



The Speed of the Inevitably Obvious

“Now this is the inscription that was written out: ‘MENĒ, MENĒ, TEKĒL, UPHARSIN. This is the interpretation of the message:

‘MENĒ’—God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it.

‘TEKĒL’—you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient.

‘PERĒS’—your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Medes and Persians.”

Then Belshazzar gave orders, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a necklace of gold around his neck, and issued a proclamation concerning him that he now had authority as the third ruler in the kingdom.

That same night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain. So Darius the Mede received the kingdom at about the age of sixty-two.

— Daniel 5:26-31

It’s fascinating that the phrase, “The handwriting’s on the wall” is quoted so often in everyday conversation, because, as the world so often does, it is actually misquoted to the extreme of meaning its exact, original opposite. Politicians, commentators and just plain common folk use this metaphor drawn from the Bible to identify something they are saying is obviously, in-your-face inevitable, when the true biblical context is something which cannot be understood without a right relationship with God. No one could actually understand the supernatural hand or its message, and even when provided an explanation through God’s servant, it was too late to take appropriate action because all they ever practiced was the wrong thing. Daniel provided an explanation the night before it all came true, and yet Belshazzar and the Babylonian Empire continued to party that night, and Darius and the Medo-Persian Empire completely replaced them the very next day. I wonder how many Christians realize how powerful this “now you see it, now you don’t” supernatural way in which spiritual things suddenly take place on earth has been demonstrated in the COVID-19 virus? This tiny thing— compared to the efficacy of End Times events to come— shut down the institution of the church in the first-world West in our time in nearly the same way.

Whereas the pandemic predicted to be unleashed when Christ breaks the 4th Seal will be experienced by the entire earth (Rev. 6:7-8) so as to contribute to a rolling series of like events which will take 2 billion lives (Rev. 6:8), this minor tremor has only shaken a few million scattered throughout the world. And yet, in the Western Church experiencing the most political freedoms and deepest pocket books, this little ol’ peek into the future

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has not only vacated all our buildings— big and small— but erased much of the means of the congregants supporting them who enjoyed providing like financial support. When the daily media musings on the pandemic prophesy the varying scenarios of what they characterize as a “return to normalcy”, do you really think that church, as previously practiced, is going to return to that even keel? And that the economy will completely restore the jobs from which the Western Church could not only support its local institutions but the missions programs to the rest of the world?

Unless you live in a very small town, church facilities most likely outnumber all others in providing a regular gathering place for groups. Even a “small” church that seats less than 100 far exceeds a pandemic limitation of less than 10. Literally overnight, church as we knew it ended. Even if we are fortunate enough to correct it and return to pre-pandemic freedoms, the precedent has nonetheless been established which can be employed yet again. In reality, the rest of the world never reproduced the western model of church under the weight of political and associated pressure from other religions, and now the playing field in this regard has been geographically leveled. The precedent in the West has now been established that church gatherings are a danger to public health and safety in a physical way which mirrors the previous less substantial opinions of its spiritual danger.

If you think with the world’s wisdom, “This too shall pass”, get your pastor to engage in a frank and honest discussion concerning the spiritual state of his particular flock, even if he’s able to continue providing streaming or recorded sermons over the Internet. The crucial elements of fellowship, individual discipleship and personal counseling being absent or difficult at best are widening existing cracks which were at least manageable when everyone could simply come together regularly. And if you could have the same kind of a conversation with those who were already managing a shoe-string budget keeping the facility and its activities going from week to week, you would realize how the parallel economic collapse is bringing pressure threatening the survival of each local church, not just for the facility itself, but in how it is going to wreak deleterious effects on the profession of pastor.

As each new cycle of this pandemic sends us back and forth into reclusion and unemployment and continually forbids us from doing “church as usual” again, we are eventually going to have to embrace a new model of church based on small groups and having no professional, full-time clergy. There will be a spiritual pandemic weeding out those who are a true follower of Christ from the insincere. If this continues long term, every seminary will disappear as there will be no need to provide a professional class of clergy. The demand for those who have studied their Bible well enough to guide a small group is going to move to the top of the list.

And as the shape of what it means to “go to church” changes for the mainstream in the West, even more additional pressures will be brought to bear to multiply the effect. Although small groups of less than 10 may be technically allowable, just wait until your neighbors start turning you in for that small group who regularly meet in your home. They will no longer lose cases in the courts which would normally uphold religious rights but win on the basis of “public safety” or some issue of risk to public health. Things are going to be reduced to a very personal level, indeed, and we’ll be fortunate to meet with a group as large as 10.

But the greater lesson is how the introduction into the world of something which has a spiritual agenda can manifest itself so quickly so as to change the whole planet

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overnight. We all thought things were different in the Western world where the accompanying constituted rights of free speech and assembly were backed up by religious freedom. Our assumption was that this was a roadblock to Satan's working which would have to be overcome gradually and in some kind of measured and subtle manner. The Bible prophesies of much greater Satanic feats to come so perhaps we can divine what it will be like when they transpire with a much greater impact than found in this minor forerunner labelled COVID-19. The almighty, constitutionally protected institution of the church was so easily turned inside out overnight with but a small tremor. How well are we reading the handwriting on the wall in our own times?

