

NERO, CHRIST, AND COVID

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Scripture: Romans 13:1-6

INTRO: I plan to go overtime over the usual overtime, time. Due to covid, this message is a little longer than usual. We are presently in a time of a declared pandemic. This declaration puts health officials in a more authoritative position in the everyday affairs of people. Governments are trying to contain the pandemic, at least that is what they say, and they are using various procedures to seek to do that.

For us as Christians, this has created a dilemma. We are all familiar with Romans 13:1 which says:

1 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.

The responsibilities the government is taking on is encroaching on that which God requires of believers, and we struggle now with how far Romans 13:1 applies. This verse was one Hitler's Nazis all knew and used. Whenever they met Christians who resisted what Hitler was doing, they used Romans 13:1 to try to guilt them into obedience.

Romans 13:1 was written by the Apostle Paul when Nero was in power. Nero, the roman ruler of the time, was a wicked and ungodly man. Tradition says it was also Nero who ordered Paul to be beheaded. He lived from 54 AD to 68. So I titled this message, *Nero, Christ and Covid*. In this message, Nero means human government, Christ means God's government, and we don't know what Covid means. Is it a deadly disease or a deadly tool? And our question today, in the pandemic is when has Nero overstepped his authority? How far does Romans 13:1 reach?

When the Church was born 2,000 years ago, secular government was in the hands of Rome. Then a horrible thing happened. A Roman ruler professed to become a Christian. That disaster adversely affects Christianity to this very day. Secular Rome became sacred Rome, the Roman Catholic Church. Rome has a pope today who is as far removed from God as one could possibly be removed.

And what happened with the Roman church? It became the ruling power over the state. They set up kings and put them down. Kings kneeled before the pope. That is how it was when our early

Mennonites came on the scene. And our early Mennonites struggled with this same question we struggle with today, only their conclusion as to what obedience to God meant also caused them to be tortured to death in most gruesome ways.

There is a difficult stage between when persecution might be coming to when it starts and you are brought to the ultimate choice between Nero or Christ. There is a murky in-between period. What about church? What about preaching? What about masks? What about having more than two family members to your house? What is the right thing to do now? The in-between time is a time when all is blurred. And even when things get very serious, nothing seems to be clear.

Our Catechism gives us little instruction on how to handle things with regard to government as relates our question this morning. Here is what it has:

7. How shall we conduct ourselves toward the authorities?

"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power, but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God" (Rom. 13:1).

So we are back again to Nero and Christ.

I. WHO IS NERO?

So let me ask, just who is Nero? He was the Roman ruler at the time Romans 13 was written, so in this message he will speak of human government. Now notice the verse says, "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities..." Note first the word "subject." You will be familiar with this word from my preaching. It is the word used when it says women are to be submissive to their own husbands. Can someone tell me the word? *Hypotasso*; to subject, to be in subjection, to be submitted to. So, everybody is to be submitted to their government.

Second, look at the words "governing authorities." The KJV says, "higher powers." The first word is "higher," and the second word is, "authorities." What we need to understand is that there is a significant difference between an authority and a power. A power has the ability to do something. An authority has the right to do something, though it may not have the power. When this verse was

written, Nero was the governing authority of a government that ruled the world.

Now I want you to notice that though Nero was a world ruler, he is not THE authority. He is AN authority. If he was the authority, this verse would not speak of authorities, plural. He is one among others who have come and gone. Now you may have authority because of who you are, or because it has been delegated to you. I have authority over my car because I am the owner. But if I loan you my car, now I have delegated that authority to you.

Conclusion? Government does not own the people, government has been delegated authority over their area of jurisdiction by another. Recently the Alberta Government put out a paper on how they would handle school during the pandemic and they spoke of the children in our province as "their children." No, the children of this province are not their children. But let me say this; if we send our children to government schools, for the time they are in school we have delegated our authority to the government.

