

Katoomba Baptist Church Bulletin

41 Waratah Street, Katoomba NSW 2780.

May 2020.

Church services and group activities are suspended for the time being.

Sunday service is live-streamed at 10am on Katoomba Baptist Church's YouTube channel.

Bible Study: First and Fourth Wednesday of the month, on Zoom (email: Grahame McCraw mowogmaca@gmail.com)

From the editor

"My Word ... shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish what I please" [Isaiah 55:11]

One of the great benefits of the worldwide lockdown is that millions, if not billions, of people are denied their usual communal worship practices. What do I mean by that? How can that be good? Please bear with me.

For the first time in many people's lives they are not having their worship directed by rabbis, imans, and priests of all religions. They are not being told what to believe. They are also being freed from rituals and works-based practices. Not only in the major faiths is this happening but also in many cults and apostate branches of Christianity.

This is an opportunity — perhaps a God-given opportunity — for people to hear the Gospel, to read God's Word, to encounter true Christianity through the online presence of ministries that they otherwise may have never encountered. There are reports that evangelical websites are receiving enormous traffic from nations where other faiths are prevalent. Even increased traffic and enquiries from those in "Christian" nations. God is always calling out a people for His Name, and we are seeing this happen yet again, and markedly in this time in history where vast sections of the world's population have been driven indoors and kept away from the social activities that regulate much of our daily existence.

Of course there are challenges. I can speak for all of us in that we miss worshipping together as a fellowship. And there are temptations for those in the Church: to drift away, to go into sinful pursuits, to be self-centred. However, if this is a time of testing of the reality of our faith, then we need to draw close to the Lord Jesus Christ, pray for each other in the worldwide Christian fellowship as well as for KBC. Keep in communication through technology as best we can. Devote the day to God by studying the Bible and give praise and worship to Him. Pray for all those who can come to Him while this unusual lockdown opportunity remains.

Paul wrote some of his epistles from home confinement and then from prison. When God determines to achieve the spread of His Word, nothing can prevail against it. In these times, we would do well to remember this principle: what may have been intended for evil, God can use for good "to save many people alive" [Gen.50:20]. That we can't worship together as a fellowship may cause us much anguish. But just keep trusting in the Lord. Great things are being done by Him across the world. Let us keep faithful and support the Gospel in prayer.

I was pleased to hear that Catholics are being encouraged to read the Bible as they cannot attend the Mass. Pray that many do! Orthodox Jews are discouraged, even forbidden, to read the book of Daniel and Isaiah chapter 53. Pray that the Holy Spirit guides them to those scriptures and opens their eyes. Muslims are told that Jesus is a prophet. Pray that the Lord appears to them as God the Son. For all those entangled in the false and heretical doctrines of cults, pray that Almighty God can break their chains and deliver them from bondage. For people everywhere who don't know the living and true God, pray that He may draw them to Him.

To God be the glory. May our Saviour's name be exalted.

Your brother in Christ, Bill.

Please pray

- for the Lord to guide us through these times in which we live, and grant us strength and wisdom.
- for our leaders and authorities, for medical staff and indeed all those who are dealing with this crisis.
- that the Lord will minister to all who are undergoing trials and suffering, here and everywhere.
- for Israel, for the "Peace of Jerusalem" (Ps 122:6) and for the Gospel there "To the Jew first." (Rom 1:16).
- for our persecuted brothers and sisters in nations rich and poor and for those who persecute them.
- with thanks for the rain; for the Lord in His grace and mercy.
- for the people whose livelihoods have been impacted by the Coronavirus, the drought and fires.
- for revival in our community, state, nation, and throughout the world, and for our faith to increase.
- for the Church to wake up and be alert to the lateness of the hour and proclaim the Gospel.
- for the power of the Spirit in our lives, for discernment and wisdom as we live through these last days.
- that the Lord will help us to use our gifts for His glory and to share the Gospel with others.
- for missions, especially those we support as a church.
- that we continue to grow in Christian love as a church, serving the Lord and each other.
- Maranatha! ("Come, O Lord!")

**"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks:
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).**

Church announcements

- KBC Sunday service is now live streamed. Google "Katoomba Baptist Church YouTube".
 - Let's maintain our KBC fellowship by whatever means we legally can in the unity of the Spirit.
 - Pray! "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." [Hebrews 4:16]. Daily prayer 7pm to seek the Lord's grace in this crisis.
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"It is tomorrow that fills men with dread. God is there already. All the tomorrows of our life have to pass Him before they can get to us." [F.B. Meyer]

From the Voice of the Martyrs website [<https://vom.com.au/rice-and-bibles-launched-to-north-korea/>]
"Rice and Bibles Launched to North Korea"

North Korea is among 15 countries around the globe that still claims to be untouched by COVID-19. While experts have expressed concerns that the country's health system isn't equipped to fight an outbreak, and remain sceptical of its coronavirus-free status, Voice of the Martyrs Korea recently received confirmation that COVID-19 is rife in North Korea.

