The Mark

Ezekiel 9:1-4

1 He cried also in mine ears with a loud voice, saying, Cause them that have charge over the city to draw near, even every man with his destroying weapon in his hand.

2 And, behold, six men came from the way of the higher gate, which lieth toward the north, and every man a slaughter weapon in his hand; and one man among them was clothed with linen, with a writer's inkarhony by his side: and they went in, and stood beside the brasen altar.

3 And the glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub, whereupon he was, to the threshold of the house. And he called to the man clothed with linen, which had the writer's inkarhony by his side;

4 And the LORD said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.

The Question

• Ezekiel, whose name means "God strengthens", was a prophet who stepped on the scene at the onset of the Babylonian captivity that was first prophesied by Isaiah and then by Jeremiah.
  o Against the backdrop of a broken nation that is facing the wrath and judgment of God and in the midst of a devastating captivity Ezekiel begins to receive prophetic visions from God.
  o In over 30 visions he foretells both judgment and future restoration for Israel as he declares the words of God.

• In the 9th chapter we find a striking scene where the city of Jerusalem stands on the brink of severe judgment from God.
  o This judgment of God is going to come because of the sins of the people.
  o The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceeding great, and the land is full of blood, and the city full of perverseness according to Ezekiel 9:9

• So Ezekiel begins to relate a vision of six slaughterers who are gathered around the brazen altar awaiting the command of God to go out into the city and slay, without mercy.
  o They will be commanded to slay the young and the old, the men and the ladies, children and infants will not be spared – terrible judgment is coming.

• But, in the moments before the judgment God sends another servant out into the city.
  o This servant is clothed in linens and armed with an inkarhony and brush.
• His commandment from God is not to slay anyone but instead to mark those who will be sheltered from the coming judgment.
• This man with the inkhorn is instructed to place a mark upon the forehead of certain individuals.
  o It seems that there were some in this desolate city of Jerusalem who had no part in the abominations that were taking place there, neither were they apathetic and complacent about what was going on around them.
• The servant with the inkhorn was instructed to seek out all of those that were sighing and crying over what was happening around them.
  o This was the definition of those that would be spared from the terrible judgment that was coming they were in despair because of the state of their world.
  o They were moved by what their eyes were seeing.
    ▪ With great passion they were stirred to lift up their voices against the onslaught of evil.
    ▪ Their response was vocal and public -- they cried and sighed!
  o The Lord instructed his servant to seek out the criers and the sighers.
• I have a simple message tonight and it revolves around a provocative question.
  o If it were possible that this servant of God, who was armed only with an inkhorn and a brush, could make the journey through time and space to visit our world today that sits just as certainly on the edge of the judgments of God as did the nation of Israel then,
    ▪ if by some great miracle, the man with the inkhorn could walk into this house tonight,
      • my question is simple – would he set his mark on your forehead?
      • Would you be counted among those who sigh and cry at the present condition of this fallen world?
      • Would the servant with the inkhorn visit your pew tonight and place a mark on your forehead?
• Before you are too quick to dismiss the notion of this Old Testament Prophecy being played out in our modern world you need to know that the book of Revelation contains a similar prophecy about the end time.
  o In Revelation 7:3-4 an angel is sent forth to seal the Bondservants of God with a mark upon their foreheads!
    ▪ This mark seems to signify salvation, it seems to signify an means of escape from coming judgement – but it signifies so much more than just an escape.
    ▪ It signifies a people who are affected by the condition of their world!
    ▪ It signifies a people whose hearts are broken by what they see taking place in their world, in their nation and in their very cities.
    ▪ It signifies a people who have given themselves over to a spirit of intercession,
• who are concerned enough to spend their days in sighing and crying about the condition of their world.
  o Those chosen few who receive the mark on their forehead are those who have become possessed by a burden for their world, they are those who are concerned about the lost in their city!
• My question tonight is intended to be one of introspection, one that causes you to stop and consider yourself.
  o If the man with the inkhorn walked down this aisle tonight – would he pause at your pew long enough to place a mark on your forehead?

