

Swords into Ploughshares, Spears into Pruning Hooks

I expect we can all picture ploughing today, a tractor pulling a heavy wide metal frame with a multitude of curved metal blades designed to dig in then turn over the ground. When Isaiah was writing, an ox dragged a wooden beam, to which several pointed rough-hewn iron blades were attached, to no more than break-up the ground. I guess the tipped end of a broken sword or spear might be ideal for recycled use on the plough! The sword will be uniting our two passages today.

Read Isaiah 2: 1-5

No surprise that Isaiah's vision implanted by God begins with His first desire and priority – all peoples returning to their true Father. Those who are far away (physically and/or spiritually) will see afresh God raised up and beckoning them. Who will raise God up? Answer = Judah/Jerusalem/Temple/Zion, which today these terms are all best understood as 'God's people/witnesses', that's you and me.



1a. What will God's people demonstrate to the peoples God is beckoning in the vision? Is all our discussion of 'welcome' in recent home group meetings relevant here too?

1b. Depicted are peoples at war, perhaps actually physically fighting, but equally, would encompass mental stresses and strains, emotional and spiritual warfare, and crucially, God's people are not excluded from the need to work for peace amongst themselves as well as with others (v. 5). Too often perhaps we have the sword in our hand when it should be a ploughshare. Let's have a short time of prayer now to pray for blessing and encouragement for all peace makers in all situations, large or small. And, especially in relation to 'Remembrance', those who have been impacted by the ravages of war.

1c. Are there times and circumstances when a Christian should have a sword in hand? If so, what might these be?

1d. Picture the plough at work; breaking the ground, turning over / turning back, aerating /enabling, old to new. Why do you think this ploughing picture so appropriate for this passage?

Read Ephesians 6: 10-17

2a. I'm not the first to point out that, of the parts of armour needed, all are for defensive use except one, the sword. The ratio is 5 defensive against one offensive. What reasons would you give to explain this?

2b. "The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God". Are your defences up or down when you read the word of God? What experiences can you identify as being 'pierced' by the Word.

2c. All the armour, including the sword, are to defend ourselves against 'all the flaming arrows of the evil one'. What connection do you see with 'Remembrance Sunday'? What sort of shape do these arrows now take, and how do we keep our armour ever-ready? Will our armour still work?

Prayer: We offer ourselves to be the instruments of your peace, and witnesses to your love. Give peace in our time, O God, through him who is called the Prince of Peace, Your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Jamie Wallace