Have You Read the End of the Book?

*“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.* *Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled, Though the mountains shake with its swelling … Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!* *The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.”* Psalm 46: 1-3,10-11

Billy Graham liked to tells of a time, during the early years of his preaching ministry, when he was due to lead a crusade meeting in a town in South Carolina, and he needed to mail a letter. He asked a little boy in the main street how he could get to the post office. After the boy had given him directions, Billy said, "If you come to the Central Baptist Church tonight, I'll tell you how to get to heaven." The little boy replied, "No thanks Mr., you don't even know how to get to the post office!"

I must admit, over the past couple of weeks I have kind of felt like that little boy at times as I try to discern what the experts are telling us about this stealthy (unseen) invader called the Novel coronavirus, or COVID-19 which has created a global health crisis to which the eyes of an anxious world are watching and reacting to. As you are all keenly aware, this “invisible enemy” has caused us to take drastic steps as a nation to protect ourselves and has officially put our nation on a war footing. Our nation, by order of the President and Congress, is operating as if a state of war existed which allows our national, state and local governments to take extraordinary measures to provide emergency care in extraordinary circumstances to prevent or lessen the tsunami of illness that has invaded our American soil. Yes, we face an invisible enemy whose effects have extended far beyond what can be seen under a microscope or has been experienced in a laboratory.

As a shepherd charged by God with the care, protection and feeding of my entrusted flock, I have found myself listening intently as God speaks to my heart through His Word by the Holy Spirit. While I have found it necessary to refocus my priorities and ways of doing ministry in order to be safe and to diligently keep those under my care safe, God reminded me that what we face is not an existential threat but a reality and how we inform ourselves as Christians, people of God’s Word, will keep us focused on the task of ministry which our Lord has placed before us and to which He has called us. So, be joyful and be encouraged, the Church, the body of Christ was created for even greater ministry in such times as these!

Where do we begin to address this “invisible enemy” biblically? Let’s begin with a spiritual reality check.

1. Creation After the Fall of Man (Genesis 3:17-19)

Since the fall of man and God cursed the earth because of Adam’s sin, the whole of creation struggles and its groaning is intense.

Paul explains in Romans 8:20-24 “For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, [God] in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved.”

Because of the fall of man, every part of God’s creation was subjected to a curse. Under the curse, all creation groans: the ground was cursed for Adam’s sake, thorns and thistles and noxious weeds began to grow, the pain of childbirth was experienced, and death entered the world. “Douglas Moo writes, “This is why the whole of creation is waiting for the fulfillment of God’s plan when at last sin is removed from the children of God and all of nature will burst forth in glory because the full work of redemption includes the reversal of God’s curse.” Therefore, as Christians, we me have a great and accurate view of things to come.

2. A View of Things to Come

Jesus, speaking of the End Times instructed the disciples in Luke 21:9-11 “But when you hear of wars and commotions, do not be terrified [frightened]; for these things must come to pass first, but the end will not come immediately. Then He said to them, ‘Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.”

Theologically, there is much to discuss concerning biblical prophecy and the return of Christ in this passage, so given the world’s history as prophesied by Jesus, should we be surprised by any of these events? In John 16:33, Jesus reminded the disciples in His final hours before His suffering, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." Our hope is that from the very moment of Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, His return has been imminent (happening soon). Now, for those questioning the validity of Christ’s Imminent return, I would remind you that the advent of Jesus’ birth, the coming of the promised Messiah and His death was prophesied centuries before the actual event that changed the world. Paul tells us in Galatians 4:4-5 “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.”

God’s plan is always on time and Jesus is coming again!

In light of present world events, Jesus, speaking of His return, said in Matthew 24:36, “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father … Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. **44**So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”

I am also reminded that before His ascension into heaven, the disciples raised this question to Jesus and in Acts 1:6-7 they asked Him, “… Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom of Israel? He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.”

And in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2 Paul writes, “Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.”

3. The Blessed Hope

Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, “Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who sleep in death, or grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep [died] in him. According to the Lord’s word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep [died]. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.”

While we are not and will not be gathering as an assembled church for a season and we must walk in an abundance of caution given our present situation, please be encouraged and filled with hope that our God is Sovereign, our Salvation is secure in Christ and our mission continues. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20) and The Great Commandment (Matthew 28:18-20) are God’s mandates for every Christian and in love we must faithfully persevere in them until His return. Let us not fall into a trap of apathy or become passive because of our circumstances but let us ask God to enlarge our faith, our vision for ministry in the midst of trial and to renew our anticipation of expectancy as we walk in faith, move forward in God’s will and wait on God in faith believing for our future.

We must be a prepared people living in obedience to His commands in light of our Lord’s return. As we consider the events that are unfolding around us, I believe these times in which we live are reminders for us, the Church, to wake up, to focus, to be encouraged in ministry and the hope of all God’s promises, to be the Church in every sense of the word, and walking in the power of the Holy Spirit rather than in fear and panic. Of all people, we are to be an expectant people as we face the progressive events that will ultimately lead to the end of human history and a total renewal of the earth.

The Apostle Peter gives us such great perspective in all of this as he encourages the Church to look and live with a forward view, knowing and understanding that what God has before us is far greater than our past and present.

Peter encourages these suffering Christians with God’s promise, purpose and plan for the future of the world. In 2 Peter 3:8-13, Peter writes, “But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.  Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.  But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.”

I have read the end of the Book; I know how it ends. As French Arrington writes in his book, An Expectant People, “The final outcome of God’s plan is and will be a remarkable blessing and encouragement to God’s people. They will see the Lord come in the air for His people, both living and dead. They will witness the union of Christ with his bride (the Church), and they will experience the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth [and]... Finally, everything will be made new.”

How about it, is your heart beating a little faster?

**Prayer:** Our Father, while we do not know what a day will bring, we are certain that we are experiencing your presence and Sovereign love moment by moment as we face the uncertainty of each new day. We know your plan for our future is secure with you in Christ and far greater than we could ever imagine. We ask our Father, for your grace to carry us through the duties and difficulties that we cannot see in each new day and ask for the strength of your Holy Spirit that we may be sufficient for each task and challenge that meets us as we walk so ever close in your watchful care. Bless you O’ Lord for every promise you have fulfilled and will continue to accomplish as you have revealed in your Holy and powerful Word. In Jesus Name, Amen!

Resources

Victory in Spiritual Warfare by Tony Evans

What the Faith Is All About by Elmer Towns

Enduring Word Commentary by David Guzic

Spiritual Warfare: A Biblical and Balanced Perspective by Brian Borgman and Rob Ventura

The Expectant Christian by Alan Platt

An Expectant People by French Arrington

The Epistle to the Romans, New International Commentary on the New Testament by Douglas Moo