

## The Hopes of God

Dear All,

I thought it would be good to pick out a number of passages that I thought were special or made me think.

Whilst we go through this pandemic, it is a time of readjustment and consideration of the role of humans in the world. There are examples of how, whilst the human race is brought low, how many other species of animal are strengthening and reclaiming their environments. It makes me wonder about what God meant for our race when he said about us holding dominion over all the world.

Have we lost sight of what that means? In the hideousness of what is happening now, is there a point where God's presence and hand can be seen in the restoration of the earth's balance? And how much pain do you think God has to go through to restore that balance?

I remember reading a couple of years ago about how Jesus was the ultimate sacrifice and that his death meant that man no longer needed to make sacrifices because, by Jesus dying, our sins are forgiven. It was a real moment of revelation for me: I had heard this, obviously, many times over the years, but it was only on reading the magnitude and importance of sacrifice in the Old Testament, did it actually twig what that meant: that all these animals that were dying for man, as penance for our sin, but this was changed by one man being our final, sacrificial lamb. This is the first time I have seen of the parallel of the blood of Passover on the door lintels being likened to the blood on the cross...shed for us so that we might be saved. And through all of this, dominion comes to mind again: the arrogance of the sacrifice of other animals, those which we were meant to be custodians of, to atone for the sins of man. With Jesus, the sacrificial lamb, being the final sacrificial atonement.

And how do we hold that responsibility now? Now we don't need to make traditional sacrifices? Has Jesus's death stopped sacrifice? What do we consider as sacrifice...and in front of what alter? We burn trees, hunt animals, kill indigenous people and, for some, at the alter of power, material wealth and success. Where is the gentleness of holding God's creation? Where is respecting that we need shed no more blood? Where is the acknowledgment of the vast and awe inspiring responsibility that God placed in man's hands when he gave man dominion over his creation?



But then, we start to see hope: the levelling of the field, the least and the lost are ushered to the finest seats....where does that stand in holding dominion?? And how does God know every one of us, every hair on our head and have a place for us in his house with many rooms...he is there, having bled and died for us, holding us in his heart...and his hands, carrying our burdens and waiting for us to come to him...either in life or in death. And over all of our wrongly placed control, he loves us like a parent, forgiving us our sins and giving us unconditional love and guidance...if only we were to listen with our hearts and souls. Never giving up hope, never thinking that we are wasted or passed the point of forgiveness and redemption.

So, bringing it back to today, can we see, in the horror of the death, pain and suffering; new life, new hope and new beginnings? And taking it back to that first paragraph, out of death, comes hope and perhaps, just perhaps, a new understanding and agreement for the human race, those who do hold dominion over the world, on how to treat not only each other, but also God's creation. And through this new hope comes, perhaps, increased love and a better understanding ...that God loves us...and he wants us to love one another....as much as we love him...we come to him, with our hearts full and perhaps a little lighter knowing that, through God, there is hope.

One of the sentences at the end of the chapter is: If they force you to walk one mile, walk a second mile as well. On our penultimate day in Israel, we went to Capernaum and our guide showed us a column that would have been present in Jesus's time. It was a mile marker and the guide told us that the Romans would wait by the marker for travellers to come by. They would get the travellers to lift the Roman baggage and carry it to the next mile marker. It was cruel and the people that carried the Roman's belongings/goods suffered. That was where Jesus taught if you were forced to walk one mile, then travel the second in love, go that bit further. We were fortunate to have some time to ourselves – to be still right at the edge of the Sea of Galilee. It was a quiet and moving place, you could hear the water gently lapping next to the shore, you could feel the stillness and the love. You could feel the presence of Jesus, right there, teaching ....and you could feel the overwhelming sensation of peace.

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