The letter, sent by a North Korean inside North Korea, who received an MP4 player containing an audio Bible, included the following:

"I receive hope of living as I am praying. The virus situation in Pyongyang and Sinuiju is more serious than the border areas. I think we will all die from starvation or being infected. Both are deadly and cause despair, but after knowing Him, my fear has vanished. We truly thank you again."

In the midst of the pandemic, this man is greatly comforted by the Word of God.

The COVID-19 crisis has made it even harder to get the Word of God into North Korea, and with the shortage of food becoming more pronounced, VOM Korea is undertaking a project to send both spiritual and practical assistance into North Korea. Voice of the Martyrs Australia has partnered with VOM Korea to float, via sea, PET bottles containing rice and Bibles to North Korea.

Due to the ocean current, there are only a few days each month that it is possible to send bottles to North Korea. On these days, in addition to sending the bottles, a GPS is also sent in order to verify that the bottles make it to shore. Recently, 500 bottles were floated to North Korea in just one day.

This is one of the most sustainable methods of reaching North Korea and environmentally friendly too. The bottles that are launched have already been recycled and the North Koreans will use them once they arrive.

We thank God that we have been able to send practical and spiritual assistance to North Korean citizens and will continue to support this project. Our prayer is that many North Koreans will find the help, love and encouragement they need at this very challenging time.

May birthdays: Keith Schwarze 30th

May the Lord bless you abundantly on your special day and in the year ahead in your walk with Him.

Spurgeon on Paul's request from prison

Paul had a few books which were left, perhaps wrapped up in the cloak, and Timothy was to be careful to bring them. Even an apostle must read. ... He is inspired, and yet he wants books! He has been preaching at least for thirty years, and yet he wants books! He had seen the Lord, and yet he wants books! He had had a wider experience than most men, and yet he wants books! He had been caught up into the third heaven, and had heard things which it was unlawful for a man to utter, yet he wants books! He had written the major part of the New Testament, and yet he wants books! The apostle says to Timothy and so he says to every preacher, "Give thyself unto reading." The man who never reads will never be read; he who never quotes will never be quoted. He who will not use the thoughts of other men's brains, proves that he has no brains of his own. Brethren, what is true of ministers is true of all our people. You need to read. Renounce as much as you will all light literature, but study as much as possible sound theological works, especially the Puritanic writers, and expositions of the Bible. We are quite persuaded that the very best way for you to be spending your leisure is to be either reading or praying. You may get much instruction from books which afterwards you may use as a true weapon in your Lord and Master's service. Paul cries, "Bring the books"—join in the cry.

... Paul herein is a picture of industry. He is in prison; he cannot preach: what will he do? As he cannot preach, he will read. As we read of the fishermen of old and their boats. The fishermen were gone out of them. What were they doing? Mending their nets. So if providence has laid you upon a sick bed, and you cannot teach your class—if you cannot be working for God in public, mend your nets by reading. If one occupation is taken from you, take another, and let the books of the apostle read you a lesson of industry.

... Search human literature, if you will, but especially stand fast by that Book which is infallible, the revelation of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

[Charles Spurgeon, from the sermon, "Paul — His Cloak and His Books", 2 Timothy 4:13.]

Let's keep Israel in our prayers and as we remember Pentecost

***"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."* [Acts 3:36-39]**

Contributions welcome: Our church bulletin is available on the first Sunday service of the month. Contributions of a missionary or devotional nature can be made to the editor, Bill Fewer (email: hillbillyfewer@gmail.com). Please contact Bill if you would prefer to receive the bulletin by email. The email version is much longer!

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away." [Mark 13:31]

Katoomba Baptist Church Bulletin Online Extra

** Please note that to access websites referred to in the Bulletin, please copy and paste the link into the address bar of your web browser.**

Exciting news!

KBC now has a YouTube channel and Sunday services are livestreamed, 10am.

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCipoCHXwVIAhnQY1cnI2B3g>

*****Don't forget to Subscribe!***And give it a Thumbs Up*****

(If this makes no sense, then please consult with a young person)

Thanks to the hard work and techno savvy of the Thomas brothers, Daniel and Joshua, our church has entered the 21st century. The Sunday service, though filmed in the empty church, is very engaging, professionally produced, uplifting. The preaching/teaching is superb. While it can never replace the joy worshipping together, this online service is a wonderful solution to the restrictions we face as a fellowship. Also, we just don't know who the Lord will lead to the YouTube channel. Perhaps some locals out there will start attending church because they first encountered Christ on the internet. May the Lord be blessed and glory be to Him.

Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT website

In response to the Covid-19 crisis, the Baptist Union has put together a very helpful page on their website which is an excellent guide for local churches and their fellowships:

<https://nswactbaptists.org.au/covid19/>

Plus, there is a national call to daily prayer at 7pm to seek the Lord about the crisis:

<https://www.baptist.org.au/covid-19-national-call-to-prayer/>

And there is also the previous disaster which is still affecting many people:

Bushfire Relief and Recovery Campaign

<https://nswactbaptists.org.au/bushfire-relief-and-recovery/>

And, finally, you can contact the Baptist Union website and request to be added to the prayer mailing list.

