

An Open Letter: The Corona Covid-19 Pandemic

While the world is trapped in the trenches of this virus, many are struggling to make sense of it in a way that satisfies their reasoning. To date, here are the approximate numbers: Globally, 2,243,710 infections and 154,215 deaths. The leading country is the US, reporting: 701,610 infections and 37,055 deaths. If these constantly rising numbers do not have your attention, then the country-wide restrictions on commerce, restaurants, schools, sports, entertainment and now social distancing are certainly compelling. Of course, the stock market has reacted to this with record declines as panic selling and volatility is now commonplace. The airwaves are filled with breaking news banners and interruptions to regularly scheduled programs with endless updates to restrictions and fresh toll numbers. In some states, there are evening curfews imposed with mandates to wearing face masks in public. We are constantly told to stay home with the hope that this will flatten the rising curve of infections and the devastating death toll. On top of all that, this is an election year in the US. So, there are political aspirations and posturing to factor into the mix. Just about everyone I know is affected in some way by the virus or the restrictions. A general feeling of anxiety is taking hold, with everyone longing for relief in the form of a promising drug or vaccine. We all would love to get back to what *was* normal.

From what I can see, Christians have not fared any better than the general population. I don't have any real numbers to support this observation other than my limited experience. To note, the bible does have plenty of examples of God using plagues in the world to impose His will (see Psalm 91:2-16). However, the claims that the blood of Jesus covering believers from the virus, and references to the Egyptian plagues not coming near them have *not* stayed the infections and death toll among Christians. Churches, like schools, for the most part are offering on-line services. Those insisting on meeting publically have come under great scrutiny and there are examples of the virus spreading more in some cases. So, what is the Christian response to this? Our witness to the world is important to our mission here as well as our own safety. While I cannot speak for the entire Christian world, I can certainly share my thoughts.

My message is simple and comes from our Lord before He departed, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33). Jesus was ministering to those 11 disciples, who, after Pentecost became the foundation of Apostles for the Church (Eph 2:20). So, in the world we can expect trouble, "pressure (literally or figuratively): - afflicted, (-tion), anguish, burdened, persecution, tribulation, trouble (Strong). Jesus did not say we would be free from trouble, or immune to it, but that it would be a part of our experience in this world. A question could be asked, what kind of trouble? Well, this world is the battlefield and Satan is the "ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient" (Eph 2:2). He is also called, "The god of this age" (2Cor 4:4). This is the devil's world and it is not redeemable. According to the word, for the foundations of the earth and the heavens, "They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end" (Heb 1:10-12). On top of all of this, Christians can also suffer due to the hatred of the world from our relationship to Christ (see John 15:18-21; Phil 1:29-30).

To summarize, this world is indeed wearing out. I can see signs of this in my short lifetime. I believe the environment and disease is a part of this deterioration of sin's effect on the world and it's "bondage to decay" (see also Rom 8:20-22). This all began when our first parents partook of the forbidden fruit. As already mentioned, there is certainly suffering that will be the result of our stance for Christ. We should know, "that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands" (2Cor 5:1). So, we are to serve the Lord while we are here on the battlefield, without fear. Our

motivation should be the hope we hold for the future. "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day" (2Cor 4:16). Just remember, as long as we live in this world, "outwardly we are wasting away". We may get sick and we may die, yes those are possibilities. While you can certainly, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1Pet 5:7), we are sure that, "our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all" (2Cor 4:17). We are here because "he chose us in him before the creation of the world" (Eph 1:4a). So, we are a new creation, and "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God" (2Cor 5:20).

While we cannot save the world, since it is destined to perish, we can be used of God to bring the light of the glorious gospel to the lost souls for whom Christ died. Infections and death are happening all around us. And for sure, our hearts are mourning and filled with sorrow for the souls perishing and transitioning into eternity, but we know there is hope. If we are still alive in this world, we have a mission. We (Christians) don't have a magic bullet or some supernatural healing power to fix everything. I realize many will disagree with this, but I think it is the reality. If you feel you have some special power over sickness and death, you should head over to the swamped hospital emergency rooms where you can make a difference. I don't believe it is our calling and that it is certainly NOT happening. (2Cor 11:1). We can and should pray for sure, but we *must accept* that God's will be the sufficient outcome, and not our will (see also 2Tim 4:20). In order to do this, we must continue to be encouraged in hope and available to God for His purposes. Stay focused and do not be distracted, "live a life worthy of the calling you have received" (Eph 4:1b). We are His witnesses in this world. In closing, here are some passages for reflection:

"Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen." 2Pe 3:17-18

"We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." 2Co 4:8-10, 18

"Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality." Rom 12:11-13

"Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured." Col 4:12

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God." 2Co 1:3-4

"We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." 2Co 5:8-10

"Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." 1Co 15:58

In Christ, Doug Presley
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