

and his presidential responsibilities), inverting the thinking of a significant 1970s book, *Small is Beautiful*. Is smallness now to be viewed with disdain?

My kindly PhD examiner, the late Canon Donald Allchin, suggested that 'a small nation is not the same as a large nation', not least in terms of power (over). Of course, small nations can be petty and mediocre and delusional and sometimes even rogue. Smallness does not inevitably save any from perpetrating wrong (and my nation of Scotland historically has embraced enthusiastically the imperial aspirations of larger neighbours). Yet, in their relative weakness and vulnerability, small nations may (at their best) have an orientation towards creative dynamics, awareness of interdependence, avoidance of a desire for dominance, a sense of community inside and outwith, an alignment with others' vulnerability, and the seeking a world role rooted in other than economic, political or indeed military power.

To suggest this is neither to be blind where history tells another story, nor to claim some moral high ground. The best instincts of small nations come in part from the realisation that they are denied the possibilities of a large nation. For many in the smaller nations, however, there is perhaps a sense that some talk of recovering greatness feels alien, not least because we are trying to explore what smallness, weakness and vulnerability mean for us in the world today.

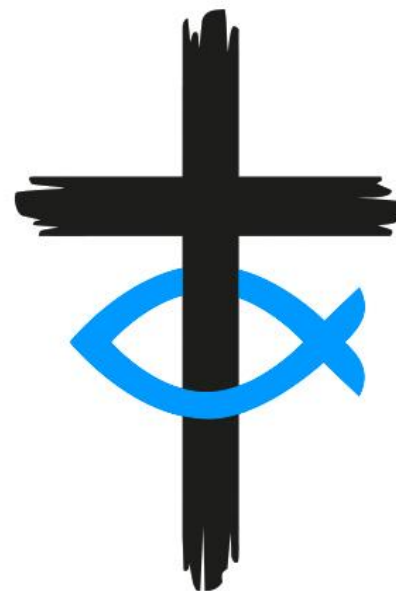
#### Prayer

God, your power is exercised in enabling humanity to reflect your love and peace and justice for the world you have made.

Saviour, your power is expressed most fully in the vulnerability of the Cross for the sake of the world to whom you came.

Holy Spirit, your power is at work when we humbly embrace the potential of the weak in power to challenge and to change how we live together. Amen.

## Daily Devotions from the URC The State We're In



*Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> October – Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> November*

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## The State We're In

The United Kingdom finds itself in what might, euphemistically be called “interesting times”. All through the Summer ideas of leaving the European Union with no agreed deal with our former partners have been floated, along with ideas about early General Elections, care taker governments and optimism about a new deal being found that will commend itself to Parliament. Laws have been passed about Brexit, the government have said they will and won't obey the law. Courts have been ruling on the suspension of Parliament and whether the Prime Minister misled Her Majesty The Queen.

There was a narrow majority of 52% to leave the EU. Scotland, however, voted by 62% to remain and now finds itself having to leave without its consent despite being told, in the Independence Referendum that the only way to stay in the EU was to stay in the UK!

Believing that our Devotions should inform, and be informed by, our context various writers who live and work in Scotland have crafted 7 Devotions which, we hope, will stimulate discussion, thought and

and we see that we are all made in your image,  
precious and loved by you.

Open our eyes to each other  
and our hearts. Amen

[Saturday 2nd November The State We're in...Despise not the Small](#)

The Rev'd Dr Jack Dyce is a retired URC minister, a former Principal of the Scottish United Reformed & Congregational College, and now its Emeritus Professor of Nordic Theology.

Zechariah 4:6-10

He said to me, 'This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts. What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain; and he shall bring out the top stone amid shouts of "Grace, grace to it!"' Moreover, the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also complete it. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you. For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel. 'These seven are the eyes of the Lord, which range through the whole earth.'

Reflection

'What do you want to be when you grow up?' – a question generally aimed at eliciting a child's vocational aspirations and ambitions – sometimes gets the answer 'Big', which was indeed the response of Tom Hanks in the comedy film of that name. Whether we are talking about nations or persons, the attractions of largeness are apparent – status, agency, resources, rewards, power. Bigness can be imagined as beautiful (as President Trump is reported as saying of the Oval Office

Empire is attractive. At least for those who are in charge and those who benefit from the exploitation of others. But what happens when those who are at the sharp end decide that enough is enough?