If, as many scientific sources are currently postulating, COVID-19 is like a regular strain of flu and can be caught by the same person over and over again, there will be no "return to normalcy" until a viable vaccine can be made available to the entire population, an endeavor surely many years in the making. Even if that should come in an optimistic 3-5 years distant, how many church buildings and properties will still reside in Christian hands? How many full-time pastors will there still be to populate them? In such a scenario, how many times will we engage in a cycle of suspending and returning to doing church as we know it? Even if we can effect a relatively quick return to normalcy, the precedent has been set in every type of political model from democracy to dictatorship. All of them the world over has agreed that "church" can become such a threat to public health and safety that even its practitioners agree its closure is best for the public good. Church will be labelled a persistent threat while all other venues such as sports and theater will be exempted.

In what seemed like a single evening, church as we knew it ended. The precedent has been set for all future events to come, and especially begs the observation that if by comparison this little "birth pang" changed the face the entire institution of the church in the West, how this exposes the potency of the full-on "birth" which is to come. Or in a more colloquial explanation, "You ain't seen nothin' yet!" The salt and light which were to characterize the effect of the Church on the secular world at large are going to give way to Christ's prediction, "...night is coming when no one can work". (Jn. 9:4) Current events have only moved the End Times clock closer to dusk when it becomes more difficult to work; total darkness is but a wink of fading light away.

It has been a thorn in my side when it comes to how most Christians integrate issues of technology into prophecy so much of the time. Having been a professional technology geek in secular life, I have to keep reminding Christians, for instance, that the mark of the beast cannot be a microchip in a world where a full third of its citizens don't enjoy electricity or even a "dumb" phone much less a "smart" one. But I will have to concede a scenario in this regard where the Western Church is concerned, that step one of a satanic plan seems to have been enacted which has turned off physical gatherings of congregations. As a result, the designated pastors of those flocks have had to move their teaching to the modern technological marvel of streaming or recording through the Internet. Now that the message of God's Word has been consolidated to that space, phase two will be to simply turn them off. ("OK, Google...delete all the Christian YouTube channels.") The Western Church will finally mirror the rest of the world and return us to the 1st Century Church, not having an independent clergy class nor erecting facilities in which to meet. It will be a purging process never before experienced in the West where the preaching of God's Word will have to go into complete manual mode.

Sometimes we can learn best by studying Scripture in reverse. This is particularly the case in the Olivet Discourse when it comes to the Harpazo of the Church— that is, the

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supernaturally quick removal which is also said to be witnessed by those left behind. This illustrates how quickly something can take place on a number of levels and in different yet parallel ways.

Phase 1: The signs only the faithful will recognize.

“Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; so, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door. (Mt. 24:33-34)

We are given much more than a single night but an entire season. And yet we are not to act as if there is still plenty of time, but that *“He is near, right at the door”*. How long does it take for someone standing on one side of a door to open it and walk through? The first phase is characterized as, *“Conditions are right for fulfillment; it could be any day now”*, or at its most leisurely, *“Is it summer already? Where did the time go?”*

Phase 2: The signs the whole world will recognize.

“But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. (Mt. 24:29-31)

Everyone’s attention will be drawn upward to try to understand why there have been such dramatic changes in the heavens only to find out they were presaging Christ’s personal appearance in the sky. And at the accompanying sound of the trumpet and working of the angels, those about to be left behind will respond with mourning because it will be too late for them. It could all take place in a matter of minutes, going from a normal afternoon’s day to signs preceding the dramatic removal of *“His elect”*.

But how quickly will that removal itself take place as prophetic signs narrow down to this final event where the Church is concerned?

Phase 3: The removal of the faithful in a blink of the eye.

“For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. (Mt. 24:27)

This is why the Rapture is elsewhere described as the Harpazo— the violent and sudden snatching away. To the faithful it really won’t come as a surprise who have correctly recognized the signs of the times, to the unfaithful it will be preceded by signs they will recognize only when it is too late so that they can only mourn, and the final milestone event itself will transpire within the width of a lightning flash.

But out here in the “birth pangs” which are merely foreshadowing the final events to come, just as in the very same way COVID-19 has in such a short span of time permanently altered the way we do church in the West, we are provided a valuable lesson of what is soon to take place. “All of the sudden” summer has arrived; “all of the sudden” the heavens have changed; “all of the sudden” the Church is gone. These are but a few of the many End Times milestones which “suddenly” turn things topsy-turvy, seeming to have occurred without notice...but they really do not come without warning, do they? For the faithful they are welcome steps toward our salvation having recognized their impending arrival so as to be properly dressed and ready; for the unfaithful recognition comes too late to avoid the consequences of their spiritual condition.

Meanwhile, we have what the world would call a “pre-test” to expunge those not ready, what the Bible describes as the “great apostasy”. This simple pandemic test resulting in making it more difficult to do church in its previously protected and opulent venues (when compared to the rest of the world), shows how the shallowest of Christians will fall away. Just wait to see the real fallout when authentic, global persecution begins. The falling away we will witness this year is nothing compared to what is just on our horizon and will reveal the true depth of the Church’s current character. The simple loss of their facilities in the prosperous Western Church will show how many millions were never properly prepared for meaningful persecution and we will see the apostasy at its earliest stages.

The main point I am trying to emphasize is the speed with which each change will come for each of the final events of God’s prophetic Word is being demonstrated on a much smaller scale in the COVID-19 pandemic— this is but a reduced example of the final milestones to come. The question is whether we are learning the proper lesson from this practice run prior to the real deal to come, or whether the modern handwriting on the wall will be recognized too late.

In Him,

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