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Prophet Jim Smith. December 2004

Black theology? Prophet Jim Smith

Introduction

There is much to challenge in the material which follows – much to challenge me as much as those who read what I have written. But I honestly believe that God's destiny for Africa could be seriously hindered, unless we begin to pray and think about what God is saying to us here. I do not believe that I have any unique insight into things African. God never gives the whole picture to one person. But I offer this thinking as a contribution to the on going search for Africa to find itself in the sight of God. There are many questions raised, but not so many answers. It is the answers which we have to work at together.

How to use this material

In many of the topics under discussion, especially in the “ROOTS” teaching, you will find THREE sections.

Section 1- this is what I think God is saying to us, and I've written it in the clearest and most straight forward way.

Section 2 – “Going deeper” In this section, I want to look at some of the theological issues which are behind what God is saying to us.

Section 3 – “Deeper still.” This section is for the theologians who are reading and studying this material. I've tried to take on some of the most complex thinking which has to go into understanding.

So - if you just want to get hold of the Wonderful things God is saying to Black Africa, skip the deeper and still deeper sections. They are quite hard. But if you really want to dig in, then do so, but be warned, some of the issues are quite tough.

Blessed Continent

Africa is a blessed continent. Twice it has had the privilege of serving Jesus. It was to Africa that Jesus was taken to protect him from Herod, and it was an African that helped him carry his cross to Calvary. The Continent has suffered greatly as a consequence of these acts of service. Now, in the third millennium, a third opportunity is arising. For centuries, the Western world has led the Christian world. But these days are now numbered. As the West sinks deeper and deeper into apathy, greed, compromise and surrender to other faiths, God will have to raise up another Continent to lead His people. He is looking for a people to shepherd his world-wide

people, and I believe that Africa is that shepherd. Here is a vision I had some years ago, which you can find in the last chapter of my book “Africa in the heavenly places.”

“I looked again, and saw yet another vision. I saw a group of people standing in a circle. They were very still, yet full of joy. Then the Lord came and stood in the middle of the circle. As I watched, I saw a man approach the circle. He was not an African. He was very tired, and full of hopelessness and despair. He was covered in dust from a very long journey. His shoes were worn out, and his clothes were old and torn. He came very slowly to the circle, and when he drew close, one of the people in the circle - and I saw now that they were all Africans - turned to the man. He cowered down on the ground, holding his hands above his head. He expected to be hit. But then one from the circle lifted him gently, and drew him into the centre of the circle. When he saw the Lord, he slowly came to his feet. The Lord touched him, and I saw that his face was filled with the same joy as the members of the circle. Then he turned and joined the circle.

The Lord said to me “See this and rejoice.”

As I looked, another person came towards the circle. This was a woman, and she was also broken and stained with tears and sorrow. Again, one from the circle went to her, and brought her into the circle. She too was touched by the Lord, filled with joy, and joined the circle.

The Lord said to me “See this and hope.”

Yet again a third person approached the circle, and like the others, was drawn into the circle, and was made part of it.

The Lord said to me “See this and pray.”

“But Lord” I said “I do not understand this. Please give me understanding.” The Lord said “I have placed Africa in the world as a great door, through which those who are broken can come and be healed, and become part of my plan for creation. Africa has been chosen by me, and has been prepared through suffering to have a heart for those who suffer. Africa will never reject the broken, because she and her people have been broken. Africa has a place in the world - to rescue and redeem the world. The rich and powerful - those who have been imprisoned by wealth and greed - will come to Africa and be healed. The poor and the hopeless - those who have been broken by the world - will come to Africa and will be healed. I will heal the Nations, and I am going to begin that great world healing through this Continent.”

One great weakness

This is a great plan, but there is a great weakness in it, which the enemy will exploit to the uttermost. I have struggled to put this into words, and the best I can come up with is this – Africa lacks a black theology. This is a crazy term! There is only one theology, from which we all derive our principles. The Bible says “There is neither

Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”
(Galatians 3:28)

But having said this, we have to accept that each country makes a cultural copy of the biblical theology, with which it can work, and it seems to me that Africa has failed to develop its cultural copy, its “black theology.” How has this happened? It’s a sad tale. Over the centuries, many white people – businessmen, missionaries and visitors have come to Africa, with high levels of skill, excellent education, strong financial support and powerful backing. Sadly, many of these well intentioned guests failed to recognise black culture, black consciousness, and black ways of living and working. They had a strong desire to help, but could not lay aside their cultural ideas, and they refused to be changed by the black culture they came to serve. They held on to their old ways. This degraded, often unintentionally, the positive values of black Africa.

At the same time, black Africa submitted and became dependent on these western friends. They gave up their precious cultural identity when it appeared that the world didn’t care about it. Refusing to stand and work for what they wanted, they longed for the western money, influence, and power. They became prostitutes to western ways, western dress, western thought, and western theology. The concept of sacrificing personal needs for the work of God in Africa was eroded. “We are little and can do little” became, and still is the cry.

This has led African theology into a spiritual wilderness, where the past still has a powerful influence. The concepts of sacrifice, surrender and hard work to achieve God’s goals has been replaced by “who will pay for it?” Even worse, “how can I get the west to pay for it?” We have become people of the price tag, people of the invoice, people of “take,” not people of faith.

To bring an end to this situation, we have to discover a black version of theology which will give a foundation on which God can build his black Church - a Church with confidence in itself, and in its ability to do the work God has set before it. This is not easy, because we are in a mess, financially, socially and historically, but it has to be done. Let me say here that many western people want to help us, and we are glad about that. But really and truly we have got to learn to do it ourselves. Then we can work with the West as brothers in Christ, as co workers, as equal partners in the service of the Lord. Currently we are not at this point. Some painful decisions about western help and western involvement lay ahead for us.