What happens when a different story about who we are and what is important begins to take hold? A story that says that everyone belongs, that there is no 'them' and 'us'. That the resources of the country should be for the benefit of all the people, not just some of them. It's no surprise that when two groups of people see themselves in very different ways that separation would be on the agenda.

In Rehoboam's time that's exactly what happened. The Northern and Southern parts of the Kingdom split because people eventually decide that enough is enough.

As Burns wrote:

O wad some Power the giftie gie us  
To see oursels as ithers see us!  
It wad frae mony a blunder free us,  
An' foolish notion:  
What airs in dress an' gait wad lea'e us,  
An' ev'n devotion!

Prayer

God of all,  
not just me,  
not just people like me,  
not even of just the people I like,  
you have given us the power  
to see ourselves as others see us.

When we look hard enough  
our differences fall away

prayer. We want to be able to speak about the State We're In as our context rapidly changes.

[Saturday 26th October The State We're In - Repentance](#)

The Rev'd Craig Jesson is Minister of Park URC, Airdrie; Coatbridge URC and Cumbernauld URC in Lanarkshire.

St Luke 19: 1 – 10

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax-collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a Sycomore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.' So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, 'He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.' Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, 'Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.'

Reflection

At the heart of Brexit is a desire, primarily by the more southerly residents of the United Kingdom, to "take back control" and not to be an equal partner in a family of European nations. This is fed by the, erroneous, myth of British exceptionalism and a looking back to the false glory of Empire.

All parts of Britain gained and profited from the Empire. As a result of a failed overseas project, brought about by Westminster in its desire to persuade Scotland to unite and benefit from joint empire building, the Scottish Lairds and noblemen voted for the Union of the Parliaments in 1707. In the aftermath of that Union, Scotland and the other countries of the Union profited excessively from the exploitation of other nations and, thence, the slave trade. A traveller on a journey down the Firth of Clyde today, may visit communities such as Kilcreggan, Cove, Blairmore, Rothesay, Tighnabruaich, or Largs, and marvel at the numerous very large country houses and castles; many of these were built directly or indirectly by the profits of Scottish Caribbean or American plantations and the capture, trade and exploitation of African people as slave labour.

Other imperial powers have had to repent - Japan and Germany in particular – and, as a result of coming to terms with their past, have flourished. Britain, like Russia and America hasn't come to terms with our imperial designs - nor, in our case, a loss of Empire. What might repentance look like in the context of empire given that our Union was an imperialist project?

For Zacchaeus repentance meant putting things right not just expressing sorrow. Making financial reparations would bankrupt the United Kingdom, but, perhaps, eradicating racism in our country by channelling vast amounts of money into predominantly black or Asian communities for social, educational, medical and mental welfare improvements might be a good start. If we were to improve the quality and availability of social housing, remove the postcode lottery from good NHS healthcare, improve schools and make universities more accessible, then we might begin to make right some of the wrongs that still haunt our own land.

If we were to clamber up that Sycamore tree to better see Jesus, I wonder...would he walk right past us, or would he see promise in us as he saw in Zacchaeus.

say to them, “My little finger is thicker than my father’s loins. Now, whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.”

So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam on the third day, as the king had said, ‘Come to me again on the third day.’ The king answered the people harshly. He disregarded the advice that the older men had given him and spoke to them according to the advice of the young men, ‘My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.’ So the king did not listen to the people, because it was a turn of affairs brought about by the Lord that he might fulfil his word, which the Lord had spoken by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam son of Nebat.

#### Reflection

People all over the country are feeling the strain. Work is crippling with long hours and low pay. Housing is poor. Food is scarce for many. People are barely getting by and they are being made to work ever harder by a leader who wants only to increase his own power and influence and the wealth of his followers. The leader is presented with legitimate demands by representatives of the people to improve their working conditions in return for greater productivity and loyalty and he takes advice from the wise old men who have seen it all before. They counsel mercy, but the bullish new leader, keen to show just how tough he is, listens to his younger advisors who are keen to get more as quickly as they can, and at any cost. They even countenance further enslavement of their own people as well as the foreigners they have already forced into punishing jobs that the locals don’t want to do.

And they say the Bible has nothing to say about current affairs!

Help our words to be true,  
our critiques to be fair,  
and our politics to be just. Amen.

Friday 1st November [The State We're In...6: The End of Empire](#)

The Rev'd Stewart Cutler is minister of St Ninian's Church in Stonehouse - a Local Ecumenical Partnership between the Church of Scotland and the URC.