II. WHAT JURISDICTION DOES NERO HAVE?

So, we ask, what jurisdiction does Nero have? If human government is not the ultimate authority and they only have delegated authority, where does their authority come from? And just how much authority has been delegated to them? Again, our verse answers:

1 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God...

There is only one ultimate authority and that is God. And He has delegated certain areas of authority to the government, but He has not handed all authority to them. Turn with me to John 18. It speaks of the events of that fateful night when Christ was apprehended in the Garden of Gethsemane.

You will know the account. Judas and his Roman band had captured Christ at Gethsemane. They took Him to Annas and then Caiaphas, the Jewish religious leaders. They wanted Jesus dead but the religious leaders did not have that authority. So they then brought Him before Pilate.

Pilate then questioned Jesus and we pick up in John 18:33:

33 Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?"

34 Jesus answered him, "Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?"

35 Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?"

Then Jesus said, "Dear Pilate. I have a word for you." And here it is in verse 36:

36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."

Nero is not the only governmental authority. As a matter of fact, though he ruled the world, he was not even the main authority. There is another kingdom, one the secular world often does not want to acknowledge. And of that other kingdom, Christ is King. So listen to Pilate in verse 37:

37 Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

Go now to John 19:

1 So then Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him.

2 And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe.

3 Then they said, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they struck Him with their hands.

4 Pilate then went out again, and said to them, "Behold, I am bringing Him out to you, that you may know that I find no fault in Him."

5 Then Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate said to them, "Behold the Man!"

6 Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him."

7 The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God."

8 Therefore, when Pilate heard that saying, he was the more afraid,

9 and went again into the Praetorium, and said to Jesus, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer.

10 Then Pilate said to Him, "Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?"

The word translated power here is *authority*. Pilate said, "I have authority to crucify you." Really? The facts are he did not have authority from Rome or from God to crucify Christ. Why? Crucifixion required a just cause. He had the authority if there was a just cause. He had admitted himself that Jesus had done nothing wrong. Pilate knew the Jews had delivered Jesus for envy. His authority was to deal with that which was wrong, not with what was right. The secular government does not have authority to fine you or jail you when you have done nothing wrong. You see, they may have the power, and there is nothing you can do about that, but they do not have authority to do that. So here is Jesus' answer to Pilate. Verse 11:

11 Jesus answered, "You could have no power (authority) at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin."

Oh yes, Pilate has authority, but it does not originate in himself. John 18:36, which we read earlier, is a most significant verse. Let me read it again:

36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."

There is only one ultimate authority and that authority is the Creator and Ruler of all. His name is Jesus. His kingdom is over all kingdoms. The day is coming when His kingdom will smash all other kingdoms. And I am a member of that Kingdom. He is my King. I do what He says. What jurisdiction does Nero have? Just exactly as much as God gives him and no more. And in no place is he authorized to go beyond what God allows. He may take that authority to himself, but he will stand before God and he will give account for every wrong he did and he will be punished accordingly.

Turn to Acts 4 the disciples had healed a man and had been witnessing for Christ. This time about 5,000 people were converted. So, the Jewish leaders met to see how they could end that. They set the disciples in their midst and said, "By what power" this word means *ability*, not *authority*, "By what power or by what name have you done this?" They had healed a lame man. And Peter said, "Let me tell you something; if we are being judged for a good deed to a helpless man, I would like you to know, and all the people of Israel too, that by the name of Jesus of Nazareth, whom you crucified and whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here whole!"

Well, they sent the disciples aside and then said among themselves, "What are we going to do? This is truly a notable miracle, and we can't deny it. But so that this thing spreads no further, let's severely threaten them." So they did that and listen now to verses 18-20:

18 And they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.

19 But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge.

20 "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

21 So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done.

There is a biblical principle here: When governmental authorities require that which is contrary to God, they have overstepped their authority. Such matters do not belong to them. God is the ultimate authority.

