

Follow The Herd?

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In my last commentary on January 18, 2020, titled, “The Remaking of America,” which now seems like a lifetime ago because of recent events, my focus was on the trend that was moving young left-leaning billionaires to fund socialist politicians. I posited that this unusual change in ideology of some of the richest elite toward a very liberal and socialist point of view had the potential to remake America by the time of the Presidential election on November 3, 2020, into something we never imagined on January 18, 2020.

Towards the end of that commentary, I said,

First of all, brethren, do not be surprised if this turn toward socialism is the future of the United States sooner rather than later, and this year’s election takes a turn in a direction we never imagined, a direction made possible because of incredible wealth that is suddenly in the hands of the new liberal elite minted by this country’s secular, misotheistic universities and the so-called knowledge economy. There is a perfect storm of destruction well on it’s way.

However, I concluded with,

We have the privilege to patiently wait in sure hope regardless of the situation. The same Great God that set up the centrally-controlled power and wealth in Egypt 400 years before He actually used the circumstances to develop His servant Moses and liberate His people for His glory; under His power over the greatest nation of men, is still absolutely in control today!

Brethren, I suppose most us never imagined then that in the two months since I gave the commentary America, as well as the whole world, would have been turned on it’s head!

The Democratic presidential nomination that was going to be an entertaining circus of candidates all the way to the convention in the summer of 2020 has now, for all intents and purposes, been determined. Almost all the candidates suddenly and mysteriously withdrew their names to support someone who can’t even remember if he is running for the presidency or the Senate.

A virus that had been a localized problem in China has now become a worldwide pandemic that has caused drastic actions in this country and around the world. An unstoppably strong and prosperous economy is now plowing downward like an uncontrollable avalanche.

Supposedly steadfast, fiscally conservative legislators are proposing and approving so-called stimulus programs that make FDR’s New Deal pale in comparison!

We have seen in recent days the Speaker of the House of Representatives calling on the President to invoke the War Powers Act that would give huge additional power to someone she had previously labeled as a clear and present danger!

But within this, I want to remind us to clearly hold onto what I said toward the end of that last commentary:

But more importantly, we need to know, and know that we know, that God, who declares the end from the beginning, is absolutely in control and sees what we do not! Our job now is to watch and wait as His faithful witnesses!

And, I might add today, "Be ready to respond calmly and carefully with our eyes focused on Jesus Christ and living in these times faithfully in accord with the truth of His Word."

One of the biggest challenges we have today is not reacting to every idle piece of gossip that is flying around each and every day in a world that is driven by self-serving carnal nature that is enmity against God. We need to understand that regardless of whether or not this is a conspiratorial event, manipulated by one group or another to control the population, or if God is beginning that time leading directly up to Jesus Christ's return, we must constantly be seeking God's guidance in real truth in a desperately untruthful world, driven by greedy carnal nature and a herd mentality.

With that in mind I would like to read a couple of stories that came out right as this thing was starting to snowball at the beginning of the month before many people really saw the gravity and greed involved in this whole thing.

The first is from a March 4 *New York Post* article and the second from a March 6 article by Dr. Joseph Mercola, and both should sound off warning bells for all of us about the covetousness and greed of the times that are such a source of our own skittishness in this "Who Do You Trust?" time!

One of the most absurd, though telling, events that led off some of the nonsense we see all around us was recorded in the following article from the March 4, 2020, *New York Post*. The author wrote,

Amid a wave of Corona virus panic buying, no product has proven more prized than good ol' toilet paper - no matter how many plies.

The mass buying spree has many wondering why people choose to stockpile the basic necessity, which has many alternatives, albeit not quite as comfortable.

In Australia, where authorities had stressed that there is no shortage [remember, this was the beginning of March], people have wiped store shelves clean, leading major grocery stores to impose strict limits on TP sales, according to Reuters.

"We're trying to reassure people that removing all of the lavatory paper from the shelves of supermarkets probably is not a proportionate or sensible thing to do at this time," said Australia's chief medical officer Brendan Murphy in addressing parliament.

Consumer psychology experts say the irrational herd mentality is fueled by social media and alarmist news coverage, according to the BBC.

Another explanation for the phenomenon is what's known as the FOMO - Fear Of Missing Out - syndrome, as Associate Professor Nitika Garg, a consumer behavior researcher at the University of New South Wales, told the news outlet.

“They think if this person is buying it, if my neighbor is buying, there's got to be a reason and I need to get in on it, too”, she said.

“The rush to get toilet paper is just this sheep mentality to maintain that status,” the University of Sydney's Rohan Miller told the BBC.

“Toilet paper doesn't really matter - it's just so far down the survival list compared to other things like food or water - but it's just something people cling to as a minimum standard,” Miller added.

Justin Wolfers, a professor of public policy and economics at the University of Michigan, said in a series of tweets that “even if you’re not freaked out about a pandemic, you worry that everyone else is, and they'll stockpile and you don't want to be left paperless.”

“Fear of a run on toilet paper - like a run on banks - is enough to create an actual run,” he said.

“All this says that what we need right now is a government backed Strategic Toilet Paper Reserve,” Wulfers added.

“The Strategic Toilet Paper Reserve removes the incentive to stockpile. It ensures that even if you see others running to the store to stockpile toilet paper, you no longer need to try to run to beat them,” he said.

I began this commentary with this article that was intended by the author as a “tongue in cheek” description of the absurd because it did point to a few very important points for us to consider here today, as this has become a reality here in the Northern Hemisphere three weeks later.

