

Friday Night Theology, 11<sup>th</sup> December 2009.  
Peace, Prosperity... and Climate Change

When the Israelites were exiled to Babylon, it was hardly the land they wanted to be in – their longing was for Jerusalem. Despite the promise that they would be brought back, Jeremiah's message was to get on with life in the place where they were, engaging with the city rather than separating from it. He instructed them, "Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper" (Jer. 29:7). While in Babylon, the Israelites were called to look not only to their own interests, but to the interests of the *whole city*. Part of this was for the good of everyone, but Jeremiah also made the point that it would benefit them as well.

Thinking about wider peace and prosperity appeared to be [lacking amongst some nations](#) at Copenhagen this week. It's widely accepted that if we want to reverse the effects of climate change, drastic action is needed. While people are often happy to sign up to this in theory, the consequent practice is often neglected. This lack of practical commitment and response surely comes from seeking primarily the interests of only our own countries – not thinking sufficiently about the global picture and its [future generations](#).

An agreement will never be reached if each nation only asks the question, "What's in it for us?" Such an attitude also fails to recognise that we will all be affected by climate change eventually if action isn't taken. If we want to prosper, we need to ensure others can prosper too. This is not to suggest that the solutions to climate change are easy, or even that what should be done is straightforward. But it is to say that we must at least be asking the question: what is good for the whole planet for generations to come, not just what is good for my country right now.

It would be nice to think that Christians were different in this regard, that we were well known for always having an attitude of seeking the wellbeing of wider society. Sadly I'm not sure this is always true. Are we at the forefront of making changes to our lifestyles to cut our carbon emissions so that others may benefit? Or do we prefer to protect our own interests first – flying off on holiday, driving the car unnecessarily and so on? I know I'm guilty of both of these things.

And of course all this applies to issues far beyond climate change. Are we always known for speaking and complaining about the issues that affect the Christian community, or are our concerns much wider? Even within the church, I wonder how many of us have complained that the sermon or worship didn't suit us, without thinking about whether it might have been good for other people in the congregation.

"Seek the peace and prosperity of the city." Jeremiah may have written this message thousands of years ago, but it's just as relevant today as it was then. What kind of image do we want to be giving to the world around us? One of narrow, self-interest or one of concern for the well being of all? And if we do this, Jeremiah encourages us that not only will they benefit, but so too will we.

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