

March 28, 2020

Hello Brethren,

It has become virtually a cliché now to say that we are living in unique, surreal, unprecedented (or some other descriptor) times. I find that my vocabulary seems to fail me to be able to adequately describe my thoughts as I watch the situation in the world change almost minute by minute. As of yesterday an article in Business Insider stated that fully 1/3 of all humanity (that is over 2.5 BILLION people) are currently under some form of lockdown, quarantine, or shelter at home orders from national, state or local governments!

It certainly seems that we are witnessing some of the precursor events that will lead to the final conflagration at the end of this age. We know these things are to happen at the time of the end, but what has amazed me is the blinding speed with which this has all happened.

Jesus referred to events like this as "... the beginning of sorrows." in Matthew 24:8. To slightly misquote a line from an old Bachman Turner Overdrive song, I'm afraid "We ain't seen nothing yet...!" (But on the upside, at least the wall-to-wall coverage of the coronavirus has largely overshadowed all the childish political wrangling that had dominated the news before!)

I trust the regular communication you've been receiving by phone and email has been helpful to you. We want everyone to have the information from Headquarters and local information as well. It is our most sincere desire that everyone stay informed and aware, and also be able to "keep calm and carry on" as per Mr. Meeker's sermon last week!

So, with everything that has happened and is happening around us, how are you responding to this current challenging time? Physically I'm sure we are each trying to use wisdom, take precautions and follow the restrictions that have been put in place. But I'm not just talking about physically, I want to ask how you are responding spiritually to what has happened?

It is my suspicion that for the world, this crisis is a "shot across the bow" because of the mountain of sins of mankind, and the fact that almost no one seems willing to acknowledge sins or cry out to God for help. Listening to the news I hear nothing that even hints at a repentant attitude. But of course, it is prophesied that this will be the continued pattern for men even as the terrible times of the end become considerably worse (Revelation 9:21; 16:11 etc.).

What about you and me? Have the events of the last several weeks served as a kind of "wakeup call" for us? I'm not insinuating that we have been entirely spiritually lax, or negligent like the five foolish virgins described at the beginning of Matthew 25. They were entirely without any oil, which symbolizes God's Holy Spirit. I don't think that would be an accurate description of most of us.

But neither do I believe that we have all been spiritually charged up with what Mr. Kilough has called a "fire in the belly" for our calling. We've faced some trials, sometimes heavy and difficult trials as individuals and families. And in many if not most cases these trials have

spurred an extra level of prayer and perhaps Bible study at least for a time. But it seems that as life settles back down to more normal, our spiritual effort may die down some too.

The prophet Jeremiah was inspired by God to warn the inhabitants of Jerusalem not to trust on past accomplishments, or what they thought they had. When warned of impending invasion by Babylon that would bring the destruction of much of Jerusalem and enslavement for the people, they stubbornly repeated what was apparently a common proverb of the day “The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD are these.” (Jeremiah 7:4).

The meaning was that we have God’s temple here in Jerusalem. God CAN’T allow His temple to be captured, defiled and destroyed, so we are safe and have little to worry about. God HAS to protect us! And so in spite of repeated warnings, there was no spiritual renewal, no “fire in the belly” was kindled. And of course that proverb proved to be absolutely worthless when God allowed Babylon to successfully invade and devastate the city and the population.

This account should be a warning for us to look carefully at ourselves – something we should be doing prior to the Passover anyway. We have a divine and special calling from God, we’ve been granted God’s Holy Spirit, and we are in a position where we are being led by humble, wise and faithful men who are following God. So, what do we really have to worry about? The Church has done well, God has very clearly opened some powerful doors for us as a Work, and we enjoy a level of peace and unity in the Church we haven’t seen in many years. Look at what we have now – obviously we’re doing fine!

I believe this kind of thinking is quite dangerous. It was true that Judah had the temple with all the splendor and rich symbolism dedicated to God. But they couldn’t look to that when their own personal relationships with God were severely lacking.

It is also true that God has blessed us beyond our imagination in the last decade, and we do have peace and we do have faithful, loyal, humble and wise leadership to follow. But those men can’t be zealous for us – in our stead. We each must have that “fire in the belly” for the Truth of God for ourselves!

Consider once more the virgins of Matthew 25. Those who were wise, and had oil in their lamps were not able to give oil to the foolish ones. Likewise someone who is zealously studying, praying, using the tools of fasting and meditation to grow spiritually can’t somehow share that growth with someone else. Because you can’t have a relationship with God for me, and I can’t do that for you. We must EACH have that close, loving relationship with Him ourselves!

Please take some time to consider where you are spiritually, and let’s each use this time of crisis as a bit of a wakeup call to inspire us to redouble our efforts with prayer, Bible study, fasting and meditating on the Word of God. This current “shot across the bow” may go entirely unheeded and unnoticed by the world, but it should not be so for us. We have a job to do now, so that we may be among the people our Lord will find so doing when He returns (Matthew 24:36)!

Best regards,

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