So we have asked, how far does Romans 13:1 apply? The answer is, only as far as God's Word allows. Neither Nero nor Hitler nor any other government ultimately has authority to give rules beyond what God allows.

III. HOW DOES THIS AFFECT COVID?

So, having briefly looked at Nero and Christ, how does this apply to Covid? The rules of government must not take what belongs to God into their own hands. The Lord Jesus Christ is our ultimate authority. Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world." That kingdom is first and foremost the kingdom I belong to.

There are two realms of kingdoms, not one. There is Christ's realm and there is Nero's realm. Here is what I have to say to our premier and our Prime Minister: I am a happy subject of the country God has delegated authority for you to govern. I live right and support what is right. But I belong to Christ's kingdom first of all and it is the kingdom I belong to from which you get your authority. I am telling you, not as a matter of pride, but as a matter of fact: you can have no authority over me at all, but such as God grants you. And that which He grants you, He has asked me to obey. And if you will disobey the Lord and mistreat me, then someday my King will deal with you.

You will not remember, but many years ago I did a series on God and Government. The main point was whether Christians should go to war for their country. I dealt with the subject of God and government from creation to the new heavens and earth. And during that time, Mr. Samuel Nafziger, whom some of you will remember, gave me a file of material and a book by Guy F. Hersberger. This was for the studies I was undertaking. Mr. Hersberger was of Swiss Mennonite background. The Swiss Mennonites were always far advanced from our own brand of Mennonites as far as biblical scholarship is concerned. After I looked at the list of contents and briefly browsed through this book I phoned and asked if there was any chance of purchasing the book. He said there was and I could have it for the price marked inside the cover. Well the book was written in 1944,

the time of World War II. It is hard cover and almost 2 inches thick, want to guess the price? The price was \$2.50. I upped the price 7 times and I still came away feeling like any Mennonite does when he gets a good deal. I would gladly pay \$50.00 for that book.

Since it was written in 1944, no doubt the writer wanted Mennonites to understand their responsibility to secular government as far as war is concerned but the book has a wealth of material. I want to read one part that has principles that affect our present circumstances.

There is a section called: *Functions Which the State May Not Legitimately Assume*. Before I read this I will read a Scripture he will refer to. Turn to Matthew 22. The Pharisees were getting more and more desperate in their attempts to do away with Jesus and here they tried to trap Him again. We begin in verse 15:

15 *Then the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him in His talk.*

16 *And they sent to Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth; nor do You care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men."*

17 *"Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"*

18 *But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, "Why do you test Me, you hypocrites?"*

19 *"Show Me the tax money." So they brought Him a denarius.*

20 *And He said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?"*

21 *They said to Him, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."*

With that passage in mind let me now quote from Hersberger's book:

When Jesus granted that to Caesar should be given what belongs to Caesar, He also added: 'And [render] unto God the things that are God's.' The negative of this statement would be: Do not give to Caesar the things that are not Caesar's. The Christian must never forget that there are some things that do not belong to Caesar. The state may legitimately increase its functions along certain lines for the promotion of the general welfare. But this extension of function has a definite limit. **When the state reaches into the realm of religion, conscience, and the home, and attempts to control these, it is demanding what does not belong to it.** Modern totalitarian states attempt to dominate the whole of life. They regard their own authority as the source of all authority. They do not recognize the independence of religion, culture, education and the family. They seek to impose on all citizens a uniform philosophy of life. Education, up to a point, is a legitimate function of the state, but totalitarian states make an illegitimate use of education when they seek to create a particular type of man with a totalitarian world view. If the state enters this realm and makes demands which are in conflict with the will of God, the Christian must have the courage to say: 'We must obey God rather than men.' The Anabaptists of the sixteenth century insisted strongly that the state must not rule in these matters, and many of their leaders died as martyrs for the faith which required separation of church and state. The Mennonite descendants of our day will do will to follow their example (195-196).

