

Kingdom Report

Week of 29 December 2018

Things to Come

Well its that time of the year. Last Sunday CNN's Fareed Zakaria on his GPS program asked two prominent public intellectuals what does the future hold. One for the good news the other for the bad news. I would like to comment from a Kingdom perspective....

I used to at this time of the year go into some well known prophetic ministry websites to see what is the prophetic consensus for the coming year (i.e. Elijah List etc.). I don't do that anymore because it seemed always the same...."the Lord is about to do something suddenly" or "next year is a year of breakthrough" ...you get what I mean. I don't mean to despise prophecy which is dangerous nor to demean prophetic ministry....God still has his genuine prophets even though it seems Baal has us outnumbered 400 to 1. But I'll take Elijah anytime.

By the way I am increasingly getting the impression that our Charismatic movement is treating the prophetic like daily Horoscopes. The pressure on the prophets are enormous, What is the Lord saying today? What must I do? Like little children that need constant reassurance that they are loved or are significant or have great destiny's. Just a quick word of advice....expect the Lord to talk to you prophetically if you are doing something seriously wrong or going in the wrong direction....otherwise just keep doing "what your hand finds to do" because "The steps of a righteous man are ordered of the Lord." That works for me....

So I have no "Thus sayeth the Lord" for 2019 for you but let me instead analyze what the secular prophets or prognosticators are saying and comment on it from the Kingdom perspective. And frankly I agree with both the good news and the bad news...because both are part of this great "end times" transition of the ages to the coming age of the victory of the Kingdom of God.

I always like watching Fareed Zakaria on a Sunday with his Global Public Square broadcast because he always has interesting guests with something to say. Last Sunday he had two guests to present the good news of what is ahead and the bad news of what is ahead.

The good news was presented by Prof. Steven Pinker well known for his in-depth research on the great arc of human progress through the ages. The other guest was Prof. Niall Ferguson the well known presenter of the BBC TV series on Civilization and also the history of money and finance. What made it interesting for me was that I have both of their best books on their topics and read them avidly...which made it frustrating that as usual Fareed could only give a very short time to each to make their case.

The Good News

Steven Pinker (a Harvard Professor) published his book this year called **"Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism and Progress."** On the front book cover is an endorsement from Bill Gates that reads "My new favourite book of all time." That is quite an endorsement from someone like Bill Gates who is known to read 50 books a year...and important books!

Frankly I read this with fascination. What Pinker describes in graphic detail of charts and statistics is a major problem for the prophetic movement. By that I mean that I remember the great prophecy books of 40-50 years ago. I was there. I used to preach it. "The Late Great Planet Earth", "The 1980's: Road to Armageddon". "88 Reasons why the Rapture is in 1988". All bad news ahead but we can escape through the rapture.

What Pinker does is basically show the historical trend lines of as many metrics as he can come up with that measure human progress and the conclusions are stark and unassailable....mankind has never had it so good!

In his Part 2 of the book entitled Progress he devotes 14 chapters to 14 indices of human well being and progress as follows:
Life, Health, Sustenance, Wealth, Inequality, The Environment, Peace, Safety, Terrorism, Democracy, Equal Rights, Knowledge, Quality of Life, Happiness.

In each one of these chapters are time charts over the decades that show that on planet earth as a whole, not just in the West:

We are living longer, we are healthier, wealthier, more peace and safety, violence is decreasing every year, quality of life is improving, hundreds of millions are moving out of abject poverty, knowledge is cheaper more accessible, the environment of air, water and other things improving every year, food and calorie intake growing every year, happiness improving.

Personal confession: If you had told me 40 years ago that this is the world we would be living in around 2018 I would not have believed you. In fact I would never have actually expected to be still here alive and well on planet earth in 2018. Not one prophetic voice of the 1970's predicted this. In fact it was exactly the opposite....Armageddon, destruction of the earth, hunger and disease, one world government, the Antichrist etc. I don't have to describe those prophecies to you because they are still being preached today.

In God's timeline of prophetic purpose, what do we do about this phenomenon of good news? How does this fit into a prophetic understanding of the ages, of the end times? I believe I have the answer to that but lets go to the bad news....because the next 40 years are not going to be like the last 40 years....according to Prof. Niall Ferguson.

The Bad News

I like Prof Niall Ferguson. Very erudite but scholarly. Oxford and Harvard professor. He is a serious historian which is important to me because he looks at the arc of history and man's actions over millennia. I have a whole collection of his books including Civilization the West and the Rest, Empire, The Cash Nexus, The Ascent of

Money, The Tower and the Square. My point being when Prof. Ferguson writes I read and meditate...he has something important to say about our world and history (or His Story!)

But the very important book he wrote on why the future is bleak for civilization is his book "**The Great Degeneration: How Institutions Decay and Economies Die.**" Unfortunately Fareed Zakaria did not have enough time on his program for Ferguson to actually give his very reasoned response of this book why the future is bleak for world civilization. All he could basically respond to Prof. Pinker is yes things are going good and better...however, watch out for the famous "black swans", those unforeseen things that can and will spoil the good times.

In Ferguson's book he gives 4 reasons why civilization will self-destruct if we do not find a solution. He did not have time to elaborate so I will list them here simply and then I want to make a comment from a Kingdom perspective to both the good news and the bad news of the world ahead.

Let me quote from the back of the book his theme...

The decline of the west is something that has long been prophesied. Symptoms of decline are all around us: slowing growth, crushing debts, aging populations, anti-social behavior. But what is the cause? The answer....our institutions - the intricate framework within which a society can flourish or fail - are degenerating. Representative government, the free market, the rule of law, and civil society: those were the four pillars of Western societies which set them on the path to global dominance after around 1500. In our time however these institutions have deteriorated."

