

## **Faith through fire part 1: The message that has always given life.** **By Daniel Zanich**

So, we are entering a new phase for our local body. That statement is fairly obvious. But this is not a new phase for us alone because we are not alone. We are not simply a local body. We are not, by ourselves, the body of Christ. We are among countless others in the body of Christ that has now spread across the globe through countless centuries - The Church Universal. Those who have gone before us into the presence of the Lord have seen times like this before and some that would have been worse in some ways. Believers who will come after us will see more and more of the same as this age draws to a close and the final stage is set for Israel's belief and national repentance. During that final stage, seven years such as the world has never seen, there will be believers looking for people whose faith held strong. A new Hebrews 11 for the people to come.

We may not be able to assemble, but the body of Christ is always open for business. In generations past, churches have been closed, outlawed and burned but yet here we still are to this day. Those who have preached the message of life in times past have been persecuted, beaten, arrested, tried, imprisoned, tortured and executed, but yet we are still here. Job losses, economic crashes, social displacement, conflicts, strife, exiles, slavery, natural disasters, political plots and conspiracies, and yet we are still here. Nothing can prevail against the kingdom of God and His kingdom disciples.

Just like the faithful in the age of Israel through their division and eventual downfall. A nation that rebelled against God, His call to holiness and His righteous standards, and who brutalised the needy and persecuted all those who stood by God's laws. Now we have seen her rebuilt in a fashion. A sign that God is always faithful to His people and His promises. If so for Israel, then also for all who believe. But also, a sign that our time is drawing to an end. They have survived the greatest conspiracy of all time started in Genesis by our arch enemy the Devil, the Satan, the Accuser. He keeps trying, and now we are involved. But hey, we know the end - Jesus wins!

Hebrews 11 offers us one of the most powerful principles for right now. While all those things were happening to faithful people of God, it was only happening to things of this life, things of this world, including their dead bodies. By faith through the fire, they looked not to a release *in* this life but *to* the life that is to come. To a kingdom that cannot be shaken and to a reward that is secure and incorruptible. So, where is your faith? Faith in Hebrews 11 gives you eyes to see what cannot be seen. To think and dream above and beyond what you can touch, taste, hear or smell.

We are not seeing anything that is truly new. The touch, taste and smell at this stage is kinder than many things that have befallen the church before. Solomon told us all millennia ago that there was nothing new under the sun. It may be new to you because, well, you haven't seen it before or experienced it before with the five senses that God has given you. But there is a more important sense, your mind or your thinking, your ability to process the other five. Descartes', "I think therefore I am" should speak volumes to us right now. If pondered too deeply we might rightly

wonder if anyone truly exists. But the power to process and to perceive, to be wise and prudent, is truly a gift from God.

By the time Christ was murdered on a cross, the innocent for the guilty, it wasn't a 'new' thing. Jesus had been telling His disciples it needed to happen. Now, with perception and the eyes to see, we read it all over the Hebrew Scriptures. In this 'new' thing we face, we now see again the words of Jesus for those who "think therefore I am". Without thought we act as nothing more than brute beasts crushing what is around us rather than working wisely by redeeming what time we have. The time is still there; the restrictions only hinder those who don't have eyes to see or the thought to consider what might be possible. We have a relatively new innovation called the internet; we have phones; Australia post still works sometimes; and Jesus, our brother and high priest, hasn't deserted His place in the heavenly sanctuary. If all else fails, pray! Social distancing doesn't apply in the holy of holies so don't be afraid of overcrowding Him there.

Jesus told us that things would get worse before they got better. So, there is nothing unexpected in what we see today. In truth, what we see today is only a taste of what is to come. But, for all we know, tomorrow we wake up, as if from a bizarre dream, and a cure has been found. Life would return to normal and we would only remember the past few weeks or months on the new-year's-eve special before we tick over to 2021. So, what would we have learned?

