

Problems and Promises

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The scene is a poignant one from the Dicken's classic novel, *A Christmas Carol*. Gathered around the glowing fireplace, the Cratchit family listens attentively as verses from Psalm 91 are read by the oldest son: *"Neither shall any plague come near thy dwelling...Because he has set His love upon me, therefore will I deliver him and honor him, with long life I shall satisfy him and show him my salvation."* Musing as the Scriptures are read, the mother wells up with tears. Obviously, something is wrong. Just then, Bob Cratchit enters from outside having just returned from a visit to the grave of his son tiny Tim. Within minutes, he breaks down and bemoans the loss of his cherished child. Somehow the words of Scripture did not seem to apply to that situation.

The Problems of this World

I must admit that these verses came to mind as I viewed with others the news concerning the recent coronavirus outbreak. One of the men from our weekly Bible study stated that with him. *"No evil shall befall you and neither shall any plague come near thy dwelling."* It is a great promise of Scripture that the Lord's people have claimed through the centuries. Truth be told many of us were praying that the perilous pestilence would not come near our dwelling either. For some it did, but for others it did not.

Naturally, this begs the question – "How far do we go in claiming the promises of Scripture?" I love singing the catchy tune, *"Every promise in the book is mine, every chapter, every verse every line, all are blessings of His love divine, every promise in the Book is mine."* It sounds great and makes me feel good, but is it true? Is every promise of the Book mine? Are there not promises in Scripture that have a certain application to certain people in a certain situation? It would seem so. It underscores the fact that Scripture needs to be applied in context, demanding that we rightly divide the Word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15). Regardless of the context, we can glory in the Lord when we witness His faithfulness in every situation.

The Promises of His Word

But before we dismiss a very large portion of the Bible as inapplicable to believers today, relegating it to another time and another place, it is important to keep in mind the whole counsel of God. We need to remember that we belong One who fully loves His own (John 13:1) and that nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of Christ (Rom. 8:35). We need to remember that our God is changeless and that we have a ready access and can boldly approach His throne by faith to obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:16). These are the spiritual promises of those who have a heavenly citizenship (Phil. 3:20) and a heavenly calling (Heb. 3:1), who belong to a heavenly country (Heb. 11:16), who serve heavenly things (Heb. 8:5) because they have come to a heavenly Jerusalem (Heb. 12:22). These are the promises that will always apply to the children of God, despite the problems of this world. Despite the harmful effects of a virus that *"walks in darkness"* and *"lays waste at noonday"* (Ps. 91:6), the promises of God remain true. Scripture cannot be broken.

Lessons Learned and Re-Learned

During this recent pandemic, I have been reminded again of a few interesting facts about this world and some fundamental truths about God's Word. I have seen how easily it is for this world to be united, especially through the phenomenon of social media. How this sobering fact will play out in the prophetic framework is obvious – and frightening (Ps. 2). I have also been reminded about the speed and

devastating effects of earth-born illnesses, a sobering picture of the effects of sin, which is also quick and devastating in its spiritual consequences upon a global population. It lays low, both small and great, regardless of economic or educational differences. Sadly too, we have seen the evidences of the selfish “me first” mentality, people on the cusp of panic, hoarding the necessities of life. How easy it is for believers to get caught up in the wave of worry and forget the words of Hebrews 13:5-6, *“The Lord is my helper.”*

Conversely, we have also seen some good things highlighted in the news, deeds of unselfish kindness called in some in some theological circles as the “common grace of God.” Common or not, it shows itself in a special care for those in need, whether in the Church or in the community. Those deeds may or may not have been seen by most, but they don’t miss detection by the One who sees everything done in His Name.

Until the effects of the COVID-19 coronavirus subsides, we will still need to rigorously observe the CDC guidelines for social distancing, group gatherings, and healthy hygiene – things like washing our hands frequently and covering our coughs and doing everything else to ward off this insidious pestilence. But as we practice these precautions, we also need to look up – beyond the hills to the One who made heaven and earth (Ps. 121) and stays true to His Word. Let us then seek the opportunity to share the gospel with our neighbor and words of encouragement the household of faith to the glory of God, all the time but especially now.