Let me make note of a few things he has said. Before I do that, let me qualify what I will say. If the Covid virus was a deadly malady such as the Spanish Flu, we as a church would not need to be pushed to do whatever was wise. Nor would we joke about it. But the facts are the death rate is very low, and the age of death is high. Our premier said that 2/3s of our hospitals do not have one covid patient! Yet my wife can't even get a dental appointment until March! They are concerned for our health? Nor is the government that much more brilliant than we are in caring for our loved ones. I dare say we care a whole lot more for our children and elderly than they ever will.

Go to homes not run by a church, and you will see who cares most. About 30% of covid deaths in the US occur in nursing homes. I have an aunt in a large nursing home in Red Deer, Alberta run by Christians and they have no deaths at all,

and she has older friends who are passing away regularly from normal deaths. Does our government think we are going to irresponsibly endanger our loved ones? If we had anyone in our church who was acting irresponsibly, I trust the government would not need to step in. Yes, we are happy for factual information and concerned recommendations. And just as true, if there was legitimate ground to that information, we would listen. But we have seen inconsistencies that defy all logic and we would not be very bright if we did not begin to question what is going on.

Now the first thing from the quote I gave I want to point out is this statement, "When the state reaches into the realm of religion, conscience, and the home, and attempts to control these, it is demanding what does not belong to it." We watched with care the first few weeks or so when restrictions were put on churches.

But when numerous inconsistencies arose, we began to wonder. Then when rioting was acceptable across our border, but church was not, it raised more questions. When bars were allowed to be open but not churches in places, now we are asking questions.

And here is our struggle: How long does Romans 13:1 hold true for a situation like this one? As a pastor, when am I teaching people to obey the government responsibly, or when am I teaching blind obedience to power hungry government? A red line was reached for me when they said preachers over 60 should not be preaching and we should not sing. I have a mandate from God to preach. We are instructed in Scripture to sing. I know God would allow exceptions in exceptional cases, if in fact there was such. And so I have preached and we sing. Now if evidence showed there was some legitimacy to the claims that we are endangering society, I trust they would not even have to give us rules, just tell us what the actual, factual, scientific danger is.

If there should be a legitimate danger, I trust our government will find us most compliant. If it is not legitimate, you may find me in jail. If I should have a parent in a home and that home did not allow me in, and that parent wanted me in, in spite of the risk, I would remove them from that home. There are some places where Romans 13 does not apply.

When the government says, "Your children are our children," they have violated divine law. There are sacred places that simply do not belong to our government. When we came to this country in the 1800's we made agreements with the Canadian government. We said we want freedom of worship, freedom from warfare, and freedom to educate our own children. They said, "Rest assured. In our country you will have those freedoms. Farm our land and enjoy it. Many others are here for such reasons too." Our government will have forgotten that, but whether they agree or not, we still have those freedoms today, and not from government, but from the God.

And if our government will not overstep their authority, I will seek to obey and do my very best for them and I will preach obedience to them. Christians are not against government. God has put them in place.

In the quote from Hershberger, there is another point I want to make. It is this. Hershberger said:

"Modern totalitarian states attempt to dominate the whole of life. They regard their own authority as the source of all authority. They do not recognize the independence of religion, culture, education and the family. They seek to impose on all citizens a uniform philosophy of life."

We are not a totalitarian state. But we fear that may be the direction things are going. We wonder now, how long do we blindly follow when we may be following into a trap? When do we say, "This is the red line?" How long until we get used to being told to do this and that and the other without saying: "Woa, this is far enough. There is a red line." I ask, does our province, does our nation recognize the independence of religion, culture, education and family? So far it seems it has. But are we now taking on a new direction? And if so, how long do we go that way? These are the questions we may soon need to answer. This is the murky state I mentioned earlier.

