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The gospel 'vaccine'

"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool," Isaiah 1:18.

Last night, my sleep was disturbed as I thought over the last article I sent out - UK 'absolutely' preparing for second Covid-19 peak and may not see back of virus for 'several years'.

Time and again I found myself developing the subject further, with scripture after scripture flooding into my mind.

Now, as I try to put down those thoughts, I trust the Lord will bring back to my mind the scriptures that came to me in the night!

In the last article, mentioned above, I more or less dealt with the issue of the Government lifting the lockdown restrictions from a simple factual, human point of view. If 'social distancing' has brought the spread of the Covid-19 virus down, what will the lifting of those regulations do, only increase the spread of the virus since it has not been utterly removed from society nor has a vaccine been produced!

This the Government acknowledges to be so because it is preparing for an increase in the numbers infected after it relaxes the restrictions upon social distancing.

A flood of death

But the consequences for the nation, and those other nations engaged in the same foolish and reckless undertaking, is more than just increased infection with its subsequent increased burden on the health service, deaths amongst the vulnerable and elderly, distress amongst the families of those infected but above all it will see a dreadful flood of people being ushered out into eternity before their time, if I may use that term.

For the Christian, the chief distressing feature of these days of pandemic is the undeniable fact that there is hardly any reference whatever to the Lord amongst the ranks of the nation! It is as if His name is also to be 'isolated' from. His name must not be uttered. Government spokesmen certainly never mention the Lord in the context of this plague, or in any other context, we must say! The 'common man' in the street likewise makes no reference to the Lord, even those who, when interviewed for news reports on their recovery, are thanking doctors and nurses and care workers, but they rarely ever mention the Lord. I say 'rarely' for I have not heard all such reports but just in case there have been instances of the Lord being thanked I thus qualify my statement.

I certainly have not heard the Lord honoured by any!

More surprising is the fact that a true Biblical way of looking at the events of the last three months has not been heard from the leaders of the so-called main churches. Now that does not surprise me for we have in this apostate age, 'the blind leading the blind', as the Saviour so succinctly put it in Matthew 15:14. "Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch."

Man's thinking

In the absence of a Biblical perspective, the nation and its political leaders will not act properly and wisely in the face of this plague. The Government's plan, which we have criticised in our previous article on the subject, is but born of man's thinking! It is man stumbling along in his own darkness without the light of God guiding him!

As I tossed and turned somewhat during the hours of last night, I thought of the decisions made by men encountering similar devastation. I thought of the days of Noah. Through his preaching, preaching which is termed by Peter as the Lord speaking amongst men, no heed was given to what Noah said.



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We are not given a direct description of the attitude of the population to Noah's message, but we are told that "GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually," Genesis 6:5. That rules out any heeding of the message of Noah. Furthermore, since "few, that is, eight souls were saved," 1Peter 3:20, that is the family of Noah, the rest of humanity alive when the flood came, rejected God's warning. Instead "they did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all," Luke 17:27.

Surely that scene reminds us of the very matters being mentioned today as the Government plans a return to 'normality' in the face of the coronavirus outbreak!

In the days of Noah, the world did have a powerful witness to God's truth. We are told in Genesis 6:3 that God's Spirit was striving with men and that striving continued for one hundred and twenty years. The means the Spirit used to strive with men was, of course, the Word preached by Noah. As I mentioned above, the Lord was speaking to the anti-diluvian world. Hear what Peter, inspired by the Holy Ghost of course, said on the matter. "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: by which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water;" 1Peter 3:18-20. So, the Lord Jesus, by His Spirit, preached unto those of the days of Noah, those who are now in the 'prison' of hell awaiting that great day of judgment, for they were 'disobedient' to the merciful warning of God issued through Noah's Christ-empowered preaching!

Brethren and sisters, that is the witness that must be maintained in these days. We must be as a Noah and tell of the soon coming of the Lord Jesus "in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day," 2Thessalonians 1:8-10.

Tragedy

The tragedy of today is that, in the midst of the efforts to restore social gatherings and times of drinking and partying, there is absolute no thought within the reasoning of men, of the spiritual and eternal significance of what is happening today! This 'plague' which has so paralysed the world's developed nations' economies and slaughtered hundreds of thousands of people, is but a foretaste of what is to come upon this world which has forgotten God, aye, rather deliberately put away all thought of Him from their minds.

Does not God say: "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God," Psalm 14:1? The world is peopled today by those who hold to this philosophy in one form or another. There are plenty who would not take the word 'atheist' upon their lips but who in truth are such! They reject the true God as He is revealed in His own Word and embrace a god of their own invention.

There have been many references to such a god by religious and political leaders. It is to such a god that some have turned at the suggestion of their leaders. I confess that there has been little or no reference even to such a false god here in the United Kingdom, and this serves to illustrate just how far from the gospel this nation has drifted. However, we have read reports of President Trump referring to 'God' and a need to pray. He 'tweeted' on March 13th: "It is my great honor to declare Sunday, March 15th as a National Day of Prayer."

He stated that he would be 'tuning in' to Pastor Jentezen Franklin, a tele-evangelist's internet service.

