



A Spiritual Encouragement Message

March 25, 2020

As I promised in the past Thursday article, I will continue to address how the first disciples of Jesus responded in situations similar to the one we are facing today.

During this critical time people with fear and unbelievers may be asking, "Why doesn't God do something about this Corona-virus?" The fact is, He does! Just like I wrote referring to the example of the collection, where God trusted the saints to take care of the needy saints among them. The answer is God sends us to do something about it (Matthew 25:31-46 please read). One day God will ask each one of us, what did we do in those kinds of cases and situations?

You see, during the first two main pandemics that struck the roman empire in the first three centuries, one third of the population died because of the diseases.

The Antonine plague 165-180 A.D. Ancient sources say 2,000 people died daily and 5,000,000 people died as it ran its course throughout the empire.

Then the plague of Cyprian 251-266 A.D. caused 5,000 deaths per day in the roman empire, according to history.

During those pandemics, the government officials, as well as the elite of society, fled the cities for the countryside leaving the sick and the weak to die in their misery without their help. But the persecuted Christian community remained behind acting themselves as a godly force of caretakers, responding to the needs of the suffering people with compassion. In the year 260 A.D. Dionysius Bishop of Alexandria wrote:

"Most of our brother-Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves, and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbors and cheerfully accepting their pains. Many, in nursing and curing others, transferred their death to themselves and died in their stead, turning the common formula that is normally an empty courtesy into



a reality: The best of our brothers lost their lives in this manner, a number of presbyters, deacons, and laymen winning high commendation, so that death in this form, the result of great piety and strong faith, seems in every way the equal of martyrdom. With willing hands they raised the bodies of the saints to their bosoms; they closed their eyes and mouths, carried them on their shoulders, and laid them out; they clung to them, wash them, and wrapped them in grave-clothes. Very soon the same services were done for them, since those left behind were constantly following those gone before. The heathen behaved in the very opposite way. At the first onset of the disease, they pushed the sufferers away and fled from their dearest, throwing them into the roads before they were dead and treating unburied corpses as dirt, hoping thereby to avert the spread and contagion of the fatal disease; but do what they might, they found it difficult to escape."

That Christian compassionate response contributed to the growth of Christianity.

Back in 2015, I had the honor to meet a fellow Christian who has a self-sacrificing faith comparable to those believers described in Dionysius' letter above. Our brother in Christ, Doctor Kent Brantly (ACU graduate) recently helped treat and cure patients infected with Ebola in Liberia, Africa. Kent contracted the Ebola virus himself while going out of his way to save the sick and dying people on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. I recognize that you and I are not as talented as Kent, but there is always an extra mile we can go, there is always something more we can give according to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

As today's situation with the corona-virus worsens or progresses, we will be seeing more and more opportunities to show compassion, to reflect God's image, to add works to our faith, to store treasures in heaven by showing the gospel in action in a foot washing metaphorical way.

In Christ,

Oscar Velazquez