Recommended Resources for Covid-19 information

With so much sensationalism and speculation on the internet, news and social media, please refer to the following websites for official information and guidelines:

NSW Ministry of Health:

- COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Homepage

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/diseases/Pages/coronavirus.aspx>

- COVID-19 – Frequently Asked Questions

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/alerts/Pages/coronavirus-faqs.aspx>

Australian Government Department of Health:

- Coronavirus (COVID-19) Health Alert

<https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert#how-to-protect-yourself-and-others>

- Coronavirus (COVID-19) Resources

<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/collections/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-resources>

World Health Organisation:

- Q&A on Coronaviruses (COVID-19)

<https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>

- Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) – Advise for the Public

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>

John Hopkins University, USA:

- Coronavirus COVID-19 Global Database

<https://gisanddata.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/bda7594740fd40299423467b48e9ecf6>

[Thank you Daniel for preparing this information]

“The Pretribulation Rapture and the Suffering of the Church” from the editor

Our brother Costa, in his article in last month’s Bulletin Supplement, wrote this:

May I ask the question yet once more? How much if any suffering must the Church endure before we see it removed? But that’s not the pre-tribulation position, I hear you state emphatically with the great certainty upon which you base your Biblical position.

I kept thinking over the point Costa makes here: do those who hold to the Pretribulation position really promote this view — that the Church will not suffer before the Rapture? I must admit that it’s not a view that I’ve come across much either in study or conversation. Persecution and small “t” tribulation is what the Church can expect before the Rapture. Scripture tells us this repeatedly. But the big “T” — *the “Tribulation”* — is something else again. It is Daniel’s Seventieth Week, the Time of Jacob’s Trouble, the Day of the Lord. It is when God’s wrath is unleashed by the Lord Jesus Christ Who opens the seals of judgment in Heaven as the gathered Church worships Him there. It is an unprecedented and terrifying period in world history (Matt. 24:21).

At one point, the Antichrist, in-dwelt by Satan, is granted permission by God “to make war with the saints and to overcome them” (Rev. 13:7). This is obviously not referring to the Church, for: “we are more than conquerors through Him (Christ) who loved us” (Romans 8:37); the Lord assured us He will build His church “and the gates of hell the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18); and He urged us to ““Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:36).

The Church is never mentioned in Revelation Chapters 6-18 which detail the events of the Tribulation, while humanity is described in numerous verses as “those who dwell upon the earth” (Luke 21:35; Rev. 3:10; 13:8,14; *et. al.*). These are earth-dwellers — but the Church dwells in heaven: in the place prepared for us by the Lord (John 14:1-4). As Paul wrote in Colossians 3:4: “When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.” The Rapture then, it must be remembered, is the gathering of the *completed* Church to Christ, it is a great miracle of resurrection: first, the dead in Christ who receive their glorified bodies, and then the believers who are alive are instantaneously changed into their glorified bodies (1 Cor. 15:51-53; 1 Thess. 4:16-18). The “saints” in the Tribulation are those who come to salvation after the Church has been completed.

However, in terms of suffering and being “shaken” by what is happening in the world, I think that it is only logical that the deeper we are in the “perilous times” (2 Tim. 3:1) and the closer we get to the Tribulation, then we can expect to be affected by the increasing chaos and calamity of the global “birth pains” of which the Lord warned (Matt. 24:4-8).

One of the problems here is the cultural portrayal, especially in films and documentaries, of the Rapture happening on a perfectly normal day in a perfectly normal world. Now that is an image that can readily come to mind when we think of the Rapture. Perhaps none of us expected that the Church would be taken away when the world was in such turmoil as it is now — and has been for several years, with global events only intensifying with each passing month and taking us further away from any semblance of normality. Even the secular media are increasingly reporting of disasters that are of “Biblical proportions”, “apocalyptic” and so on.

But enough of my blathering. Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians really clarify this issue of the Church undergoing persecution and suffering as distinct from enduring God’s wrath, as well as placing the Rapture before the Tribulation. The Thessalonians were distressed because they thought they were in the Day of the Lord. Paul reassures them that they were certainly not. John MacArthur does a far better job than I ever could in explaining this, and I conclude with this extract from his New Testament Commentary:

Of all the end-time events, the Rapture of the church seems to generate the most interest and discussion. The young church at Thessalonica also had questions about that event, so Paul addressed their concerns in this passage. But unlike most modern-day treatises on the subject, Paul’s concern was not just doctrinal, but pastoral. His intent was not to give a detailed description of the Rapture but to comfort the Thessalonians. The intent of the other two passages in the New Testament that discuss the Rapture (John 14:1-3; 1 Cor.15:51-58) is also to provide comfort and encouragement for believers, not to fuel their prophetic speculations.