We look back in history and consider how Adolf Hitler managed to murder 6 million Jews while the world looked the other way. How did the Jews in Germany themselves not see what was coming? Are we now in those same early, murky, stages of danger? Well, we all hope that this will soon come to an end like a bad dream, but none of us knows what lies in the future. If we are now heading in a bad

direction, what is our part in setting directions for our families, and where are our lines, and when do they need to be drawn?

Now there are times when there is nothing you can do. Jesus got to that point, and He was crucified. Millions have died when there was nothing more they could do. That is not new to our Mennonite history. But listen to Jesus in Matthew 10:28:

28 "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

We do not want to arrive at this alternative. But if we should, losing this body is not exactly the worst thing that could happen. Losing our soul, that is the worst thing that could happen, and no government can do that without our consent, though it might mean death.

IV. HOW THEN SHOULD WE LIVE?

A. In the Secular World

So we ask, how then should we live? Let me ask that first with regard to living in the secular world of which we are all part. What about social distancing, or maybe, "Unsocial distancing"? What about the mask? What should I do?

These are all personal decisions. I cannot tell you what to do and what not to do. I can tell you I put on a mask in places where they require it. If I have the option, I leave it off. It does not affect my faith nor will I knowingly let that happen. I will not follow the herd no matter where they go. I will ask, "How does this affect my faith?" On the other hand, if not complying is a matter of pride, I need to say, "I will not let my pride keep me from what is not harmful to my spiritual life."

If it should in fact be the case, and someone's conscience is affected, follow your conscience and pay whatever price it may cost, Romans 14.

B. In the Sacred World

What about with regard to my spiritual life? As a Christian, I am committed to Jesus Christ first, not Nero. Human government is not the rule of my faith, my conscience, or my home. Does the government have the authority to tell me that I can only have one or two or three family members over at one time? Does the government have the authority to tell me I cannot have Christmas with my family? If the pandemic was real, they wouldn't need to.

I ask, could our government take such a dim view of their subjects that they think they will foolishly endanger the lives of their loved ones? I do not know of parents in our community that would have family members over if they honestly thought they were putting their loved one's lives in danger. I want no part of endangering other people's lives, even if they are not family members. I do not even want to have part in overloading our hospitals, even if it does not cause death.

Now I recognize there are always a few that spoil things for many. With new guidelines in place, those few will still do what those few do. Might I ask our government, why not concentrate on dealing with those few rather than all?

Furthermore, does the government have the authority to tell me that I cannot go to church? To sing? To preach? They don't. They may overstep their authority and make that their business but it is not. They may have the power to deal with me, but they do not have the authority. I want to obey my government. I am ashamed that we have in our religious community those that do such things as damage government property. That is very shameful. I want no part of that kind of thing. I want to obey our government.

I ask, is it the job of government to tell me whether I can go to church or preach or sing or have more than two family members over? Or would it be the job of government to give me the science and let me decide what is best? I understand, there are always a few who do not care and make it bad for the rest. How about taking all that effort spent on everybody, and concentrate it on those few? Again, if we have a real

danger of some kind, I would want to do all I can to stand with the government.

David Cloud keeps updating on covid matters. Here is what he said in his latest update: "The *Great Barrington Declaration* has now been signed by more than nearly 50,000 medical doctors, scientists, and practitioners, up from 15,000 when it was first published on October 4. The Declaration calls for a new approach to dealing with Covid-19."

What is the concern of these health professionals? Here is what they say:

"As infectious disease epidemiologists and public health scientists we have grave concerns about the damaging physical and mental health impacts of the prevailing COVID-19 policies, and recommend an approach we call Focused Protection. Coming from both the left and right, and around the world, we have devoted our careers to protecting people. Current lockdown policies are producing devastating effects on short and long-term public health. The results (to name a few) include lower childhood vaccination rates, worsening cardiovascular disease outcomes, fewer cancer screenings and deteriorating mental health - leading to greater excess mortality in years to come, with the working class and younger members of society carrying the heaviest burden. Keeping students out of school is a grave injustice. Keeping these measures in place until a vaccine is available will cause irreparable damage, with the underprivileged disproportionately harmed" end quote.

