

Article of the Month

April, 2020

Pandemic of Peace!

It seemed good to devote this month's article to a combination of what IS and what SHALL BE. In the midst of fears, apprehensions, restrictions, and prohibitions, most people are, quite naturally, wondering what is happening and, more importantly, what WILL happen. Indeed, Jesus foretold the time when we would see "people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world." (Luke 21:26 ESV)

The Apostle Paul refers to the collective population as a groaning and suffering creation (Romans 8:22). But he appends a wonderful and mysterious thought to this. He says they are AWAITING (in ignorance) "childbirth." Does this not put an optimistic twist to the subject? It is Paul's accurate assessment that the world's ills are like the pains that come before something usually anticipated with such JOY that the pains, as difficult as they might be, soon disappear into nothingness when the "blessed day" arrives!

"Pandemic," of course, has been used nearly exclusively for something bad — about disease. But the word comes from two Greek words: "pan" (meaning across) and "demos" (meaning people). Usually, therefore, it is applied to a disease which spreads across a whole country, a continent, or the world. But the word has no built-in "bad" meaning. So, in the interests of Scriptural optimism, we want to look forward to a "pandemic of peace."

Isaiah 14:7 puts the whole concept into a single verse:

"The whole earth is at rest and is quiet —
They break forth into singing!"

Meanwhile, however, there isn't much singing going on. But there is a prophecy in Zephaniah 2:3 which is helpful for those who seek some spiritual refuge or direction in this time of stress.

At the present time, the Lord is primarily dealing with those who are His by covenant (Psalm 50:5). Nevertheless, the Lord is mindful of others who are "humble" or "meek" in their attitudes, and who in their lives have sought the principles of righteousness to govern them. His advice through Zephaniah is:

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“Seek ye the LORD, all you humble of the earth who have carried out His justice; seek righteousness; seek humility. Perhaps you will be hidden in the day of the LORD’S anger.”

It is extremely rare for Scripture to use “perhaps” or “maybe.” We should take notice of this regarding this Zephaniah text. The Lord is not promising that the ills surrounding the collapse of the old order will not affect this group of “meek” people. But He IS strongly suggesting that a course of righteousness, practiced with humility, will put a person in a position where he is less vulnerable to the anger surrounding him. People tend to appreciate good and trustworthy attitudes in others, and they are, therefore, more likely to protect these exemplary neighbors and friends.

“THE DAY OF VENGEANCE”

In Luke 4:17-21, there is an account of Jesus’ reading from a prophecy in Isaiah 61. Jesus DID NOT QUOTE the entirety of Isaiah’s prophetic verses. He stopped in the middle of verse 2 in Isaiah 61. He stopped just before the words, “and the Day of Vengeance of our God.” Jesus LEFT OUT these words because they were not appropriate in his day. In Luke 4:21, he said, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” The part which Jesus DID QUOTE was being fulfilled in Jesus’ day. But the “Day of Vengeance” was FUTURE from that time. We now are living in that “Day of Vengeance.”

But the LOVELY part of the prophecy which Jesus was quoting shows the CONTENT OF THE GOSPEL. Jesus pointed out that from his day forward it was time “to preach the Gospel” and “to proclaim” a message of WHAT WILL BE once the “Day of Vengeance” has ended. That good news includes:

- (1) “Release to the captives.” The entire world has been held captive to sin and disease and death. They will be RELEASED from all of these things.
- (2) “Recovery of sight to the blind.” If this were ONLY a literal statement, it would be good news. But it is not just literal. It is symbolic of the inability of the entire race of mankind to “see” (comprehend) who God is, and what He is doing. The ability to “see” truth and its rewards will be the “recovery” of the race!
- (3) “Set free those who are downtrodden.” The poor and neglected, the cheated and abused, the enslaved and the handicapped — ALL of these will finally find rest and deliverance from their “captivity.” There no longer will be class distinctions. There no longer will be want or inequalities!
- (4) Jesus then concluded his quote from Isaiah with a hint as to why all of

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this has to wait. He said that he must “proclaim the favorable year of the LORD.” Jesus was speaking at the beginning of the Gospel or Christian Age — the age set aside to select (or “call”) the people who will be privileged to “reign with him a thousand years” (Revelation 20:4) in order to accomplish “the restitution of all things” (Acts 3:21). But this “reign” and this “restitution” must await the completion of this “Church.” THEY, with Jesus, will be the instruments of blessing “all the families of the earth,” as was promised to Abraham way back in the Book of Genesis, and as was confirmed by the Apostle Paul in Galatians 4:28 and 3:8. “The favorable year of the Lord” is the Christian Age BEFORE the peaceable kingdom for which we pray.

Because of this “wait,” Paul, after he has said that the world groans awaiting childbirth (Romans 8), explains that the “child” IS THE CHRIST (head and body — Jesus PLUS his Church). Paul says that “we, ourselves,...groan within ourselves...awaiting eagerly...the deliverance of our body” — the “body of Christ.” THAT deliverance will mark the end of the troubles and the beginning of peace — the “Pandemic of Peace.”

MEANWHILE

Zephaniah called our day “The day of the LORD’S anger.” God’s “anger” is, in this prophecy, not directed at individual people. It is directed at the whole way mankind has used and abused the privileges of life. It is God’s intent to destroy the entire old social-political-economic-religious world — the practices and errors of 6,000 years of sin and death. Zephaniah 3:8 and 9 comment on this. The eighth verse shows that His anger is directed at “the nations” — not at individuals. Then the ninth verse shows His intention to give to the individuals all of the blessings needed to “call upon” (rely on) the LORD’S character qualities (“name”) so that they will, with united effort, serve Him and his principles for their eternal blessing and eternal life.

But before that blessing comes, this poor, old, tired, world is going to have to endure its own demise. It will not be easy, because mankind will not easily or willingly give up the old ways of doing things. God, according to all the pertinent prophecies, is going to find it necessary to bring the world to its knees. Every vestige of the way we do things is going to come to a crashing termination. It sounds *terrible!* And it IS. But the pains of childbirth will result in the birth of the peaceable kingdom for which Christians have so long prayed (although many have made this prayer ignorantly).

The current viral pandemic is just one of the many birth-pangs forecast. Hold on! Even though more are coming, the result will be so gratifying as to exceed the boldest imaginations of the greatest dreamers! The world will “**break forth into singing!**”
