

April 11, 2020

Hello Brethren,

I trust the Days of Unleavened Bread have stated out well for each of you. I've talked with several, and it appears the webcast came through clearly for everyone. For that we can all be grateful!

It has been a very unusual Passover and first Holy Day – unlike anything any of us have ever experienced before! Having to conduct the Passover remotely to EVERYONE was a unique and not entirely comfortable experience for me. It is very different to be speaking to only two people in the room plus a camera. It seems a little more difficult for me to stay mentally focused on the message when I have little if any visual feedback from the audience.

The timing of the Passover service was also a bit of guesswork. I knew we had everything from individuals by themselves connected all the way up to one group of 8 or so. How long will everyone take for the footwashing portion of the service? I had no way of knowing, and no real way to get feedback. So I waited what I felt would probably be an appropriate amount of time, and from what I've heard, it worked out for all.

The Holy Day service yesterday came in very clear for us. I found the messages very inspiring. I think Mr. Franks' sermon was very much "on point" for where we are, and a good reminder of the need to stay focused on the important things at this time. As I know we've talked about already, it is so easy to become distracted by what is going on around us, and miss the importance of these days entirely.

Every week Mr. Franks has been holding a webinar with the ministry, updating us on what is happening during this crisis. I thought I'd share several things with you from his update this week that I found helpful and/or inspiring. And some of them will give us something more to be praying about too!

There was a lot of concern for the brethren in Zimbabwe regarding the Passover. Many if not most had been unable to get supplies for the Passover, and it was feared most would have to take the second Passover. As it turned out, it seems about half the membership were able to take the 1st Passover, but the other half we not. They will work toward taking the second, but if course if their situation does not change, and they weren't able to this time, it is possible they won't be able to in a month either. They would appreciate our prayers.

I'll mention also that things seem to be going fairly well in both Ghana and Nigeria. In Ghana the government has implemented strict measures, forbidding gatherings of more than 10 people. There have been several reports of Sunday-keeping pastors who defied this order and were arrested as well as some who were beaten along with some members by the police. So our brethren are being very careful and trying to be wise in what they do and how they are obeying God's instructions.

Mr. Franks sent out a survey of sorts to the ministry earlier this week to see how the membership in general are faring with all the jobs being lost. In the last two or three weeks here in the US a record 17 million people have filed for unemployment benefits! While we would expect some of our brethren will be affected by these job losses, the reports so far are very encouraging, indicating that a small number have permanently lost jobs or been temporarily laid off. Obviously more are concerned about what the future may hold, but for the time being it appears the majority of our brethren are being spared.

He also commented how during this negative and stressful time he is seeing so many very positive things happening within the Church. He said there are so many examples of brethren calling and looking out for one another. Some have gone way out of their way to make sure others are taken care of. And there has been an almost universal outpouring of love and support for the efforts of the Church coming in to him and the rest of the Administration at Headquarters.

As he was saying this I had to nod my head in agreement (not that any of them could actually see me...). This is exactly what I've found within our congregations. I keep hearing how so many of you are calling, writing and encouraging one another. Almost every time I call and talk with some of you I hear in passing how others have been calling to encourage. That is wonderful, and so very needed right now. And it is in keeping with what we read on the night of the Passover: *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."* (John 13:34-35).

Please keep it up!

Tomorrow we will once again have our local services webcast beginning at 9:30 am. There will also be services webcast from Headquarters at 12 noon. Tomorrow it will include the annual camp video too, so I imagine we are all going to want to watch it. Interestingly, Mr. Franks told us that as best as they can tell by the numbers, about 75% of the entire membership are watching both their local services as well as the one from Headquarters. To me that speaks volumes about how much we as a people are hungering and thirsting for righteousness, and good solid spiritual food!

I wish you all a good Sabbath, and ask that we all pray for one another, and for the technology we are using to stay connected and united. And also, let's pray for God to be merciful and allow this crisis to pass quickly, so we can get back to meeting and fellowshiping as we want and need to do!

Best regards,

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