the world are burned, and few men are left.*

***7****The new wine mourned, the vine languished, all the merry-hearted do sigh.*

***8****The mirth of tabrets ceased, the noise of them that rejoice ended, the joy of the harp ceased.*

***9****They shall not drink wine with a song; strong drink shall be bitter to them that drink it.*

***10****The city of confusion is broken down: every house is shut up, so that no man may come in.*

***11****There is a crying for wine in the streets; all joy is darkened; the mirth of the land is gone.*

***12****In the city, there is left desolation, and the gate is smitten with destruction.*

***13****When thus it shall be in the midst of the land among the people, there shall be as the shaking of an olive tree, and as the gleaning grapes when the vintage is done.*

***14****They shall lift their voice, they shall sing for the majesty of the Lord, they shall cry aloud from the sea.*

***15****Wherefore glorify ye the Lord in the fires, even the name of the Lord God of Israel in the isles of the sea.*

***16****From the uttermost part of the earth have we heard songs, even glory to the righteous. But I said, My leanness, my leanness, woe unto me! The treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously; yea, the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously.*

***17****Fear, and the pit, and the snare, are upon thee, O inhabitant of the earth.*

***18****And it shall come to pass, that he who flees from the noise of the fear shall fall into the pit; and he that cometh up out of the midst of the pit shall be taken in the snare: for the windows from on high are open, and the foundations of the earth do shake.*

***19****The earth is utterly broken down, the world is clean dissolved, the earth is moved exceedingly.*

***20****The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard and shall be removed like a cottage; and the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it; and it shall fall, and not rise again.*

***21****And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall punish the host of the high ones that are on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth.*

***22****And they shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison, and after many days shall they be visited.*

***23****Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed,*

**A Brief rendition of Holst’s Mars, The God of War, may be played if that is technically possible.**

**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4gKHw7KJ7pE**

**INTRODUCTION**

This service opens with the following three related questions: -

**1.** Where does our hope lie?

**2.** How do we avoid engaging in delusory false hopes?

**3.** In what or with whom do we place our hopes as followers of Christ? But first, let us define what hope is.

**Definition:** Hope consists of two elements – expectation and desire. This means we both expect and want something to happen (or not happen). It may be a small thing we hope for, such as the bus taking us to work arriving on time, or it may be something huge, like hoping that through placing our faith in Jesus Christ, we have received the gift of eternal life. Whatever its scale, the same elements of expectation and desire are present. Hope tends to vary in strength depending on our mood, our circumstances, the time of day, or whether we are enduring hay fever. Achoo!

**Assumptions:** One key assumption behind this reflection is that *"Hope deferred makes the heart sick”* (Proverbs 13:12), and isn’t this something we are seeing a lot in the trans community?

An equally important assumption is that we must be cautious in what (and in whom) we place our hopes. To see how Christians can go wrong in this area is to Google *‘Trump idealised as Jesus’* in Google Images and prepare to be shocked. However, as we will see, the Trans Community has made a similar mistake as those American Evangelicals who have put their trust in Trump.

A final assumption is that we are living in increasingly desperate times, where the temptation to place our hope in an object like AI or some charismatic political or religious leader has never been greater. We need only glance at the news headlines to see that this is the case. The following section will examine the nature of these times in greater depth.

**THE CONFESSION**

**First reading: From Jeremiah 17:3-10**

***9*** *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*

***10*** *I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings*

Let us begin by confessing our sins to the Lord.

**Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves. We are genuinely sorry, and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen.**

**DESPERATE TIMES**

**Second reading: From Joel 2:31-32**

[***30***](https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Joel-2-30/) ***And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke.***

***31*** *The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes.*

[***32***](https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Joel-2-32/)*And it shall come to pass,*that*whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call.*

**Folk Song: Eve of Destruction**

**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\_38SWIIKITE**

**Reflection 1:** A glance at the News Headlines would reveal that, to quote Bob Dylan *‘times are a-Changin'.*’ Indeed, things are coming to such a head that it is hardly surprising that even Sober-minded Christians are wondering whether we are living in the immediate run-up to the second coming. Apocalyptic thinking is beginning to abound. For example: -

**1.** In recent days, we’ve seen stars in the form of missiles fall from the Heavens above Jerusalem (Matthew 24:29)

**2.** For the first time in History, Humanity can inflict the kind of plagues described in Zechariah 14:12, where across many nations the inhabitants find that their ‘*flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet.’* Also present is a capacity to inflict the kind of environmental catastrophes predicted in the book of Revelation

**3.** Many false prophets have arisen, and thanks in part to social media, wickedness is multiplying on a vast scale (Matthew 24:11-12). The popularity of selfie photographs may represent a fulfilment of 1 Timothy 3:2, which warns that people will become *‘lovers of self’* in the last days.

