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## **Jesus For A Plagued World**

God's PEACE is ALWAYS YOURS in Jesus.

Hear the Word of God from Joe 2,

“Blow a trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, proclaim a solemn assembly, gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and the nursing infants. Let the priests, the Lord's ministers, weep between the porch and the Altar, and let them say, ‘Spare Your people, O Lord, and do not make Your inheritance a reproach, a byword among the nations.’”

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST,

Wow! What a year it's been! To respond to danger and disaster by not gathering ourselves together in God's house is counter-intuitive to our faith in Jesus Christ. Our normal response, in times of tragedy, is to run to the Lord's house, to call upon Him in prayer, and to receive the comfort and forgiveness of His body and blood. Sadly, the pandemic that has hit our world has caused us by and large to run to our homes instead.

The very fact that we have been faced with this dilemma is a reminder that: ‘*Satan prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.*’ The devil has been, still is, and will continue to be in “attack mode”, of the whole world, but especially those who trust in Christ, until the last day when He's judged forever.

Not only does the devil – and his cohorts – seek to viciously assault and hurt the body (as we see in so much of the rioting, and in the virus), but the devil also wants to rob us of the comfort and consolation of the Good News of Jesus, that all of our sins are forgiven, and that everything has been set right between us and God, so that God isn't mad at us anymore, but is totally at peace with us. For it is that Good News alone that gives our consciences and hearts peace in a virus-plague, riot-plagued, sin-plagued, and devil-plagued world.

So how is it that God's people normally respond to calamities, disasters, pestilences and plagues? Certainly God's people do respond with prayer to the Lord, not only against the assaults and accusations of the devil, and not only for the preservation of the church, and of our nation, but the proper response of God's people, and of all people should be that of repenting and fasting, and seeking God's forgiveness and mercy, for the sake of Jesus, for our part in the collective sin and guilt of our world.

In the face of evil (as we've seen on our streets), and all manner of suffering (as we've experienced in the pandemic), Christians call upon the Name of the Lord to withdraw His chastening and discipline, while confessing that we have sinned much in our thoughts, words, and deeds, and acknowledging that if God were to be 'fair' to us, there'd be 'hell to pay'. And so we cry out with David in Psalm 130:3, ***"If You, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand! But with you there is forgiveness. Therefore, You are feared."***

In other words, we do recognize the hand of the Lord in what we're going through, but not as though the Lord is intent on casting us away. 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 3 reminds us, ***"The Lord does not want anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."*** To put it another way, Hebrews 12:4 says, ***"The Lord rebukes the people he loves, and He disciplines those he calls his own."*** And the greek word for 'discipline' means something that we actually feel in our body. As a result, I am convinced that the virus that is infecting the world is as much from the Lord, calling all to repentance, as it is from the devil, trying to destroy people in body and soul.

Now, to be sure, we dare not presume to identify any particular event, as a specific judgment of God on a specific sin, unless the Lord Himself tells us so. We are to see every suffering and disaster, as a call from the Lord for all people everywhere to repent. Where does the Bible teach this? In many places, but let's look at Luke 13. This is where Jesus says, "***Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup> I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.***"

In other words, if you spend your time blaming the Chinese, the President, or the Governor for the CoVid-19 virus, you're missing someone else to blame. And that is yourself, as Romans 5 explains, "***Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way, death came to all, because all have sinned.***" When hurricane Katrina destroyed New Orleans many Christians, rather than repenting, chose to blame instead, and said, "***This happened because of what goes on in New Orleans during Mardi Gras.***" In fact, Bourbon Street ended up in pretty good shape, while many churches were destroyed. To blame others for disasters is the old shift-a-roo. Even if there is some truth, God won't let you get away without repenting. Hasn't our nation, and each of us, many times in our lives, been throwing God's Word, and His salvation in Christ alone to the wind, so that we shouldn't be surprised at all, when we reap the whirlwind. Yet, and this is critical to remember, we're told in Job, that the Lord spoke to Job from the whirlwind, and said, "***I Am with you always Job. Just repent, trust in Me, and you will be saved, and safe.***"