Our self-centered, covetous attitude is driving people like a herd of sheep, and regardless of the truth of the case, it is driving people farther into their own corners as rumors fly all over the place.

A few excerpts from the March 6 article by Dr. Mercola is a bit more serious—on the level of “Who Can You Trust?” He wrote,

In January 2020, Dr. Julie Gerberding—director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention from 2002 until 2009, who after leaving the CDC became president of Merck’s vaccine division in January 2010—sold half her Merck stock options for \$9.11 million.

Gerberding also cashed in on her company stock options in 2016, when she sold \$5.1 million-worth of Merck stocks, and 2015, when she made \$2.3 million. In total, Gerberding has made \$16,592,144 from selling off her Merck stocks—all of which, by the way, is over and beyond her regular paycheck—and she still owns Merck stocks worth \$9 million.

And we’re supposed to believe she has been impartial about vaccine safety and has been all along? As noted by Del Bigtree in his Highwire report:

“Do you trust the information that come from your government agencies, when a year after working [at] that agency, they move into the very company that they exonerated from any wrongdoing and end up making \$20-something-million dollars in stock options, plus a gigantic salary? Sounds like a payoff to me.”

The payoff Bigtree is talking about refers back to Gerberding’s exoneration of the MMR vaccine, which came under fire when Dr. William Thompson, a CDC research scientist, blew the whistle claiming the agency covered up a vaccine-autism connection in relation to the MMR vaccine.

According to Thompson, scientific fraud was committed for the express purpose of covering up potential safety problems so the agency would be able to maintain that the MMR vaccine had been proven safe to give to all children.

Thompson explained they simply eliminated the incriminating data, thereby vanishing the link, and this cover-up occurred while Gerberding headed up the CDC. The CDC subsequently also blocked a request for Thompson to testify in an autism lawsuit.

Indeed, you’d have to be really naïve not to see the enormous influence her former high-level ties to the CDC can have, considering Merck makes a majority of the pediatric and adults vaccines recommended by the CDC.

The vaccine industry is booming, and it’s become quite clear that profit potential is the driving factor behind it. One of the reasons for this is because vaccine patents do not expire like drugs do, so each vaccine adopted for widespread use has the potential to make enormous, continuous profits for decades to come.

Vaccine makers also enjoy a high degree of immunity against lawsuits—and in the case of pandemic vaccines, absolute immunity—so the financial liability when something goes wrong is exceptionally low, compared to drugs.

The article by Dr. Mercola then goes on at length to comment on the role Merck played in state HPV immunization policies that have been mandated by the CDC for 76 million American children, providing Merck with an annual \$2.3 billion revenue.

Brethren, I read these alarming stories to you because we are living in a time when we are inundated with alarming information that *may or may not be true*. All of this can cause so much anxiety and distress that we will lose our focus to it, rather than maintaining our focus on what we have the privilege of all men to keep as our focus in the Word of God.

With the herd mentality of covetousness, we will be like sheep led to the foolishness and the slaughter! But it is our privilege in these days to individually follow the Good Shepherd, whose word is the word of truth that must be what we use navigate peacefully in faith.

In Psalm 91, very possibly written by Moses, as was Psalm 90, we have our marching orders in such unsteady times. Psalm 91 tells us,

Psalm 91:1-10 He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress; My

God, in Him I will trust." Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence. He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler. You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day, nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday. A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you. Only with your eyes shall you look, and see the reward of the wicked. Because you have made the Lord, who is my refuge, even the Most High, your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling;

Brethren, we need to navigate through these times *in faith*, carefully obeying God's laws, as we assemble together on His Sabbath and throughout the weeks ahead, using the truth of His word in outgoing concern for our brethren with wisdom and love without fear.

Richard Ritenbaugh was supposed to be here this weekend. He was supposed to be here today to give the sermon from here, but I called him a week ago Friday, not knowing what things would be like by this week. As a matter of fact, if he was here, we would have big problems because we are locked down. I told him what was going through my mind, and if he thought rescheduling his trip was a good idea; we would be very disappointed, but we knew it may have been something he may want to consider within all of his various responsibilities to all of the church.

He had not considered not coming, and knew it to be his responsibility to continue in faith. But after a bit of a conversation, he said he would seek some additional counsel and carefully consider it over the weekend.

Sunday night, Richard called and told me that after careful consideration, he had thought it perhaps wiser to put the trip off until May. But it was the reason that impressed me, because it wasn't faithlessness but love and wisdom that motivated his decision. He was concerned that in going through the airports, rental facilities, hotels, etc., if this thing is really as contagious and as devastating to some segments of the population as they say it is, he could be bringing it to us. His decision was made using wisdom and godly, outgoing concern for others, something that we are definitely not seeing in many segments of society today who are only concerned for themselves.

I hope I have not embarrassed Richard, but I think it was a good lesson from our associate pastor, who is trying to faithfully go about business as usual but with godly wisdom.

Brethren, within our circumstances we are assembling today in faith, knowing 1,000 fall on one side and 10,000 on the other, but God will hold up those who faithfully use His word of truth with wisdom and outgoing concern for the body.

In a few weeks, we will be reading a very, very important scripture that is the reality of the lives we need to be living:

John 14:1-4 "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know."

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

John 14:12-15 “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it. If you love Me, keep My commandments.

Brethren, believe it or not we are living in the best years of our lives, as we learn to faithfully follow the truth of God with our focus on Jesus Christ, in a world that has no idea what real truth is. We are not just sheep following the herd, but sheep individually learning to follow the Good Shepherd in truth.