When Paul penned this epistle, the Thessalonians had only been in Christ for a few months. The apostle had taught them about end-time events, such as Christ’s return to gather believers to Himself (e.g., 1 Thess.1:9-10; 2:19; 3:13). They also knew about the Day of the Lord (5:1-3), a time of coming judgment on the ungodly. But some issues about the details of their gathering to Christ troubled them. First, they seem to have been afraid that they had missed the Rapture, since the persecution they were suffering (1 Thess.3:3-4) caused some to fear that they were in the Day of the Lord, which they obviously had not expected to experience (2 Thess.2:1-20). Furthering that misconception were some false teachers, about whom Paul warned in 2 Thessalonians 2:2, “[Do] not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.” But the persecution they were experiencing was not that associated with the

Tribulation or the Day of the Lord. It was merely the persecution that all believers can expect (2 Tim.3:12) and that Paul had warned the Thessalonians about (1 Thess.3:3-4).

The Thessalonians' fears that they were in the Day of the Lord and thus had missed the Rapture imply that the Rapture precedes the Tribulation. If the Thessalonians knew that the Rapture came at the end of the Tribulation, persecution would not have caused them to fear they had missed it. Instead, that persecution would have been a cause for joy, not concern. If the Day of the Lord had arrived, and the Rapture was after the Tribulation, then that blessed event would have been drawing near.

(from John MacArthur, '1 & 2 Thessalonians' in MacArthur New Testament Commentary, p.124, accessed from Google Books, 26/4/20)

J.C. Ryle, from *Holiness*, chapter XIII, 'The Church Which Christ Builds', pp.133-4

Holiness, we must never forget, is the prominent characteristic of all who belong to the one true Church.

I. We have, firstly, a Building mentioned in the text. The Lord Jesus Christ speaks of "my Church."

Now what is this Church? Few inquiries can be made of more importance than this. For want of due attention to this subject, the errors that have crept into the world are neither few nor small.

The Church of our text is no material building. It is no temple made with hands of wood, or brick, or stone, or marble. It is a company of men and women. — It is no particular visible Church on earth. It is not the Eastern Church or the Western Church. It is not the Church of England or the Church of Scotland. — Above all, it certainly is not the Church of Rome. The Church of our text is one that makes far less show than any visible Church in the eyes of man, but is of far more importance in the eyes of God.

The Church of our text is made up of all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, of all who are really holy and converted people. It comprehends all who have repented of sin, and fled to Christ by faith, and been made new creatures in Him. It comprises all God's elect, all who have received God's grace, all who have been washed in Christ's blood, all who have been clothed in Christ's righteousness, all who have been born again and sanctified by Christ's Spirit. All such, of every name, and rank, and nation, and people, and tongue, compose the Church of our text. This is the body of Christ. This is the flock of Christ. This is the bride. This is the Lamb's wife. This is "the holy Catholic and Apostolic Church" of the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed. This is "the blessed company of all faithful people," spoken of in the Communion Service of the Church of England. This is "THE CHURCH ON THE ROCK."

The members of this Church do not all worship God in the same way, or use the same form of government. Some of them are governed by bishops and some of them by elders. Some of them use a prayer-book when they meet for public worship and some of them use none. The thirty-fourth Article of the Church of England most wisely declares, "It is not necessary that ceremonies should be in all places one and alike." But the members of this Church all come to one throne of grace. They all worship with one heart. They are all led by one Spirit. They are all really and truly holy. They can all say "Alleluia," and they can all reply, "Amen."

This is that Church to which all visible churches on earth are servants and handmaidens. Whether they are Episcopalian, Independent, or Presbyterian, they all serve the interests of the one true Church. They are the scaffolding behind which the great building is carried on. They are the husk under which the living kernel grows. They have their various degrees of usefulness. The best and worthiest of them is that which trains up most members for Christ's true Church. But no visible church has any right to say, "We are the only True Church. We are the men, and wisdom shall die with us." No visible Church should ever dare to say, "We shall stand for ever. The gates of hell shall not prevail against me."

This is that Church to which belong the Lord's gracious promises of preservation, continuance, protection, and final glory. — "Whatsoever," says Hooker, "we read in Scripture concerning the endless love and saving mercy which God showeth towards His Churches, the only proper subject thereof is this Church, which we properly term the mystical body of Christ." - Small and despised as the true Church may be in this world, it is precious and honourable in the sight of God. The temple of Solomon in all its glory was mean and contemptible in comparison with that Church which is built upon a rock.

I trust the things I have just been saying will sink down into the minds of all who read this paper. See that you hold sound doctrine upon the subject of "the Church." A mistake here may lead on to dangerous and soul-ruining errors. The Church which is made up of true believers is the Church for which we, who are ministers, are specially ordained to preach. The Church which comprises all who repent and believe the Gospel is the Church to which we desire you to belong. Our work is not done, and our hearts are not satisfied until you are made a new creature, and are a member of the one true Church. Outside of the Church which is "built on the rock" there can be NO SALVATION.

II. I pass on to the second point to which I propose to invite your attention. Our text contains not merely a building, but a Builder. The Lord Jesus Christ declares, "I will build my Church."