In John 5, Jesus healed a man in the pool at Bethsaida. But then he told him, "***Now repent, lest something worse should befall you.***" Which means what? To blow off God's call to repent, when disaster happens, may mean that the next disaster will have your name written all over it. And yet, no matter what we face individually, or as a nation, the Lord tells us what His overarching goal is in Ezekiel 18, "***I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, but rather that they would turn from their evil ways and live.***" God's goal for everyone is life, but when individuals and nations have no time or space for God in their lives, we leave Him with no other alternative but to use suffering to shake us up, and wake us up, lest something worse befall us – namely, the final judgment of God. For, as Hebrews says, "***It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hand of God – that is the judging hand.***" Page 3

Luther put it like this, *“God may, at times, have to lay us on our back in the hospital, to get us to look up to heaven again.”* And Max Lucado once put it like this: *“A season of suffering is a small price to pay, for a clear view of your Savior.”*

We live in a world and a nation that has, by and large, been blowing God off. And even many Christians, and dare I say all of us at times, are very cavalier when it comes to the important of our Savior, Jesus, and His Word in our lives. We absent ourselves from God’s house to worship the ‘sleep god’ at St. Mattress. We cut ourselves, and our children, from God’s Word, either for no particular reason, or because we prioritize sports and entertainment ahead of Jesus, so that even our kids and grandkids don’t know how to get out of their graves alive – and then we say: *“Pastor, why is the Lord sending this storm upon us?”*

I am convinced that the Lord has either directly sent, or, at the very least, is permitting the CoVid-19 virus to hit our world, our land, and our lives to give all of us a big “TIME-OUT” from *“all of the false gods that we’ve been setting before our eyes.”*, and to teach us to hunger and thirst for His Word, His forgiving supper, and Jesus’ death and resurrection, as the EPI-CENTER of our lives again. In other words the Lord’s M.O. is often times to bring us to our knees in repentance, so that we learn again to pray to the One Who is our very life, and to seek the Good News of the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus, which alone can save us from the judgment that is coming, which is far worse than a virus, or anarchy in the streets.

In other words, both the health crisis and the moral crisis that our world is facing are a call to repentance, and trusting in Christ alone for life and salvation; for no amount of science or medicine will stay the Lord’s hand until we repent; nor can Uncle Same save us from sin, death, and the judgment of God. Only God’s mercy toward His wayward children, and all of His creatures, can save us now or ever!

But maybe you’re wondering, *“Pastor, is there a way for us individually, or as a nation, to stay the hand of God in or from such judgments?”* Let’s let God answer that one from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 11:31, which says, *“But if we had judged ourselves (meaning: see our sin and repent of it, and turn to Christ for forgiveness), then we would not have fallen under judgment.”* Page 4

Luther once said, *“It is the faithful and fervent prayers of Christians...that prevents the devil from destroying everything.”* The devil is not only trying to destroy each of us individually, but He is trying to destroy this nation, which was once a bastion of Christianity, and the Light of Christ, but now only a remnant of that light still glows. And this year’s election should not be viewed simply as a referendum on CoVid or whose lives matter; but whether we still see ourselves as a nation created by God, and blessed by God, to be a city on a Hill proclaiming Christ to the nations, or whether we see our nation as entirely evil from the beginning, that must be recast while erasing the Lord, and any remnant of Christian belief from our pages. I believe that America is at stake in this year’s election, primarily because, we as a nation, have for generations now, been seeking to replace the Lord with ourselves, and the truth of His Word, with the so-called truth of mankinds’ godless opinions.