1 Kings 12: 1 - 15

Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had come to Shechem to make him king. When Jeroboam son of Nebat heard of it (for he was still in Egypt, where he had fled from King Solomon), then Jeroboam returned from Egypt. And they sent and called him; and Jeroboam and all the assembly of Israel came and said to Rehoboam, 'Your father made our yoke heavy. Now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke that he placed on us, and we will serve you.' He said to them, 'Go away for three days, then come again to me.' So the people went away.

Then King Rehoboam took counsel with the older men who had attended his father Solomon while he was still alive, saying, 'How do you advise me to answer this people?' They answered him, 'If you will be a servant to this people today and serve them, and speak good words to them when you answer them, then they will be your servants for ever.' But he disregarded the advice that the older men gave him, and consulted the young men who had grown up with him and now attended him. He said to them, 'What do you advise that we answer this people who have said to me, "Lighten the yoke that your father put on us"?' The young men who had grown up with him said to him, 'Thus you should say to this people who spoke to you, "Your father made our yoke heavy, but you must lighten it for us"; thus you should

Prayer

Loving God, help us to reform our thinking.  
May we seek to become a people of potential, like Zacchaeus.  
May we work together to eradicate individual and community inequality.  
May we become a nation renowned for the way we share our wealth so that poverty and inequality have no place in any of our communities.  
We can do this, gracious God, with your help and by your grace. Amen.

Sunday 27th October [Psalm 120](#)

Jeff Newall, Lay Preacher, Christ the Vine Community Church, Coffee Hall, Milton Keynes

1 I call upon the LORD in my distress;  
He listens to my prayer and answers me.  
2 Deliver me, O LORD, from lying lips  
And from all tongues that speak deceitfully.

3 What will he do to you, deceitful tongue?  
What more besides will be your fitting doom?  
4 With warriors' arrows he will pierce you through,  
And punish you with burning coals of broom.

5 What misery to live in Meshech's land,  
In Kedar's tents, among my enemies!  
6 With people loving strife I've lived too long;  
7 They are for war, but I'm a man of peace.

Reflection

My personal spiritual journey is currently taking me on a year-long prayerful stroll through the New Testament. My focus is on what it

teaches us about prayer. As well as the various questions of prayer - the who, what, where, when, why and how from which we can all learn and apply for ourselves - I'm finding many prompts for prayer, even when the subject of prayer itself isn't being discussed.

In this short Psalm of just seven verses, thought to have been written by Jeremiah, we are given the same opportunity. It begins with a reminder that whenever we turn to the Lord, He will answer us. This assurance should encourage us to pray. Verse 2 asks specifically that we be protected from people speaking falsely about us.

A recurring theme in both Scripture and prayer is that of peace, considered here in verses 6 & 7. It prompts me to think about parts of the world which currently don't know what peace feels like. It leads me to pray for those who are working hard to bring peace to our troubled world. Most of all, though, it challenges me to think about what I'm doing to bring about a peaceful world and to pray for God's guidance in achieving what I can. How might this Psalm lead you in prayer?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you that we can turn to You in Prayer, knowing that You are always being there for us.

As we serve You, may we be protected from those who may speak ill of us and of You.

We pray for peace in our world and for all those working for it.

Help us to do whatever we can.

In the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace.

Amen

decried the input of experts<sup>1</sup> and Mr Trump has made famous the slogan "fake news". It is hard to know if what we read, or view, is trustworthy. This isn't new.

Today's, little known, story from Genesis is ignored these days. Noah's curse was against Canaan yet generations of Christians suggested this was the "curse of Ham" who, despite no evidence, was depicted as black. Ham's supposed curse became part of a complex Biblical justification of the enslavement of black people. Slavery *per se* didn't need much justification as the Bible, generally, condones it. Some justification was needed, however, as to why pagan Africans could be enslaved but Christian Europeans couldn't. It took abolitionists several generations to persuade people that this was a misuse of the Bible.

Our nations are weary of Brexit - at the time of writing it's not clear what Brexit may look like. Experts are derided, news sources are treated with suspicion and we live in an age where our institutions are distrusted. Many in Scotland believe the media to be partisan. Many in the Labour party believe the mainstream news is biased against their political vision for the future. Many in European institutions believe the British press lied in its coverage of European affairs. This distrust, and the reasons for it, harms both our democracy and our civic institutions.

