

## Kingdom Report

Week of 21 March 2020

### Covid-19 Plague: Impact Analysis on the Church

I want to do a series of analyses of world pandemic on the church, economies, geopolitics....but let's start this week on the church. Issues: The charismatic prophetic movement; prosperity; Israel; mega-church movement. And an interesting historical look back on the early church and the great Roman Empire plague.

Here is my initial analysis of what I see are going to be areas of permanent impact on our charismatic evangelical movement worldwide from this pandemic. BTW I purposely focus on our charismatic evangelical movement because that is now the new "mainline churches" of world Christianity....all other previous "mainline churches" are in irrecoverable decline even before this pandemic.

I ask myself the obvious question "What is the Lord saying?" because something of this magnitude could not be happening without a message from heaven that needs to be pondered. So here are the things I am "pondering":

My first question is Where were the multitude of prophets in our movement on this? Specifically I ask: Do you remember at the end of each year and beginning of each year we have this annual ritual of "What is the Lord saying for 2020?" and then conferences are held, prophetic roundtables are organized etc. With the wonderful internet I am able to connect with many of these and download videos of the meetings without attending to try to catch an idea of anything of significance. Maybe you do too maybe you don't but I do because that is part of my thing as a regular ministry blogger....keep informed on what is happening around the world in the church.

Problem: End of December it was all good news. Especially from the prophets out of America. Economy is booming, stock market new record highs, Trump re-election assured as prophesied etc. This carried over to the prophetic roundtables of early January. All the usual, "this is the year of breakthrough", lots of "2020 year of New Vision" etc.

What I did not hear anywhere was this....*'Thus saith the Lord this is the year the world economy is going to absolutely fail, a stock market rout and meltdown is coming that will be greater than 1929, nations will shut down, international travel will collapse, fear will engulf the world, your pensions will be wiped out, nations will go bankrupt, great corporations will fail, joblessness will rise, hospitals will be overflowing'*

And all of that just 2-3 months after your annual prophetic gatherings.

We have a problem folks and we need to face it. We have never in the history of the church had so many thousands of minister in the church whose title is "Prophet xxx".

And the oft repeated claim by all is Amos 3:7 ***"Surely the Lord God will do nothing but he reveals his secret unto his servants the prophets."***

Here is my predicted impact: There is going to have to be a serious re-examination in our movement as to who is and who is not a "prophet". And by this I hold with Paul that I "wish you would all prophecy" in the sense of prophecy for most of us being "comfort, exhort, edify". That is fine and wonderful. What I mean is who is really a "seer prophet" in the Old Testament sense of the word. From my experience these types of prophets are very rare, most are born into that office, you cannot pray for it, you cannot be "taught" how to; you cannot claim it; you definitely cannot fake it with hit and miss. There is coming a separation of wheat from tares on this issue!

Next issue: The prosperity movement. Everything was looking great up until January. Seed faith, give and it shall be given, financial blessings if you give to my ministry etc. Great message during national prosperity times. In the American church especially. Trump plus a record stock market plus lowest unemployment in history....and people gave, to ministries, gave to Israel, gave and gave. That by the way is one of the wonderful things about the American Christians, they are wonderful children of God with open hearts and a compassion for giving to help.

Here is the problem: How many times have I heard in recent years the message from the faith prosperity movement...."your time of reaping what you have sown has come..." etc. Each year in fact that message is the most popular "prophetic word for the year". Now what? Specifically I am referring to the "Boomer generation" born between 1946 and 1964 that is the core of the charismatic movement, is the core of the givers and tithers in any church....and they are the ones whose pensions are tied up in the stock market. They are supposed to be drawing down assets every year for retirement. Well \$35 trillion of stock market assets world wide just got wiped out.

I predict this financial crisis is going to cause a major re-evaluation of the faith and prosperity movement. And it is a discussion that is long overdue. There are a lot of ministries that are not going to survive this.

And mix into this whole discussion the issue of "Who blesses Israel is blessed of God". I mentioned before last month we had an article in our local charismatic magazine JOY "Is South Africa Cursed because we don't support Israel?" Well I don't know any nation on earth that has done more for Israel than America....and this is how God rewards America...with I financial collapse" Is this how God rewards all those faithful believers who gave to support Israel?

Question: Instead of doubting the blessings and goodness of God maybe we have this whole Israel issue wrong? Maybe we should take another look at Romans 9:6 "Not all Israel is Israel" and ask ourselves are we really supporting the right Israel of God?

Issue: The Church meeting structure.

All over the world and certainly here in South Africa we now have the call for "social distancing" until this pandemic is over. That means no large gatherings. Here in South Africa the limit is under 100. It may be different where you are.

Say this lasts for months. How does this affect churches with over a hundred people? More specifically how do you keep income coming in without the offering in the service. More problematic is this....what about the fate of the large mega-churches. We have plenty of those here in South Africa. And as far as I know most under the best of circumstances struggle with finances. How many will survive after 3 months of no meetings? I don't know.

