

Bring out your best through
persecution

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SO... lets talk about coronavirus



The unhappy side of the “toilet paper panic.”

- On Sat 07/03/20, two women in a Western Sydney Woolworths got into a physical fight over toilet paper.
- One woman wanted a single pack of toilet paper, while the other one had a trolley full on it.
- Both women got charged and will face court in April.
- Full story here: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-03-08/coronavirus-toilet-paper-fight-at-woolworths-leads-to-charges/12037046>

Bringing out the “worst in people.”

- While in some instances, hardship brings out the best in people, mostly we hear about how it brings out the worst in people.
- I have personally learnt a lot from the coronavirus epidemic. Not from the disease itself, but from how people are reacting to the perceived threat.
- A month ago, the aforementioned toilet paper fight would have been unthinkable. In the “grand scheme of things,” the coronavirus is not a particularly deadly threat, but the mere threat of the disease spreading has caused otherwise regular people to behave in extreme ways. I shudder to think what would happen in an actually severe crisis, such as a war.

The Bible proved correct again

- There are two important aspects of Biblical worldview which I think have been proved absolutely correct by the coronavirus episode.
 - That hardship bringing out the best in people, is a sign of the Holy Spirit working in your life. (We will talk about this in this service)
 - That mankind has been tainted to such a state that we tend to fall into a sinful nature when left to our own devices. The only remedy to this is the Holy Spirit. (We will discuss this in the second service).

The example of the believers

- Whether we like it or not, we are representatives of our G-d on the Earth.
- It is not an option to “turn off” even for a second.
- How we react to different situations will show others the truth or otherwise of our faith.
- This can be for the good:
 - “...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16)
- Or the bad:
 - “And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. He said to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you make it a den of robbers.” (Matthew 21:12-13)

Hardships the believers faced

- In the New Testament, we read about many hardships the believers faced, in particular persecution.
- Think of the examples of Jesus himself, of Paul, of the others (Stephen comes to mind).
- Their hardships were far more perilous than the coronavirus.
- What was their response?

Hardships the believers faced

Firstly, let's understand the context of these comments:

- The Temple was either about to be, or was already destroyed.
- There was great turmoil, uncertainty and upheaval in the Land of Israel.
- There was great persecution of the early Church (by fellow Jews as well as the Romans).
- The essentials (food, water, shelter) would have been in short supply. Paul sometimes talks about the body “wasting away” (see 2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

Jesus's response to hardship

- Let's ponder some of what Jesus said regarding hardship:
 - “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake.” (Matthew 24:9)
 - “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” (John 14:27)
 - “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you...” (John 15:18-20)
 - “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

Paul's response to hardship

- Let's ponder some of what Paul had to say:
 - “More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” (Romans 5:3-5)
 - “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Paul's response to hardship

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:35-39)

Our response to hardship

- “Be *sober-minded*; be *watchful*. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. *Resist* him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.” (1 Peter 5:8-9)
- “Count it all *joy*, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces *steadfastness*. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” (James 1:2-4)
- “Therefore *encourage* one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.” (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

Conclusions

- Yes this crisis is likely to produce some hardship.
- If we put this into perspective, the “crisis” we are experiencing does not compare to what our ancestors had to go through.
- But the lessons are the same:
 - Expect hardships to come.
 - Think clearly about them.
 - Endure.
 - Continue in the hope we have through Jesus, rejoicing in this.
 - Encourage each other.
 - Understand we will be delivered in the end.