

**Friday March 5**

**2 Chronicles 7:11-16 – repenting of what?**

**11** When Solomon had finished the temple of the LORD and the royal palace, and had succeeded in carrying out all he had in mind to do in the temple of the LORD and in his own palace,

**12** the LORD appeared to him at night and said: “I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a temple for sacrifices.

**13** “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,

**14** 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.

**15** Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.

**16** I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my Name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there.

“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.”

So says God to King Solomon when the construction of the new temple in Jerusalem was completed many centuries ago. His words are recorded in the Old Testament, in the Second Book of Chronicles chapter 7. I’ve often heard Christians come out with these words at times of crisis – a command (‘REPENT’), and a promise of forgiveness and healing. Given the content of this promise, it’s no surprise that it resonates so strongly at a time like this. But I find myself asking: what exactly is it that we need to repent of? Today and tomorrow, let’s think about that a little more deeply.

Yesterday we recalled the second great commandment of the Jewish and Christian faiths: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’. Well, have I? I could decide to put my own interests ahead of others; all sorts of other things then follow. I start objecting to restrictions on my personal freedoms: one 83 year-old became a minor celebrity last year when she said in a TV news interview that she didn’t ‘give a sod’ about restrictions put in place to protect people from the spread of the virus. I easily forget that the restrictions are not just about protecting *me* from other people; it’s about protecting other people from *me*. Remember, scientists tell us that there are many ordinary people like me – like us - walking around carrying the virus but without any symptoms; they don’t know they’ve got it. If we then ignore the restrictions, or get careless, other people catch it, some get hospitalised, some get very ill indeed, and some of them die.

Something similar applies to masks. I could say, ‘I don’t need to wear a mask’ or ‘I object to wearing a mask’. Again, the point about wearing masks is not so much to protect me from other people, as to protect other people from me. So there are two different attitudes I could take. One is to put myself and what I chose to do first. The second is to decide that I’ll start doing all I can to protect other people from catching the virus. That is what REPENTANCE is all about.