

Quo Vadis?

“Where Do We Go From Here?”

*“There is a time for everything...
a time to be born and a time to die...
a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them...
He has made everything beautiful in its time...”*
(Ecclesiastes 3:1a-2, 5, 11a) (NIV)

Several weeks ago the world stopped. Governments ordered their citizens to stop meeting in churches or businesses or schools. Fear of the Pandemic brought a new phrase and concept into our vocabulary: “*Social Distancing*”. We look askance at others who nervously pass us by, careful to stay 6 feet apart. Handshakes and hugs are replaced by frowns and suspicion. The warmth of community is replaced by cold isolation.

The World Stopped and We Were Scattered!

Scattering and Gathering

Man, by nature, seems to be a builder. Whether it is a family, church, business or government, he wants it bigger. I once asked the head of a large charitable organization the purpose of their group, and he replied without hesitation, “*To get bigger!*”

God’s first command and blessing was to “*multiply*”. To multiply requires that we first *divide*. The process works automatically for families because children leave home and the older members die. But the other three institutions have all found ways to try to grow and exist indefinitely. Churches, businesses and government institutions have attempted to make themselves immortal through corporations and other legal creations. But history makes it clear God will divide us by *scattering* us from time to time, when we refuse to do it voluntarily.

Ecclesiastes 3:1, 5 (NIV) says, “*There is a time for everything...a time to scatter...and a time to gather.*” It is much like breathing that keeps us alive: we breathe in and then we breathe out.

As I read these verses, I was puzzled why “*scattering*” came before “*gathering*”, until I realized that God first “*scattered*” on the earth, as He breathed life into His creation. After that He gave His command for us to repeat this process as we “*fill the earth and subdue it*”. (Genesis 1:28) (NIV).

Jesus explained the rationale in John 12:24 (NIV): “*I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.*”

It seems God does want us to build and increase—but it is not to make ourselves bigger and more powerful, but in order that we may “*scatter*” it all in God’s name, and for His glory!

Unfortunately, we seem to like to “*gather*” more than to “*scatter*”.

Mankind’s rebellious nature quickly became evident as they built the Tower of Babel, reflected in Genesis 11:1-9 (NIV) (Emphasis added) , saying, “*Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and **not be scattered** over the face of the whole earth.*” But God would not allow them to wrest control from Him, “*So the Lord **scattered** them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city.*”

Jesus gave similar instructions at the beginning of the New Testament, when He told His disciples “*...you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the **ends of the earth.***” (Acts 1:8 (NIV) (Emphasis added) But Christianity didn’t begin to explode across the world, until “*...a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were **scattered** throughout Judea and Samaria.*” (Acts 8:1) (NIV) (Emphasis added).

God's unwavering call throughout history has been for mankind to "*scatter*" after we "*gather*". Yet every generation, including ours and those who will follow us, tries to build its' own Tower of Babel. We have always failed—and we will always fail! Because God will not yield His Power and Glory to us!

Our current culture seeks ever bigger companies, governments, programs, and charitable organizations, and looks for great leaders to show us the way—and the effect is often to paralyze us from being individuals who do what God has created us to be and to do.

When I was a young man at the close of WWII, the world had been devastated by conflict. Poverty and want were rampant. Our nation led the world in exporting our resources and our form of government and economics that have brought untold wealth and well-being to millions of people.

But there has been a subtle and unexpected cost for our affluence. In 1950, we were a nation of individuals and small institutions. We were poorer then, but we knew the corner grocer, and the local manufacturer. Families were intact and churches were full on Sunday. Much of our laws were made and enforced at the local or state level. The era of sports for the young and retirement homes for the older was just beginning.

Seventy years later we are a richer nation. But we are plagued by illegitimacy and broken families, declining faith, national and international ownership of our news media, restaurants and shops, our factories and our grocers and drug stores. Massive stadiums, theme parks and entertainment centers dot the land. But we have joined the world in printing money and increasing our debt to continue the abundance we have come to expect. And our laws and government are increasingly vested in Washington or some international body that seems almost foreign to us.

Once again we have tried to build our Tower of Babel, reach Heaven on our own, make a name for ourselves and not be *scattered!*

But, once again the World has been *scattered!* God has allowed the Virus Pandemic to shut down the entire World. Night after night the television screen has shown us pictures of cities that were deathly quiet, as the World Has Stopped.

Quo Vadis?

Now, we are asking, “*Where do we go from here?*” (Quo Vadis?)

Many families are huddled together unsure of their future. Churches and other charitable organizations are wondering how they will survive in a new, unknown environment. Businesses see the need to regroup and are pondering what changes must be made. Even governments around the world are reeling from the effects of the sudden, mysterious change that has taken place. Massive unemployment, dwindling tax revenues and the need to find a vaccine haunt our thoughts. Life changing decisions must soon be made.

Many of us have begrudged the weeks of being “*scattered*” from our familiar groups. But is it possible that God in His Wisdom and Grace has actually given us an enforced time to think about how we are going to “*gather*” as the World starts again?

In every person’s life there are precipitating events, that bring momentous change. Births, marriages, and deaths occur. We *gather* into new formations, live in new ways, and then are *scattered*. So the rhythm of life goes on!

The same is true of our World as we are *scattered* and then *gather* in new forms and new norms. WWII was such a precipitating event and it appears the current Pandemic is another. But here I would add a note of caution. WW II lasted almost 6 years. We have been dealing with the Pandemic for only a few weeks. And already I hear people planning to get back to the “Old Normal” in a few months!

As an old man looking back at life, I believe this is a monumental change that will take years to run its course. We did not know the

outcome of WWII or what course the World would take, until it gradually began to take shape as the months and years rolled by. I believe the same will be true for us. When it begins to happen we will see it, if we are looking and asking the Lord to guide and direct us.

For now, we are adrift in an ocean of uncertainty. Our principal task is to survive and get through the Crisis. To do that I am using the guides I sent to some of you several weeks ago in *The World Has Changed*:

1. **Accept it!** The world has changed and it will never be the same again.
2. **Let Go!** Look forward and don't try and hang on to the old normal.
3. **Expect Uncertainty!** It is like WWII when we didn't know when (or even if) we would win.
4. **Think Long Term!** This may go on for years before it settles down.
5. **Live Lean!** Prepare to do without and substitute, but build margins of the essentials.
6. **Love and Be Loved!** Relationships with God and People will become increasingly important.
7. **Trust God!** Stop worrying and apply His Word e.g. The Sermon on the Mount.

As the scene unfolds, I pray we will all think Longer, Deeper and Wider as we ask God how he wants us to regroup and be His Ambassadors in the New World He gives us!

From Grandpa With Love

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