



The Harvester

*Preparing Souls
To Serve The Lord!*

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Enduring the Virus

“As Seeing Him Who Is Invisible”

Brian R. Kenyon

One of the main reasons people are in such fear of this virus (besides or in addition to the media's reaction) is because it is unseen. Because it is reported that COVID-19 has never been seen, people are naturally fearful. Its invisibility (to the naked eye) means that people can be seemingly unaffected by it but carry it unknowingly and transmit it to others. There has always been a natural fear of the unseen, and that fear is especially heightened with instantaneous media coverage.

Facing, enduring, and overcoming the unseen is nothing new to God's people. In fact, this very theme is prevalent in Hebrews 11, one of the most encouraging chapters about faith in the Bible. Many verses explicitly mention the unseen, for example: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1); “By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible” (Heb. 11:3); “By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household ...” (Heb. 11:7); “By faith he [Moses] forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible” (Heb. 11:27). In the very context of these verses, the faith of several Old Testament individuals is held-up as encouragement to God's people (cf. Heb. 12:1). Let us consider three practical points that can com-

fort us and prevent us from breaking “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3).

“Unknown” Versus “Unseen”

Although the two terms are often used interchangeably, a distinction must be made here between the “unknown” and the “unseen.” No one can fear the completely “unknown” because no one knows it. For example, if we knew nothing about this virus, no one would be afraid. However, with knowledge of this virus comes fear. “Unseen,” as it relates to this virus, has to do with the knowledge of it but not being able to see (with the naked eye) its initial infection and/or its transmission. Of course, all viruses have this same, unseen characteristic. Yet, because this particular coronavirus reportedly has not been known or seen until now, people are in an unusual amount of fear, partly legitimate and partly generated by media reporting.

The Bible records examples of this “unknown” versus the “unseen” in both good and bad light. First, in Noah's day, people knew nothing about a rain storm that could cover the earth with water (cf. Gen. 2:5-6). Thus, Noah's contemporaries did not believe his preaching enough to be afraid of what God said (2 Pet. 2:5). However, since God told Noah about this flood, it was not “unknowable,” though it was “unseen” before it came. This is one reason why Noah's faith is commended. He did not have to see

such a rain to know it was true and thus prepare as God instructed (Heb. 11:7).

Second, the Assyrian King Sennacherib's besiegement of Jerusalem in King Hezekiah's reign is an example of the "unseen" resulting in legitimate fear because Sennacherib's men rebelled against the true God (2 Kgs. 18:13-19:37; 2 Chr. 32:1-23; Isa. 36-37). After Hezekiah consulted the prophet Isaiah, and prayer was made to the God of Israel, an unseen "angel of the LORD" killed 185,000 Assyrian troops in one night, and upon the next morning's discovery of the dead multitudes, Sennacherib and his remaining army returned to Nineveh (Isa. 37:36-37 cf. 2 Kgs. 19:35-36). According to *Easton's Bible Dictionary*, "Though Sennacherib survived this disaster some twenty years [until being murdered by his sons, Isa. 37:38], he never again renewed his attempt against Jerusalem." He had a legitimate "unseen" but "knowable" reason to fear returning to Jerusalem!

Third, a very obvious example of trusting in the "unseen" and being delivered is the passover (Ex. 12:1-29). The Israelites witnessed the first nine plagues, so they were knowledgeable of their God and His power. They were given instruction on how to spare the death of the firstborn in their families, including how to memorialize it for subsequent generations (Ex. 12:1-27).

The Israelites did as God commanded (Ex. 12:28). Thus, unlike "in the land of Egypt" (Ex. 12:29), the Israelites were spared the death of their firstborn. The whole event immediately resulted in the Israelites' deliverance from Egypt (Ex. 12:30-38). Additionally, was not the remainder of their journey, when they displayed faith, a trust in the "unseen" God?

In all three of these examples, there is a vast difference between how God's faithful reacted to the "unseen" and how the ungodly reacted. We can know God exists and the Bible is His word! Let us trust in Him "who is invisible" as we endure this virus!

Responses That Should Be Seen and Unseen

First, as brotherhood reactions to this virus have unfolded, beginning about mid-March, there have

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been two basic, polarized extremes that should be unseen. One extreme: there are some who enthusiastically side with government agencies, medical “experts,” and the media who reports what these agencies say and what it thinks they mean. These brethren argue that the science and testimony of what has been reported in other countries demands a certain response to the point that any other response is irresponsible and unchristian. The other extreme: there are some who enthusiastically side with what they perceive the Bible to teach about trusting in God and the untrustworthy track record of the media’s “crying wolf” on other “top stories.” These brethren argue that God will watch over His people, and they wonder why brethren have all of a sudden started fully believing what the agenda-driven media portrays. These brethren demand a certain response to the point that any other response is irresponsible and unchristian. It is very sad that both extremes “bite and devour one another” (cf. Gal. 5:15)! Yes, some of both extremes contain some truth, but we must avoid both extremes and the baggage that goes with them!