So where do we begin? I am not suggesting that we are starting from a totally negative position. Good things have been done already, by African thinkers, theologians and leaders. But I want to offer a basis for more, for further and deeper understanding by more of God’s African people.

1. The unique value of “black.”

“Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.” (Luke 12:6-7)

God places value on all that He has made. So our starting point has to be this - what God made in black Africa is of equal value with what He has made in the white West. I was speaking to two cooks in one African country. Their whole aim in life was to get to England. I asked why they wanted to do this, and they said "We can have money, a better life, medical care - so many things." I told them; "but you will sacrifice all that your own culture is giving you. You will be looked down on for being black, for being immigrants, for taking jobs which white people want. Why would you want to live like this?" They saw only the improvements which the West could bring, and an escape from the mess of Africa. They did not see their own unique value as black men, working in Africa, helping Africa move forward at whatever personal cost.

I'm sure the Lord appreciates the many different cultures he has made. He knows our difficulties and our differences. Within his Kingdom, we are one people. But I am sure that He doesn't devalue one culture against another. The Bible teaches us that in heaven there are people "from every nation, tribe, people and language standing before the throne and in front of the lamb." (Revelation 7:9) The Lord made us one Christian family, but has not abolished our uniqueness as cultures. The problem is ours. If we go on seeing ourselves as rubbish, if we keep on yearning after what is on other cultures because it is better than ours, how can we ever move forward?

My years in Africa have shown me two things. First the unique, special and lovely African heart, revealed in the different countries I have visited, AND the lack of appreciation of that lovely heart by the African people themselves. We can share the best of our cultures - I'm not trying to suggest that one is better than the other. But we cannot surrender our uniqueness under God. Black is unique and special, with its own unique contribution to make to God's creation. Until we see this, and change our attitude, we are lost as a Continent and as Nations within it.

Going deeper.

Look at these passages:-:

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." (Jeremiah 1:5)

"Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows." (Luke 12:6-7)

Study these principles

Africa feels worthless in the twenty first century. All power belongs to the West, and the West has very little compassion for Africa. Try as hard as they can, Africans just\can't come up to Western standards, and so they feel irrelevant, useless and rejected. We have to let theology challenge this feeling. God knew Jeremiah even before he was conceived in his mother's womb. There was only ever going to be one Jeremiah - a unique creation, conceived in the heart of God, and brought to birth and maturity by that same God. The same is true for Africans and Africa. We don't have

to reach any Western standard to be appreciated and loved by God. We just have to walk the path he has planned for us, secure in His love and approval.

We must shake off this defeatist and negative attitude about ourselves. We are unique and chosen by God, and we must walk in His way. Western people and countries are also unique. We are not saying “we are more unique than you!” But what we have been saying and feeling is “You are more unique than us!”

Deeper still

“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” (1 John 4:10)

This is one of those issues which stretches our minds beyond our capacity to understand. God loved us, before we were created, and knowing the heart of men, he knew he would have to make a great sacrifice to guarantee that love. Despite knowing us as we truly are, he still made the sacrifice. This makes us very special. But then the question arises – why? Why should God be like this to His creation? There is no answer to such selfless and sacrificial love. There is nothing we can do to repay it. It just is! I invite you to follow this thought on and on and on, for as far as you can go. But I can guarantee that, one day, all you will be able to do is to gaze in wonder at a God who values you so much, who sees your uniqueness and specialness as so precious, that he was willing to give everything to protect that uniqueness.

2. Roots.

Protestant theology has strong roots. From the Reformation onwards, there has been a steady stream of really excellent theology, and from this background the Church has grown. But I often hear it said that African theology doesn't have good roots. There are few books, little in-depth theological training, and little history. This breeds a dependence on Western theology which is unhelpful, as we seek to find our own feet. Don't misunderstand me – I am a product of that Western theological system, and I am intensely grateful for all I have received from that system. And I am daily being blessed as I read and study theology from all over the world. But Africa does have its own theological roots, and from them we can develop a good theology. What are they?

A strong spiritual awareness.

In Africa we are powerfully aware of the spiritual world which is around us. We allow that spiritual world to touch our daily lives. We easily interact with the Lord, we expect visions, dreams, prophetic words, angels and daily miracles. For us, our environment is interpreted by spiritual perception, and because Africans live in this environment, they don't realise how precious a heritage it is. In the West, we do not have a strong spiritual awareness. Our rationalism prevents us from perceiving the daily presence and actions of our sovereign God. We are hard and closed to the presence of God and his angels. So for us, getting spiritual interpretations so much harder than it is in Africa. When the trees of the fields clap their hands, (Isaiah 55:12) Africans see the Lord at work, but the West would just see the wind! African

Christians - this is a strong root from which to grow. Our powerful appreciation of the things around us is part of OUR contribution to world wide theology. It is our black gift to our many coloured and cultured brothers and sisters in Christ.

GOING DEEPER

Look at these passages.

“At once Jesus realised that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, ‘Who touched my clothes?’” (Mk 5:30)

“He replied, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.’” (Luke 10:18)

“Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled.””(Mk 14:49)

Study these principles.

1. Jesus was very sensitive to the touch of the Spirit on his life, and in the same way, we must be very sensitive. We have to be careful that we don't miss the promptings of the Spirit. God does not shout, and seldom repeats himself. This verse from Isaiah describes the sensitive nature of God's communication with us **“A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out.”** (Isaiah 42:3) Africa is loud, and hearing a sensitive voice is not easy.

2. Being sensitive to the Spirit meant that Jesus was also very sensitive to the spiritual battle in the heavenly places. Our sensitivity is not just open to what we hear concerning ourselves, or earthly events. We also have to be tuned in to the heavenly places, and the activity and actions there. Jesus saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. It was a significant moment. How many of us would have missed the moment, because we are too concerned with what is happening to us or around us? This inability to discern the heavenly places is yet another price we have paid for following the “My miracle now” teaching. We have become interested only in ourselves, and we have become desensitized to the things of the Spirit.

