

EASTER SUNDAY SPECIAL

"Our Risen Lord's Directives On The Crisis We Face (Revelation 1:17-19a; 3:21 with 7:17)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

This Easter Sunday, even many ministers are struggling for answers over the way the coronavirus pandemic quarantine has shut down most religious activities. Tracy O'Shaughnessy's story, "Struggling against an evil force" in the Republican-American (April 3, 2020, p. 1B) told how one cleric told her, "I know . . . we should not fear, but . . . this could be really . . . bad." Another asked, "(H)ow do you manage a spiritual life after this? Because people went into this . . . saying, 'God will provide; God will get us through this.' But, then people who are not of the faith will question, 'What kind of God would allow people to lose their lives this way?'" (Ibid.) One pastor said, "(T)his plague is not intended by God as . . . punishment . . . Our God is a suffering God who is with us . . ." Ibid. Another stated, "This might be a chance to step back and ask ourselves, 'Where is meaning?'" (Ibid.) Another pastor taught, "(T)he Christian community's distance from one another parallels that of Jesus during the last days of his life, called Holy Week . . . when Jesus knew that sense of desperation, of isolation, of God's presence no longer with him." (Ibid.)

Tracy O'Shaughnessy's Good Friday story, "Communion ban tests Catholic churches" (Ibid., April 10, 2020, p. 1B) told how the quarantine has forced Catholic priests not to serve communion though they hold that sacrament to be essential for salvation. One Monsignor claims it is "the hardest time I've had in 49 years as a priest," Ibid.

Some of our own Church members wonder how this pandemic relates to Bible prophecy: they recall my teaching that a "mini-Great Tribulation" was predicted for our era of Church History from Revelation 3:21 with Revelation 7:17, but they have told me that they don't understand how I can see those verses predicting such an event.

On top of this, The New York Times has run an article on the rise of conspiracy theories related to the crisis. (Max Fisher, "Why Coronavirus Conspiracy Theories Flourish. And Why It Matters," April 8, 2020; nytimes.com)

Thankfully, in A. D. 95, the risen Lord gave a revelation to the Apostle John predicting what would occur for each believer from John's era to eternity, and Christ's guidance for each one. We need to revisit that revelation today!

Need: So, we ask, "This Easter, what does our risen Lord explain and direct regarding the pandemic we face?!"

- I. **When the Apostle John was exiled for his faith on the Island of Patmos, the risen Lord appeared to him in glory, and John fell at His feet as if dead, overcome by the power of Christ's presence Rev. 1:1, 9-17a.**
- II. **The Lord Jesus immediately graciously ministered to encourage John, Revelation 1:17b-18:**
 - A. Christ placed His right hand, His hand of honor, on John, cheering him in view of the dishonor he experienced in his banishment by the Romans, Revelation 1:17b; Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, fn. to Revelation 1:16.
 - B. Jesus affirmed that He was the sole God versus the false emperor god of Rome, for which belief John was suffering banishment, Revelation 1:17; Isaiah 44:6; Ibid., p. 1785, "Introduction to the Revelation to John."
 - C. Jesus reminded John that He Himself had conquered death, that Christ was sovereign over death and the eternal destiny for every human, what comforts us believers who face a pandemic today! (Revelation 1:18)
- III. **The Lord then told John to WRITE what he saw in this vision and send it to all the believers who would live in Church History (Revelation 1:11, 19a), what thus applies to US believers TODAY. We explain:**
 - A. For a *full* background to this sermon, I refer the listener to our web site messages on Revelation chapters 2-3. However, to explain fully the "mini-Great Tribulation" in this sermon, I *condense* that background as follows:
 1. Revelation chapters 2-3 speak of 7 churches, and they represent 7 successive eras of Church History from John's banishment on Patmos in A. D. 95 to the end of Church History at the rapture in Revelation 4:1-2a.
 2. The first 6 eras have been fulfilled and the 7th era began around A. D. 1950 and will end with the rapture.
 3. In Revelation 3:14-17, Christ critiqued our "Laodicean" Church era, what are today's evangelicals, for replacing the Fundamentalism of the 6th era "Philadelphian" Church (late 19th & early 20th centuries) with Calvinism, what caused the rise of Arminianism that opposes Calvinism. Both systems are laced with paganism and mishandle Scripture, leaving today's evangelicals to compromise with errors of past Church History and with evolution, Marxism, Oriental religions and materialism today, yielding false spiritualities.
 4. Christ's Revelation 3:18-20 advice for today's evangelicals is that they learn *by trials* He allows to part with errant evangelical beliefs, ministries and associations and return to Biblical beliefs and spirituality.
 - B. Having given this *brief* background, we now more fully explain the Revelation 3:21 "mini-Great Tribulation":
 1. For overcoming the world as Jesus did in His earthly life (Jn. 16:33b), Christ in Revelation 3:21 pledged to enthrone today's overcomer "in" His earthly throne like He sat down "in" His Father's throne. We explain:

- a. Only in Revelation 3:21, 5:6 and 7: 17 in Scripture is Christ said to sit in or in the midst of a throne!
 - b. Now, Revelation 5:6 (with 5:2-5) presents Christ alone as able to judge man in the Great Tribulation, so Christ's Revelation 5:6 action has no application to God's promise to the overcomer in Revelation 3:21.
 - c. However, at Revelation 7:17 (in the Revelation 7:13-17 context), Christ who is "in" the Father's throne is foretold to shepherd believers who come out of the Great Tribulation, nurturing them. The wording in Revelation 7:17 alludes to Isaiah 49:10 where Christ shepherds people in His future earthly reign!
 - d. Well, Christ shepherded the oppressed by *teaching* them in Mark 6:34, what Bible expositors do today!
2. Thus, for overcoming the world, Jesus will give Bible expositors in our era of Church History a ministry of nurturing those who come out of some sort of tribulation that is a mini sample of the Great Tribulation of oppression by evil rulers and acts of God's judgment that occur after the Church is raptured!
 3. So, in **our** era, evil rulers via intrigue and oppression will arise and God will allow calamities to get men to repent as in the Great Tribulation, but to a **lesser degree** akin to the Revelation 2:21-22 bubonic plague and the Revelation 3:10 "tribulation" of World Wars I and II, the Spanish plague and the Great Depression.

Lesson: *Our Lord has allowed the current pandemic to come to warn the world and wayward Christians to repent. Christ will use Bible expositors who obey Him to comfort oppressed believers like He will do in His earthly reign.*

Application: *(1) May we heed Scripture to trust in Christ for salvation, Acts 17:30; John 3:16. (2) May we repent of sin as revealed by Scripture and heed our Lord for blessing in our "Laodicean" era of Church History.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

In view of Christ's message for our era this Easter Sunday, we apply His Word to issues of concern that we mentioned in our introduction so that God's people might find spiritual balm (as follows):

(1) As for fear of the pandemic, this pandemic is small compared to the loss of 25% of the world's population in the future Revelation 6:7-8 pandemic of the Great Tribulation after the rapture! In place of fear, then, we should be comforted in our hope of the future pretribulation rapture and keep on serving Christ, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-13, 14-17.

As for the threat of death from the pandemic, our risen Lord in Revelation 1:18b asserted that He controls death and the destiny of the souls of all men, so we should practice good hygiene as responsible believers, but also entrust our welfare to God and just keep serving Him while we have life. Ultimately, He controls our life spans!

(2) As for a spiritual life after the pandemic, 1 John 1:7 calls us to fellowship with God by walking in the light, that is, obeying Scripture (Isaiah 8:20-9:2), and Psalm 23:4 teaches God will then be with us to minister to us even if He directs that we suffer and die from the coronavirus! However, many believers today disobey God's Word and do not fellowship with our edifying Lord, so they along with the unsaved world live in fear without God's comfort!

(3) As for the question of what kind of a God would let people lose their lives in the pandemic, Isaiah 10:1-4 NIV tells how our righteous God's wrath is aimed at those who flaunt sin and error in His face, what has occurred in our generation to a great degree on the issues of abortion, LGBTQ orientations, materialism, feminism, Marxism, etc.

(4) As for the view that the pandemic is no divine punishment, that God suffers with us in this pandemic, James 1:17 claims God is immutable -- He is not subject to weakness like we are. Also, Hebrews 12:28-29 claims our New Testament God is a consuming fire! This pandemic is God's warning especially to believers in our generation to repent like the tragedies Jesus addressed in Luke 13:1-5 in His day were a warning for Hebrews in His era to repent!

(5) As for the claim that the pandemic should make us ask, "Where is meaning?", God wants us to go beyond that question to obey His Word so as to trust in Christ for salvation and heed Him in the power of the Holy Spirit!

(6) As for the claim that the social distancing faced in this pandemic parallels Christ's sufferings during Holy Week when He allegedly knew a loss of God's presence, implying we are to suffer alienation pain in our quarantine, God strongly disagrees: (a) Even when the disciples abandoned Jesus at His arrest, John 16:32 claims He still had spiritual fellowship with the Father! (b) Jesus **was** separated from the Father's fellowship **only** when He bore our sins on the cross, Matthew 27:45-46 with Isaiah 53:5-6, 10-12. (c) We **never** should suffer alienation from fellowship with God to observe man-made "Lent" or "Holy Week," for 1 Thessalonians 5:16 calls us to "Rejoice evermore!"

(7) As for restrictions from serving communion during the pandemic, Ephesians 2:8-9 claims salvation is by faith and not works, so quarantines that prohibit usual communion practices are utterly harmless to our salvation!

(8) As for conspiracy theories on the pandemic, since we face a "mini-Great Tribulation" today, we should expect **some** intrigue by oppressive leaders as will occur in great amounts in the Great Tribulation. God wants us to respond to such trials by living by faith like believers in the Great Tribulation will do. (Luke 18:8b; Matthew 24:13)

May we trust in Christ for salvation. May we then heed our risen Lord's message for us today!