

## **“Are you Safe from the Virus, Yet Heading toward Hell?”**

Pastor Mark Blair – BICF ZGC English

That might not be the most comfortable, or politically-correct, question you will hear while living under the burden of this Corona virus. But it might be one you need to consider. If not for your own soul, perhaps for the dear ones in the room next door, down the hall, and all across the great nation.

I am asking this direct question from the safety of the warm side of the Pacific. We are home visiting churches whose prayers and support enable us to serve the Lord in the BICF. (I praise the Lord for our faithful on-site ministry team in ZGC!) In recent weeks we have been in the church Dayna grew up in and I first served almost 40 years ago! Some of the same people are still there serving Him, many have passed, and some have wandered away from the faith – or perhaps were never in it? It gives us a painful and vivid reminder that simply being ‘in church’ does not mean you are ‘in Christ.’

I wonder if these days of isolation have revealed an emptiness in your soul? Perhaps your faith seems ‘alive’ when you are surrounded by vibrant believers. But now it seems distant, maybe it disappeared? Were you borrowing from the faith of others, or have you truly been born again to a living hope? These are questions we should all consider, making our calling and election sure.

If you have been wondering about your own eternal standing before God, may I remind you of the wonderful Gospel of our Lord Jesus?

When we have wandered far from His secure embrace, snared by the lure of what does not please Him, it is so good to turn around and find you can indeed come home. The best news in all of human history is that Jesus came to bring us home. This message is great, good, and glorious!

This news is great because it is true! The shores of history are lined with wrecks of broken promises and dashed hopes. But the claims of Jesus stand, because He stands. The New Testament unfolds the horror of Jesus’ abandonment. Crosses were designed to make death as long and agonizing as possible. He was broken by the cross, but He burst the bonds of sin, death, and hell. He lives. His resurrection is one of the best established facts in all history.

This is amazingly good news...almost hard to believe. How can the very God we offend give His best to bring us back? Why should the God we reject be rejected for us? For some reason we will never understand, God loves those who will not love Him. God in His goodness has made bad people like us good. This is the purpose of the cross. God’s justice demands sin’s penalty be paid. God’s mercy declares He has paid it through the gift of His Son. Romans hung thousands of people on crosses. Yet there was something unique about Jesus death. An officer at the foot of His cross said, “Truly, this was the Son of God!” (Mark 15:39). No other victim of Rome was without sin. Yet the enormity of sin was seen in His suffering and death for the sins of the world. Jesus was also a Victor over Rome. His Kingdom is more enduring, His Lordship is eternal. Through this very bad event God brought great good – forgiveness for sin – life from death – heaven, because He endured our hell.

This news is glorious! Paul, a man of considerable intellect and experience, said, “God forbid that I should glory, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Galatians 6:14). Of all the world’s wonders, Paul found just one thing ultimately glorious. It seems the cross was a place of gory, not glory! Surely the misery was unimaginable. But His incalculable suffering achieved an eternal redemption. Paul gloried in the cross because it changed him. And as he lifted high the word of the cross he witnessed more change – deep within human hearts, through all spheres of ancient cities, and beyond the realm of established empires. Throughout eternity multitudes from every nation, culture, tribe, and language will give glory to their Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you glory in Him? Do you know Him? “Welcome home!” The longer your journey, the more stirring these words feel.

Perhaps these simple might help you find your own words to talk to our God in prayer....

*"Heavenly Father, I admit that I have gone my own way. I have offended you in my thoughts, words, and actions. I am sorry for my sins. Help me to turn away from them. Lord Jesus Christ, I believe that you died for my sins. You paid the penalty that I deserved to pay. Cleanse me from my sin. I rejoice in your resurrection and promise to follow you as Lord. Holy Spirit, I ask you to fill my life with your power and purity. I want to live in your strength every day, serving you for the rest of my life. Please come into my life merciful God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - that I may live with you forever. Amen."*

Two of David's Psalms are heart-felt prayers for forgiveness and saving mercy. May I suggest you read and pray through Psalms 32 and 51. Even better, do so with some friends down the hall --- even with a mask, you can still share this Good News!