3. Sensitivity must go one step beyond understanding the heavenly places, and reach for an awareness of the Father's plans and purposes. Jesus was sensitive to this, so when things happened in Gethsemane, rather than shouting or fighting, he submitted himself to the Father's will. How can we do the same if we are not sensitive to it? It isn't enough to read the Bible. We have to be sensitive to the will of the One who wrote it

DEEPER STILL

Along with strong spiritual awareness must go an ability to discern who is making this awareness possible. The prophet Micaiah ben Imlah gives us some insight into the dangers. Read these verses:

“Finally, a spirit came forward, stood before the Lord and said, ‘I will entice him.’ ‘By what means?’ the Lord asked. ‘I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouths of all his prophets,’ he said. ‘You will succeed in enticing him,’ said the Lord. ‘Go and do it.’ So now the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouths of all these prophets of yours. The Lord has decreed disaster for you.”

(1 Kings 22: 21-23)

There is some very important theology here:-

1. Lying spirits do exist, and their purpose is to deceive God's people.
2. They only have any freedom because God gives it to them. God gives permission for the lying spirit to act. **The Christian faith is MONOTHEISTIC.** This means that we only believe in one Kingdom - the Kingdom of God and his Christ.

“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.’” (Matthew 28:18)

“At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth.” (Phil 2:10)

“Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: ‘Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down (Revelation 12:10)”

Any evil activity has to seek the permission of God before it can move to act. The enemy could not move on from Gethsemane until Jesus gave permission.

“Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour—when darkness reigns.”” (Luke 22:53)

We do not subscribe to DUALISM. Dualism sees the battle between two equal Kingdoms, where one battles it out for victory over the other. This gives Satan far too important a position – one which he longs to have in our minds and our theology. He is not a king, but a beaten rebel, allowed to act to serve the purposes of God. How he must hate this position! We might not always understand God's purposes in acting this way, but one thing we do understand – we are the victors through Christ:-

“When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” (Colossians 2: 13-15)

3. As we hear and see, so we must discern. Being open to the things of God must be linked with the gift of discernment, based on a good biblical and theological understanding of the ways of God.

“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”
(1 John 4:1)

God clearly wants to give us spiritual awareness. Indeed, it is part of our spiritual make up. Satan knows this, and dresses himself up in guises what deceive:-

The angel of light:

“And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.” (2Cor 11:14)

The voice of reason:

“If you are the Son of God,” he said, **“throw yourself down. For it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’”** (Matthew 4:6)

The unstoppable force which must be obeyed:

“Men worshipped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshipped the beast and asked, ‘Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?’” (Revelation 13:4)

This material has been written to help students get a better hold of the theology which undergirds the miracle of hearing from God. It's good to have theology, but let's remember it is only an aid to understanding, not an end in itself. Living in a spiritual environment is a spiritual gift and blessing, to be experienced and exercised by men and women of faith, filled with the holy Spirit.

God answers us!

A brother came up to me once and said “Prophet, I am going to Bible school in Switzerland. I need \$1500.00 for my fare.” I thought he was going to ask me for money, but he went on “And today, God has done it. I have the money.”

It's hard for Africans to realise what a shock this is to western Christians. Many in the West have long ago given up the idea that God answers prayer in such a powerful and exciting way. They believe in their head that God answers prayer, but seldom expect it in daily life, or if they do expect it, they expect it small! I met a western brother recently who was praying for money for a new house. I asked him what he expected to happen. “Oh, I expect I will get a loan from the bank” he replied. I asked him “why don't you ask God to give you the full amount you need?” He looked at me rather sternly and said “Are you crazy! Where is God going to find three hundred thousand pounds?” I was tempted to reply “ I expect he will use the same power that raised Jesus from the dead!” But I said nothing. I was up against western theology, which limits God to doing what little we can believe.

Jesus said “Ask and you will receive!” We take this as a foundation principle in Africa, and get on with it. Sometimes we ask for the wrong things, and we don’t always get quite what we want. But we believe that God answers prayer, and so we get on and ask. From this powerful root, God can develop an understanding of Him which enables us to believe for the resources to do his will, however big or small.

Of course, this root can lead to misunderstanding and bad practice. We have seen plenty of that, but it also leads to the possibility of Africa doing great things for God. How blessed we are, and yet we keep thinking we have nothing to offer, and prostitute ourselves to the West. We fail to see the good roots of our theology.

Going deeper

Look at these passages:-

“The LORD said, ‘I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering.’” (Exodus 3:7)

“But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days.” (Daniel 10:13)

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.” (Matthew 7:7-8)

Study these principles.

1. God hears his creation – even the unspoken urges and desires. He does this, because it is his nature to listen and respond. We humans like to hear and respond to people, and because the bible teaches that we are made in the image of God, (Genesis 1:26) then so does he! It’s a stunning to realise that the God who made the world wants to hear and be involved with something so insignificant as my life. As God’s people we have got used to this idea, and it’s wonder sometimes escapes us.

2. Sometimes there can be spiritual hold ups in God’s response. In this unusual passage from Daniel, the Archangel Michael assures Daniel that his prayer was heard, but there was spiritual opposition to a speedy reply. God hears and answers. Sometimes there are good reasons for a postponed reply – spiritual opposition, wrong timing, wrong request. We have to hold on to the truth that, even when there are pauses, God is still hearing.

3. We have a part to play in the answering process. We are not children, but adult believers, and we have to be actively involved in knowing God’s answers. We have to seek the right door, and knock on it. We also have to be prepared for the Lord to say “No,” or “Wait.” Here our theology comes up against the African problem – se want action now! I personally like this approach to life. It’s positive, and enables God to work. But some things can’t be won by instant action. Some requests have to be brought to God and left with him, and others have to be brought to God with daily and even yearly persistence.