There is enough fulfilment of these dire prophecies to ensure the Bible should be taken as God’s Word. Scholarly critics who scoffed at its veracity would do well to consider eating a lot of humble pie! It appears that the world's population is heading towards a mass extinction event or some period of trial, during which no one would survive unless the Lord shortened its duration for the sake of His elect (Matthew 24:21-22). Events suggest that we could be on the *‘Eve of Destruction.’* That old pop song appears more applicable today than when it was released back in 1965. I remember being haunted by its lyrics as a child, and I am now even more haunted by them sixty years later! There is also much to bewilder the trans Community. Still, I will say little about this as relevant issues in connection with this development are already well known and have been the subject of intensive discussion both here and elsewhere.

**Praying For Mercy**

Lord, these desperate times hear us when we call upon you, (Psalm 4:1)

**Do not be far from us, (Lamentations 1:16)**

Or deaf to our prayers (Psalm 38:16)

**Do not hand us over to the fury of the oppressor (Jeremiah 25:38)**

Please do not withdraw your Holy Spirit, as you did with Israel of old (Ezekiel 10:18-19)

**Spare us, oh Lord! For the sake of Jesus, who shed His blood for us, please quench the fury of your holy rage (Psalm 39:13)**

Father! In these desperate times of global calamity

**Outpour Your Holy Spirit and greatly multiply the number of angels sent to guard and protect us, your people (Psalm 91:11)**

**WRONGLY DIRECTED HOPE**

**Third reading: From Psalm 146:2-7**

***3****Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help.*

***4****His breath goes forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day, his thoughts perish.*

***5****Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God:*

***6****Which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is: which keeps truth for ever:*

***7****Which executes judgment for the oppressed: which giveth food to the hungry.*

**Chorus: All Other Ground is Sinking Sand https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TlX-m4KfD90&list=RDTlX-m4KfD90&start\_radio=1**

**Reflection 2:** As the trans community is now finding to its cost, placing one’s hope in government is the equivalent of putting one’s feet into sinking sand. Politically, for reasons that need not be gone into, they have in the UK been thrown under the bus by a supposedly progressive left-wing government. In the United States, the situation appears to be even worse, with overt hostility being on the rise. Even if well-intentioned elected officials are often too hamstrung by socio-economic and bureaucratic constraints to be of much assistance. In the UK, especially, there is a problem of an unsustainable state, in the sense that the government sector has grown too large to be supported by what is a diminishing financial base. Sooner rather than later, money will run out. By placing their trust in Princess, the Trans Community has repeated the mistake of Right-Wing Trump-Supporting Evangelicals who foolishly trust a Prince who seems to think he should be their King!

To place undue trust in large church institutions is simply to replicate this problem of misdirected hope in the religious rather than the political sphere. The well-publicised abuse scandals should warn against pursuing this option. Indeed, to expect such institutions to change in one’s favour is to be like one of the two tramps who were endlessly waiting for Godot.

Given the warning of Jeremiah 17:3-10 and Matthew 15:19, we should be wary about placing too much hope in ourselves. This is especially the case during stressful times, when a succession of distracting and traumatic events may well cloud our judgment. We can easily deceive ourselves into pursuing a wrong course of action. As Proverbs 14:12 warns, *“There is a way which seems right for a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.”* We must be in a personal relationship with God to avoid this scenario. Only then can we receive the wisdom needed to navigate a way forward (James 1:5-8)

By this juncture, we have knocked away commonly held false hopes as if they were a row of skittles. The question of where we should place our hopes will be addressed in the next section.

**RIGHTLY DIRECTED HOPE**

**Fourth reading: From 1 Peter 1:3-6**

***3****Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, ac*

Re*cording to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,*

***4****To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for you,*

***5****Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time.*

***6****Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:*

**Hymn: Fight the Good Fight**

**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YppcFC8mxKM**

**Reflection 3:** In summary, we should place our hope in Jesus because of who He is and what He did in opening the way for us to enjoy an eternal, loving and life-changing relationship with God. As Philippians 2:1-11 shows, we place our hope in a Divine Saviour who descended to Earth as a Jewish man to identify with our suffering and procure forgiveness for our sins through his willingly offered sacrificial death. Our Lord knew what it was like to live in desperate times when God’s people were less than a generation away from enduring a terrible Holocaust that would ravage their land and (in AD 70) destroy their capital City, Jerusalem, along with its temple.

