

If not God, Why?

More Big Thoughts in a COVID-19 World

How quickly things change! Just a month or so ago my wife and I were returning from a once in a lifetime trip to Israel and Jordan, the Holy Land. For nearly two weeks we walked in, around, and near the places Jesus walked: Nazareth, Cana, the Sea of Galilee, Bethlehem, and Jerusalem. We also saw and experienced the ancient cities of Jorash and Petra, the Dead Sea, and so much more. The Corona virus was a distant cloud in a distant land, nothing to worry about! But that was changing by the time we headed for home at the end of February. Within a week, borders were starting to close; travel bans were being put in place. In two weeks we saw the long lines – people stuck for hours at Chicago’s O’Hare airport as they processed through Customs and Immigrations – the very same lines we had passed through so quickly just weeks ago. We felt blessed that we made it home when we did! There are some who might say God was looking out for us, and while I think God was pleased with our good fortune, I do not believe God had a hand in it.

“WHAT?” I can almost here the cries! “A pastor not believing that God intervened on his behalf? How can that be?” Well, it’s like this: If God chose to help me, does it mean that God chose not to help all those who were stuck in the airport just two weeks later? Does God really love me (OK, maybe it was my wife) more than those hundreds who were stranded? I think not. Such thoughts speak more to my nature than to God’s. Of course we all want to think that we are special in God’s eye, and maybe some are, but the safer guess is that God created all of us, and that God loves each of us. The same.

God created each one of us equal in God’s sight, all equally worthy of God’s love, all capable of receiving God’s grace and forgiveness; and it’s a good thing, because after that it’s all on us. God provided us with guidance on how to live a good life – the kind of life that God wanted each of us to have – a life of abundance. But we found it difficult to follow all 613 of those laws, much less the big 10 as delivered by Moses. Many years later (hundreds of years), God sent his Son Jesus to simplify things for us, demonstrating God’s love first-hand, and clarifying all those commandments with two statements, in Matthew, chapter 22:37 and 39, “You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind...” and ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” (NLT) And guess what? We still have a hard time following God’s instructions! Leading to all kinds of problems for ourselves and others.

God didn’t send us this virus to punish us or to teach us a lesson, it happened. God *IS* watching how we respond. Hoping that we will love God with all our hearts, minds and souls, and love one another as we love ourselves. The measure of God’s love is seen in God’s Son Jesus, who died for all those times we failed to love. Jesus’ return from the dead demonstrates God’s power over death – we have a future in God! A future we celebrate on Easter! A future beyond this virus and all the restrictions; a future that is ours if we choose to have it!

If all goes right, this will be printed just in time for the most holy nights and days of Holy Week. Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday. Each of these have Bible readings assigned to them, (John 13:1-17, 31-35, John 18:1-19:42, and John 20:1-18, respectively) I encourage each of you to read through these readings, I like the New Living Translation, and recommend www.biblegateway.com if you don’t have a copy at home. I also invite you to seek an online worship service in these times of social distancing – some of them are very good! Stay well.

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