What in the World is going on? (Coronavirus version)

**Intro** – The last three weeks have been at least challenging for the Christian, probably terrifying for everyone else. As I have listened to people in the marketplace, I hear a growing question: “is this the Apocalypse?” It is an important question, and it is not hard for the Christian to give a detailed, biblical answer. **The answer is, no, it is not the Apocalypse.**  That word is used to identify the “revealing” of Jesus. It is from the Greek word *apocalupsis* which means “revealing, disclosure, to take off the cover.” It is a time largely described by the Book of the Revelation in which God tries to reach unsaved man before condemning him to eternal hell. The church will not be present for it, having been translated to heaven en masse prior to the start of its seven horrific years. So what is this current pandemic and what is its purpose?

 **Ex 9:13-16** - *'This is what the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, says: Let my people go, so they can worship me. 14 If you don't, I will send more plagues on you and your officials and your people. Then you will know that there is no one like me in all the earth. 15 By now I could have lifted my hand and struck you and your people with a plague to wipe you off the face of the earth. 16 But I have spared you for a purpose—to show you my power.* NLT

This verse shows the typical purpose of a plague. God doesn’t do evil to His people, but he does inflict and slay the lawless and those who hate Him. Plagues consisted of any natural catastrophe, like weather, disease, insects, drought, darkness, or the befouling of something man depended on for survival, like water or soil. Coronavirus, which we could rightly call a plague, is certainly being used as a punishment to get the attention of the 7.3 billion people on the earth. Right now, God is rebuking China and Iran for their persecution of the church. He is secondarily trying to reach all unbelieving humans, all of whom He loves, in an attempt to keep them from hell. Thirdly, He is disciplining His church so it will mature and do the work of Jesus while it is still on the earth.

**1 Thess 4:15-18** - *We tell you this directly from the Lord: We who are still living when the Lord returns will not meet him ahead of those who have died. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the Christians who have died will rise from their graves. 17 Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever.* NLT

You can know when the Apocalypse will start. It will start with the event described in the verse above which we have coined a word for: the rapture. Pastor Tim LaHaye’s great book, Left Behind, describes this event well. What a wake-up call for all the world that will be, when all the saints currently alive and the bodies of all the deceased saints of the church age come forth from their graves and meet the Lord in the air and go to be with Him in heaven. There is nothing in prophecy left to be fulfilled before that can happen. What we will experience up until that moment is life as we know it right now:

**Luke 17:26-30** - 26 *"When the Son of Man returns, it will be like it was in Noah's day. 27 In those days, the people enjoyed banquets and parties and weddings right up to the time Noah entered his boat and the flood came and destroyed them all. 28 "And the world will be as it was in the days of Lot. People went about their daily business—eating and drinking, buying and selling, farming and building— 29 until the morning Lot left Sodom. Then fire and burning sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. 30 Yes, it will be 'business as usual' right up to the day when the Son of Man is revealed.* NLT

In my opinion, of the signs of the nearing of the Apocalypse is coming into place, i.e., The final form of gentile world power in the form of four great kingdoms: 1) **The kingdom of the Beast**, which will probably be some confederacy of European nations depicted by the feet described in **Daniel 2:42** as composed of iron and clay. The iron and clay don’t adhere, naturally. The entire history of Europe, including its present form, the European Union, is a divided, disorganized mess. This is the kingdom from which the Antichrist, or Beast, will come. 2) **The kings of the East**, **(Rev 16:12**) a group of nations east of the Euphrates River, likely an Asian bloc perhaps including China, North Korea, Vietnam, etc. They square off against the kingdom of the Beast for the final battle of Armageddon, which is an entire campaign, like World War II. Just two hundred years ago, Japan and china were nations of peasants. Now they are nuclear powers. 3) **The king of the North (Ezekiel 38:2-6),** likely a confederacy of nations with Russia as its head, including Iran and many nations geographically in between Russia and Israel. Germany is included in that confederacy. The confederacy is destroyed by the Lord on the mountains of Israel. 4) **The King of the South (Daniel 11:40),** a mysterious ruler, little understood until just the past several decades. This will probably be a Muslim confederacy consisting of North African (Egypt) and Middle Eastern nations. The confederacy did not exist until their founder, Mohammed, came on the scene in 532 AD. Now they are a prominent political and military force. The king of the south invades Israel and is destroyed in the conflict. Over the course of modern history, numerous alignments of nations (European wars, World War I, World War II) have given rise to speculation that Jesus’ return would happen at any moment. These nations have never been assembled ever before in an alignment so well matched to the Scriptures.