The true Church of Christ is tenderly cared for by all the three Persons in the blessed Trinity. In the plan of salvation revealed in the Bible, beyond doubt God the Father chooses, God the Son redeems, and God the Holy Ghost sanctifies every member of Christ's mystical body. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, three Persons and one God, co-operate for the salvation of every saved soul. This is truth, which ought never to be forgotten. Nevertheless, there is a peculiar sense in which the help of the Church is laid on the Lord Jesus Christ. He is peculiarly and pre-eminently the Redeemer and Saviour of the Church. Therefore it is that we find Him saying in our text, "I will build — the work of building is my special work."

It is Christ who calls the members of the Church in due time. They are "the called of Jesus Christ." (Rom. i. 6.) It is Christ who quickens them. "The Son quickeneth whom He will." (John v. 21.) It is Christ who washes away their sins. He "has loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood." (Rev. i. 5.) It is Christ who gives them peace. "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you." (John xiv. 27.) It is Christ who gives them eternal life. "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish." (John x. 28.) It is Christ who grants them repentance. "Him hath God exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance." (Acts v. 31.) It is Christ who enables them to become God's children. "To as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God." (John i. 12.) It is Christ who carries on the work within them when it is begun "Because I live, ye shall live also." (John xiv. 19.) In short, it has "pleased the Father that in Christ should all fullness dwell." (Coloss. i. 19.) He is the author and finisher of faith. He is the life. He is the head. From Him every joint and member of the mystical body of Christians is supplied. Through Him they are kept from falling. He shall preserve them to the end, and present them faultless before the Father's throne with exceeding great joy. He is all things in all believers.

The mighty agent by whom the Lord Jesus Christ carries out this work in the members of His Church is without doubt the Holy Ghost. He it is who is ever renewing, awakening, convincing, leading to the cross, transforming, taking out of the world stone after stone, and adding to the mystical building. But the great chief Builder, who has undertaken to execute the work of redemption and bring it to completion, is the Son of God, the "Word who was made flesh." It is Jesus Christ who "builds."

In building the true Church, the Lord Jesus condescends to use many subordinate instruments. The ministry of the Gospel, the circulation of the Scriptures, the friendly rebuke, the word spoken in season, the drawing influence of afflictions — all, all are means and appliances by which His work is carried on, and the Spirit conveys life to souls. But Christ is the great superintending Architect, ordering, guiding, directing all that is done. Paul may plant, and Apollos water, but God giveth the increase, (1 Cor. iii. 6.) Ministers may preach and writers may write, but the Lord Jesus Christ alone can build. And except He builds, the work stands still.

Great is the wisdom wherewith the Lord Jesus Christ builds His Church! All is done at the right time, and in the right way. Each stone in its turn is put in its right place. Sometimes He chooses great stones, and sometimes He chooses small stones. Sometimes the work goes on fast, and sometimes it goes on slowly. Man is frequently impatient and thinks that nothing is doing. But man's time is not God's time. A thousand years in His sight are but as a single day. The great Builder makes no mistakes. He knows what He is doing. He sees the end from the beginning. He works by a perfect, unalterable, and certain plan. The mightiest conceptions of architects, like Michelangelo and Wren, are mere trifling and child's play in comparison with Christ's wise counsels respecting His Church.

Great is the condescension and mercy which Christ exhibits in building His Church! He often chooses the most unlikely and roughest stones, and fits them into a most excellent work. He despises none, and rejects none, on account of former sins and past transgressions. He often makes Pharisees and Publicans become pillars of His house. He delights to show mercy. He often takes the most thoughtless and ungodly, and transforms them into polished corners of His spiritual temple.

Great is the power which Christ displays in building His Church! He carries on His work in spite of opposition from the world, the flesh, and the devil. In storm, in tempest, through troublous times, silently, quietly, without noise, without stir, without excitement, the building progresses, like Solomon's temple. "I will work," He declares, "and who shall let it?" (Isaiah xliii. 13.)

The children of this world take little or no interest in the building of this Church. They care nothing for the conversion of souls. What are broken spirits and penitent hearts to them? What is conviction of sin, or faith in the Lord Jesus to them? It is all "foolishness" in their eyes. But while the children of this world care nothing, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God. For the preserving of the true Church, the laws of nature have oftentimes been suspended. For the good of that Church, all the providential dealings of God in this world are ordered and arranged. For the elect's sake, wars are brought to an end, and peace is given to a nation. Statesmen, rulers, emperors, kings, presidents, heads of governments, have their schemes and plans, and think them of vast importance. But there is another work going on of infinitely greater moment, for which they are only the "axes and saws" in God's hands. (Isai. x. 15.) That work is the erection of Christ's spiritual temple, the gathering in of living stones into the one true Church.

We ought to feel deeply thankful that the building of the true Church is laid on the shoulders of One that is mighty. If the work depended on man, it would soon stand still. But, blessed be God, the work is in the hands of a Builder who never fails to accomplish His designs! Christ is the almighty Builder. He will carry on His work, though nations and visible Churches may not know their duty. Christ will never fail. That which He has undertaken He will certainly accomplish.