As Christians one thing we can positively add to the current state we're in is to be trustworthy ourselves, to check our facts and to be accurate in our words and actions. We can also play our part in calling out "fake news" and helping folk to, again, respect experts.

Prayer

O God, through your Word of truth all things came to be; we live, move and have our being in your gentle embrace.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/3be49734-29cb-11e6-83e4-abc22d5d108c>

The Rev'd Andy Braunston ministers with four churches in and around Glasgow. He is the Editor of the Daily Devotions.

Genesis 9: 20 - 29

Noah, a man of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard. He drank some of the wine and became drunk, and he lay uncovered in his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backwards and covered the nakedness of their father; their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said,

'Cursed be Canaan; lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers.'

He also said,

'Blessed by the Lord my God be Shem; and let Canaan be his slave. May God make space for Japheth, and let him live in the tents of Shem; and let Canaan be his slave.'

After the flood Noah lived for three hundred and fifty years. All the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years; and he died.

Reflection

We live in an era when we can no longer trust the news. The plurality of TV channels - some owned by other countries - means it's hard to know what's accurate; social media intersperses cute images of puppies with political campaigning and messaging (well it does in my Facebook feed!). During the EU referendum Michael Gove famously

Monday 28th October The State We're In...Imperial Nostalgia  
The Rev'd David Scott is the Minister of Duke Street in Leith and Saughtonhall in Edinburgh.

Deuteronomy 7: 1-5

When the Lord your God brings you into the land that you are about to enter and occupy, and he clears away many nations before you—the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations mightier and more numerous than you — and when the Lord your God gives them over to you and you defeat them, then you must utterly destroy them. Make no covenant with them and show them no mercy. Do not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for that would turn away your children from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the Lord would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly. But this is how you must deal with them: break down their altars, smash their pillars, hew down their sacred poles, and burn their idols with fire.

Reflection

It can be dangerous to step out of the present and go in to the past when looking to the future. The risk is that in doing so we apply the filter of nostalgia, which distorts our remembering and subtly leads us to a sentimental connection to and longing for all that was good and better but is no more.

Much of the debate prior to the European Referendum applied this filter when concerns about potential adverse implications on trade relations with our European partners were raised. Claims were made that there were other trade opportunities with reference given to the Commonwealth, old colonies and past dominions.

As a filter of imperial nostalgia was applied, the power abuse, destruction, injustice, killing and evil of the past failed to register. Indeed, it was such trade relations that built the grandeur of some of our cities and in particular busy thoroughfares in Glasgow such as Jamaica Street and Virginia Street. Imperial nostalgia is dangerous because it prevents us from seeing Empire for what it is, the costs it brought and the people, groups and organisations involved, including the Church.

Ancient Israel had imperial ambitions and believed they had authority from God to do all it took in order to dominate and control the people and land around them for their own gain. Such passages from Deuteronomy have been used as justification for many horrific experiences at many times and in many places. Yet we know that God always shows a preference for the weak, the poor and the oppressed, even when sadly, God's people are the oppressors.

Applying a filter of imperial nostalgia carries many dangers as we look from the present to the future, and discern God's guidance and will.

Prayer

God of all time, forgive our past actions.  
Forgive our past understanding.  
Make us learn from what was; recognise what is; and discern your will for what is to be. Amen

[Tuesday 29th October The State We're In...A Global Britain?](#)  
The Rev'd David Coleman is chaplain to Eco-Congregations, Scotland

Jonah 3: 1-10, 4: 1-5

It is 400 years since the first slaves arrived in America which was part of the English (later British) Empire and those slaves worked and died to make many men rich. The attitude of the slave owners was that some people were inferior and could be used however their masters wished. Has this changed or is modern day trafficking and slavery part of a legacy from those times? Over the past couple of years, I have spoken to many people who say that they want out of Europe because they don't want immigrants coming to Britain. Is their attitude another legacy of the time of the British Empire?

We can't change everyone's attitude, but we can follow the example of David and thank God for all that we have. We can lead by example and welcome immigrants and show how much they contribute to the United Kingdom. We can also follow the instruction of Paul in 1 Timothy 2 "I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people, for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness."