The Examples
• This fellowship of the marked is nothing new, nor is it original to Ezekiel and Revelation.
• The pages of scripture are filled with the stories of those who sigh and cry at the condition of their communities.
• One has only to visit with Jeremiah for a moment to find his poetic exclamation in Jeremiah 9:1
  o Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!
• You can hear it in the pleading of Moses as he stands between Israel and the fiery wrath of God
  o Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt -- forgive their sin -- and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.
• It resounds in the voice of David as he hears the news of the death of Absalom
  o O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee...
• This is the passion, this is the empathy and the concern that the man with the inkhorn is seeking out.
  o Those who weep and cry, who moan and groan, who appeal not to the wisdom of men but to the mercies of heaven to turn the tide of immorality and sin!
  ▪ This is the fellowship of the marked!
• Jesus Christ, He who was fully God and fully man, joined their ranks on that day that stood and, looking over Jerusalem cried out
  o O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, andstonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!
• The great apostle Paul counted himself among that number as he cried with fervency
  o I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh:
• That’s the kind of passion that grips the heart of the redeemed through the ages.
They are consumed with a passion for their world.

- They are defined by the tears that they cry and the intercessions that they make.

- This, not their faith, not their obedience of scriptures, not any other thing, but this was the identifying factor of those who were marked to be saved from the coming destruction!

The Urgency

- If you will give me just a moment tonight, I want you to hear the heart of your Pastor.
  - It is high time that we became aware of the urgency of the hour.

- Our world is quickly deteriorating,
  - the judgments of God are quickly coming
    - and the knowledge of that truth should stir us.

- When we stop to consider that the world’s population has broken the threshold of 7 billion people
  - and that the majority of them don’t know the life saving power of the name of Jesus – it should cause our souls to sigh!

- When we realize that our hospitals are full and our funeral homes are busy with the dead and dying who have never received the glorious gift of the Holy Ghost – it should cause us to cry!
  - We need to become possessed by a burden!
  - We need to be caught in the grip of a passion for the lost.
  - We need the urgency of this hour to be pressed upon our souls!
    - We are the church,
    - we are the redeemed,
    - we have the only saving message of truth and salvation!
      - Our world is lost and undone,
      - wallowing in the muck and mire of filth and perversion,
      - sin has had its heyday and judgment is looming on the horizon.
    - Where are the weepers?
      - Where are those who sigh and cry?
    - Where is the sound of groanings that cannot be uttered.
      - Where is the man of this generation who will arise and say
        - Oh that my eyes were a fountain of tears that I might weep for my people?
      - Where are the intercessors?

- I am afraid that if the man with the inkhorn were to walk the aisles of the church tonight he would find many that are gripped by apathy instead of by a burden.
  - I am afraid that the one who makes the mark would find many of us so wrapped up in our own lives and so desensitized to the condition of our world that we would fail to be numbered among the sighers and criers!
    - It shouldn’t be so!
• We are the church – when we look at the condition of our world – our hearts should break!
  o When we read about wickedness in high places – it should cause us to cry with grief.
  o When we consider the horror of judgment that awaits our world, it should bring tears to our eyes!
• We, who are living at the end of the end time, should, above all the ages, be numbered among the sighers and criers.
  o I ask you again, if the man with the inkhorn stopped by your pew tonight, would he put a mark on your forehead?
    ▪ Have we become satisfied with empty pews?
    ▪ Are we complacent as Salvation is preached within these four walls but the parade of lost souls drives by on the outside with no hope of ever hearing the truth?
  o It is high time that we sought the Lord of the harvest – it is high time that we found a spirit of travail!
    ▪ The scripture still says that when Zion travails she produces!
  o Perhaps that’s why our altars are empty – perhaps they need to be filled with the tears of the redeemed before they will be filled with the tears of the repentant!

The Cross
• The original rendering of Ezekiel 9:4 reads, from the Hebrew, “And mark thou ‘Tau’ on the foreheads.”
  o ‘Tau’ is one of the letters in the Hebrew alphabet and appears to be the mark that was to be made upon the foreheads of the sighers and the criers.
    ▪ This is very interesting because the ancient form of the letter ‘Tau’, the form that was used in the time of the Old Testament, was written like a cross – a hashmark down with one crossing it horizontally.
• The mark that the man with the inkhorn placed on the foreheads of the sighers and the criers was the mark of the cross!
  o The mark of the cross is the mark of one who is willing to surrender themselves so that others might live!
    ▪ The mark of the cross is the mark of those who will lay down their lives, their passions, their dreams and reach for a lost and dying world with all that they have.
  o The fellowship of the marked is, indeed, the fellowship of the cross!
    ▪ And it rightly should be that all who have seen their sins washed away by the blood of the lamb and the power of the name
    ▪ and all who have been filled with the glorious gift of the Holy Ghost
• should stand among the fellowship of the marked – because it is the fellowship of the cross!