[From A Puritan's Mind website,

<http://www.apuritansmind.com/wp-content/uploads/FREEBOOKS/Holiness-J.C.Ryle.pdf>

“The Pandemic Lockdown Is a Godsend for the Indian Church”

by Isaac Shaw, April 16, 2020

[<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/april-web-only/india-churches-covid-19-coronavirus-pandemic-lockdown.html>]

COVID-19 took away our usual Easter. But I believe it could also spark the first revival in India in a century.

As India continues its attempt at the world's biggest social isolation effort to halt the new coronavirus outbreak, millions are struggling to navigate weeks of cancelled public transit, closed businesses, and therefore no Sunday services.

Many smaller churches have their attendees join the livestreams of larger churches. Our own sunrise service on Easter, conducted on Zoom, drew 250 people—despite its 5 a.m. start.

After greeting Christians and praising “Lord Christ” in Good Friday and Easter tweets, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced this week his decision to extend the lockdown until May 3, due to the lack of widespread testing for the virus as the death toll rises.

However, despite all the disruption and our inability to worship together as usual, I believe the pandemic lockdown is being used by God to use his church in a new way.

Two things were happening before the pandemic hit. First, the church was severely opposed. Second, because of this opposition, there has been a prayer movement that resulted in great unity among the national Christian community. Churches have begun to overlook their historical denominational divisions, bringing the Indian church to the cusp of revival. There has been news of breakthroughs in the work of the Holy Spirit in places and among people. And in spite of severe opposition, the church has been responding maturely and collectively to its challenges. As a result, the church has been growing spiritually and numerically.

Church leaders across denominations have fostered a misperception in the pews—and in the watching world—that Christians concentrate their efforts solely on Sunday gatherings. Commitment to the church and its goals has been gauged by Sunday morning attendance. Thus, at the initial stages of the pandemic, only a very small portion of churches in India were responding practically to the upcoming challenges.

Following the lockdown, churches began scrambling to put plans together. I asked one congregation how they planned to hold their services, and their response was rather naïve. They said that churches cannot close their doors, believing that the Bible mandates weekly group worship in buildings and that God grants health to the faithful. Because of this general attitude, it took three weeks for many churches to get their feet under them and to provide online alternatives.

When churches started streaming their services online, they were surprised at the audience they received. I know of small churches that normally had less than 100 people attend on an average Sunday now have more than 700 viewers online. Our own church, Bible Bhavan Christian Fellowship, which has been livestreaming for more than four years, saw a 300 per cent increase in viewership. People have been watching from all over India, and all around the world. We have received responses from as far as Africa and South America.

Indian churches have been praying for the Lord to enlarge their borders, and the Lord has answered with an unexpected opportunity to reach more people.

The challenge that churches now face is harnessing this new reach and developing tools for follow-up and discipleship in a new teaching model. For example, our midweek ministries have taken on a life of their own as physical attendance is no longer a criteria. Our groups for men, women, youth, and pastoral care have more participants and from farther away, which is good because we are ministering to many more people. While we had to close our Bible schools in seven locations, we are moving our complete syllabus from written materials to audio, visual, and digital versions. We were too busy doing the Lord's work to think of this before, and we may have missed the bus on such innovations if the lockdown had not happened.

From Got Questions website

[<https://www.gotquestions.org/why-would-God-allow-Covid-19.html>]

Question: "Why would God allow Covid-19?"

Answer: "Why would God allow Covid-19?" The whole world seems to be asking this question, a fact that actually gives the biggest part of the answer. More on that shortly.

COVID-19, or coronavirus disease 2019, is a respiratory illness caused by a coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2). The effect of the illness can range from mild to severe. First identified in Wuhan, China, in late 2019, the virus quickly spread to other countries. On March 11, 2020, COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization.

Only a liar or a true prophet can claim to know God's reasons for bringing about COVID-19 or any other specific calamity. That's partly because God's purpose extends to every individual involved, from the beginning of time to the end of the world. Understanding every possible factor goes far beyond human ability, but God has within His complete knowledge and control every facet of every situation (Romans 8:28–30). The Bible reveals some insights about God's use of deadly disasters in general, but we must apply relevant Scripture and the principles of faith in order to gain wisdom about any specific disaster.

As with any mystery, to solve it we must go from the known to the unknown in our search. So we'll put question of why God would allow COVID-19 into the context of what we already know from the Bible and from personal experience: we know that life is a gift from the Creator (Isaiah 42:5; Acts 17:25). We know that God alone has the right and power to give life and take it away according to His own wisdom and plans (Job 2:10). We know that life is short and includes some degree of suffering, ending in death and judgment for how we lived our lives—only one life with no "do-overs" (Hebrews 9:27). Short or long, our lifespan and date of death are set and controlled by God (Matthew 10:29). Even the longest human lives are "like a breath; their days are like a fleeting shadow" (Psalm 144:4).

Moses described God's sovereignty over life and death, and this could have been written about today's COVID-19 pandemic:

"You turn people back to dust,
saying, 'Return to dust, you mortals.'
A thousand years in your sight
are like a day that has just gone by,
or like a watch in the night.
Yet you sweep people away in the sleep of death—
they are like the new grass of the morning:
In the morning it springs up new,
but by evening it is dry and withered"
(Psalm 90:3–6).