Deeper still

When it comes to hearing from God, there is one very complex area to consider – how do we understand his silence? After all, if he is a God who longs to answer, how can he remain silent? The Bible is clear that God both hears and answers us:-

“Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.” (Jeremiah 33:3)

“And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.” (John 14:13-14)

So why does God sometimes “fail” to answer our requests? There are a number of reasons:-

Arrogance and pride get in the way

“This is what the LORD says: “Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, ‘We will not walk in it.’ (Jer 6:16)

Disobedience gets in the way

“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me (Hosea 11:1-2)

Getting what we give

‘When I called, they did not listen; so when they called, I would not listen,’ says the LORD Almighty. (Zech 7:13)

Judgment

“I will turn my face away from them, and they will desecrate my treasured place; robbers will enter it and desecrate it.” (Ezek 7:22)

In each of these cases, God’s silence is a challenge to examine our lives, and to put right anything which may be hindering his ability to respond to us. Is this simple teaching the end of theological thinking in this area? It might be, if it had not been for Job. Here is a man who suffers catastrophe, for no apparent reason. Being a godly man, he cries out to God for an answer –**“Do not condemn me, but tell me what charges you have against me.”** (Job 10:2) Again and again, in page after page of his book, Job begs, demands and longs for an answer from the God he knows and loves. All he wants to know is why he is having to suffer so much, when he has done no wrong. But no answer comes. In his final cry, he asks again **“let the Almighty**

answer me!" (31:35) His agony was simple - why didn't the God who made him and who loved him, answer him? The theological truth here is that we just don't know. Sometimes our theology brings us to a position where we have to admit that some things are beyond us. For those who want to study Job, there is a very long speech from God, after Job's final struggle. But if you read it carefully, you will see that God does not answer Job's question. He basically reminds Job of their respective positions - he is God and Job is Job. God in effect says, "there are some things you will never be able to know this side of heaven."

Faith has to step in to bridge these gaps, and its probably best this way, although for missions of people who don't have answers, it is very painful.

SACRICICE

Sacrifice is at the heart of Christian faith. John underlined this when he said "Look, the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) All western Christians and theologians give assent to this in their heads, but many lead lives contrary to this principle. Many western Christians are rich beyond the wildest dreams of Africa, and yet God's work struggles for its finance, because the principle of sacrifice rests in the head, not the heart. Many western Christian keep God in a nice tidy box. They worship on a Sunday, give their money, (usually small amounts) pray occasionally and attend a mid week meeting if they have time. But the concept of a sacrificial life, paralleling the sacrificial life and death of Jesus, is absent. I went to one Church, where the Pastor was cutting the missionary budget, because, he told me "things are financially difficult in the Church." So I took him out to the church car park, which was full of cars – many of them worth thousands of pounds. I said "Pastor, some people are using your car park. You must stop them doing this." He looked puzzled, and said "but these are the cars of my church members." I looked at him and said "Well, there appears to be no shortage of money in the pockets of your members. How come there is a shortage in the giving?" No answer!

In Africa, we sacrifice willingly to the work of God. I have met church members who have walked for hours and hours to attend church. I have seen churches give their all for the work of God, even to giving away the money for their food. I have seen men and women sacrificing what they have to serve the Lord. We are not perfect at it by any means, and one of the things which hinders us is that we too quickly look to others for our needs, rather than making a sacrificial offering to keep the work of God moving forward. But we do understand the principle of sacrifice.

This blessing has come to us in a strange way. The occultists, fetish and voodoo religions make a very big thing of sacrifice. In this way they seek to appease the devils which torment them. Most of God's people have been delivered from this background, but have brought with them the concept of sacrifice. So, and this is one of the strange ways of God working – what they have learnt through the false religions, they are able to perceive very clearly in the true religion.

This root is so powerful, but we have yet to activate its full potential. This will only happen when we take hold of sacrifice again, and stop looking for others to do it for us. Some of the most powerful movements in the early days of faith in Ghana

concentrated totally on building their work with the support and sacrifice of God's African people only. God blessed them! Once we begin to draw our strength again from this root, we will be able to achieve impossible things for God. This is another of our precious theological roots. It is also a painful one! No one likes sacrificing, because it hurts, and we are going to have to endure many hurts as God prepares us to lead the Christian world. But what a joy and privilege to model our lives, churches and countries on this powerful principle.

Going deeper

Look at these passages

"But the king (David) replied to Araunah, 'No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.' So David bought the threshing-floor and the oxen and paid fifty shekels of silver for them." 2 Sam 24:24

"Then Jesus said to them, 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.'" Mt 26:38

"Jesus - who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness." Philippians 2:6-7

Study these principles.

1. David would not offer to the Lord something which cost him nothing. The sacrificial life is costly. This principle is easily lost. No one wants to suffer – it's natural to want blessing. But the "my miracle now" ministries have robbed us of the capacity to sacrifice. According to them, all we have to do is "name it and claim it!" Once we swim in this stream, we lose our understanding of sacrifice. If we want to wear the crown, we must carry the cross. "If anyone would come after me," said Jesus, "he must deny himself, take up the cross and follow." If we want to follow, we have to willingly accept sacrifice. David knew it. Jesus experienced it. So must we. The sacrificial life can really hurt. We are not talking about an intellectual experience, but a real one. For example:-

One lady turned her heating down, and suffered in the cold in the UK, (where winters are really cold) so that she could give more to the Lord.

One person sacrificed her whole month's earnings, and suffered greatly, so that she could give to the Lord.

One person left a really well paid job, and went into the Lord's service. This was a very costly sacrifice.

One man went to South America, and starved to death because no one would listen to the message of Jesus, and support him

One man was murdered in a Muslim country, because he spoke out for Jesus.

