

I don't think the world has seen a pandemic like the Covid-19 virus in the lifetimes of many of us. Add in the recent Australian bush fires and it begs the question, "Are these judgements of God?" Or are they something else? Consider the following: In World War One, soldiers found guilty of desertion or cowardice were often executed by firing squad. That is judgement. However, if a modern soldier were to go on patrol and could not be bothered to wear their bulletproof vest, and takes a fatal shot, that is not judgement - that is lack of protection.

When nations reject God and his Son Jesus, as many have, he is forced to lift his hand of blessing and protection off them. Those nations then become prey for humanly or satanically engineered circumstances, or random events, that cause much suffering and oppression. I believe that is what we are seeing currently. I do not believe that the day of judgement has arrived or that the Covid-19 pandemic is such a judgement.

Isaiah, one of the great prophets of ancient Israel, predicted that the promised Messiah would say of himself: *"The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God..."* (Isaiah 61:1-2a NIV).

When Jesus Christ, came he quoted this prophecy at the start of his ministry. Luke 4:18-19 *'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'*"

Jesus stopped short of including *'and the day of vengeance of our God'*, which is another term for the day of judgement. That is because Jesus' first coming inaugurated the time of God's favour, where Father God would show mercy and grace to a lost world, wanting all to be saved. When that time is up, Jesus will return to judge the world and rule over the nations. That will be the day of vengeance against God's enemies.

But it is not here yet. We are still in 'the year of his favour'. Any "judgements" now are discipline that are redemptive in nature - a loving Father correcting an errant world to get its attention and cause it to return to him. And as already stated, it's not that God is sending these judgements - it is our lack of protection that brings such things on our heads. It is important to know this so we can confidently ask God for mercy and deliver us from evil.

Matthew 5:44-45 (Passion Translation) says, *"However, I say to you, love your enemy, bless the one who curses you, do something wonderful for the one who hates you, and respond to the very ones who persecute you by praying for them. For that will reveal your identity as children of your heavenly Father. He is kind to all by bringing the sunrise to warm and rainfall to refresh whether a person does what is good or evil."*

If God expects us to show mercy to those who harm us, how much more then will he respond to our cries for mercy for an unprotected world. In the book "The Shack", God speaks to Mack, a father who is angry at Him due to the kidnapping and murder of his six-year old daughter: *"Mack, just because I work incredible good out of unspeakable tragedies doesn't mean I orchestrate the tragedies. Don't ever assume that my using something means I caused it or that I need it to accomplish my purposes. That will only give you false notions about me. Grace doesn't depend on suffering to exist, but where there is suffering, you will find grace in many facets and colours."*

Once again, let the global church ask God for spiritual rain that will put out the fire of this current pandemic. And also pray that there will be a great spiritual awakening in the hearts of those filled with fear. I don't believe that God sent this pandemic, but he will use it for his own purposes - to reshape the church, awaken us to his Kingdom priorities, soften people's hearts, and usher in the long prophesied global harvest. Once it is over, may we never return to being the same as before.