

## THINKING RIGHTLY ABOUT COVID-19

How are you thinking and feeling about what's been happening with regard to COVID-19, to the coronavirus? These have been tough times, most difficult times. These past six weeks have been like none I have ever seen before, and I am 66 years old. There's talk about sickness, death, social distancing, mitigation, masks, ventilators, testing, therapeutics, vaccines, antibodies, and herd immunity. There's talk about jobs, layoffs, unemployment, financial stimulus, protests, inflation, recession, and getting back to work.

There are the thoughts and emotions of people trying to deal with this: Anxious, distraught, fearful, frightened, nervous, scared, unsettled, worried. Alarmed, angry, annoyed, mad, upset. Aggravating, difficult, disruptive, frustrating, inconvenient, stressful. Bored. Confused. Depressed. Lonely. Oppressed. Questioning. Uncertain. There is no doubt that people have been greatly affected by this sickening little virus that has been spreading all over the world, now in 184 countries. How about you? How are you doing? How have you been affected?

I am sure you have been tested by this most unusual trial. Peter 1:6-7 tells us, *"In this we greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold... may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."* God says that trials are **distressing**, are difficult and troubling for the body / or soul. They take place **now**, only during your life on this earth. They last a **little while**, not very long compared to eternity. There are **various trials**, all kinds of trials, and this pandemic is a very unique one. Romans 5:1-5

They are **necessary**. They help you be humble, for you see that God is much greater than you, that He is sovereign and in charge, and that He will do what He wants to do. They help you have faith in God, to trust Him, for He is good and powerful, and can enable you to get through the trial (James 1:2-12). They help you grow in hope, for you know things will get better, that there will be a time when everything is perfect (Rev. 21-22). They help you grow in love, for you learn to love God even more, for it is He who strengthens and comforts you, and who through the Holy Spirit, is with you all the time. *"The Lord your God is testing you to find out if you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul."* Deut. 13:3

God is using this present pandemic, this Coronavirus trial, to help you spiritually grow up, to be more humble, have more faith, be hoping in Him, and be loving Him. God does not want you to be like people in the world who are fearful, upset or angry, or who are trusting in themselves, in their money, or in the government. He wants you to love Him, and trust Him and obey Him. *"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."* John 14:15

But to love God, to trust and obey Him, you need to think about how God is your heavenly Father, how He is the only One who greatly cares for you, who loves you far more than anyone else. At times like this, you need to have an intimate relationship with Him. And for that to happen, you need to know that He is sovereign, is in complete control, and that He is holy, loving, merciful, faithful, wise, purposeful, good, unchanging, righteous, and truthful. Only as you truly know God and His character will you be delivered from fear, loneliness, anger, stress and boredom, and be given all the grace, peace and joy you need. Then you will be encouraged and enabled to love and obey Him. Phil. 3:7-10, 2 Tim. 1:2

But you need to see this pandemic with the big picture in mind, in light of the end-times, the last years leading up to the end of this age and the return of Christ. Most of you know that God has told us many things in His word about the end-times, the condition of the world before the coming of Christ. That's because He doesn't want you to be surprised when His Son returns to rapture the church. As Christians we are so blessed and privileged to be living in the end-times, a period marked by the return of the Jewish people to their land. It is during this time that *"birth pains"* will be occurring around the world, signs that are designed by God to wake us up, to alert us to the soon coming of Christ.

This plague, this pandemic, is one of the birth pains, along with wars, great earthquakes, famines, and economic distress. *"You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pains"* (Matt. 24:4-8). *"There will be great earthquakes, and in various places plagues and famines..."* Luke 21:8-11, Rev. 6:1-8

Now I must admit, this pandemic, this present birth pain, has personally affected me. What do I mean? Well, for the first time ever, I feel like I have an idea of what it's like to go through an end-times' birth pain. Like an expectant mother literally experiences and feels her birth pains, I am now literally experiencing and feeling the effects of this pandemic. I don't believe Florida has ever had wars, great earthquakes, or famines. But now there's this plague, this coronavirus, affecting our country, my county, my church, and my wife and I. And God wants this plague, this virus to sober up, to wake up the Christians, which includes you and me. These birth pains are God-ordained problems, designed to get our attention, to get our eyes off ourselves and on Him. God does not want us to ever be living for the world or for self, but only and always for Him. 2 Chronicles 15, Psalm 27:1-9

What can we say about these birth-pains, which includes this pandemic?

1. These birth pains will continue and will increase in frequency and intensity. This present plague will come to an end, but there will be more of them. As much as we would like to say they won't happen again, Christians must know that these plagues, along with wars, famines, and great earthquakes, will continue to take place in the years ahead, leading to the *"birth"* of Christ, that is, the coming of Christ and the rapture of the church. 1 Th. 5:4-11, Matt. 24:4-31

2. These birth pains will not be continually taking place. You know how an expectant mother, at a certain point in time, will begin experiencing these birth pains. But once they start, they don't continually keep going, one right after another - one happens and then stops, and then another happens and then stops, and so on. The point is that these birth pains will be happening now and then (Matt. 24:6-8). This means this present pandemic will come to an end. In the future, another one will take place, and only God knows exactly when it will happen, how bad it will be, and how in the world it relates to the coming of Christ.