This list could go on and on, and it's really important to grasp this one truth – sacrifice is a real physical and emotional pain and cost.

2. Jesus had a sacrificial heart. That's how he was able to give his life away, so that God's purposes could be worked out. If we want to follow Jesus, and if we want to claim the title "Christian," then sacrifice is a part of the foundation of our life. It is not an option, and we will not want it to be so. But as we want to be like Jesus, so we must have a sacrificial heart. It seems to me that so often, we who are his followers are very selfish. We want all his blessings, but allow him to do all the sacrificing! It is so important that we also take our share in the sacrificially victorious Christian life which he wants for us.

Deeper still

The roots of sacrifice are to be found in the theology of the cross. Many of God's African leaders have never arrived at such a theology, perhaps because they feel it is too complex. It is true to say that it is not simple, but it is understandable. I think that it is very important, not just in the understanding of sacrifice, but in understanding all the things of God, to have a good understanding of the cross. Here is one simple outline:-

1. The cross is the place of payment, where Jesus, dying in our place, paid the price for our sins. (This is known as substitutionary atonement.)

"Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:4-6)

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Cor 5:21)

2. The cross is the place of sacrifice. Jesus was the sacrifice which made things right between us and God.

"The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'" (John 1:29)

"So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him." (Hebrews 9:28)

3. The cross is the place of victory. Satan was defeated once and for all. His schemes and plans came to nothing.

"When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." (Colossians 2: 13-15)

4. Closely linked to the defeat of Satan are two other principles:-

The destruction of all curses:-

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.’” (Galatians 3:13)

The place of healing:-

“Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows.” (Isaiah 53:4)

As we take hold of this good theology, so we are taking hold of the roots of sacrifice, which are deeply rooted in the Old Testament. Abraham, Esther, Hosea, Jeremiah and Zechariah all teach and explain the concept of sacrifice. From this foundation, we have to grasp a theology of personal sacrifice, for ourselves, and for those we have to teach and lead. How might such a theology look?

1. Sacrifice first:- “Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.’” (Mark 8:34)

2.No compromise:- “Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, ‘O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.’”(Daniel 3:16-18)

3. No limit:- “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” (John 10:11)

God is in control

I got talking to an official at Kotaka airport recently. He wanted to tell me about what God was doing in Wa. We had time to talk, while he processed my visa. He had a vision for a school there, and said “I believe God wants it. God can do it.” I suspect none of my African readers would be surprised at this conversation. We have this conviction that God is in control of circumstances, and we love to share this truth. But I know that many of my western readers would be amazed. “You mean an immigration official talked like that to you at the control booth!” Yes- naturally. Why wouldn’t he? “And he expects God to build a school because he believes it?” Yes. “Well, I mean, that’s just foolishness.” No it is not foolishness, because another of the roots of African theology is a total belief that God is in control. God is in control of my life, my Church, my home, my business, my school, my Government, my country. We are all in his hands, and he will lead and guide us. This is an agreed truth between all of us. There is no doubt here. We expect him to act for us, to answer us, to do outrageous things for us, because he is God. When the Bible says “Nothing is impossible with God” (Luke 1:37) we take that as a foundation theological principle. This makes it possible for God to use us in his eternal purposes in a powerful way. What is so different here from the West? Simply that we do expect and believe it, without hesitation, qualification or lack of faith. On this foundation God can lead us forward, and raise up Africa.

Going deeper

Read these verses:

“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father.” Mt 10:29

“This is what the LORD says: ‘Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.’ But you said, ‘We will not walk in it.’” Jer 6:16

Study these principles:

1. God is not up in heaven, leaving us to get on with living on the planet he has made. He is actively involved with us, as we live in his creation. He can be known, and wants to know us. To us this seems normal, but other religions do not have a god who is so approachable, and who wants to be closely identified with creation.
2. God does not insist that we do what he says. He is not a dictator, and we are not puppets, dancing on the end of his strings. We have free will, and can choose to disobey or ignore him. This has consequences, for us and for God. For us, it means that we can easily step out of his plan and his protection. For him, it means that his plans can be easily spoiled by our disobedience. But he is prepared to risk this, that he might know us, and we might know him. What a wonderful God we serve.

Still deeper:

There is a very deep and complex theological issue here for those who would face it. This isn't a question of “black” theology “ or “western theology.” This is a basic challenge to all theology. Don't read on if you don't want to be disturbed!

A bishop in a Muslim country alerted the world press to a very dishonest legal decision which had sentenced a man to death for being a Christian. Under pressure from the world media, the government changed that decision. One week later, the bishop was murdered on his way home from church. Even to this day, no one has been prosecuted for his murder. The bishop was committed to Jesus. So why didn't Jesus protect him from this murderous attack?

This leads us to the heart of the issue - what kind of God is it who doesn't apparently protect his own from this kind of thing? If God is truly loving and caring, how do we explain this? This thinking has a technical name - theodicy. Theodicy is our attempt to sort out God's theology of himself. This is not for the average man or woman of God to worry too much about, but it is necessary for those who lead God's people. In thousands of years of trying, we haven't managed to answer this question. Job tried to find the answer. His friends tried to offer him explanations about his suffering as a result of being committed to God, but none of them really answered the question. So Job tried to find his own answer. Eventually he had to make do with God's “answer” in chapters 38 to 41. Was this a satisfactory answer? Read it for yourself, and see what you think.

Theodicy is a hard struggle, and a real privilege. Our God is willing to allow us to try and understand him. How does he think? How does he behave? How does he view suffering? Why does he allow things to go wrong? We must have the courage to think about these things. That's what makes the book of Job so important. God wants us to know him, to the limit of our understanding. If some things are beyond our understanding, then that in itself is understanding. Theodicy is God saying to us "I want you to know as much about me as you can." What a wonderful God we serve

I have a part to play.

