



Network for Revival 18 March 2020

What is God saying through Coronavirus – including about Revival?

Our hearts go out to those suffering from Covid 19 and we pray for their healing. We also need to pray for and care for our neighbours facing the effects of the crisis. We need, where possible, to help them as they face anxiety, loneliness, job loss, financial crisis, frustration and boredom. We need to pray for the government and NHS as they face huge demands and inadequate resources. I don't for one moment minimise this suffering and self-sacrifice in what I am going to say now.

But we also need to ask about God's perspective on the crisis. What is he saying? What is he doing? This may not become the worst pandemic in terms of the number of deaths. Some 200 million died in the Black Death and 40-50 million in the Spanish Flu epidemic following the terrible losses in World War 2. But it is having a very dramatic effect on society. Sky News referred to a week in mid-March as "frightening and bewildering." The Chancellor of the Exchequer said "We have never in peace time had such an economic fight as this one." One commentator said "The world will never be the same despite all technology because a very tiny invisible object can bring us down."

This huge worldwide crisis comes at a time when there is also profound concern about the environment – and some scientists believe the spread of Coronavirus resulted from abuse of one aspect of the environment. It is also a time when persecution of Christians is worse than ever; when the Western world has largely turned away from its Christian heritage and when, as we noted last time, the church is abandoning important teaching of God's Word. It is likely to result in the global economic system being under very serious threat (it doesn't take much imagination to think it could at some stage collapse in a day as the Book of Revelation describes in chapter 18). It also comes at a time when there are significant events happening with respect to Israel (see my article <http://www.prayerforpeace.org.uk/paradox50.html>). All of these things are matters which Jesus said were signs of the End. Although some of them are early recurring signs, the coinciding of them all is surely intended to make us prepare for his Return, as Jesus taught his disciples.

The serious effect and the context of Coronavirus show that it is an act of redemptive judgment, i.e. it is one of God's warnings intended to lead us to repentance. It is making people think about their mortality and the meaning of life. Doubtless many outside the church will turn to prayer. People are likely to be more open to God than they have been. We trust also that leading Christians will use the media for evangelistic purposes.

The Coronavirus crisis is also God calling the church back to him. We now cannot even worship together! Yet we have seen the church develop endless, largely prayerless, committees, synods, reorganisations, regulations, administrative procedures, etc over recent decades. But God is calling the church back to himself – which primarily means extensive individual and, where feasible, corporate prayer. Jesus felt the need to major on prayer. How can we soft-pedal it? How many churches have prayer meetings? During this crisis many Christians will have time on their hands. We need to use that to major on prayer. It is vital to do so, not least because the Book of Revelation teaches that redemptive judgment, if unheeded, is followed by eternal judgment.

God is also calling the church back to his Word - not just renouncing liberalism but living biblically i.e. being radically biblical in the power of the Spirit. How many modern disciples match up to the standards Jesus taught "*If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters – yes, even their own life – such a person cannot be my disciple ... In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples*" (Lk 14:26, 33). Obviously the word "hate" is not literal but it is Jesus' dramatic call to put God way before all loved ones. How many churches correct persistently sinful members as Jesus said they should? How many churches proclaim the sternness of God as well as his kindness, as Jesus did?

I have no delusions of grandeur – I am a tiny piece in God's jigsaw picture. But I know that, out of the blue, in November 2015 he gave me a strong sense of call to major on prayer and preparation for Revival. He called me initially to invite people local to us to join in, then, to my surprise, to create a national mailing list, which he has blessed. The four years since then have been probably the most spiritually rewarding I've ever known. Now almost 600 people, mainly clergy, ministers and church leaders in the UK, are members of Network for Revival. This is significant and now we are confronted with this Coronavirus mega-crisis. I believe it is not a coincidence but a God-incidence.

For members of the Network, Coronavirus is also a call to redouble our prayer and preparation for revival. I believe God is calling us to pray that many, many people who feel vulnerable and therefore more open spiritually will turn to the Lord. The Coronavirus crisis is not just a difficult event. It is a powerful divine call to pray for Revival *now*. It is intended to give us a sense of urgency as we see remarkable events and trends in the world. I am very sympathetic to those affected by Coronavirus and, as a family, we are seeking to reach out to neighbours pastorally and evangelistically. But the fact that people feel vulnerable, sense their mortality and therefore are more open spiritually is, I believe, an answer to prayer. We need to pray they will concentrate on eternal realities and the need to be ready to meet God and that this will be a permanent change, not just whilst the crisis rules

We need to pray for revival to happen *now*. The way it comes about may be different from earlier revivals. Pray that this crisis will turn into revival. We must *not* miss this opportunity – for the sake of humanity – and for God’s sake. God is calling us – the matter is urgent!