• I don't mean to sound harsh, nor do I mean to come across as judgmental,
  o but if you count yourself among the redeemed,
  o if you consider yourself among the fellowship of the cross then the answer to my hypothetical question should have been a resounding yes!
    ▪ Because the fellowship of the marked is the fellowship of the cross.

• I would even go so far as to say that if you can look upon this world and the condition of the lost and it doesn't stir your soul or bring tears to our eyes that you probably need to revisit the cross!
  o This is the point of the message tonight – this is the reason for the question.
    ▪ I truly believe that we, as a church, need to revisit the cross so we can rekindle the passion!
  o We need to see the pain and the horror of the cross,
    ▪ we need to consider the terrible cost of sin
    ▪ and we need to ponder how horrible judgment must be if the only means of escape is for God to robe himself in flesh and die such a horrific death!
  o We need to recognize the condition of our world and, in so doing, we need to be gripped with the same passion that drove Jesus to the cross!
    ▪ Let us revisit the cross so we might rekindle the passion!
      • It is my prayer that each of you would allow God to plant a burden in our heart.
      • That you would realize the utter urgency of the hour and recognize the need for men and women who will stand in the presence of God and sigh and cry for a lost world!

• Tonight, if the man with the inkhorn were a recruiter rather than a judge, would you be willing to step out and volunteer yourself to be counted among the sighers andcriers.
  o Would you be willing to take a step of faith and beseech the servant to place the mark of the cross upon you forehead, to emblazon it across your heart!
    ▪ Who, tonight, would be willing to ask the lord for a burden?
    ▪ Who would be willing to rekindle the passion of the cross?
      • Will you wear the mark?
      • Will you number yourself in the fellowship of the cross?

CLOSE
Many years ago there was a great fire in New York.
The huge buildings were so quickly wrapped in flames that escape seemed impossible.
  o Those poor souls that were trapped within the burning buildings came to the windows and cried out for help.
• Lieutenant Bonner, a son of a former fire chief, became a hero on that day.
• Five times he charged up a fire escape that was glowing cherry red from the heat.
  o Four times he came down with a woman or a child in his arms.
• On the fifth time he was making for safety with an unconscious woman on his back when his strength finally gave out.
  o He staggered and would have fallen to his death except for the strong arm of one of his comrades who came racing to his rescue.
Bonner later told the story of how, on one of his trips up that ladder he came to fourth story window and pulled a little girl from the flames.
• He told how she begged him to let her make the descent on her own so that he could go into the fire and save her little brother that she had carried to the window with her.
  o He was already unconscious, the sister said, and the fire was almost upon him.
• Without reserve Bonner jumped the windowsill into the burning inferno.
  o He found the little boy just inside the window and carried him from the flames to safety.
It is inconceivable that a paid employee of the city should exhibit such heroism.
• Just an ordinary man, in an ordinary job – he’s going to get paid the same whether he goes up that fire escape or not.
  o He could easily have sat back and watched the building burn.
• He could have joined with others and lamented the great loss of life as he sprayed the fire with water from many hundreds of feet away.
But there was something about the urgency of the situation that gripped him.
• There was something about the need that seized him.
• He was compelled by the need that he could clearly see and laid aside any thoughts of self preservation,
  o risking life and limb to save the few that he could reach before it was too late.
This is the urgency that Jude references in Jude 22-23:
• And have mercy on some, who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire...
It is high time that we got a vision of the fire that is consuming our world and that we were compelled to save as many as we can, snatching them from the fire!
• Tonight I want to know, who will pledge themselves to join the fellowship of the marked?
• Who will pray to the Lord and ask to be gripped with a burden?
• Who will join the ranks of the sighers and the criers?