I spoke at one meeting in Africa, and during my talk, God moved me prophetically to speak about people being called to ministries. One of them was a ministry among children. I said this:- "If God has touched you in any of these areas, please pray for one month, and then speak with your Pastor." The next morning a Pastor came to me and said "Prophet Jim, a woman came to see me this morning. She has been praying all night, and knows God has called her to this ministry with children. She wants to know when she can start!" So much for waiting a month, but like so many African Christians, she wants to serve, and she is keen to get on with it.

In Africa, we make ourselves available to God to serve. We are not like Moses, waiting with five good reasons not to serve. We are like Peter, just waiting for the chance to walk on the water! This attitude develops from all the other things I have outlined. We know God calls, we know God answers our prayers, we know he is looking for people to serve him, we know about sacrifice, and so we make ourselves available - sometimes too quickly! How God must love his African people. How he must love to call us to serve. In the West, it is proving increasingly difficult to find people to serve him in this way. Many ask questions like "how can I do it?" or "who will support me financially" or "this is not the time." In Africa, we just get on and play our part. In this way, we set an example of what a black theology leads to – a sacrificial and serving people.

These are such precious things, and as one who works in both black and white cultures, I can say without any doubt that these roots should make African theology strong. In the West, we give intellectual assent to these truths, but we don't live by them. So when I preach and ask for a response to the living word of God in my mouth, few respond. Most go away to "think about it", and that usually means forget about it. In Africa, my problem is stopping my audience from responding before I have finished my message! This positive desire to hear and respond to God is your black heritage! It has been passed down to you over the ages, and illuminated by the Scriptures, has the potential to make you a formidable spiritual army.

Of course you can learn from Western theology. To say otherwise would be to degrade what God is doing in the West. But stop degrading yourselves. These great and powerful roots are yours, and to be honest, I envy you a little!

Going deeper

Read this verse.

“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me as you have said.” Then the angel left her. Luke 1:38

Study this principle.

God does not force us to play any part in his plan. We have the choice to say no, and until we say yes, our part in his plan cannot begin. God looks for volunteers. It’s best this way. If we willingly accept to serve, then, when things get tough, we cannot complain. I chose to say yes to my calling as prophet. There have been many hard times since that day, and I have moaned and groaned quite a lot! But it was my free choice to accept, so I can’t accuse God of making me do something I didn’t want to do.

We don’t just have any part to play. God picks the people to do the jobs. He matches up our gifts and skills with the jobs he wants done. To kill Goliath, he choose David. (1 Samuel 17) To encourage God’s people he choose Barnabas. (Acts 4:36) To minister to himself he choose Mary Magdalene. (John 20: 1-18) To be his mother he choose Mary. He calls us to tasks he has equipped us for, and he calls us by our names. Having a free choice is a very great privilege. The King of Kings and Lord of Lords asks me if I would consider being a part in his plan! What a fantastic honour.

Deeper still

We cannot remain children in the area of service. It is a fantastic privilege, but also a very tough one. When we step out to serve, the enemy targets us in a way that we do not experience when we remain in the sheep fold. We have to accept that serving God is a painful and hard process. Saying “yes” and playing our part can lead to:-

Intense difficulty. (Jeremiah 37:13-15)

A lifetime of pain. (Hosea)

Uncertainty. (Mary – Luke 2:35)

Struggle. (Paul – 2 Corinthians 11:22-29)

Death. (Stephen. Acts 7:59)

Sometimes, under this kind of pressure, we end up shouting “What’s going on?” This was a question Job asked again and again, but never got an answer. Service is tough, and we have to be tough to endure, to press on, to reach the goal, whatever the cost.

“But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.

What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.” (Philippians 3:7-8)

Say “Yes” by all means. Accept the part we have to play. But realise also that we are walking into a battlefield, where the dangers are plentiful and the cost of remaining are very high. This realistic approach will not weaken our courage, but strengthen our hearts, so that we can serve more and more.

3. Preparation

In the summer of 2003, I led an international prophetic Conference in Kumasi. It was at this conference that the original “black theology” was published. The conference was a powerful event, and everything flowed smoothly. But it had taken 18 months of hard preparation to make this conference run so well. We had faced many difficult problems, and once or twice, we found it hard to believe that we would ever do it. But we did! Our careful preparation brought the blessing.

I believe that the same is true for Africa. Twice it blessed Jesus – by giving him shelter in Egypt, and by carrying his cross. For two thousand years since, the enemy has been trying to destroy Africa, because of what the continent did. He has attacked, torn and divided the Continent. He has robbed Africa of wealth, prosperity and education. He has brought many invaders, from many lands, who have destroyed, enslaved and reduced the people to feeling worthless. The enemy wants to rejoice at this, but, as usual, he has misunderstood the purposes of God. This long period of agony has, I believe, been a time of preparation. God has been preparing his suffering servant Africa, so that, at his appointed time, she will be ready to take her place as the leader of the Christian world. It's worth reading of the suffering of the servant in Isaiah. From these passages, we can develop our theology of suffering as a preparation for service. This is what I believe has been happening to Africa. If this is true, then the suffering is not a cause for despair, but a reason for hope. God is preparing, in order to use us. The whole Christian world will one day rejoice at our strength, and recognise that God has prepared and called. This is a cause of great encouragement and hope.

Going deeper

Read these verses:

“Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope.”(Isaiah 42:1-4)

See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Just as there were many who were appalled at him— his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness—so will he sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand. Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our

iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed . We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. (Isaiah 52:13 -53:11)

Study these principles

In these servant songs, we see the hard and painful preparation which is necessary for all those who serve the Lord. Africa has been struck, beaten, insulted, humiliated, broken and destroyed. So was the servant of the Lord. Yet God sees this breaking as part of his preparation – his preparation of his servant, so that he could serve and triumph. The centuries of hurt and pain have been Africa's preparation. Perhaps we are not yet at the end, but we are approaching that time. Africa will rise up, serve and triumph. God has placed his trust in us, and his trust will be seen, in the coming centuries to have been well placed.