Donald Trump has worshipped in Episcopal, Baptist, Presbyterian and in churches associated with his wife's religious affiliation - Roman Catholic!



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In other words, Trump has no religion at all. Such a 'potpourri' religion is no religion and it is the religious affiliation chiefly embraced by humanity!

The religion of the Bible, true religion, is stated for us in the first, second and third commandments.

1. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me."

2. "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments."

3. "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain," Exodus 20:3-7.

These basic rules of faith and worship condemn all modern religions with their statues, idols, saint and angel worship and a plethora of other practices contrary to God's Word.

Here in Ulster, the DUP/Sinn Fein power-sharing Executive, relaxed 'social distancing' and allowed churches to open for private prayer. That was a concession to Popery for its people are accustomed to gathering privately in their church buildings to count their beads, pray to Mary and repeat man-devised prayers to saints and angels.

That is about as near as the leadership in our little country came to bringing any mention of the Lord into the our crisis.

This is mere 'Hollywood Religion'! It is idolatry with a sprinkling of Biblical-sounding phrases to give it the appearance of Christianity.

Abhorrent

Such evil 'tom-foolery' is abhorrent to God! We are reminded of the message of Isaiah in the midst of a very similar set of circumstances.

"Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool," Isaiah 1:13-18.

Where, on a national level, do we have such plain and faithful preaching today! The nation has never had it explained to it just why we are enduring the plague that has suddenly befallen us. The eating habits of some Chinese have come in for much comment, but the eating of cats and dogs, mice and bats etc., seems to be quite common in some Asian countries so, WHY ONLY NOW IS THE PLAGUE BREAKING FORTH?

There have been mentions of the fact that the hand of God is at work but, as we know in one sad and humiliating case, political pressure brought about a rapid back-peddling by the professing Christian politician who made such a reference.

Such an idea is to be scoffed and laughed at and rejected!

Irrespective of the mockery that follows such a declaration, it is true that God is BEHIND this plague! It is a



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manifestation of His vexation with the nations because of their sin and utter rejection of Him and His Word.

It is not unreasonable to say that the events of this coronavirus are likely the first sightings of those awful events prophesied in the Book of the Revelation, chapters 15 onwards when the seven last plagues of God and the vials of His wrath are described.

Yet even in this there is mercy! A foretaste of God's wrath and judgment is surely a forewarning and an opportunity to avail of His proffered mercy before the fulness of wrath falls! Is it not a case of "when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah," 1Peter 3:20? Is not God exercising patience and longsuffering toward mankind today by showing His wrath in this limited form as a warning of what is yet to come in its fulness upon this generation if there is not a turning away from sin?

Witness

We have a record given us in the Bible of God's anger toward sin and we have further evidence of that anger presented to us in this coronavirus. This two-fold witness should be listened to!

Just what should men do? Well Isaiah did tell us what it is the Lord requires of us. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool," Isaiah 1:18.

How many committees and gatherings of men have been convened in response to this Covid-19 outbreak? BUT here is one gathering together that has not taken place, to any measurable degree. There has been no real seeking unto the Lord.

The word translated 'reason together' means to hold a meeting in order to assess just what has brought about this situation we are faced with.

There has been no consulting of God or a humble seeking of His explanation of events. Rather, He is dismissed and disregarded and His Word disposed of. Yet, it alone holds the key to deliverance from this plague and that which will undoubtedly follow on.

The Lord, in wonderful reasonableness offers to the most wicked, a means of deliverance. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

That is how our sins are. They are deep-dyed! They are glaring in their wickedness and depravity. And yet, mercy is offered. "They shall be as white as snow . . . they shall be as wool."

The old gospel message is summed up in the words of the grand hymn:

What can wash away my sin?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
What can make me whole again?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

*Oh! precious is the flow
That makes me white as snow;
No other fount I know,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

For my cleansing this I see—
Nothing but the blood of Jesus!

For my pardon this my plea—
Nothing but the blood of Jesus!

Nothing can my sin erase
Nothing but the blood of Jesus!
Naught of works, 'tis all of grace—
Nothing but the blood of Jesus!

This is all my hope and peace—
Nothing but the blood of Jesus!
This is all my righteousness—
Nothing but the blood of Jesus!



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The blood of the Lord Jesus is indeed the ONLY means of cleansing away our sins.

I tremble at just how ignorant our nation has become of this once broadly understood, if not believed and personally received, truth. As a boy, though knowing very little of the gospel and hearing even less from my attendance at Church of Ireland services, I at least knew that "Christ died for the ungodly," Romans 5:6!

Sadly, the religion of mankind has become one! Christendom and Heathendom have united in one common creed. Man's redemption lies in his own hands. It is by his 'good works' that man will find deliverance and entrance into 'eternal glory'!

The Muslim, the Sikh, the Buddhist, the Episcopalian, the Presbyterian, the Methodist, the Baptist, with very few exceptions, all teach a common central creed - salvation is by our works!

There has been an abandoning of the Gospel by professing Christianity and an embracing of that 'natural' religion, the religion of Cain and his kind: 'self redemption'!