Issue for further discussion: Is it not time for a return to the New Testament model of the church in the home? This is where discipleship takes place. Don't get me wrong, Jesus had mass meetings, lots of them, miracle crusades. There is a place for Sermon on the Mount or sermon in the mega-auditorium. But when it got to discipleship it was Jesus and 12 people. And at the end of His ministry of 3,5 years of crusades and miracles and feeding the hungry....who could He count on? 120 people that met in the Upper Room. And that is what carried the gospel in all ages...those who have been discipled.

And please let me give a warning here. There are some really foolish ideas going around among some ministries desperate to keep the churches full...they are asking their people to ignore all requests to not congregate in numbers...they are more powerful than the devil and this virus. Here is sound advice from Jesus in gospel of John 7:1 ***"After these things Jesus walked in Galilee for he would not walk in Jewry (Judea) because the Jews sought to kill him."***

Please wrap your head around that verse: Jesus is God in the flesh. He can call on 12 legions of angels at any time. And yet He was not foolish enough to be walking into danger purposely. Which is also why God told his parent Joseph take the baby to Egypt for protection because Herod wanted to kill Jesus. Be wise folks, don't foolishly court danger as a bravado of faith, think of the famous Pentecostal snake meetings. Not too many of those around anymore.

## **The Roman Empire and Plague: How Christians Responded**

And now something different. Our great early church heroes in the Roman Empire went through this with great results for the spreading of the gospel.

Christians facing the coronavirus today would do well to remember how the selfless love of the early church helped spread the gospel in a world much more hostile to Jesus' message than our world is today. Christianity spread in the face of persecution for many reasons, but in two cases it spread in the midst of deadly plagues — because Christians risked their lives to save others.

Two historic plagues ravaged the Roman Empire: the Antonine Plague (165-180 A.D.) and the Cyprian Plague (249-262 A.D.). The plagues killed roughly a quarter to a third of the population, striking down emperors (Marcus Aurelius, Hostilian, and Claudius II Gothicus), and ravaging the empire. As in the case of the coronavirus today, panic spread because the society did not understand the disease.

As sociologist Rodney Stark noted in *The Triumph of Christianity: How the Jesus Movement Became the World's Largest Religion*, Christians responded to the plagues differently than their pagan neighbors.

*"During the first plague, the famous classical physician Galen fled Rome for his country estate where he stayed until the danger subsided. But for those who could not flee, the typical response was to try to avoid any contact with the afflicted, since it was understood that the disease was contagious. Hence, when their first symptom appeared, victims often were thrown into the streets, where the dead and dying lay in piles,"*

Bishop Dionysius recounted the events in Alexandria, Egypt, during the Cyprian Plague: "At the first onset of the disease, they [pagans] pushed the sufferers away and fled from their dearest, throwing them into the roads before they were dead and treated unburied corpses as dirt, hoping thereby to avert the spread and contagion of the fatal disease."

Yet Christians sought to help the sick, even risking their own lives. As Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, put it, "Although this mortality had contributed nothing else, it has especially accomplished this for Christians and servants of God, that we have begun gladly to seek martyrdom while we are learning not to fear death."

Even basic care likely powerfully reduced the death rate. As William McNeill pointed out in *Plagues and Peoples*, even "quite elementary nursing will greatly reduce mortality. Simple provision of food and water, for instance, will allow persons who are temporarily too weak to cope for themselves to recover instead of perishing miserably." It is entirely plausible that Christian care for the sick would have reduced mortality by as much as two-thirds, Stark argued.

This Christian charity did not just save lives — it also spread the gospel. Historians have long struggled to understand how a small group of Christians after Jesus's ascension, eventually outnumbered all other faiths in the Roman Empire (with an estimated population of 60 million).

Using estimates from historical sources, Stark found that growth from 1,000 Christians in 40 A.D. to 33 million Christians in 350 A.D. required a growth rate of 40 percent per decade. While this growth seemed miraculous to Christians at the time and historians afterward, it can also be explained through the acts of charity that drew pagans into the Church in large numbers.

When Christians risked their lives to help their pagan neighbors during the plagues, two things happened. Pagans who did not come into contact with Christianity were more likely to die, and pagans who received Christian charity were more likely to live and to develop relationships with the Christians who saved them. A pagan saved from death may befriend the Christians who saved him, and he may have lost his previous friends from the plague. By saving pagans, Christians not only demonstrated the love of Jesus but also spread social influence.

This is a time for we Christians all over the world to show compassion for the needy and those holed up in isolation, those who are afraid and those who grieve and need comforting.

Time to get back to normal Christianity that our fellow believers through the ages knew and practiced. Yes God does have a message for us in this time of crisis.