Deeper still

Our difficulty with a theology of preparation is that we see it in the short term – years, decades – whereas God is dealing in centuries and millennium. This doesn't suit our African mentality! It is worth studying the longer term plans of God, not only to be encouraged, but to see how his plan develops and matures as the centuries roll past. What we learn from the rescue of Noah (Genesis 8:21-22) is very different from what we learn from the vision of Jeremiah, (Jeremiah 31: 31-34) the vision of Daniel,(chapter 7) the thunder of Malachi (Malachi 3:1) the visit of the magi,(Matthew 2:2) and expectations of the second coming. (1 Thess 5) As the preparations move forward, so our understandings change and develop. We must be prepared to spend time in reflection and study on the dealing of God with his people. His principles do not change. But be warned – this is a dangerous experiment, because it will change us, our thinking, our attitudes, our expectations, and our behaviour.

4. Provision

“Go at once to Zarepath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow there to supply you with food.”(1 Kings 17:9)

This verse doesn't reflect black or white belief. It is the universal principle of the Bible - God provides for the needs of his work and his workers. But here comes the lack of black theology. Many black Pastors have changed this slightly to “God provides for the needs

of his work as I plead with the rich west to give.” Poor black theology has led to the failure to seek the face of the providing God of the Bible for the needs of the ministry. One of the strengths of early Pentecostalism in Africa was the understanding that Africa must and will be able to meet the needs which God calls on Africa to meet. The Pastors and leaders sought God for his purposes, and then called on the people to sacrifice so that those needs would be met. So what has gone wrong?

Because Africa is so poor, and poverty breeds a poverty of thought, a poverty of theology and a poverty of commitment. Seeing prosperity elsewhere, black Africa prostituted itself to get this wealth for the purposes of God. I get a steady stream of e mails asking me for money. One said “I will come to your conference. Please send me the return air fare.” One said “I am getting married. Here is my Western Union number. Send me money.” One said “We need a new car to do God’s will. Please send us the money.” African people please learn the lesson - - this demeans God’s work and workers in Africa. How he grieves to see you becoming beggars. Just one additional comment. So many Africans have sent so many letters and e mails begging from the West, that now it is getting more and more difficult to get money to do work in Africa. One prominent English Christian said to me “I never answer any letter from Africa. If you do, the next one asks for money.”

Because Africa has forgotten the power of sacrifice. Forgotten? Yes. It is the sacrifice of God’s people which God is looking for, so that He can bless us. He is able to provide everything needed for his work instantly if he so wishes. But he tends to provide as we sacrifice the little we have to give him. (John 6:9)

In our sacrifice, he sees our love for himself, and he performs works in abundance to what we can ask or expect. But we have to sacrifice. From our poverty we have to give, and God will use our gifts to bless his people, his Church, Africa, the world

Because Africa has lost sight of the true God. One African leader wrote this:-“Wherever God has put you, he has placed enough resources to take care of your need.” I would want to go further and say “Whenever God calls on his people to enter into any works in his name, he will release through us enough recourses to meet his challenge.” I’m not saying that the West cannot help Africa. What I am saying is that Africa should look to itself to fulfil the purposes of God for Africa. This is true theology.

Because Africa has lost sight of its value. In Ghana, whenever a piece of work is suggested, the first questing seems to be “who will pay?” This is a non question, because if God calls us to a project, He will release us to pay, so that His kingdom can come. God can multiply, but not if we think we are worthless, and have little to offer. We look at the rich West, who can, we think, do much more than we can, because they have the resources, and we feel inadequate. It is a short step then to stop believing in God’s love and passion for Africa. We stop responding to his love.

And we lose the blessing. This last is so important. I give to God’s work, because I want a share in the blessing. If I am forever looking to others to provide, and they do provide, they get the blessing. This is where the lack of black theology destroys us. The West give, and take the blessing which their giving generates. We are left with nothing but a poverty of spirit.

Black theology demands that this comes to an end. The Western Church will always give to us, because they love us. But they must be the second line of giving. They themselves must be moved to give by the Holy Spirit, not by our begging letters. We are God's first line of provision. We must give until it hurts, and brothers and sisters it will never hurt us terminally. A short term pain for a long term gain – the raising up of Africa. Surely if I can see that, and I am from the West, then you who belong and inherit this great heritage, should see it more clearly that I do. Just one word on my "westernness." A white journalist, who worked for all his life in South Africa said this " A true African is distinguished not by the colour of his skin, but by his inner attitudes." I share your "inner attitudes." I do feel that I am an African on the inside, and perhaps the best proof of that is what you are reading here.

Going deeper

Read this verse: "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want." (Philippians 4:12)

"And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:19)

Study this principle.

We know that God provides, and this simple principle has sustained God's people through the centuries. But there is a deeper issue here, which goes beyond the simple level of trust and obedience:-

Where is our Provider God in the starvation of Ethiopia, the child mutilation in Sierra Leone, or the genocide in Rwanda? Or to bring it much nearer home, many in Africa are suffering, struggling to provide daily bread for themselves and their children. Times are hard, and many are struggling. Where is the provider God?

We have to take a very broad theological view here, and the Apostle sums it up well – we have to learn to be content in plenty or in need. Our provider God does and will provide. Sometimes he does not, for deeper purposes which we cannot understand. But does not this theology fail when faced with famine, mutilation or genocide? Yes it does, if we try to turn God into a divine shop keeper, who has to open his store and give us whatever we need whenever we want it. But it does not fail if we are able to hold on to the biblical position that God provides, and knows the plans and purposes he has for us. It does not fail when we accept the privileges and pains of mature service. It will fail, if we remain children, demanding sweets, and kicking and shouting when we do not have them. Provision is a challenge to our maturity.