So what is God's purpose in allowing COVID-19? Without being too dogmatic, we know that, generally speaking, one of God's purposes in trials is to get the world's attention off themselves and onto Him, their Creator and Saviour—which is the biggest part of the answer to the question at hand. "Why would God allow COVID-19?" Millions are suddenly asking that question right now, believers and non-believers alike, which means that God is on their minds. God desires for all people to earnestly seek Him and find Him, discovering that He is actually close to us (Jeremiah 29:13; Acts 17:26–28). God desires us to sense our own weakness and neediness so that we put our trust in Him (2 Corinthians 12:9). God desires people to fear Him with proper reverence and awe (Proverbs 9:10); to love Him more than their own lives (Matthew 10:37; John 12:25); and to show love and gratitude for the Saviour by loving and helping fellow humans, especially the suffering (Romans 15:1; James 2:14–17). God desires to shift our focus and affection away from this temporary, troubled world to our eternal, heavenly home (Colossians 3:1–2; Hebrews 12:1–2).

Times of trouble are a prime motivation for us to store up treasures in heaven rather than cling to treasures on earth (Matthew 6:19–20; Colossians 3:1–3), and to be good stewards of those blessings God gives us in this life (Luke 16:11; Matthew 25:14–30). God wants us to trust Him absolutely, knowing that our times are in His hand (Psalm 31:15).

Ultimately, it is the poor and hurting who seek God, not the rich and comfortable. It is danger and calamity that turn men to their Saviour, not health and wealth (see Mark 2:17). It is suffering that wakes us to our true need. C. S. Lewis put it this way: "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world" (The Problem of Pain, HarperCollins, 1996, p. 91).

Life for all people means facing suffering, death, and their eternal destiny. Even if we develop immunity to COVID-19, we can't escape the fact of trouble in the world. What's best for us, in any situation, is to seek God: "Blessed are those who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart" (Psalm 119:2).

From Slavic Gospel News, No. 231, April/May 2020

[<http://www.sga.org.au/pdf/newsletter.pdf>]

Prison Ministries

*“Impoverished and Malnourished, Prisoners in Stryzhavskaya Now Have Access To Bible Study”
from Nickolai Kukushkin, Ukraine*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, I sincerely and cordially greet you with the love of Christ from Ukraine! I continue to work in the Field of God. I visit local churches in the country villages because God's people need encouragement, exhortation and spiritual support.

I'm now also conducting Bible studies on Wednesday's for prisoners at the Stryzhavskaya Penal Colony. There are many people there who have suffered a serious fate. Sadly, some of them know nothing in life apart from their upbringing in an orphanage and then living in prison. I saw that the food is terribly meagre. All of them are skinny. Those who have relatives outside the jail are allowed gifts of food and clothing. But those who are from orphanages walk in slippers, even in the winter! Spiritually, it's even harder. There are a variety of prisoners: those that are serious about God, and those that are opposed. Some sincerely ask me to pray for them. Many want help to quit smoking.

To those who voluntarily want to attend our services, the prison administration allocates two hours. We have about 15 - 25 people coming for a study of the Word. We also sing and pray together. May God abundantly bless you for all you do in His name and for His glory, especially in support of our ministry here in Ukraine!

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*“Gospel Presentation Infuriates Some Prisoners, While Others Respond With Interest”  
from Ruslan Osmanov, Kalbardino-Balkaria, Russia*

*Peace be unto you! The recent period turned out to be quite challenging for prison ministry. Yet the Lord was at work!*

*I was able to visit the high-security facility in Vladikavkaz only twice. There, I had meetings with inmates within the facility, distributed Christian literature and shared the Gospel. We held a great Christmas meeting, and many inmates attended, many of whom were ethnic Chechen Muslims. During my message I preached the Gospel and called them to repentance. I also shared my personal testimony about how Jesus found me. Some of the Chechens were furious and left the room, slamming the door! However, those who stayed were interested and asked questions. I had the opportunity to explain the Gospel and give each of them a Bible. We agreed to stay in touch before I departed. These men were also Chechens, my countrymen! During the event we also distributed other Christian literature and Christmas presents.*

*Also recently, I visited a group of inmates suffering from tuberculosis. These men had been transferred to a prison-hospital in Nalchik. I shared the Gospel with them, prayed with them and brought present for Christmas. Now and then, I bring food parcels to those in the tuberculosis facility as well.*

*We had our access passes renewed, so we should be able to visit regularly again this year. Please pray for the Lord to open the way for outreach in other facilities; for more ex-prisoners to be added to the churches; and for help reaching the Chechens.*

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Pastoral Support

*“Ruvim Expands Ministry To Four Villages, As God continues To Bless”
from Ruvim Voloshin, Chechnya*

Dear brothers and sisters, peace be upon you!

I feel exhausted! I fall asleep on the go! I recently got sick! But spiritually, I'm wide awake! It's true I don't have energy to plan and I can't concentrate. Nevertheless, I enjoy every new day, because the ministry of evangelism continues!