The Rapture kicks off the Tribulation, a period of seven years of intense judgment by God against the sinful people left behind after the church is translated. Numerous “plagues,” in three groupings, occur during the Tribulation: 1) **Seal Judgments** (**Rev 6:2-17**) consisting of a false attempt to establish peace on earth, followed by the complete removal of order, followed by complete anarchy and war. 2) **Trumpet Judgments** (consisting of the rise of armies which slay a third of all living men on the earth, judgments making water and land unusable and uninhabitable, judgments on rulers of nations, torment inflicted on men via stinging insects, etc. 3) **Vial or Bowl judgments (Rev 16:1-21)** consist of calamities poured out on worshippers of the Beast, removal of life from the sea, darkness and removal of light, invasion of the Kings of the East, and the display of the fierceness of God. The Tribulation is brought to a close by the physical return of Jesus with His saints (you and me). You can see that we are certainly not living in the Tribulation right now. Again, we will not be present for it, we will be in heaven.

**Micah 6:6-8** - *What can we bring to the Lord?* *What kind of offerings should we give him?* *Should we bow before God* *with offerings of yearling calves?* *7 Should we offer him thousands of rams* *and ten thousand rivers of olive oil?* *Should we sacrifice our firstborn children* *to pay for our sins?* *8 No, O people, the Lord has told you what is good,* *and this is what he requires of you:* *to do what is right, to love mercy,* *and to walk humbly with your God.* NLT

**So, what is God saying to us, His church, in this time of worldwide pestilence?**  We naturally run quickly to find every Scripture concerning God’s protection. Nothing wrong with that, but let’s look deeper. Do you think God, through the coronavirus, is telling all of us to change, permanently? To really mature into fully developed sons of God with the stature of Jesus? Although the worldwide church has many members today who are really pleasing Jesus, a great part of the church, especially in the developed West, has been focused on itself. Church is a building with a rather impersonal meeting we attend. We “go to” it and comfortably leave when the program is over. Pastors build the church into what pleases us. Worship means standing and singing some songs, not the sacrifice of our lives, ambitions, possessions, destinies, careers, estates, etc. To many Christians, Jesus ends up being bumper sticker, a good luck charm on our dashboard, a nice addition to our Christmas tree, a social event on Sunday which will last about 1 ½ hours. We will be free, having done our duty, after that to mow our grass or clean patio furniture. He may be a life preserver for the troubled, an ATM machine for the short on cash, a butler for every need, who we desperately cry out to until the crisis of our moment has passed. It’s then back to Western Christianity, which mostly involves the pursuit of our personal goals and, for some spiritual seasoning, the endless pursuit of information. Bible studies abound. Pastors provide endless streams of it, but people are no stronger after 10 years of it than they were 10 years prior to that. We’re comfortably distanced from the poor. They have to figure out how to exist through government programs, as the rest of us build our financial estates, adorning and improving our homes. Many poor are that way because they have squandered their provision through laxity. Humility is needed on their part to become diligent with what they have. Similarly, the affluent need humility and faith to take what they have and give some of it away. Financial independence is still the very real goal of most Christians. Is it really a godly goal? Jesus told a rich ruler to go and sell all he had and give it to the poor and follow Him (**Luke 18:18-27**). These are instructions from Jesus! In the meantime, widows have mounting needs which are referred to government programs. Most church life doesn’t *really* include the disabled. If they can make it to our congregation meeting, wonderful. If they can’t… How about taking the church to them, empowering them to lead in their settings and start a church right there? How about the offenses we hold toward each other? You know, the list of people you can’t be with or function around because you don’t like them. Most churches are like an 8-cylinder car trying to run on 4 cylinders. Half the power is gone due to personal conflicts. We simply find a big enough church service to attend so we don’t have to be too close our offenders. How about the pastor’s and elders’ incessant push for a bigger building, more staff, bigger footprint in the community, air time, advertising, etc.? It’s exciting to have lots of notable programs, which are glitzy, promotional, exciting, and missionary-oriented. Since everything is done at the church building, we don’t need church anymore in our homes. It seems a lot less exciting to make disciples, day in and out, of the people we see all the time than it does to do a mission trip to the Congo. Outside of the apostle Paul’s visits to the scattered early church, there were no mission trips in the Bible. Consider on top of all that the many churches that don’t acknowledge the work of the Holy Spirit, avoiding healing, prophesying, etc., because it is not a good crowd-builder. Go even further and realize there are parts of the church which blatantly disobey the standards of God and condone same-sex marriage and promote homosexuality. Don’t you think God is concerned about all of this?

**Concl** - Jesus is calling us back to the church that He started. One in which we simply do rightly, love mercy and walk humbly with God. Don’t fear the plague, fear God!