

It's not about the numbers really! Daniel ch.9

Today's TFTD is from the Revd Rod Hill of Alderley Edge Methodist Church

Some of you will know, by now, that I am a bit weird – well, aren't we all, just a little bit?

If I'm on a long car journey, especially on the Motorway, I like to play in my head with the numbers on the car in front. It's not just the numbers, though, it's the letters too.

Here's what I like to do. First, I turn each of the letters into numbers, based on their position in the alphabet – in the example above A=1, F=6 and so on. Then I add all of those numbers together and if I get a total bigger than 9 I add the numbers up again, and again, until it's a number between 1 and 9. So, in the above example it will come to 1.

I know, I know – but it entertains me and keeps me alert. So it is that I find the numbers in this passage absolutely fascinating and I wonder what the significance is of 490, or 434, or 7. Lots of ink has been spilled over the numbers that we find in Daniel, and in Revelation, and in their symbolism. But much as I find the numbers fascinating, I want to suggest that to focus there, in this story, is to miss the point entirely – at least, as far as people today are concerned. The message for today is not, I think, to be found in the numbers. No, it's in the attitude with which Daniel comes before God in this passage.

Daniel comes before God “speaking and praying, confessing my sin and

the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the Lord my God for his holy hill”.

Daniel approaches God in an attitude of confession, not only for himself but also for his people. Its almost a truism that the Church is not the place for perfect people, but for sinners who know their need of forgiveness. Its absolutely right that when we come to God in worship, we come in an attitude of repentance but all too often we individualise that, as if sin was only a matter between ‘me’ and ‘my God’; as if faith were a purely private matter – it isn’t, it’s an intensely public matter.

Forgive me if I mention it again, but corruption isn’t just an African thing, as some suggest. It’s an endemic part of how human society seems to work, it’s an expression of corporate sinfulness that goes way beyond the greed or sinfulness of one person. As I write this I’ve just been looking at the news regarding the provision of personal protective equipment in the early weeks of the current pandemic and how some people were able to procure ‘lucrative contracts’ by knowing the right people, or so it seems.

At every end and turn in our national life at the moment it seems that human sinfulness is to the fore, even the selfishness of some who refuse to wear masks or are abusive to shopworkers. Oh yes, we need to come before God in confession, not just for ourselves, but also for our nation.

Daniel’s vision then goes on to speak of God finishing transgression, putting an end to sin, atoning for wickedness, bringing in everlasting righteousness and sealing up vision and prophecy ‘to anoint the Most Holy Place’. It’s a really positive and forward-looking vision for the future but, in the meantime

Its not the numbers that matter, it's the attitude!

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