

HIM GOD RAISED UP

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These days of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 are unprecedented in the history of the world. Never have the civil governments of the world all at once been so oppressive. Even the governments of the United States have joined in the tyranny. In some states the church of Jesus Christ is not exempt. For example, the governor of the state of Kentucky, Andy Beshear, has ordered all people of the state, excepting those whose business it is to sustain life, to remain at home until further notice. He has not excepted Christians gathering for worship, and he has said that Christians who do gather for that purpose will be forced to quarantine for fourteen days. The authorities ostensibly are taking such measures in order to save lives. Governor Beshear said, "I hear people say, 'It's my choice.' Well, it's not the person next to you's choice... This is the only way that we can ensure that your decision doesn't kill somebody else, that your decision doesn't spread the coronavirus in your county and in your community." Of course, neither Governor Beshear, or any other official has explained how this squares with the fact that people every day make choices that risk their lives, and the lives of others. Moreover, although the actions that the authorities have taken might save some lives from the disease, they might kill more people in the long run. The authorities have taken measures to prevent the spread of the disease, but those same measures may be the ruin of society, depriving people of property, liberty, and even life.

The people of God have existed for thousands of years, and will continue to exist. Yet, in those thousands of years, the people of God have suffered much hardship. Before the Advent of Christ, they were enslaved in Egypt. They were oppressed by the pagans in the land of Canaan. They were oppressed by their own kings. They were conquered by the nations of Assyria and Babylonia and carried away captive into exile. After the First Advent of Christ, they suffered terrible persecutions under the Romans. Even so, because Christians were faithful to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, the number of Christians increased. The position of the Church changed when, in the Year of Our Lord Three-hundred and Twelve, the emperor Constantine became a Christian, and the following year he and the emperor Licinius issued the Edict of Milan, granting religious toleration in the empire. About eighty years after, the Edict of Thessalonica established the Christian faith as the state religion. Over the course of several decades following, barbarian tribes encroached on the empire until Flavius Odoacer, a barbarian king, deposed the Roman emperor, Romulus Augustus, and became king of Italy. Most historians consider this to mark the end of the Roman Empire. It may have seemed to some Christians at the time that all was lost for the Church, but Jesus said, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18) Barbarian tribes had subdued the empire, but Christians continued to love God, and their neighbors, and to proclaim the Gospel. About thirty thirty years after the fall of the Roman Empire, Clovis, king of the barbarian Franks, converted to the Christian faith. Eventually, all the Franks became Christian, and their conversion was the foundation of the Holy Roman Empire, which began with the coronation of Charlemagne in the Year of Our Lord Eight-hundred. In the Reformation, Protestants were persecuted by the Bishop of Rome, but they, like so many Christians before, were faithful, and they established Protestant churches in most of the lands of western Europe, and in New England. These are but a few of the examples of how God's people were faithful to Him, and He was faithful to them. Christians are now in another crisis. For years, the civil government have been increasing their persecution of Christians, and now they assert that they have the authority to forbid Christians from meeting, if it is in the public interest to do so. In this epidemic, civil

authorities are expanding their control, and making havoc. How should the Church respond? It should respond as it has always done: being faithful to love God, and love people, and to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. If the Church is to proclaim the gospel, then it needs a good understanding of what that gospel is. The Scriptures not only explain the gospel to the reader, but they also record instances of the apostles' preaching the gospel. One such instance is Saint Peter's preaching to the household of Cornelius.

When God called Abraham, He said to him, "And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee. In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." (Genesis 12:3) A few years later, God showed Abraham the stars, and said to him, "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be." (Genesis 15:5) And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness." (Genesis 15:6) Abraham was righteous before God, not by works, but by faith. Some years later, God said of Abraham, "All the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him." (Genesis 18:8) Saint Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, explains that this is the Gospel, and that it means that, not only Abraham was justified before God by faith, but everyone one, whether Jew or Gentile, whether physical descendant of Abraham or not, is justified before God by faith. He wrote, "And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed." (Galatians 3:8) A man is justified, whether he be Jew or Gentile, not by the rite of circumcision and by keeping the law of Moses, but by faith.

That a man is justified by faith, and not by works of the law had been difficult for some Jews to understand. It was difficult for Saint Peter to understand. When God in a vision showed Saint Peter a number of animals, including some that the law prohibited him from eating, and commanded him to eat, he refused. God said to Him, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." (Acts 10:15) God was teaching Pete that the food laws which separated Jew from Gentile, were abrogated, and that there is no longer a religious distinction between them. In the meanwhile, God told Cornelius, a Gentile proselyte, to send for Peter who would have instructions for him. He sent for Peter, and so Peter came to the house of Cornelius. When the members of Cornelius's household were assembled, Peter said to them, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." (Acts 10:34, 35) God does not accept a man on the basis of his nationality; He does not accept him on the basis of his social standing, or his religious credentials. Whatever a man's nationality, whether he be Jew or Gentile, God accepts any man who fears Him and does what He commands. It is so simple that a child can understand it. God accepts any person who trusts and obeys. Saint Peter finally understood this lesson. Cornelius and his household, although they did not observe the rite of circumcision, nor did they follow the laws of food, were acceptable to God because they believed in Him, and did as He commanded them.

