

## ☞ Can You Hear Me Now?

The phrase, "Can you hear me now" was a popular catch phrase in the first decade of the 2000s. Verizon used it in the "Test Man" commercials to promote their cell network coverage and people still quote it today. I wonder if God is using that phrase at this time. In a recent post on Facebook I suggested that we should purposely take time to ask God what he is saying to us in this pandemic. We have been pushed into near solitude and it's in solitude that we can best hear God. So, what is he saying? Hopefully you have been seeking God on that matter.

Some are seeing prophetic signs of the times unfolding right before our eyes and I am in that camp. I can see a number of ways that events are aligning with scriptural prophecies about the very last days. Jesus said that there would be signs and that people who are paying attention will recognize those signs. I believe more firmly than ever that Jesus' return is just around the corner. I also believe that because God is merciful he will give warning and opportunity for people to get right with him. I think that is what is happening in this pandemic.

Is there biblical support for my point of view? Of course, there is, or I wouldn't be saying it. I'm not one to publicize my personal views or opinions on debatable matters, but I have no reservation about directing people to God's word and his opinion. There are two primary scripture references that come to mind in relation to our current situation and what's happening around the world. One has to do with the effect on churches.

The current pandemic has led to something that I have never seen nor even heard of before. Churches around the world have closed their doors and are no longer meeting together. If I was told just a few years ago that all the churches in the USA and around the world would be closed I probably would have scoffed and thought that could only happen if believers were raptured away. But here we are doing online church because gatherings are closed around the world.

Did you know there's a biblical reference to churches being closed? I was reminded of this scripture recently in a podcast by Bob Sorge. Here's the scripture.

### ☞ Malachi 1:10-14

**10 "Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you," says the Lord Almighty, "and I will accept no offering from your hands. 11 My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations," says the Lord Almighty. 12 "But you profane it by saying of the Lord's table, 'It is defiled,' and of its food, 'It is contemptible.' 13 And you say, 'What a burden!' and you sniff at it contemptuously," says the Lord Almighty. "When you bring injured, crippled or diseased animals and offer them as sacrifices, should I accept them from your hands?" says the Lord. 14 "Cursed is**

**the cheat who has an acceptable male in his flock and vows to give it, but then sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord. For I am a great king," says the Lord Almighty, "and my name is to be feared among the nations.**

The first thing to notice here is that God is the one wishing that the temple doors were closed. He is the one lamenting the useless fires on his altar. He is the one that is displeased. That is astounding! In a nutshell God is saying that he would rather close the doors than continue on with worthless worship. Wow! That should grab your attention.

Now, I don't think that God is saying every believer and every church is offering worthless worship. But I do think that every church and every individual needs to seek God to determine what he is saying specifically to each of us. That being said, God does cover ☞ the fundamental reasons for his view. In verse 6 he asks, "**Where is My honor?**" Through Malachi, God asks why they show so little respect and honor to Him in their sacrifices. They call God Father, they call Him Master, but they don't honor Him with their sacrifices. He says they have shown contempt for his name.

But they weren't even aware that they despised God with their actions. It is easier than many people think to blindly continue in sin or indifference. God wanted them to think about their service to Him, and He wants us to think just as carefully. I'm not saying that every single person and every single church has completely abandoned the Lord and despised his name. But I think it wise that every one of us honestly evaluate ourselves in ☞ this light. **Have we slipped away from our first love? (Revelation 2:4)**

In verse 14, God says, "I am a great King." The whole context of this passage is showing ☞ that God is worthy of more than the people were giving. **He deserves the best** – the best praise and the best service, but the people were only going through the motions. It was far less than their best.

In verse 10, the "useless fires" and "unacceptable offerings" are referring to this. Their sacrifices were less than their best and were not in line with what they had promised to do. Verses 13 and 14 make that clear. They had promised to give God their best, but were actually bringing their worst to him. In their day, the offerings were animal sacrifices, ☞ which we are no longer required to do, however **we still are to bring spiritual sacrifices** to him. (1 Peter 2:5) What does that mean for us?

#### ☞ **Hebrews 13:15-16**

**15** Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a **sacrifice of praise** — the fruit of lips that confess his name. **16** And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

So, our praises to God are one of the ways we bring sacrifices to him. Clearly, the question must be asked, are my praises, are your praises, the best? Or are we just going

through motions? We are to worship in spirit and in truth, not just sing and say the right words. We are to love the Lord with all our heart, mind, soul and strength.

☞ Also, **good works** are sacrifice to God. How are we doing in this arena?

### ☞ **Philippians 4:15-19**

...when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; **16** for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. **17** Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. **18** I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. **19** And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

☞ Here, our **financial support** of the ministry is a sacrifice to God. Have you been giving your best? Have you been tithing or merely “tipping” God? For some, the amount you tip at the restaurant is a much higher percentage than you give to God. It’s been said that we should give God what is right, not what is left. The scripture also talks about giving God from our firstfruits, which implies that what we give to God should be preplanned and set aside before we spend on anything else. In your giving, have you been putting God first or simply giving him what’s left over?