In November, we started worshipping in our newly-repaired main hall. So now, our services are held in a large, warm and spacious room. Thank God! And recently, we started preaching in two new villages. Please pray for them. One of the families live in very terrible conditions. There's a lot of mould on the walls and this is dangerous for their health. It's hard to breathe and very crowded, but they have nowhere else to live...

We held a special Christmas service and the holiday was a success! We had many guests and our renovated House of Prayer accommodated everyone. There were even officials from the City Administration, as well as from the government department overseeing religious organisations!

People in our congregation are troubled by their relatives. There is tension as people are annoyed that their Christian relatives are refusing to return to the faith of their fathers. We have therefore decided that we need to study the Scriptures more deeply in order to be ready with answers. We want to tell people why we haven't given up our new faith, and show them it is getting stronger! Please pray.

Now that we are visiting two new villages on Sundays to meet and read the Scriptures, we are going digital with the other village groups. They understood that the only way we can hold more meetings is by using an instant messaging service. Financially, we can't always visit them but they might have spiritual questions. Therefore, we created a chat group where we read and reflect on the texts of Scripture remotely. We have set up chat groups for two villages. Pray for them and for us...

God is answering prayer! One day, a woman and her son came to our church. We talked with her and after a while we learned that she has nowhere to live, and she has been wandering with her son. We invited them to pray because we don't have enough finances to help them (we're really going through difficult times). And I felt so bad that we had to refuse. But it was so wonderful that after a few days we met again and she reported how someone offered to pay for their accommodation, and someone else gave up their job so she could work! Thank God! I was pleased to hear that where we trust in God and teach Him to trust others, He succeeds in helping us! We look in amazement at the Lord's work!

Hmmmmmm.....

"Church pastor dies from coronavirus after disobeying social distancing order"

[<https://www.christiantoday.com/article/church-pastor-dies-coronavirus-after-disobeying-social-distancing-order/134698.htm>]

An interesting message on YouTube

With all the civil disobedience in the United States, this is a very timely message and to prayerfully consider:

Dr Andy Woods (Sugarland Bible Church)

Daniel 009. "Disobeying the Gov't? Dan.3:1-18"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFedO_pwIUo&t=2031s

[Thanks Ann for recommending this message. Ann also recommends David Hocking's newsletter, "HFT Connect". Ann has forwarded some to me and they contain excellent teaching as well as commentary on current events, especially concerning Israel. Go to <https://www.davidhocking.org> and sign up to receive the newsletter by email.]

YouTube video from Israel

"Amir Tsarfati: Living on the Edge of Armageddon"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2FdZQ6RDnMs&t=19s>

For me, Armageddon is not an abstract concept. I literally live on the edge of Armageddon. I'm always fascinated to see how fast a symbol of Armageddon populates our collective mind and triggers our survival instinct. Even in peaceful times, we seek countless books and Hollywood movies on the subject as if they are going to prepare us for the worst. And it makes me wonder, can we really be prepared for it?

Amir Tsarfati from Behold Israel Ministries takes us on a tour of the Megiddo Valley — the site of Armageddon. I was surprised by how green and lush it was (apparently Israel enjoyed bountiful rain during its winter). Amir's house overlooks the valley and he can walk to it from his back gate!

A Gospel Presentation from Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum, Ariel Ministries

"Dr. Fruchtenbaum Shares the Gospel"
<https://www.arielcourses.com>

A wonderful teaching in this brief 15 minute video. Highly recommended.

A Beautiful Gospel Song

Our sister Nancy sent me this. The setting of the video, with the flowing stream and the tree, reminds me of Psalm 1. I just have to share it with you, friends.

"He Giveth More Grace" performed by The Living Stones Quartet
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=13&v=hzhKGPireAA&feature=emb_logo

Christian life does not guarantee an absence of trials and tribulations. It does not offer us a life where we won't encounter failures and pains. But what it offers is that we will never have to walk alone amidst any of these. When our burdens increase, God will supply us with strength. In afflictions, God will shower His mercy upon us. When we feel that we cannot take it any more, God is willing to take over because His power has no boundary. And what is even more beautiful is that all the hurdles that we encounter and all the obstacles that we face has got a divine purpose. And that purpose is that we may be transformed into the likeness of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. We need only submit ourselves before a loving, merciful and powerful God. And He will lead us through.

*His Love has no limits.
His Grace has no measure.
His power has no boundary known unto men.
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus.
He Giveth, and Giveth, and Giveth again.*

A Time To Be Like Mary?

With all the social restrictions and life in lockdown, this is a time in which we can really "turn our eyes upon Jesus". I hope that this scripture will be a blessing to you.

Luke 10: 38-42

Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me."

And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her."

Psalm 131

*Simple Trust in the Lord
A Song of Ascents. Of David.*

**Lord, my heart is not haughty,
Nor my eyes lofty.
Neither do I concern myself with great matters,
Nor with things too profound for me.**

**Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul,
Like a weaned child with his mother;
Like a weaned child is my soul within me.**

**O Israel, hope in the Lord
From this time forth and forever.**