3. These birth pains occur in various places on this earth. For example, wars are not, and will not, be taking place in every single country, but in various places around the world. Great earthquakes usually happen only in certain areas, in geographical areas where the tectonic conditions are right (*"The Ring of Fire"*). Then there are famines, which typically take place in poorer parts of the world. Matt. 24:4-8 talks about these birth pains, but in Rev. 6:1-8, they are called the first four seals, and in verse 6, we read about food and poverty, which I believe relates to these famines we are talking about in Matt. 24:7.

Matthew 24:6 also says we will be hearing about these birth pains. And for most of you, isn't that the way it is? You watch TV or read some internet news source, and you hear about some war, earthquake, or famine happening in some other geographical area. It is not taking place in your locality, but you are hearing about it. For example, I do not personally know anyone who has died from this coronavirus, but I have heard that many people have died.

4. We are living in the beginning stages of the end-times, a time during which these birth pains are occurring, but not intensely so. I personally believe they will go on for about 10, 20, 30 years or more, and then Christ will return to rapture the church. *"All these things are merely the beginning of birth pains"* (Matt. 24:8). *"These things must take place first, but the end does not follow immediately"* (Luke 21:9). Many more things need to happen in our world before the coming of Christ. Some even say His coming is imminent, that no prophesied events need to take place before the rapture, that it can happen today, tomorrow, next month, or this year, but that is not true, for many prophesied things need to happen before this age ends and Christ appears above the earth, and then takes us to heaven. Matt. 24:8-31

5. I do not believe, as some say, that the birth pains start at the beginning of Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week, a seven-year period. The rapture happens sometime in the last 3½ years of this time frame, and I cannot see how you can fit all these wars, famines, earthquakes and plagues into what I believe will be a rather short time period, maybe only 4-5 years long. The very nature of these events, with the exception of earthquakes, is that they occur over an elongated period of time. I do believe they have been already going on for many years.

6. These birth pains affect believers and unbelievers. They do not affect just the unbelievers, and they do not affect just the believers. These birth pains are wake-up calls for both the saved and the lost. The very nature of these events shows us that. If an earthquake hits a city, then surely there are some Christians living in that city who are affected. And of course, this present pandemic does not discriminate, for it is affecting both Christians and non-Christians.

7. These birth pains are not God's wrath. They are separate from God's wrath, taking place at a completely different time. Rev. 6:1-8 describes the birth pains which affect both Christians and non-Christians. Rev. 7:9-14 talks about the rapture which affects only Christians. Then Rev. 8-9 describes God's wrath which affects only non-Christians. These birth pains are distinct from God's wrath and affect both Christians and non-Christians. On the other hand, Christians will escape this punishing and devastating wrath of God, which is coming upon this earth, wrath which starts after the Christians are raptured. "... *Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.*" (1 Thess. 1:9, 5:9). And so, Christ comes, rapturing and rescuing the church, and then God's wrath is immediately poured out upon the unbelievers who are still on earth.

8. These birth pains will be distressing, disruptive, and death-producing. Rev. 6:8 tells us that up to one-fourth of the world will die because of these birth pains. That's close to two billion people, an enormous amount of people, both saved and lost, who will die. In addition to that, many end-time deaths will be Christians who are martyred for their faith, particularly during the great tribulation. "*They will deliver you to tribulation and will kill you*" (Matt. 24:9, 21; Rev. 6:8-11). This sad and sobering state of our world is also described in Matt. 24:28 - "*Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.*" The word corpse means a dead body. During these last years leading up to Christ's return, great multitudes of people will be dying.

We are talking about birth pains, major events and conditions which will be affecting and, to some degree, devastating many parts of our world in the last years leading up to the coming of Christ and the rapture of the church. With this in view, here are a few closing thoughts:

1. God does not want you to be afraid when these things take place. Be strong and very courageous. Psalm 46, Eph. 6:10-12
2. Trust God during these difficult times, knowing that He is sovereign, and that He greatly loves you, and is using you for His purposes. Proverbs 3:5-6
3. Know that God is faithfully and continually working, and these birth plans are all part of His overall plan to send His Son back to earth to rapture the church and judge the world. Isaiah 42:1-4, Matthew 24:4-31, Revelation 8-9
4. Birth pains are wake-up calls to get you focused on God and your relationship with Him. They are to also alert you to the fact that Christ is coming soon. The occurrence and increasing frequency of these birth pains will be continual reminders that it won't be long before Christ returns to rapture the church. 1 Thess. 5:1-9, Heb. 10:25
5. Life on earth will get more difficult in the days leading up to Christ's coming, and you don't want to be weak, worldly or fearful. You want to be a strong, holy and courageous Christian, walking with the Lord, obeying Him, and experiencing His grace and peace.
6. Finally, you are to keep doing the work of the Lord. Even though life may be very hard, even though there may be extreme difficulties, you will need to stay close to your Father, staying focused on the work He gives you to do before Christ returns to take you home. Matt. 24:14, 25:12-19, 28:19-20 - "*Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*"