

Missionary in China: Spiritual Leaders Need Prophetic Anointing to Protect Congregations From COVID-19

In this pandemic that possibly will result in tens of thousands or even millions of deaths, we need spiritual leaders like “the sons of Issachar, those having understanding of times and what Israel should do” (1 Chr. 12:32b). Such leaders with a prophetic anointing will help to protect their congregations from unnecessary coronavirus infections while formulating policies from divine inspiration that will extend the ministry of God’s kingdom in their communities.

Compared to several European nations and the USA, Chinese territories in Asia with dense populations in which COVID-19 has been spreading for several months, both individual cases and deaths are relatively few. The facts: Hong Kong (population 7.5 million) 386 cases, 4 deaths; Taiwan (population 23.7 million) 215 cases, 2 deaths; Singapore (population 5.7 million) 509 cases, 2 deaths; Macau (population 622,000) 25 cases, 0 deaths.

Doubtless these relatively low rates are due to the painful memory of the SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) outbreak in 2003, which has resulted in Chinese people taking extreme measures to prevent the spread of the disease. In the SARS epidemic, nearly 800 people died worldwide, almost all Chinese. The death toll in Hong Kong was 299, 42 dying in one housing estate due to defective sewer plumbing. The total death rate was over 9% of those infected. If you were a church leader of a 1,000-member church in which you suspected an

epidemic would spread causing 90 deaths, would you not do everything to protect your congregation?

Coronavirus most likely started the same way SARS did. In the open markets of Guangzhou, people purchased unclean wildlife infected with the virus (also in the coronavirus family) which spread to ordinary wet-market animals and then to humans. This time it was Wuhan, not Guangzhou, but there was a repeat of a massive Chinese government coverup.

From the time people in Hong Kong (and those in other Chinese communities) realized the danger of the virus in January, they began to wear face masks in public. For the past few months, except for a few stubborn Westerners, close to 100% of the people wear a face mask whenever they are away from home. Realizing the most dangerous action is to touch your face with your hand, everyone began to carry hand sanitizers, and where soap and water are available, they wash their hands for 20 seconds each time several times a day.

Some in the West claim that because of Confucianism, in which people respect and obey the government, authoritarian governments can force their people to keep strict isolation policies. That may be true in China, but certainly not Hong Kong. Hong Kong people greatly dislike their government and strongly resist actions by the authorities, as seen in the massive anti-government demonstrations going back to June 2019.

Due to the memory of SARS, the Hong Kong Chinese demanded the government take strict measures, which it was first not willing to do. This was probably due to pressure from the government in Beijing, which wanted to keep Hong Kong open for business, fearing restrictive immigration policies would hurt the Chinese economy.

Several thousand doctors and nurses went on strike at the worst possible time (in which cases of infections in people

coming from China were increasing daily) to demand a total closure of the border with China. Eventually the government caved in and instituted a mandatory two-week quarantine on anyone coming from China. Only recently with Singapore, Taiwan, Australia, New Zealand and other nations have they completely closed the borders, prohibiting the entry of all non-Hong Kong citizens. Airline passengers cannot even transit through Hong Kong.

Unlike Italy, France, the U.K. and other nations, there has not been a total lockdown requiring people to remain home, though all schools are closed and government officials work from home. Church leaders had to make a very difficult decision: totally close the church building and only conduct meetings online, or continue with church meetings but with strict measures to assure the virus would not infect the church members. Our church, Revival Christian Church in Hong Kong, chose the latter. Many churches chose to totally close their meetings.

We have strict requirements: Only our church members and non-Christian visitors can attend. This is so the building will not be too packed with members of other churches which have stopped their meetings.

The experience of SARS showed us many non-Christians will come to church out of fear, asking for prayer. The church must be open to minister to them. Everyone's temperature is taken on entry, and anyone with a fever is not allowed to attend. We allow no handshakes and no laying on of hands for prayer, and Communion has been suspended.

The church is totally disinfected before and between the two meetings. Most important, 100% of the people, including speakers and worship leaders, must wear face masks. For those who cannot or do not want to attend, the meetings are all online, and one week 1,900 people participated on Facebook Live.

This has been the best time in years to preach the gospel. Face masks are hard to purchase and very expensive. But many are donated by God's people to the church, and recently we passed out 3,700 masks to people in the community with a small bottle of disinfectant alcohol. Teams go out on the street to various locations and put up a sign saying, "Prayer Station." Many non-Christians and Christians of other churches will come to receive prayer on the street and will hear the gospel.

If we indiscriminately pass out face masks on the street, in no time at all, they will be gone. We thus train our people how to do this to evangelize the lost. The Lord will lead them to people on the street, and through the gift of the word of knowledge or simply asking people, they will discern the physical or emotional needs of the people and pray for healing. But as in the church, absolutely no laying on of hands is allowed. In Hong Kong, people never even shake hands and never get too close to others.

Many Christians, even in charismatic churches, have no experience in personal evangelism through using prayer and gifts of the Spirit. But many of our people are now learning this, and after a few hours of personal street evangelism, return to the church to share the exciting testimonies of people they led to the Lord or prayed for to receive healing. Thus the coronavirus is one of the best things to happen to the church in years. The rule is no physical contact and always wear a face mask!

While we cannot gather in large prayer meetings, smaller prayer meetings of a few people to a few dozen are taking place all over the city in thousands of churches. Now through a ministry from the States, Faith Comes by Hearing, tens of thousands of Christians from several hundred churches are going through a daily Bible reading program online during this Lenten season, reading Matthew and Galatians. At the end, various church leaders lead in a short prayer.

While nobody knows the future, it is hoped that COVID-19 will be a repeat of SARS in 2003. The negative: Many died, including some Christians, but one was a female doctor whose testimony of her willingness to sacrifice her life to treat a SARS patient became the theme of many evangelical meetings and popular Christian songs, which resulted in hundreds of conversions to Christ.

The positive: Unprecedented unity came to the church, which resulted in city-wide prayer meetings and Christians going everywhere preaching the gospel. The high death rate and subsequent economic collapse brought down the pride of arrogant Chinese, and thus many turned to faith in Christ.

The main belief of Hong Kong people is not Buddhism or Communism, but materialism. If COVID-19 does result in an economic recession and widespread unemployment, it might indirectly result in a great harvest of souls for God's kingdom.

Also, in 2003, after several months, SARS just disappeared, and both the economy and the church made a strong recovery in a couple years. Will history repeat itself with COVID-19?