

# Weekly Update by Mark Armstrong

## - 20 March 2020

Greetings from Tyler,

Did you hear about the elderly man in Italy who was in isolation with his wife for fourteen days? He died. She strangled him. (*That's a joke, maybe a bad one.*)

Or is laughing outlawed too? Never before in American history have we seen anything like the "lock-down" going on across America and in many other nations across the world. We're dependent on information, and the mass media is pumping out some of the most frightening scenarios imaginable.

"Lock-down" is prison jargon for solitary confinement. Now it's being used to describe mandatory quarantining for citizens told to "shelter in place." Some states are promising fines and prosecutions for those who disobey.

Apparently, governments, both federal and state, having declared a state of emergency, have the authority to shut down businesses and gatherings, including restaurants and all kinds of establishments. Who knew? Companies are laying off workers, and a lot of those workers aren't going to be able to pay their bills if they're missing paychecks. What might that mean going forward?

We've had to make decisions regarding church services, and here's our position. Out of respect for President Trump and Governor Abbott of Texas, we're going to honor their request or order as the case may be, to limit gatherings to ten people or less. We intend to hold a "skeleton crew" Sabbath service here in Tyler, asking most of the congregation to stay home. We expect to have the bare minimum on hand for the service in order to keep current sermons and updates going out via DVD, and we also make the current sermons available on Youtube.

We hope the authorities know what they're doing. Maybe it's prudent to wreck the economy on account of this virus, but time will tell. There's no doubt that people who've held their wealth in the stock market are getting hammered. Their only hope is to ride this thing out and hope that the market "takes off like a rocket" (*as the President has suggested*) once the all-clear is sounded. Assuming it ever is.

Pardon our skepticism, but after being flimflammed by mainstream outlets telling one monstrous whopper after another until their credibility hit rock bottom, it's not easy to swallow the fear they're selling. But it looks as though the President and many state governors have bought into the necessity of quarantining nearly the entire population in the hope that the contagion will be brought under control. Other than the media calling the President and his supporters "racist" at every opportunity, the blame game has yet to begin.

It looks as though China bears the brunt of responsibility for the contagion spreading all over the world. First, they hid information about the circumstances in Wuhan, even punishing doctors and nurses who tried to inform others about what was going on. They reportedly refused help from some of the world's foremost specialists. Two or three weeks went by before word got out, and by then people had come and gone from the epicenter spreading the unknown contagion worldwide. Trump was called "xenophobic" for canceling flights from China, yet things might be far worse if he hadn't. China is spreading propaganda claiming the U. S. military created the virus and transplanted it to Wuhan, a claim President Trump condemned.

Did China allow the virus to infect the U. S. and other nations intentionally? The internet is awash in conspiracy theories, and since nothing makes sense anymore, who knows. It's enough to make you want to check out what Alex Jones is saying (*not really*).

The outbreak of contagion coincides with a steep decline in oil prices. Apparently, Saudi Arabia told Russia they were going to have to cut production in order to support prices at a time of increased supply, and Russia refused. So the Saudis decided not to cut production either and prices have crashed. Fracking, the technology that made the U. S. energy independent, is not cost-effective at prices below \$40 dollars a barrel, and we're seeing the price vacillate in the low to mid \$20 dollar range. This alone may be ruinous to the oil patch.

Yesterday we learned that treatments have been successfully carried out, using an anti-malaria drug that has been available since World War II. Lab technicians appeared for interviews saying that they're very close to having a vaccine. It all sounded like good news. Then late in the day Governor Abbott virtually shut down Texas by executive order, news that caught us completely off guard.

We seem to have no choice but to honor the order and hope the authorities know what they're doing. This certainly doesn't amount to "forsaking" the gathering of ourselves together. People can certainly keep the Sabbath at home temporarily without forsaking the congregation. This is not a case of "man's law" contravening God's. If we have to do things a little differently temporarily, then we will. We're not canceling all gatherings way off into the future, but expect that it will be in everyone's interest to see things return to normal a.s.a.p.

Until then, we'll try to keep our heads up and retain some joy amidst this form of tribulation. If there's one thing we've learned, it is that the American public will panic and buy up all the toilet paper at the first hint of trouble. You'd think we had a stomach upset underway. (*Cleaned up*)

By now we hope you have received the new *21<sup>st</sup> Century WATCH* magazine. We've had rave reviews on recent issues and hope this will be no exception. We've also seen a spike in first-time contributors. The next monthly letter has also gone to print, and it includes some verses from Psalm 91 which seem made to order for present circumstances. Remember that God offers protection amid tribulation to those that worship Him and keep His commandments. We're reminded also that the Israelites painted the blood of the Passover lamb on their doorposts in order that the death angel would pass over their dwellings. It is a good and reassuring thought at a time when no one knows what to believe or whether to panic. Those trusting in God are not given to fear. That's our story, and we're sticking to it.

Mark

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