We have faced so many things before that could have been "the end" and survived. We all remember the fear and absolute hysteria among certain groups as the months, weeks, days and hours ticked down to 2000. I often joke that doomsayers will one day have their day to be right. After all, if we preach enough doom with enough variety to our theories someone will be right one day. But what if, once again, what we say proves to not yet be true. That doesn't mean that it might not one day be true. But what if, for now, you are wrong. What does that do to our credibility and our message? Are we to preach primarily a message of doom or the message of life? Perhaps a right balance of both is the answer.

What if things now spiral out of control and things continue to get worse. What will that do to your faith? How will all your knowledge about just how bad things can conceivably get benefit your neighbour? And, just as importantly, what will that do to your words or persona? To put it bluntly, and in terms I haven't heard since my time at seminary in California, "we were made to ride this bad boy out!" Nothing about this should change us.

You might fire quickly back, without taking a moment to consider Descartes' theory, "but now is the time to stand up and be seen," or, "but now is the time to preach the gospel." Sorry I forgot that you had forgotten that you 'should' have been doing that all along. Don't worry, you are not alone; I have too often forgotten the same thing. We should have always been standing up for the message of life and freely proclaiming it; standing up for the kingdom of God and its principles. Regardless of the possibilities of tomorrow, perhaps this is a shot across the bow for the church to wake up. Great men and women of our past didn't wait for brown precipitate to hit the fan, they were always about their Father's kingdom business.

Jesus told us that things would get worse before they got better. Perhaps that's the best we have to offer people on this subject. But, without a doubt, while people are questioning reality, governments and their neighbour's hygiene, we have a break in the mundane to inject freely and openly the message that gives life. And yes, if your faith and current actions are lining up, then share what you know about eschatology.

So, what should our faith through this fire cling to? There are many more fires to come. Not only is the message of life our greatest gift to the people around us but also our faith stories. People around us, and people yet to be born, will need to hear and see how your faith in God's promises and your faith that could see, as if it were today, those promises fulfilled in the life to come worked out in your daily life yesterday, today and tomorrow. Be people that can share their faith; the message of life and how your faith kept your head screwed on when everyone else was overbuying toilet paper. People of faith who, though the world was in disarray and mad blind panic, could see Jesus crowned with glory, as the ruling heir in His kingdom. A great vision, by faith, of our final destiny.

We will spend some time over the following posts talking about God's plan from start to finish, where we fit in that plan and what the future holds. But for now, don't be so shocked. Don't be like the disciples when Jesus was crucified, or when Jesus rose from the dead, all shell shocked and dumbfounded. It's not new. We knew this was coming nearly two thousand years ago. And remember, this may not be the "it" yet. If you are going to sell someone on a message, they are at least going to need to believe that you believed it. If you have a great understanding of eschatology, then let them see you're all excited because you know how this truly ends.

For now, let's not try to lecture our neighbours just on eschatology, let's start with baby steps. If they ask you about things then yes, have the answers. But let's make sure your life is at least headed in the direction of someone who has hope in those answers. So, for now, focus on the most important part, the message of life, "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God who gives eternal life to anyone who believes in Him for it!" Then we can start to add, "and Jesus wins," then perhaps, "and this is how," but always salted with a life that is clearly embracing all those things with faith and sanity.

Finally, "I think therefore I am." These restrictions shouldn't frustrate, they should ferment. They shouldn't ferment resentment but the best in us. God has placed us in this time and called us to respond to this time. We have so many things at our fingertips that no previous generation could have ever thought to ask for. Use what is available to you. That's all God asks of you. Think about what you can do. Your neighbours are going as stir-crazy as you, maybe they would be interested in some conversation, even from 1.5 metres away. If you have money, use it to help others. If you have debt, ask for help. If you have the internet, keep in touch with people. If you have a phone, then call the elders when you need help, or call a friend to lift them up. If you are lonely, let the elders know. If you have neither then the post still works, write a letter or send a funny card or picture.

Always remember Shamgar had an ox goad and he thought long enough about it that he figured out how to killed 600 of Israel's enemies. A simple farmer, but with time to think, perhaps it took him decades, he realised the flat end was for flicking and the sharp end was for sticking.

Please read 2 Corinthians 8 - 9 and discuss as a family, and watch the video linked below to be ready to have a discussion on Sunday.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fZYSxs5pSoM>