

Episode 122

And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation worketh patience.

- Romans 5.3 KJV

You've got to love the King James Version. Tribulation worketh!

A few months ago, I heard an American pastor lament the fact that the state where he lived was about to lift the Covid protocols they had in place, allowing life to get back to normal as quickly as possible. What grieved the pastor had nothing to do with the Covid regulations. Instead, he felt that the church in America had missed an opportunity to let "tribulation worketh" in their lives. Rather than getting to the point where the church had been refined, restored, and renewed, he was concerned that they had leant more on their credit cards than on Christ, and now it was time to get on with life as they had before.

Whether that is completely true or not will become clear over time. One thing that I do agree with is that more than ever before it has been evident that God is wanting to use this season to rescue us from the systems and structures of Christianity. Whether our identity lay in the weekly rhythms of church attendance, large crowds or the bubbles that falsely buoyed us up on other people's faith, lockdown has systematically stripped away our structures to expose the bones of our beliefs.

One of the things God has done in this past season is to expose the lack of a personal faith in Christ. When the doors closed, so did our bibles. We entered lockdown with commentaries, online courses, and daily devotionals, only to find that we didn't have the depth and maturity to press through the dry places into his presence, without someone else doing it for us. Rather than pushing back, we need to realise our heavenly Father is wanting to rescue us from any empty scaffolding that has prevented us from abandoning ourselves to the presence of God.

Lockdown has also exposed the trap of togetherness. When we were suddenly no longer able to draw from the hype and momentum of weekly rhythms, we had to become fully reliant on the sustaining power and presence of Jesus - on our own. We've been left to rediscover what we truly believe, apart from groupthink, in silence and solitude, either forging a deepening relationship with Christ, or clinging to our credit card, waiting for the floods to subside.

Tribulation worketh, and what it will produce is a people whose hope and faith and trust are in Christ alone, a people of prayer and the presence of God, a people whose future is not based on organisational health, but on their walk with Christ. And when we are ready, he will open the doors once more and let the city stream in, to be loved on and looked after by those who have been refined by fire, and live fully reliant on the sustaining power of Christ alone.

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