Prayer

Loving God,  
I thank you for all that you are.  
I ask you to give wisdom and strength to our leaders at this time.  
Lead them in a way that will bring peace and unity across this land.  
I pray for the all leaders and citizens across Europe  
and the whole of your world that they will work together for peace.  
I pray that these leaders, and citizens will work towards a solution to  
climate chaos that threatens your creation.  
Thank you for hearing my prayer  
In the name of Jesus your son. Amen



you have wrought all this greatness, so that your servant may know it. Therefore you are great, O Lord God; for there is no one like you, and there is no God besides you, according to all that we have heard with our ears. Who is like your people, like Israel? Is there another nation on earth whose God went to redeem it as a people, and to make a name for himself, doing great and awesome things for them, by driving out[g] before his people nations and their gods? And you established your people Israel for yourself to be your people for ever; and you, O Lord, became their God. And now, O Lord God, as for the word that you have spoken concerning your servant and concerning his house, confirm it for ever; do as you have promised. Thus your name will be magnified for ever in the saying, "The Lord of hosts is God over Israel"; and the house of your servant David will be established before you. For you, O Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, have made this revelation to your servant, saying, "I will build you a house"; therefore your servant has found courage to pray this prayer to you. And now, O Lord God, you are God, and your words are true, and you have promised this good thing to your servant; now therefore may it please you to bless the house of your servant, so that it may continue for ever before you; for you, O Lord God, have spoken, and with your blessing shall the house of your servant be blessed for ever.'

## Reflection

Writing this in August means that I have no idea what will happen tomorrow; will we leave, or will we stay? I can be sure that there will be a legacy of our time in the European Union.

In the passage from Samuel we read of King David settling into his house and, most significantly, enjoying a rest from his enemies and this rest was a gift from God. David did not claim that he was responsible for his house, for the peace he enjoyed or for anything else. He thanked the Lord for providing it all.

The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, 'Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.' So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, 'Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!' And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth. When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: 'By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish.' When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it. But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. He prayed to the Lord and said, 'O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. And now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.' And the Lord said, 'Is it right for you to be angry?' Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city.

## Reflection

Jesus talks in the Gospels of 'the sign of Jonah', and how the three days in the whale might be compared to the three in the tomb. The other aspect of the 'sign' concerns the Ninevans - seemingly oblivious of Jonah's intra-cetacean transportation. For me, the "Sign of Jonah" is, therefore, that Nineveh took notice and embraced change without first having to experience disaster. Indeed, without any need for religious conversion, or a detailed fact-check.

Would that my ministry as environmental chaplain could be blessed with such an impact: change, from top to bottom, forestalling disaster. Not excluding animal life!

The strong prospect of the elimination of environmental regulations following Brexit has always been sufficient in itself for me to oppose the severing of ties which, perhaps, embarrass those who speak of a 'global' Britain, because they involve obligations to neighbours. Neighbours who might, in the lifetime of my grandparents, have been seen as enemies, or pathetic recipients of aid.

The prospect of global climate catastrophe makes a brutal mockery of any, and every, form of isolationism. In Christ, as throughout the Earth in which He has become incarnate, there is neither Scot nor English, Welsh nor French, Irish nor Hungarian. Neither European, nor African, neither American nor Asian...

The flip-side of the life-enriching variety of human culture is also, always, the tragedy of providing an excuse to disregard the voice of those thus rendered 'foreign'. What is more foreign than the prophetic call for an end to the complacent status quo of endless exploitative growth or an end to our fossil fuel addiction?

Compared with the global damage already done, and the harm yet 'in the pipeline', the haggling over our<sub>10</sub> relations with European neighbours

is a triviality. And yet this smokescreen of identity politics has rendered us more alien to our own interests than were the Ninevites to the contemptuous mystical prophet, as presented with sharply biting humour in this satirically spiritual story.

## Prayer

Dear God!

Dear God!

Help us to love ourselves enough to love our neighbour that much, and the Earth we're both made of to finally take some notice of the voice of the Earth through the signs of our times.

(And your love in the fact of the warning.)

We pray for the sign of Jonah here, now, right now, in us

Dear God!

Dear God!

Amen!

[Wednesday 30th October The State We're In...A Blessed Empire?](#)

John Collings, Lay Preacher, member of Rutherglen URC

## 2 Samuel 7: 1-2, 18-28

Now when the king was settled in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, the king said to the prophet Nathan, 'See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent.'...Then King David went in and sat before the Lord, and said, 'Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far? And yet this was a small thing in your eyes, O Lord God; you have spoken also of your servant's house for a great while to come. May this be instruction for the people, O Lord God! And what more can David say to you? For you know your servant, O Lord God! Because of your promise, and according to your own heart,