Second, lovingly respecting brethren’s personal convictions must be seen (cf. Rom. 14:1-23). Christians can still be faithful to God in circumstances like this, whether they choose to worship at home or assemble in small groups, taking the necessary precautions. A Christian’s choosing to worship at home during this “present distress” (cf. 1 Cor. 7:26, 28) is not necessarily “forsaking the assembling of ourselves together” (Heb. 10::25). Faithful Christians resort to this at other times, like when a hurricane makes landfall on a Sunday or perhaps when they are by the side of a dying loved one. We never accuse these of “forsaking the assembly.” While those with healthy immune systems are at low risk, especially when practicing “social distancing” procedures, there are those who are at very high risk. Most of these people are well aware of their condition, and, in fact, are among the most vocally opposed to anyone not self-quarantining.

Third, brethren “demonizing” one another must be unseen. Why do we hold-up nurses as heroes during this time (and rightly so), yet some brethren practically curse Christians who want to assemble on Sundays? In so doing, could we be forcing our attitudes about physical fears and apprehensions to the crushing of our brother’s spiritual peace and confidence? When this virus passes and government

agencies say its okay to assemble again, how will we treat our sister nurse who was exposed to the virus, maybe even sickened by it, versus the brother who worshiped while adhering to “social distancing” precautions? What will be our attitude toward these two types of spiritual family members based on their response to the virus? Will we show partiality to one and disdain for the other?

The Donatist Controversy arose in the early AD 300s over what to do with those “Christians” who denied the faith during the persecution by Diocletian (Roman Emperor, AD 284-305). There were some who denied the Lord to escape persecution, but when Christianity became more accepted and in the process of being legalized, they wanted to “place membership” again. Of course, when people repent, they should be forgiven and restored (Lk. 17:3-4 cf. Mt. 18:15-17), which is sometimes hard to do (2 Cor. 2:5-8). However, there is a big difference with what we are experiencing with this virus. Denying the Lord is always sinful (cf. Mt. 10:32-33), but how we handle this virus may not be sinful. Much of it is a matter of judgement! We must not take another’s personal conviction on how to handle this virus and make that a test of fellowship so that when the “all clear” is given by the government to assemble again, we treat him or her as unrepentant sinner (cf. 1 Cor. 13:4-7).

Power of the Unseen

There are two very important unseen factors that are particularly relevant to this virus situation, one obvious and the other not so obvious. First, the not so obvious factor is the unseen (with the naked eye) human immune system, designed and created by God. David’s declaration, “I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps. 139:14), is true, down to the very smallest component of human physiology! This virus is no match for a healthy immune system (emphasis on healthy). This is the reason why people with compromised immune systems should self-quarantine. This is also the reason why those with healthy immune systems who observe the precautionary measures of “social distancing” have no fear of themselves dying of this virus, although passing it on to others is still a concern. Of course, some people may think they have healthy immune systems and must “take heed lest they fall” (cf. 1 Cor. 10:12).

Some claim the human immune system is fatally ill-equipped to handle this virus (RNA versus DNA

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The Harvester

March 2020

Page 4

response, etc.), but if that were truly the whole story, then everyone who came in contact with the virus would get sick and die, yet we know that is not true. The fact that people respond differently lets us know that illness and death depend on the level of exposure, time until treatment, and the strength of an individual's immune system. Again, people with compromised immune systems should self-quarantine, but this does not diminish God's intentionally designed, unseen power of a healthy immune system. Hopefully, among the things we will learn and adjust when this virus passes is taking better care of our bodies and properly fueling our immune systems to maximize the design and power God has placed in them.

Second, the most obvious factor is the power of the unseen God. While God is "invisible" (1 Tim. 1:17), He is known through creation (Rom. 1:20), through Jesus (Jn. 14:9; Col. 1:15), and through His written word (Jn. 5:39). The Hebrews writer especially summarized the unseen strength we need to endure this virus situation, when holding up the example of Moses, "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27). Pharaoh was more of a threat to a higher percentage of God's people than this virus today. The main difference is that Pharaoh's threat was visible while this virus is invisible. Yes, many of the people Moses led still feared, but their fear was unjustified (Ex. 14:10-14). Rest assured, the same God that was in control then is in control now! We must take every precaution, but He will watch over us (Ps. 46:1-11; Jn. 14:27; 16:33). God's people can overcome what seem insurmountable odds if they will live by faith (cf. Heb. 11:32-40)!

Conclusion

Certainly, these are very trying times for people all over the world. However, let us not act like the world (who know not God) in navigating our way through this historical event. Rather, let us fervently pray for the safety of our brethren and neighbors and for this virus to pass. Continuing in prayer, let us also live "as seeing Him who is invisible," so we can have "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding" (Phil. 4:7)!

**Pray for the
nation and
our brother-
hood. Be
a fearless
light for
Jesus!**