Saint Peter then said to them, "The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached." (Acts 10:36, 37) God had sent a message to the people of Israel, a message of peace between God and man in Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all, and this message began when John the Baptist baptized Jesus. Saint Matthew records what John saw when he baptized Jesus: "And, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:16, 17) When John baptized Jesus, the Holy Spirit came upon Him and empowered Him to perform the ministry God gave Him. Then Jesus began His earthly ministry. Saint Peter said that Jesus, "went about doing

good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.” Jesus went about doing good. He taught people about God and He freed them from the heavy burdens that the religious establishment had placed upon them. He healed people of their sicknesses, and He cast demons out of them. He was a good man, a righteous man, who Himself trusted God and obeyed Him. Because He believed God and obeyed Him, God was with Him; God blessed Him and heard His prayers. After Jesus opened the eyes of a man born blind, the Pharisees interrogated the man about it. They said to the man that Jesus is a sinner, and they insulted the man. The man said to them, “Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth. Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing.” (John 9:31-33) This man knew what the religious leaders did not. He knew that the good works Jesus did proved that God was with Him, and proved that Jesus is who He claimed to be, namely, the Son of God. All these things Cornelius and his household knew, because they had heard the reports. Saint Peter said that he and the other apostles knew of these things because they were Jesus’s disciples, and so saw for themselves the things Jesus did. They were witnesses of His life. They were also, sadly, witnesses of His death. They saw the good that he did to others, and they saw also the evil that men did to Him, including how they had Him crucified, hung from a tree as one cursed of God. (Deuteronomy 21:23)

The apostles were witnesses of the life of Jesus, and of His death. They were also witnesses of His resurrection. Jesus is the Son of God, and His Father is always pleased with Him, because He always does His will. And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him.” (John 8:29) Jesus is a perfect man, and perfectly good; God would never allow Him to remain in death. God raised Him from the dead. He raised Him, not secretly, and privately, but openly, and publicly. Yet, not to all, but to a select few, Jesus’s disciples. Neither did God raise Jesus a spirit, leaving His body behind, as some heretics have said. He raised Him in His body, albeit transformed, and Jesus ate and drank with His disciples as proof of the fact.

Jesus commanded His disciples to proclaim to the people, and to bear witness to them, that He is the Son of God, the One with whom God is pleased, the One whom God raised from the dead, and whom God has appointed as judge of all mankind. Jesus, before His death, said to them:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel. For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him. (John 5:19-23)

God has appointed Jesus as the judge of the world. On the Last Day, at the Final Judgment, Jesus will execute judgment. He will acquit all those that believed Him and obeyed Him, and He will condemn the rest. He is the One of whom all the prophets bore witness that He would come, and He is the One of whom all the apostles bore witness that He has come. He is the One in whom men must place their trust if they would have forgiveness of sins, because he is the One God has appointed as judge.

The present time is for Christians one of uncertainty and trial, but Christ said that He will build His church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. Christ's church, by the power of the Holy Spirit who raised Him from the dead, will endure. It will do more than endure; it will overcome. Ten years ago, Francis Cardinal George, Archbishop of the city of Chicago, said, "I expect to die in bed, my successor will die in prison and his successor will die a martyr in the public square. His successor will pick up the shards of a ruined society and slowly help rebuild civilization, as the church has done so often in human history." If our civilization dies, God will, through the work of His people, raise a new one. This cycle of the death and resurrection of civilization will continue until finally all the world acknowledges that Jesus Christ is Lord, until "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea." (Isaiah 11:9) Christians are now in hard times, but they will, by the grace of God, persevere, and hard times will lead to good times. Cardinal George died on the seventeenth day of April, five years ago. Will the Cardinal's successor die in prison? Will any one of us? We must prepare ourselves for what may lie ahead. In the book of Isaiah, the servant of God says:

For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord GOD will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up. (Isaiah 50:7-9)

Jesus is that servant. Wicked men opposed Him, but He entrusted Himself to God. Men falsely accused Him, but He let God justify Him. He set His face like flint. He would allow nothing to turn Him away from God. God did justify Him, raising Him from the dead, and appointing Him judge of all the world. On the Last Day Christ will raise the dead, and He will judge all mankind. He will acquit all those that trusted Him and obeyed Him, and He will condemn the rest.

Let us be glad that God is no respecter of persons, and that He saves us by grace through faith. Let us set our faces like a flint, so that we will never turn away from Christ. Let us put our trust in Him, and obey Him, so that He will forgive our sins, and acquit us on the Last Day.

Now unto the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.