So Ferguson says four institutions after 1500 allowed the West to dominate the world and bring about universal improvement for all mankind. Do you notice that date "after 1500" as in after the Reformation of 1517...which he does not acknowledge.

Lets see about those four

- 1) Representative democracy: His point here is that our representatives no longer represent our people, they represent other interests. They have also broken the covenant between generations by a spending splurge on the current generation and leaving our children and grandchildren a mountain of debt that can never be repaid.
- 2) The free market: Our free markets are distorted by a tangle of burdensome regulations that stifle growth and innovation and with an erosion of the right to private property. In other words creeping socialism...
- 3) The rule of law has metamorphosed into the rule of lawyers...enough said. You get it. Jesus had the same problem with the Pharisees and the law.
- 4) Civil society has become un-civil society and problems that need to be addressed by local communities and pushed to the government and bureaucrats and nobody wants to take responsibility....leading to bigger government with the result of more inefficiency and waste...and nothing getting done. We know all about that here in South Africa.

What Ferguson is saying is that the institutions that emerged after the Reformation of 1517 (which he does not acknowledge to be the cause of the rise of those four institutions) those institutions are the reasons for the great progress of mankind over

the last 400 years that Steven Pinker so ably documents. But he says they are falling apart. And as they crumble all the blessings and the progress and the good life they have brought to mankind will deteriorate and take us back to a new Dark Age.

I say yes to that. But here is the fascinating insight he makes about turning things around. He is grasping for straws. His main thrust of all the four arguments are that we used to have people involved and active in these institutions to make them work. Key for him is civil society, a people who do things and not look to government all the time for solutions. So he needs to find an example of the kind of behavior that can turn things around.

The first example he give is himself. He bought a house by the sea in Wales and found the whole beach fouled with trash and plastic and the local council doing nothing. So he started just himself to pick up the trash and soon was joined by others and soon the beach was cleaned by the community joining in.

His second example (page 116) of what used to be and what made the West great is very important and very revealing. He gives as his prime example of a community coming together and getting things done from the year 1900 - 117 Protestant churches in Manhattan and the Bronx did the following"

"...they were responsible for forty-eight industrial schools, forty-five libraries or reading rooms, forty-four sewing schools, forty kindergartens, twenty-five savings banks and loan associations, twenty one employment offices, twenty gymnasias and swimming pools, eight medical dispensaries, seven full-day nurseries, and four lodging houses."

You see in America of the year 1900 there was no Income Tax, no Social Security tax or payments, no Medicare or Medicaid....if there was something that needed to be done to help people then the churches got together and did it. Cheaper, better and more efficient and will love and care.

The world's answer to problems are...we need more government, we need more laws, better laws, more taxes, better politicians, new programs.

Only the Church of Jesus Christ can say...we don't need your government, your laws, your taxes, your politicians, your schools, your social security...we can do it ourselves, better, cheaper and more effective. Unfortunately at the moment only the Amish church can say that about themselves...my local church has difficulty organizing a bazaar....but we are getting there!

Which brings me to my point on the good news and bad news....

All the problems that Niall Ferguson outlines that are going to cause the decline and fall of the west have to do with failing institutions. Those institutions are failing because they are staffed by people who do not have the law of God in their hearts so they need an outside law to keep them honest and in check. It will not work.

You cannot create artificial institutions to create a civilization that stands the test of time when you build on the frailty of unregenerate mankind. Those institutions are

trying to mimic the Church of Jesus Christ. They are the tares to our wheat. They have jumped ahead and said we don't need God. As Steven Pinker says Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism and Progress. But what if your reason is faulty and the Humanism you are building on are sinners who are always looking out for themselves rather than their neighbor? How far do you think your science is going to progress you?

Niall Ferguson's answer is not very far. Because the institutions we depend on to support our humanism and our science are crumbling....and with it will crumble our progress.

But I see great hope for the future. It is this...

We, the people of God need to have greater faith in the goodness of God. This is the great revelation that Moses got when after all his personal talks with God he asked for a special revelation "Show me your glory"....and God replied you cannot see my face but I will pass by you....and show you my goodness.

God still loves the world. The gospel is still good news....also for the poor. We should not be surprised that for the last 400 years ever since the start of the Reformation the world has been getting better by all metrics. It is the result of our God and His gospel and our preaching and teaching and changing the hearts of mankind. And we should not be surprised that the key to the future of planet earth and its progress and salvation is the Church of Jesus Christ and the message of the gospel. So don't be surprised if the Lord has no intention to either take us out of this world or abandon this world to Satan and his demonic world order.

The blessings and progress of the world for the last 400 years have not come from Satan who only comes to destroy...it came from God who still is on control and still has an unstoppable plan of redemption for this world.

The bad news for the world is that this good news is not sustainable by failing human institutions....without the inner change of a new man born again into the image of God our saviour. The bad news for all of us is that we are up against a tough "end times" of the failing institutions of this current world order....but the good news is that there is a new world order that God has prepared that can take over. And we will be very happy for the world to join us as scripture prophecies they will as we teach them how the Kingdom of God operates to produce endless growth and prosperity according to God's laws and His governing institution...the Church.

Bad news for the church...meetings on Sunday morning are not the future. God is going to force us into new levels of community as the world institutions deteriorate. That is going to be a critical part of the coming "end times" transition.

So as we go into 2019....

Do what your hands find to do and be confident that His angels are assigned over you to order your paths and bring you to His destination for your life. Do every day that days good work and rest in peace that night.

God has His hand on you and South Africa and His Church. We have a tough year ahead but His Kingdom will advance in 2019 and you will have a part to play in that.