

March 27, 2020

Greetings Brothers and Sisters,

We are into day something of our self-quarantine/isolation period with unknown days yet to go. Our President was aiming/hoping for a relaxation of these extreme measures by Easter Sunday. I think he saw it as a very symbolically appropriate time, the resurrection day of Jesus Christ. I would agree. It would be so very timely that we could return to our assemblies on the day our Lord fulfilled His mission, defeated Satan, conquered death, and gave hope to all mankind. But, I am not sure. It looks like a 50-50 chance to me. But we can hope.

It's hard to figure out what the tenor of my message should be today. I should hope by now we do not have to continue establishing the seriousness of the present circumstance. I have noted a little from Facebook postings and much from phone conversations that there is a range of attitudes toward our peculiar situation. I get a feeling from some that there is not a very great sense of urgency about the moment. Others suggest to me they have considerable distress. Still others, the bulk of the contacts, seem to have a balance between the two. In those I cannot tell whether they have confidence or are whistling in the dark.

For myself while in isolation I have no end of tasks to undertake, find we are both enjoying the best health since November, and am quite comfortable in our surroundings. It is hard to have a keen sense of a national emergency. But, when I talk to others, watch the news, follow the economic events of the day, converse with our daughter, or go out to the grocery store, as we did this morning, a very pronounced sense of something monumental happening comes over me. Traffic lessened by 75%, gas at \$1.75/gal, restaurants closed, the mall parking lot empty, and the feeling of a certain kind of quietude pervading the scene all speak volumes that something is going on in our lives that has never gone on before. Then, a profound sense of something dark and foreboding characterizes the moment.

I have a tendency in comfortable moments to lose focus and become careless in my actions. When all the above is observed, wisdom dictates caution. Analysis reveals not only a dark and present danger, but also another looming on the horizon ready to break forth if the immediate one lasts too long. We could pass from a severe physical life and death threat to an economic one that also will produce severe life consequences and, perhaps, by its own travails, death. And it could last much longer. So, what is the message today? To whom is it addressed? How can one message serve the casual/careless, the distraught, and the seemingly well-balanced, however much they are vacillating between the extremes, as well as take into account all the ifs, ands, and maybes.

The message from Wednesday's devotional was, "Remember, God is in control." I can reiterate that and take comfort in it. Who could question it? But, to the careless and casual, the message may make them more careless and casual. Even for the distraught it could make them relax their defenses and move toward the careless. I'm not saying the message was wrong, but we are addressing a complex challenge. I am reminded that when Israel was cast into exile, God was in control. When Israel was condemned to wander in the wilderness for forty years, God was in

control. Moses, Joshua, and Caleb also suffered the wilderness for forty years along with the malcontents.

We might be wondering why we are experiencing this present danger. Is it because of our nation's wantonness; of its movement from Christian ideals to social sanctioning of paganism? Is it just an occasion of time and chance consistent with a fallen world? Or is it, as Pogo observed, "Us." Are we the problem? Do we need to reflect upon our own lives as Christians? Are we true disciples of Christ ready to forsake all for His sake or have we become too comfortable in His blessings; perhaps too casual in our service; too attentive to our ambitions and too disinterested in the transformation of our souls. I can't answer these questions for you, but I can ask them of myself. Perhaps that would be a good thing to do in the present circumstance with all the isolated time.

If we can answer all the questions above favorably, then we have a very real and effective power with which to address the present danger. We can beseech the Lord earnestly that this life-threatening danger shall pass over us, that the potential far-reaching effects will be minimal, and that whatever the outcome we will be able to adjust to the circumstances. Israel daubed blood of a lamb without blemish over the doorposts and lintels of their dwellings so that God would pass over them when death came upon the first-born of Egypt. Israel was not yet a nation; much less fervent, sacrificial servants of the Lord. By contrast we are His people. We have claimed to have given ourselves wholly to Him. God has condescended to dwell with us and, hence, we can dwell with Him. Our hearts are God's dwelling place where He now resides. Our doorposts and lintels are covered with the blood of His Son. We have the power to pray that the worst of this present danger will pass over us. We can pray further that, if it pleases Him, that our neighbors will share in that same blessing. We can recommit to serve Him more than ever before. We can take to heart the words of encouragement the Lord gave to Joshua, "Be strong and of good courage (Jos. 1:6)... be strong and very courageous (Jos. 1:7)... be strong and of good courage (Jos. 1:9)... [and] only be strong and of good courage (Jos. 1:18)." I can be a little slow on the uptake sometimes, but I get this message.

Reflect, pray, keep in contact with some of your brothers and sisters (call a couple that you know and are comfortable with once in a while and call a couple with whom you are not so familiar), commiserate (to relieve stress), encourage, trust, and hope.

Lord willing, we will see you soon.

Love, Jim and Sharon