

QUANTOCK MINISTRIES

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*A Bible teaching and preaching ministry
for the Christian community*

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COMING OUT OF LOCKDOWN – Part 1

July 2020. We have certainly had a taste of external restriction and control over our lives, our lifestyles, and our basic freedoms during the past four months. Of course, we do understand the reasons for this, and generally Christians have not raised any objections. We are in the same position as everyone else in society and, so far, we cannot really complain that as Christians we have been unfairly targeted.

Even so, we are not used to this happening to us. If this same degree of control had been directed just to Christian worship and fellowship, or even if it had happened to all religious activity of any description, as happens in some countries today, it would have caused us to rise up in righteous protest. We would be accusing the authorities of blatant persecution, especially as the recent lockdown restrictions have been backed by legal powers. In other words, we have actually endured a level of prohibition that, if directed towards us alone, would be seen as a cause for the utmost concern – the end of centuries of freedom of worship and religious tolerance.

And yet, such legal action specifically targeting Christians has been the norm across many cultures throughout the last two thousand years. Maybe God is showing us how privileged we have been, and how easy it is for us to take it all for granted. There is no guarantee that the present lockdown circumstances are over yet, but just for now I want to share some of the thoughts that already arise from this experience we are all passing through.

1. The reality of the condition of lockdown

Perhaps we should look at the whole issue of lockdown in a broader, biblical way. Here I am defining lockdown as “a severe curtailment of our ability to live freely in the way God has provided for our enjoyment” (1 Timothy 6 v 17b). We can see that in a fallen world lockdown of one sort or another, a sense of captivity or loss of freedom, is a very common state affecting all humanity. There are many causes, and these are a few examples.

Health. Any physical or mental impairment can feel like a prison, and we rightly feel sympathy for those whose health falls far short of what it should be.

Family. Dysfunctional family life of any sort can seriously affect any member of such a family and cause a lifetime of turmoil and insecurity, restricting a normal and enjoyable level of experience. This can be caused by the breakdown in the parents’ relationship, or the nature and influence of the parents’ characters, lifestyles, and prejudices in bringing up their children.

Character. A troubled and insecure personal character can cause terrible deprivation in that individual’s life, especially when it leads to a feeling of rejection, a sense of inferiority, or addictive or violent behaviour.

Bereavement. The loss of loved ones can cause substantial lockdown in the lives of those left behind.

Finance. Debt can be a very debilitating condition to be in, even leading to suicide, which sounds like total lockdown.

Politics. The frequent and sad influence of corrupt and godless authorities, of whatever shade, religion or philosophy, often leads to terrible misery, persecution, bloodshed and death; a veritable lockdown storm.

Circumstances. Many and varied situations, often unexpected, can act as a deterrent to one’s full enjoyment of life.

2. God’s plan for human freedom

God designed a high and exalted place for mankind in His creation, a position of much joy and freedom. For example:

Genesis 1 v 26 – 28. *Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”*

Psalm 8 v 3 – 8. *When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings [the Godhead, not angels] and crowned him with glory and honour. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet.*

At the beginning God put just one restriction on human freedom, and that restriction provides a permanent reminder that mankind is to live with a sense of responsibility and ultimate accountability to Him (Romans 3 v 19):

Genesis 2 v 15 – 17. *The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the LORD God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.*

As we are well aware, following Adam and Eve’s satanically inspired rebellion, the Fall, and God’s subsequent Curse, mankind’s history has been one long saga of lockdown, with millennia of indescribable suffering and misery. God’s plan for our freedom was reasserted by Jesus Himself, as the antidote to all lockdown:

John 8 v 31 – 32 & 36. *Jesus said, ‘If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free... So, if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.’*

3. Living with the conflict between freedom and lockdown

Once we have received new and eternal life through faith in the saving work of Jesus, we should find we are developing a heightened awareness of the reality of lockdown in whatever form. We should also learn how we are to cope in these situations and live overcoming lives. Here are three very important areas of conflict.

All rebellion against God and His ordering of life on Earth - Romans 1 v 18 – 32. Apart from the fact of the original sin of Adam and Eve, we should also be very conscious of all acts of rebellion against God, both in our own lives and in the lives of those around us. The rebelliousness specifically described in this passage is displayed today through evolutionary theory. Here we’re told God’s anger results from the deliberate denial that God plainly designs, creates and sustains everything through His eternal power and divine nature. This leads to the withdrawal of His protection (“He gave them over”, vv 24, 26 and 28), and the resulting unleashing of evil forces leads to total personal and social lockdown (v 24 – 32). If we accept the biblical force of these two attributes of God, we have no problem believing in a six-day creation a few thousand years ago, as God clearly teaches us in scripture. Attributing the glory of God’s creation to the creation itself, asserting an incredible process of chance, struggle and death over billions of years, is described as wickedness. It is our duty to stand against such rebellion, being very zealous for God’s glory.

Satan’s activity, leading to spiritual warfare - Ephesians 6 v 10 – 18. This is so much more than human greed and conflict (matters of flesh and blood) but is the involvement of principalities and powers (spiritual forces of evil). Any Christian with a good Bible-based understanding, plus the inward leading of the Holy Spirit, will be very sensitive to these spiritual powers, and realise the severe degree of lockdown they generate. Spiritual discernment and a clear anointing are vital in dealing with this major area of Christian experience and witness.

Hardness of heart and determined unbelief - Mark 3 v 5 – 6. God’s patience with humanity has its limits (e.g. Genesis 6 vv 3, 5 & 6). In Matthew 12 v 31 Jesus told the Pharisees that they had gone too far and committed the unforgivable sin. Romans 2 v 5 shows that such behaviour will be subject to judgement. There are many other instances in scripture where people’s determined rejection of God leads to God’s rejection of them. In response, we need to hear and, if clearly instructed, obey the words of the Lord in such circumstances, e.g., Matthew 10 v 14 – 16.

4. God’s sovereignty demonstrated through lockdown situations

Joseph. His imprisonment in the pit by his brothers, and again by Potiphar in Egypt, were literal lockdowns. But following one of the most emotional passages in the Bible (Genesis 45 v 1 – 15) we read Joseph’s immortal words: ‘*You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives*’ (Genesis 50 v 20).

Job. Job’s trials amounted to a lockdown unlike anything any of us are likely to experience, but Job was able to triumphantly say to God afterwards: ‘*My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you*’ (Job 42 v 5).

Jeremiah. Poor Jeremiah appeared to stagger from lockdown to lockdown, but all his trials only served to make him ever more determined to get his messages across, the prophetic messages he had received from the Lord and which always proved to be completely accurate. The importance and force of his ministry were greatly enhanced by the imprisonments and miserable treatment he received.

Jesus. *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us* (John 1 v 14). The greatest lockdown of all, so forcefully expressed by Paul in Philippians 2 v 5 – 11. But then, the great scheme of redemption, universal in its application to the whole of creation, could not be achieved by any other means. Through that mighty transaction God is glorified beyond our greatest understanding (John 13 v 31 – 32).

In all our lockdown experiences, we hold on to the great reality expressed by Paul in Romans 8 vv 28, 31 & 37: *In all things God works for the good of those who love Him... What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*