

Quarantine Thoughts-8

Corona Virus and the Worshipping Community:

Some people were asking me *“Is this Corona Virus a punishment from God for our sins or the sins of the other people and because of the many persecutions in the world? Is there any Biblical reference to the plague or such pandemic?”*

These questions or doubts or the finding out reasons for this pandemic is the natural tendency in present circumstances.

Yahweh was presented in the Old Testament as a God who punishes the sinner through sickness and death. But we know Jesus revealed the true nature of God the Father who is always waiting for the conversion of his prodigal son. Our God is not vindictive nor punitive, rather who loves us so much that He gave His only begotten Son who gave us back that perfect relation which was at the beginning of creation.

I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent. Luke 15:7

However does the Bible present any reason for the major changes in the nature or in the history?

The big plagues that we see in the book of Exodus is quite relevant to study as we are going through this pandemic that stops the world.

We know Moses was asked by God to go to Pharaoh to release His people.

Each time God asks only one thing or gives only one reason to release the people of Israel. Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the wilderness.

Each time, Pharaoh promises to free the Israelites, but reverses his decision when the **plague** is lifted — until the last one.

Exodus 4/22-23 Then say to Pharaoh ‘This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son, ²³and I told you, *“Let my son go, so he may worship me.”* But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son.’”

1) Water to Blood: Ex. 7:14–24. ⁶ Then say to him, ‘The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has sent me to say to you: *Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the wilderness.* But until now you have not listened. ¹⁷ This is what the LORD says: By this you will know that I am the LORD: With the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water of the Nile, and it will be changed into blood.

2) Frogs: Ex. 7:25–8:15. Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘This is what the LORD says: *Let my people go, so that they may worship me.*”

3) Wild animals or flies: Ex. 8:20-32. Then the LORD said to Moses, “Get up early in the morning and confront Pharaoh as he goes to the river and say to him, ‘This is what the LORD says: *Let my people go, so that they may worship me.*’²¹ If you do not let my people go, I will send swarms of flies on you and your officials, on your people and into your houses.

4) Pestilence of livestock: Ex. 9:1-7. Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘This is what the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, says: “*Let my people go, so that they may worship me.*”’² If you refuse to let them go and continue to hold them back,³ the hand of the LORD will bring a terrible plague on your livestock in the field—on your horses, donkeys and camels and on your cattle, sheep and goats.

5) Thunderstorm of hail and fire: Ex. 9:13-35.¹³ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Get up early in the morning, confront Pharaoh and say to him, ‘This is what the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, says: *Let my people go, so that they may worship me,*’¹⁴ or this time I will send the full force of my plagues against you and against your officials and your people, so you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth.

6) Locusts: Ex. 10:1-20. So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said to him, “This is what the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, says: ‘How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me? *Let my people go, so that they may worship me.*’⁴ If you refuse to let them go, I will bring locusts into your country tomorrow.

7) Death of the Firstborn: Ex, 11:1--12:36;

Then say to Pharaoh ‘This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son,²³ and I told you, “*Let my son go, so he may worship me.*” But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son.’” Exodus 4/22-23

Here the important aspects emerging are the following;

- 1) The only one reason God asking Pharaoh through Moses is to release the People of Israel so that they may worship Him. So every plague is the natural consequences of Pharaoh’s denial in letting them go and worship God.
- 2) In Bible we see elsewhere the wrath of God ; in destroying the Town of Babel, Causing great flood and the making of Noah’s ark, destroying the towns of Sodom and Gomorrah, letting the people of Israel to undergo to the slavery in Egypt and later the Babylonian exile.
- 3) In all the above events, the basic reason for God’s anger was the unfaithfulness of the people in worshipping God. So there is
- 4) So there is an intrinsic relation between these and the worship.

Because as we Exodus 19/5-6— ⁵ *Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, ⁶ you^[a] will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.”*

That means :

- 1) Israel is Yahweh's beloved son or people
- 2) As per the Covenant, when people praise Yahweh during worship, they will get blessings from God.

It is the Son's (Israel) duty to worship God the Father... And therefore, we see a God who demands worship. A God who is not happy when the worship is not done properly. A God who is very **PASSIONATE** about the people to worship Him. A God who gets angry when the worship is performed with defects or in an unworthy manner.

So the sins (*being away from God*) are the natural consequences of the failure in worshipping God and later resulting in turning away from the commandments of God. Cain who failed to do a proper offering to God reached to a stage where he became a murderer.

We see in the Old Testament that God does get angry from time to time, and that anger relates to actions such as the ones we have noted—worshipping other gods or stealing someone's land.

As priests, Hophni and Phinehas were consecrated to be holy representatives and upstanding teachers; in a sense, they belonged to the Lord. Eli instructed his sons that they did not merely "sin against another" person but rather they did "sin against the Lord" (1 Samuel 2:25). In an analogous situation in the New Testament, Ananias and Sapphira had covenanted with the Lord to sell their possessions, giving all the proceeds to the Church as part of their living the law of consecration. However, as the Apostle Peter told them, by keeping back a portion of their money and breaking their covenant, Ananias & Sapphira had "not lied unto men, but unto God" (Acts 5:4).

Covenant breaking threatens our relationship not only with others but also, more importantly, with Heavenly Father.

It fits with the Old Testament data that while the New Testament describes Jesus' death as a sacrifice dealing with sin, passages such as Romans 3:25; Ephesians 5:2; Hebrews 2:17; 9:26; 10:12; and 1 John 2:2; 4:10 do not see this sacrifice as operating by assuaging God's anger, but rather a means of cleansing that makes it possible for us to be in the presence of the holy God.

And therefore, both in Old Testament and in the New Testament, we see the Sacrifice or worshipping God has a relation with either the wrath of God or Holy Eucharist that is the remedial offering by Jesus Christ.

Let us remember as the psalmist says "***Fear of God is the beginning of wisdom***". Proverbs 9:10

If we read carefully through Bible, the basic theme is the relation between God and Israel. God always keeps His covenant and He wants & expects worship from Israel /His chosen ones.

Therefore the identity of the people of Israel in the Old Testament and the followers of Jesus in the New testament is that we are a worshipping Community. We are a kingdom of Priests and a holy nation. So let us concentrate on this identity of ours as the **WORSHIPPING COMMUNITY**. One who is worshipping God cannot go away from the love of God and therefore his/her life will always be guided by God's commandments. Though we are following the quarantine style of life, still we are part and parcel of Jesus **'GREAT WORSHIPPING COMMUNITY'**.

Father Joseph