Pleading for Revival: Pleading the Name of God

It is a primary duty to honour the name of the Lord (Lev 22:32).

The Lord is zealous for his holy name

The Lord says “I will be zealous for my holy name” (Ezk 39:25). He is profoundly concerned that his name should be honoured and he acts to achieve that. He makes that clear through Ezekiel: “Wherever [Israel] went among the nations they profaned my holy name, for it was said of them, ‘These are the LORD’s people, and yet they had to leave his land.’ I had concern for my holy name, which the people of Israel profaned among the nations where they had gone. Therefore say to the Israelites, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: it is not for your sake, people of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone. I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign LORD, when I am proved holy through you before their eyes” (Ezk 36:20-23).

He brought Israel out of Egypt for the sake of his name “for the sake of my name, I brought them out of Egypt. I did it to keep my name from being profaned in the eyes of the nations among whom they lived and in whose sight I had revealed myself to the Israelites” (Ezk 20:9 cf vv 14 & 22). He says to Israel “You will know that I am the Lord, when I deal with you for my name’s sake and not according to your evil ways and your corrupt practices” (Ezk 20:44). So he blots out Israel’s transgressions for his own sake (Isa 43:25 cf 48:9-11). He says “I will make known my holy name among my people Israel. I will no longer let my holy name be profaned, and the nations will know that I the Lord am the Holy One in Israel” (Ezk 39:7).

To plead the Lord’s name is spiritually powerful

The Psalmist regularly pleads the name of the Lord in prayer ““Do not hold against us the sins of past generations; may your mercy come quickly to meet us, for we are in desperate need. Help us, God our Saviour, *for the glory of your name*; deliver us and forgive our sins *for your name’s sake*. *Why should the nations say, ‘Where is their God?’*” (Psa 79:8-10 cf 25:11; 31:3; 143:11).

Jeremiah prays similarly “Although our sins testify against us, do something, Lord, *for the sake of your name*. For we have often rebelled; we have sinned against you *For the sake of your name* do not despise us; do not dishonour your glorious throne. Remember your covenant with us and do not break it” (Jer 14:7, 21).

Daniel prays “‘Now, Lord our God, who brought your people out of Egypt with a mighty hand and who made for yourself a name that endures to this day, we have sinned, we have done wrong. Lord, in keeping with all your righteous acts, turn away your anger and your wrath from Jerusalem, your city, your holy hill. Our sins and the iniquities of our ancestors have made Jerusalem and your people an object of scorn to all those around us. ‘Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. *For your sake*, Lord, look with favour on your desolate sanctuary. Give ear, our God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. Lord, listen! Lord, forgive! Lord, hear and act! *For your sake*, my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name” (Dan 9:15-19).

We need to pray earnestly that the Lord will honour his name in revival

We live in a largely godless society and a church which often fails. This profoundly dishonours the name of the Lord.

The devil is therefore mocking the Lord and saying to us “Where is your God?” (Ex 32:9-14, 32; Isa 37:14-20; Psa 74, 80, 123). This should greatly distress us and in our prayer for revival we need to pray earnestly “Come to make your name known to your enemies” (Isa 64:2); “Do something for the sake of your name” (Jer 10:6).

Be assured of my prayers for you, especially at this stressful time.

God bless you,

Tony

PS Other articles I have written recently which you might find helpful:

UPDATE ON THE SITUATION IN ISRAEL: This paper looks at current political tension in Israel, radical US action, the dire Palestinian situation, conflict with Hezbollah in Lebanon, the growing threat from Iran and the state of the peace process. See <http://www.prayerforpeace.org.uk/paradox50.html>

UPDATE ON ABORTION: My new paper on abortion shows the remarkable early development of the human embryo which becomes a human being at conception; c99% of abortions in the UK are morally unjustified yet they involve ending the life of unborn babies. See <http://christianteaching.org.uk/blog/uncategorized/update-on-abortion/>

Revival is a supernatural event in the church and society. It is a work of the Holy Spirit which brings: an overpowering sense of God's presence leading to uplifting, inspired worship; an awesome sense of God's holiness leading to a deep conviction of sin, even amongst those outside the church; a supernatural drawing of people together and an outpouring of love for one another, all of which leads to a huge number coming to faith. People's lives and whole communities are transformed.