Our only hope in this election, regardless of the outcome, is that the Hound of Heaven, Jesus Christ, will not stop pursuing us! For what our nation needs more than a new founding, a new history, a new constitution, or new police force, or new statues, is a return to only Savior this world, this nation, and we individuals have. The danger is when nations or individuals blow off God, is that the Lord may very well give you what you ask for, and withdraw His presence from us. Psalm 127 says *“Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain.”*

Of course, the world has no more regard for prayer, than it does for the discipline of the Lord. A few months back Vice President Pence was mocked for praying in connection with his work on the Coronavirus, as though it were ignorant and useless to do so. And there were mixed reactions when President Trump called for a National Day of Prayer in response to the virus, though past presidents (Republican and Democrat) have done precisely the same thing, in response to various tragedies. The fact that we are seeing these kind of reactions are yet another indication of the prevailing wind of culture, for which we are, at least in part, reaping the whirlwind of God’s heavy hand, and for which the Lord should rightly exercise His ‘tough love’ and ‘harsh mercy’ of His discipline upon us, to drive us to our knees in repentance, and to a renewed truth in Jesus as the only One Who can, and has, saved us from our well-deserved judgment from God. Page 5

This pandemic and the anarchy in our land will not stop because we're such good people, or because we deserve to have God remove His heavy hand. That kind of thinking deserves more discipline. It is only for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Savior, and what we do with our Savior, that the Lord will determine the ending of this pandemic, at the proper time. We are given a beautiful example of this in 1<sup>st</sup> Chron. 21, where the Lord halted the plague that He had sent upon His people for their sin, when His destroying angel reached Jerusalem. God's Word says,

***“The Lord sent a pestilence on Israel, and 70,000 men of Israel fell. And God sent an angel to Jerusalem to destroy it. But as He was about to destroy it, the Lord saw, and was sorry over the calamity, and He said to the destroying angel, ‘It is enough now. Relax your hand.’ And the Angel of the Lord was standing by the threshing floor of Ornan, the Jebusite.***

***Then David lifted up His eyes, and saw the Angel of the Lord, standing between earth and heaven, with His drawn sword in His hand stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the Elders, covered themselves with sackcloth, and fell on their faces. David said to God, “O Lord, my God, please let your hand be against me, and my father's household, but not against your people, that they should be plagued.***

***Then the angel of the Lord commanded God to say to David, that David should go up and build an altar to the Lord, on the threshing floor of Ornan, the Jebusite. So David built an altar to the Lord there, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. And He called to the Lord, and He answered Him with fire from heaven on the altar of the burnt offering. So the Lord commanded the Angel, and He put His sword back into its' sheath.”***

Whether tragedies happen in the Old Testament or the New Testament, in our world, our nation, or our lives, it is always in view of Jesus - God's ultimate sacrifice for sins - hanging on the cross for our forgiveness, that the Lord remembers His mercy, and He relents from His fierce anger that we deserve. It is Jesus, and only Jesus, that causes God to relent from His fierce anger, and this is what we must know, for only Jesus interposed Himself between us, and the divine wrath of God, **Page 6**

that we deserve, being fully wounded for our transgressions, and fully bruised for our iniquities, to that by His stripes we are fully and finally healed, Isaiah 53.

And not only is Jesus our forgiveness, redemption, and righteousness, but He is also our peace with God, so that we might eat and drink of the fruits of His sacrifice, His body and blood in the Lord's Supper, and receive forgiveness, restoration and peace. For God sacrificed His own Son, that we might be spared from all of the evil that has come upon us, and saved by Jesus' mighty deliverance. *"Jesus' blood now marks our door, and death's dread angels sheathes His sword."*

As King David built an altar and prayed and sacrificed when God's people were *"in the teeth of the plague"*, let us in repentance of our sins, and in the confidence that God wants to show mercy and he loves to forgive, let us offer prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings for the sake of Jesus, Who gave Himself up for us all, for He surely desires not only that we be saved, but He also desires to show us mercy and grace in our time of need, Hebrews 4.

Therefore, in the confidence that the Lord will forgive us, and will restore and preserve the gathering together of His Holy People, in the solemn assembly of His great congregation, let us, as Hebrews 10 says, *"Let us all draw near to God, with a sincere heart, and in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled, to cleanse us from an evil conscience, and having our bodies washed with pure water; and let us do so all the more as we see The Day (the Day of Christ's return) approaching. And let us hold fast (unswervingly or tenaciously) to the confession of our hope, without wavering, for He Who promised is faithful."*  
All in Jesus. Amen.