This is that spoken of by Paul in 1 Timothy 4:1.

"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils."

The days of the final great apostasy are upon us and have been increasingly so for quite some time.

Yes, there is a rejection of the 'old gospel' the 'old path' but in the midst of such rejection we must seek to witness to that which Isaiah stated.

There is a way of forgiveness and cleansing and that way is through the blood of Christ.

Sin

Sin is a violation of God's law. "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law," 1 John 3:4.

We are ALL guilty of such violations of God's law. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God," Romans 3:23.

Transgression of God's law results in punishment. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die," Ezekiel 18:20. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned," Romans 5:12. "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord," Romans 6:23.

The death spoken of as the punishment for sin is physical death, to which we are all subject, BUT it does not end there. There is another dimension to that death which is the punishment of sin. There is an eternal dimension. "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire," Revelation 20:12-15.

There will be a resurrection of all who died without Christ, and body and soul they shall be cast into the lake of fire, 'This is the second death'. This is the eternal state of those who reject Christ and His gospel.

Now, the gospel explains to us that the escaping that terrible eternal consequence of sin entails us embracing that which Christ has accomplished on the cross. Just as men are hoping for a vaccine whereby they may be delivered from the coronavirus, in a much more wonderful way, God has created a vaccine (if I may



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be allowed to use that word reverently) whereby IMMUNITY from the consequences of sin is brought about!

Listen to those most familiar of words, even in this day of ignorance! "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life," John 3:16.

There is the source of God's 'vaccine'! God 'gave his only begotten Son.' That is, He gave Him to die on the cross at Calvary some two thousand years ago, in order to produce a wonderful means whereby sinners may be made IMMUNE from the dreadful consequences of sin.

Calvary

How was that accomplished? The breaking of the law by men had to be addressed. God's justice could not simply ignore that breach. However, His mercy cried out for a means of deliverance for the guilty sinner.

How could divine justice and divine mercy be reconciled? How could both have their accomplishment and fulfilment?

Calvary's cross holds the answer!

"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit," 1Peter 3:18.

Let me repeat that truth.

"Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed," 1Peter 2:24.

O my dear reader, this is an old message though forgotten by this age. Men may react to it as did an old man to whom I witnessed many years ago. "Did Paisley invent that message?"

Men may now think it a very modern notion, though there is in man, an inherent awareness that it is, in truth, the eternal message of God for the words carry their own endorsing convictions! It was for that reason that I, when unconverted and in darkness, could not look upon the words of the gospel text mounted on what was then 'Short Strand Congregational Church, when passing it nightly on a bus. "Jesus saith, Ye must be born again". I was ignorant yet knew that there was in those words an eternal truth which condemned me as a rebellious sinner!

No, the gospel is 'Old yet ever new'.

Many, many years ago, Isaiah said. "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities," Isaiah 53:3-11.



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Dear unconverted reader, please study carefully these words of Isaiah for they are the key to heaven if you believe them.

Perhaps I hear you say, 'There is no mention of Jesus Christ or of Calvary in these verses!'

Let me show you that the 'He' mentioned here is Christ our Saviour and the sufferings set forth do refer to the cross.

Many years after these words were written by the prophet, a poor seeking sinner read them and struggled to understand them and God in His mercy, sent one to explain them to him. The explanation he was given is just that which I have been seeking to set before you.

Listen again to God's Word.

"And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: in his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth. And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? Acts 8:26-34.

The Ethiopian could not decipher the meaning of Isaiah's words. 'Who is the man spoken of?' he asks.

The answer of God's servant is most important. "Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus," verse 35.

Here then is proof that the One mentioned as the suffering sacrifice in Isaiah 53, is indeed our blessed Redeemer.

Joy

Furthermore, the passage in Acts 8 tells us of the joyous outcome of the Ethiopian hearing the gospel of Isaiah explained.

"And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing," Acts 8:36-39.

Hearing the gospel awakened a desire to be saved and to show his faith through baptism. He gladly proclaimed his new faith in these glorious words: "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." Such faith is a saving faith. He had understood that Jesus Christ the Son of God became man, died on the cross to bear away his sins and so surrendered his soul in faith to Christ, utterly depending on His death to atone for his sin!

Please note the transformation in the man. He lost the companionship of Philip, for the Lord took Philip away, but the man retained the joy of his salvation for it says 'he went on his way rejoicing.'

The joy of the Christ is found in Christ alone and not in any earthly company.



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The Ethiopian's sins, though they were as scarlet, and as red as crimson, they became as white as snow and as wool. Hallelujah!

How wonderful is the deliverance God's 'vaccine' accomplishes. John the Baptist said "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," John 1:29. Christ takes away the sins of those who trust in Him.

How far away? "For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us," Psalm 103:11-12. "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins," Isaiah 43:25. "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee," Isaiah 44:22.

Let me close with the words of Peter to the people of Jerusalem. "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord," Acts 3:19.

In the midst of the confusion, deceit and darkness of man's ignorance, may you heed the Gospel of Christ and seek the Lord while He may be found.

Rev Ivan Foster (Rtd)

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