Because He was both perfectly divine and perfectly human, Jesus could offer a perfect sacrifice that procured the following blessings: -

1. The atonement He made for sin (Romans 5:9-11)

2. A demonstration of God’s unfathomable love for us (John 3:16, Romans 5:8, and 1 John 4:9)

3. The provision of deliverance, healing and protection for believers (Isaiah 53:5, Mark 16:15-18, and 1 Corinthians 12:9)

4. The provision of a perfect appeasement of God is justified wrath against sin (Romans 3:25-26 and 1 John 2:2)

5. The accepted ransom for our sin (Matthew 20:28 and 1 Timothy 2:6)

6. Our redemption from the slavery of sin so that we could know God as *‘Father’* (Romans 8:15-17, Ephesians 1:7, and Hebrews 9:12)

7. His perfect substitution – Christ dying in our place (2 Corinthians 5:21)

8. The best exchange ever, wherein Christ received our sin and gave us His righteousness in return (Isaiah 53:5, Romans 3:22)

9. Eternal life (John 3:16)

10. Forgiveness of sin (Ephesians 1:7)

11. Justification before God (Romans 3:20-28)

12. The means to resist the *‘World,’* the *‘Flesh’* and the *‘Devil’* (Romans 12:2, Ephesians 6:10-19, Hebrews 2:18, 1 Peter 5:8, James 1:12-15, 4:7 and 1 John 2:15-16)

The list could go on. However, by His death, we became adopted descendants of Abraham, receiving the blessings of a *‘covenant people’* and enjoying a right relationship with God as our Father. He could also pour out His Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, beginning a new work of spreading the Gospel to all nations (Acts 2:1-42). However, I shall return to that point presently.

**The Apostles' Creed**

Let us, in these desperate times, reaffirm our faith by saying together:

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
He descended to the dead.
On the third day, he rose again;
He ascended into heaven,
He is seated at the right hand of the Father,
And he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
The communion of saints,
The forgiveness of sins,
The resurrection of the body,
And the life everlasting.
Amen.**

**THE TRIUMPH OF HOPE**

**Fifth reading: From John 16:33**

***33*** *These things I have spoken unto you, that in me you might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world*

**Reflection 4:** Amidst the gloom and doom of Matthew 24 was the promise of Verse 14, which stated that the Good News about the Kingdom of Heaven would be preached throughout the world to all people before the end came. We who are gathered here tonight represent a small fulfilment of that tremendous promise. That promise is coming to pass before our eyes. There’s no exclusion clause against Trans people. So rejoice in that!

To make this hope become a reality, all you need to do is receive by faith that as a Perfect act of Love, the perfectly divine one humbled Himself to become a Perfect man so that they could offer a Perfect sacrifice that could cover (make atonement for) all our sins. A relationship with God, our maker and redeemer, is possible. Eternal life and the many blessings associated with it are there for you to receive as a gift! Just pause and think about that! Being Trans won’t exclude you from the Kingdom of God, only hardened pride or unbelief will!

For Transpeople especially, Jesus needs to be their first, last and only hope. There is no other alternative. Especially, in these desperate times, His Spirit is required to help us navigate the horrendous complexities that can be associated with being Trans. So, through faith, place your hope in Jesus and allow Him to be Lord. In the end, you have nothing to lose but your fear!

**Song: Come Thou Long-Expected Jesus**

**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=guJSLxT-yW0&list=RDguJSLxT-yW0&start\_radio=1**

**A Prayer of Commitment**

Let us now, together, make the following prayer of commitment

**Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God (Mark 1:1)**

**Have mercy upon me, a sinner (Matthew 15:22 and 20:30)**

**And please give me**

**That relationship with God, your Father (John 14:6)**

**That only you can provide (Acts 4:12)**

**Please, come into my life.**

**Please, come into my heart and mind (Revelation 3:20)**

**Please, come in to deal with my every sin**

**And Father, send your Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13)**

**To remove any fear, doubt, confusion and unbelief (2 Timothy 1:7)**

**Relying upon your strength alone (Zechariah 4:6)**

**I willingly accept you (John 1:12)**

**As my Saviour, Lord and God (1 Timothy 1:15)**

**Who died upon the cross (Matthew 27:50)**

**To take the punishment I deserved for my sin**

**And who, three days later,**

**Rose bodily from the dead (Romans 10:9)**

**So, thank you, Lord Jesus, Son of God (1 John 4:15)**

**For having mercy upon me**

**And for giving me a relationship**

**With God as my Father (2 Corinthians 5:21)**

**From now on, Lord Jesus (1 Corinthians 12:3)**

**I willingly commit myself to you**

**And to obey your will (Acts 5:29)**

**For the rest of my life, Amen**

**Closing Prayers**

Let us give thanks for Jesus Christ, our Lord and God (John 20:28)

**Blessed be Jesus, from whose generosity we have partaken and through whose goodness we live**

Let your servants now depart in peace, (Luke 2:29)

**For our eyes have seen the glory of your salvation, (Luke 2:30)**

So rejoice and go into the World

**This we will do, but even so hold back the powers of darkness and come soon, Lord Jesus, come quickly we beseech you (Revelation 22:20b). Amen.**

By way of a final devotion, we may say together...

**"To the only wise God and Saviour,**

**Be glory and majesty, dominion and power,**

**Both now and forever, Amen"**(Jude 25)

That’s it, folks!

(Leave a time of discussion to follow)