And, we love to quote verse 19 about God supplying all our needs. But that is not necessarily a blanket statement for all believers. It’s important to view that in context. I think it’s fair to paraphrase this passage like this... “since you have been faithful to support the ministry and give generously, you can count on God to take care of everything you need.”

### ☞ **Romans 15:16**

proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

☞ In this case, **the acceptable offering to God is souls won** for him. When was the last time you led someone to Christ? When was the last time you even shared the gospel with someone? To make it even more basic: do the people you work with or hang out with even know you’re a Christian?

### ☞ **Romans 12:1**

I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God

This scripture really covers it all. As believers, we are supposed to give ourselves fully to God in all matters. We are to live for him, not for ourselves. How have you been giving

☞ **yourself** to God? Is he getting the best of you or just a tiny slice every now and then?

Jesus said in Luke 9:23, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." In other words, to even be a genuine follower of Christ means self-sacrifice; denying of self.

In Malachi's day God wanted the temple doors closed because their sacrifices were less than the best. Today, our church doors are closed and we must ask, "**in what way have we given God less than our best?**" That answer may be different for every individual and for every church, but the question needs to be considered.

So, Malachi deals with the issue of churches around the world being closed and should prompt some serious soul searching. And I would also like to take you to 2 Chronicles 7:13-14.

### ☞ 2 Chronicles 7:13-14

**13 When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people, 14 if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. NKJV**

This is a classic scripture often used in speaking of revival. Many have referred to verse 14 about humbling ourselves and seeking God and I, myself have preached on it a number of times. But I hadn't really paid that much attention to verse 13 until now. A few people have pointed out that several things in our world lately have aligned exactly with verse 13.

**When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain...** I'm quoting news sources here...

The year 2019 was Australia's hottest and driest since modern recordkeeping began in the country in 1910. The 2019–20 Australian bushfire season, colloquially known as the black summer has been called the worst wildfires seen in decades, with large swaths of the country devastated and more than 46 million acres burned.

**When I command locusts to devour the land...** Africa's worst locust outbreak in decades is threatening the continent at an unprecedented scope. Since the beginning of the year, swarms of mature locusts have been roaming Kenya, Ethiopia, and Somalia. This is the worst locust invasion Kenya has seen in 70 years. A swarm containing an estimated 200 billion locusts was recorded in Kenya, and each insect can eat its own weight in food daily. That equates to about as much food as 84 million people a day.

**When I send pestilence...** The Coronavirus certainly fits here as an epidemic that has impacted the entire world and is devastating economies around the globe. The end results are yet to be seen and there are debates over just how deadly this virus is as well as concerns over government overreach. Regardless of all of that, it is undeniable that this pandemic is affecting the entire world and the economic and governmental fallout is far from over.

These three events, all intersecting in time do seem to fit the text in 2 Chronicles 7. I know some naysayers will say, there have always been fires; there have always been locusts; and there has always been pestilence. But I would counter: Have all of the above happened all at once and to the point that even God's houses of worship around the world would be closed as a consequence?

☞ These verses are fitting for this moment. **It's time for God's people to do a self-check.**

☞ **It's time to humble ourselves.** It's easy to think, "I'm a good Christian. I don't do all kinds of bad stuff. I love the Lord." But humility calls for a deeper look. Have you been giving God your very best? Concerning your sacrifices to God – your praise and good works, your offerings, your outreach, your very self – have you given your best?

☞ **It's time to pray.** It's easy to say a quick prayer before a meal or as you lay down to sleep. But when's the last time you actually had a conversation with God? It's time to talk to God and to listen to God.

☞ **It's time to seek God's face.** This means to pursue him wholeheartedly. And it's not about seeking his hand – what he can do for you – but about seeking his face. It's about knowing God in a deeper way than you have in the past. In the Gospels and in Paul's letters there is a repeated emphasis on knowing God more. It's time to seek his face.

☞ **It's time to turn from our wicked ways.** For some, this should be obvious. There are clear biblical standards that you have been ignoring. It's time to turn. Or, you may be one who has a great handle on this and live a very holy life. But I've talked before about "Columbo Jesus." Just like that old detective, the Lord will often confront us with "just one more thing." It's time to listen and to turn. Even if after all that, if things in our lives are in line, then we can repent on behalf of our nation. In Daniel chapter 9, Daniel said to God, "we have sinned," even though he, himself was a righteous man in whom there was no corruption or negligence (Daniel 6:4) He included himself in the sins of the nation and confessed to God. Whatever our personal situation, it's time to turn.

*Here's a good recipe for revival: Draw a circle and get inside, then pray God will send revival within the circle.*

The Lord always wants his people to be in right relationship with him and to seek him regularly. But I can't help but wonder if these events are a significant reminder for ☞ believers regarding our role in this world. **Our land, indeed our entire world, needs healing and we have influence to affect it. So, let's humble ourselves; let's pray; let's turn from our wicked ways; let's seek the Lord. If we do, God has promised he will hear and he will heal. Let's do our part!**