Deeper still

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:33)

Jesus came and died, in the middle of the chaos and uncertainties of what it means to be human. What we didn't realise at the time was that this was the most wonderful provision by our provider God, for our spiritual salvation and restoration. On this foundation, we approach life, being, as he was, content in plenty or need. Of course we will be perplexed when he doesn't provide physically. What I am trying to say is that this perplexity is part of what it means to be human. Take it away, and follow a God who provides at our command, and we are no longer fully human, facing the same life as those we want to see redeemed.

Living in the confusion of God the provider, who can, but sometimes doesn't. This is the challenge to our faith and life. Sorry African theologians – there is no easy answer here. Not all theology can be reduced to answers. Sometimes we have to be strong enough to handle the uncertainty of it all, believing that ultimately the “Alpha and the Omega” knows what he is doing.

4. Destiny

God has a purpose for his creation, and for every part of it, and all creation is longing for the sons of God to enter into this destiny. This includes Africa. God has a destiny and purpose for Africa. I personally believe that it is to assume leadership of the Christian world in the coming generations. The Lord is looking for a man to stand in the gap, for a son after his own heart, for a people who will pilgrim with him, towards his ultimate goal. For a people who will suffer struggle, endure, and triumph. God spoke this to me about Africa, and perhaps it is part of the destiny of the continent:

God has raised a banner over Africa.

The banner of love, of freedom, of service.

“In this continent” says the Lord

“I will show my power.

From here a river will begin to flow, to the North and to the South, to the East and to the West. A river of cleansing for my broken and dying world.

Nations of the world will be blessed.

But first my people must be cleansed,
be filled with new power, with new fire.

The leaders of the Nations must be cleansed,
and become the servants of the people they lead.

The leaders of the Churches must be cleansed,
and given the servant heart, the shepherd heart
to feed and lead my people.

My people must be cleansed, and in confessing,
I will fill the Churches with a new fire - as has never been seen before.

Then the river will begin to flow.
I will send hundreds, thousands out from
this continent to bless, to heal,
to intercede for my broken world.

Come now to my cross.”

But here is the black theological problem – most Africans don’t believe it. The reason is simple - they have little or no appreciation of their black destiny. Having been beaten down so much, they see only the destiny of the world through the eyes of other cultures. Forgetting how God has used Africa in the past, they sell their destiny for a handful of dollars, pounds, euros or Yen. The price of this prostitution is the hope of the people of God for His purposes within their own lands.

It is easy to understand how this happens. Life for most of us in Africa is a daily grind to get food, to get work, to care for our families, survive illness, robbery and disaster. Pressed down by the lifestyle of Africa, and dazzled by the riches of the West, we give up on our own destiny. But this robs us of hope and purpose, and steals away our determination to pray and work towards God’s goals for us. We lose the present and we lose the future. There is nothing for us and nothing for our future. But God makes this clear to us :-

“For I know the plans I have for you’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future.’” (Jeremiah 29:11)

How can we fulfil this destiny if we don’t believe for it? And how can we believe for it if we don’t grasp our blackness, our uniqueness, and begin to serve God within that culture?

Going deeper

Read these verses:-

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” (Jeremiah 1:5)

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

“Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:11)

God clearly has a plan, for individuals, fellowships and for the world, as the verses above show. A study of the history of God’s working with Israel through the biblical history books, (Genesis to Nehemiah) show this clearly. The Old Testament period

was working towards the birth of Jesus, and the New Testament is sending us on our way to the return of Jesus and the ultimate consummation of His plans. We can be confident that “Alpha and Omega” (Revelation 1:8) is moving towards His purposes.

Even when we fail to see the purposes of God apparently not completing themselves in our generation, we have the conviction that God’s purposes will complete themselves, and we have the understanding that we are part of that completion process. Ultimately, God will bring his purposes to pass, and no one can hinder him. This gives us courage, and the ability to sacrifice ourselves for the greater purposes of God. We are made stronger with a wider view, and weaker when we see the purposes of God as just for our life, our village, our time.

Still deeper

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord.” (Isaiah 55:8)

There is a theological challenge here, and it’s a good place to end our thinking. Is history moving remorselessly towards its end, and is everything inevitable? If we adopt such a position, then we might as well become Muslims, trapped like them in the doctrine of kismet. Or are we free spirits, working with God to his ultimate purposes? If we adopt the second position, then does it become possible for the plans of God to be spoiled by the actions of men?

I think this is a question which we will not be able to resolve. In the end, God is God, and some things are beyond us.

Final comment

God has given black Africa the intellectual capability to understand his will and his ways. It’s not easy for us, and the way out is to say “Poor us. We will have to get western missionaries in to help us.” Don’t get me wrong – I am glad for all the help which western missionaries can bring – I’m one! But the danger is that we become substitutes for Africans doing their own thinking, their own study, making their own interpretations of what God is saying, and putting this thinking into action within the African culture and continent, in a way which is natural to them, if not to guests and visitors..

Let Africa do its own thinking, and seek its own way. While I don’t want you to break from those western friends which long to help, I want you to resist those who bring western influence without any appreciation of the black culture. I don’t advocate isolationism - we are one family. But I plead with Africa – do your own thinking. Arrive at your own intellectual conclusions, and offer them to God for his work in this continent. Stop saying “Poor us!” Start the hard struggle toward a true African Christian intellectualism . Western books western bible schools, western teachers – these can all help, but they all come with a theology which is white. We are seeking a theology which is black.

I long to see an increasing stream of African theologians, writing and expressing their thoughts in African books, published in Africa for Africans to read and debate. Of course there will be lots of mistakes and errors. But this is no reason to turn away from the attempt. Through these mistakes will emerge good African theology and thinking.

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