

The Bible's Message of Light and Hope vs. the Government's Message of Darkness and Despair

It is quite ironic that, at the very time hundreds of millions of Christians worldwide are celebrating hope and life because of the Savior's birth, governmental leaders are issuing stark and depressing warnings of darkness, death, and gloom.

In the words of President Biden, "We are looking at a winter of severe illness and death for the unvaccinated—for themselves, their families and the hospitals they'll soon overwhelm." Or, to quote Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the director-general of the World Health Organization, with regard to Christmas celebrations, "It's better to cancel now and celebrate later than to celebrate now and grieve later."

To be sure, Ghebreyesus also said, "All of us are sick of this pandemic, all of us want to spend time with friends and family, all of us want to get back to normal."

And President Biden, in his fresh push for vaccinations, said, "If we do this, we're gonna keep schools and businesses open ... and I want to see everyone around enjoy that. I want to see them enjoy the fact that they're able to be in school, that businesses are open and the holidays are coming."

So, giving the fullest benefit of the doubt, we can say that both Ghebreyesus and Biden want to see life return to normal. (I know that many readers don't believe that for a second. I'm simply putting the best construction and motivation on their words.)

And when it comes to our own health choices, I am not

counseling irresponsibility, nor am I downplaying the possibility of death by COVID. I have lost too many friends to the virus to make light of it.

As to my own practices, for the last 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ years, I have made serious, daily lifestyle choices to boost my own immune system and reach optimal health. (Regarding COVID specifically, I have followed my doctor's recommendations and have been tested twice for the virus and three times for antibodies.)

I have also seen the reports that indicate a significantly higher death rate in counties with lower vaccination rates. In fact, it was no less a rightwing journalist than John Nolte who touted such a report on the Breitbart website.

And as I have stated repeatedly, I am not anti-vaccine.

At the same time, I know of countless people of all ages who got COVID and recovered without a problem, including a significant number of friends and colleagues.

And I know of churches with several thousand members that never shut down and whose members do not wear masks and are largely unvaccinated. Yet they never had even a mildly serious COVID outbreak.

I've also read the accounts of fully vaccinated people dying of COVID. And I've taken note of how many states (or countries) with high vaccination rates have also seen high rates of new infections. In contrast with this, states like Florida, which were blasted by the left for allegedly irresponsible practices, have recently seen the lowest death rates.

When it comes to the omicron variant, the latest cause for panic and concern, we are being told that, while being more contagious, it is milder and less deadly than delta. Why then, the extreme reaction and fear? Why the morbid, even apocalyptic warnings of a grim, plague-like winter?

As far as I can tell, such warnings are not only unmerited and unneeded. They are counterproductive and only spread fear. And so, it is time to say, "Enough already with the gloom and doom. There is a better way to approach the current crisis."

Again, I am not counseling irresponsibility, and I do not encourage a cavalier attitude to COVID.

But I believe we would do best to put our focus today on hope and life and light, especially when some researchers claim that one of the factors that increases mortality risk to COVID is stress. Yet it seems that, from many angles, the government is only increasing our stress. How does this help? (Shall I mention much of the media's fear-mongering too?)

When it comes to the Christmas message of light and hope, a good case can be made against Jesus being born on Dec. 25. Yet, for many centuries, it has become the time when His birth is celebrated, which means that, all around the globe, people are thinking about and singing about the most significant birth in human history. And that birth brings us hope!

To quote an Old Testament passage cited in the New Testament regarding Jesus the Messiah, "The people who sat in darkness saw great light. And on those who sat in the land of the shadow of death, light has dawned" (Isa. 9:2, quoted in Matt 4:16).

That special, great light began to shine brightly when Jesus entered this world as a baby. And it has shone brighter and brighter ever since for those who have eyes to see.

It is the birth that declares that God is with us.

It is the birth that proclaims God's love for a sinning world.

It is the birth that leads to the life and death and Resurrection of our Savior, because of whom salvation and forgiveness have been made available to all.

And so, while we learn to live with this virus (rather than thinking we can eradicate it), let's focus on the one in whom hope springs eternal. It will make a world of difference, not just in our emotional outlook but in our real, concrete, day-to-day lives.

Thank God for Jesus! {eoa}

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