

Anne Graham Lotz: Are Our Nation's Current Crises God's Gifts to Inspire Awakening?

"In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord" (Isa. 6:1a).

For my birthday one year, my mother sent me a package wrapped in plain brown paper. When I opened it, there was a gaudy, multicolored straw basket inside, stuffed with tissue paper. I actually thought my mother had totally lost her good senses! I tossed out the tissue paper, wondered what in the world I was going to do with the basket, then called to thank her for her "gift."

Mother laughed when I thanked her for the basket, then asked what I thought about what was inside it. I told her that nothing was inside except tissue paper, and I had thrown that out. She responded urgently, "Oh, no, Anne! Inside that tissue paper is your real birthday gift!"

I ran outside, opened up the trash can and went through the garbage piece by piece until I came up with the wad of tissue paper. Inside was a small gold ring with a lapis lazuli stone that had been taken from the flooring of the Shushan Palace where Queen Esther had lived with King Xerxes. I had thrown out a priceless treasure simply because of the way it was wrapped!

As our nation seems to reel from crisis to crisis, brown package to brown package—the latest being the impeachment of the president, Kobe Bryant's tragic death and the threat of the coronavirus—I have remembered Mother's birthday present. Is it possible these "packages" hold within them a treasure? Could it be that God is wanting us—as a nation—to look up? To turn to Him in repentance of sin? To call on Him for help? Is

God impressing on all of us the need to get right with Him now so that we are ready at a moment's notice to meet Him face-to-face? Could the treasure God wants to give us in the brown packages be a spiritual awakening?

In the Old Testament, God wrapped His glory in an earthly tent that from the outside must have appeared like a big, brown package. The tent was called the tabernacle. It housed the manifestation of God's presence when the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness. God instructed the Israelites to cover the tabernacle itself with layers of goat hair and ram skins and even seacow hides! (See Ex. 36:14-19). A casual observer would never have suspected that there would be any glory there! Yet the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle" (Ex. 40:35b).

Sometimes God wraps His glory in hard circumstances or ugly obstacles or painful difficulties, and it just never occurs to us that within those life-shaking events is a blessing in disguise.

So, like Isaiah, when something bad happens—when disaster, disease and death show up unexpectedly—look up! Ask God to open your eyes to His glory. {eoa}

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