Now if we believe government is overstepping their authority, here is what you and I have to consider. The government may not have the authority to do what they are doing, but they may have the power to enforce the rules they set. If those rules are out of their jurisdiction, they don't set them with the permission of the One who lets them run the country. They may have the clout to enforce those things but they do not the authority.

But, what I have to consider is what are the consequences they are able to enforce worth? We are not yet required to deny our faith. The consequences of

death would be worth standing on if we were asked to deny our faith. But what is breaking covid rules worth? Is it worth \$500.00 or \$1,000.00 dollars or whatever the fine is? Or is it maybe even worth one of those new jails that are made to look like a home but it has a barbed wire fence around it? Where is my line? What action is worth what consequence?

Now, my reminder to our government officials, since they regularly listen to my messages (tongue in cheek of course) is that someday they will give a reckoning of their stewardship before Almighty God. Justin Trudeau will be there, not standing, but kneeling. And he will confess and say, "You, Lord Jesus, are the true Ruler of all." Today he has the full freedom to choose to reject all of this, and he does, but his day of reckoning is coming.

Now I mentioned earlier that today we are in the murky state. What is really going on? We don't know. It seems there is something working behind the scenes. But we don't know. We hope it is like a bad dream and tomorrow it will be over, and it may be. But we don't know. My wife says in this time we need to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.

Could it be that the Lord is just preparing us for what is ahead? A good number of years ago, when we had gone through a very serious church problem a young man sent me a quote from Paul Washer. Here is what he said:

"The church in America is going to suffer so terribly. We laugh now, but they will come after us, they will come after our children. They will close the net around us while we are playing soccer mom and soccer dad. While we are arguing over so many things, and mesmerized by so many little trinkets. The net even now is closing around even over you and your children and your grandchildren, and it does not cause you to fear.

You will be isolated from society, as has already happened. Anyone who runs for office, who actually believes the Bible, will be considered a lunatic, until finally we are silenced.

We will be called things we are not, and persecuted not because we are followers of Christ, but as radical

fundamentalists who do not know the true way of Christ which of course is love and tolerance.

"We will go down as the greatest bigots and haters of mankind in history. They have already come after your children, and for most of you, they got them. They got them through the public schools indoctrination, in the university indoctrination and you wonder why your children come out not serving the Lord. It's because you fed them right into the Devils mouth.

"So little by little the net is closing around and its not so little by little, look how fast things are going downhill even in just a matter of weeks. A matter of weeks! But at the same time, know this; Persecution is always meant for evil, but God always means it for good. Is it not better, to suffer in this life, to have an extra weight of glory, in heaven?

"You must settle this in your mind; this is the one thing I want to say over and over. Down through history you have a wrong idea of martyrdom and persecution. You think that these men were persecuted and martyred for their sincere faith in Jesus Christ. That WAS the real reason, but no one heard that publicly. They were martyred and they were persecuted as enemies of the state, as child molesters, as bigots, as narrow minded stupid people who had fallen for a ruse and could contribute nothing to society. Your suffering will not be noble, so your mind must be filled with the Word of God when all people persecute you and turn on you.

"And if the Spirit of God and common grace pulls back and you see even your children and your grandchildren tossing in the lot that you should die. This is no game. You want revival and awakening but know this; for the most part, great awakenings have come only preceding great national catastrophes or the persecution of the church.

"I believe that God IS bringing a great awakening, but I believe he is raising up young men, who are strong in trust in the providence of God to be able to wade through the Hell that's going to break loose on us, and it will be on us before we even recognize it. Unless in God's providence He is not done.

"This is not silly talk. Apart from a great awakening, these things are going to come upon you. Be ready to lose your homes, your cars, and everything. May this warning not fall upon deaf ears" end quote.

Are we very close to this time? Again, we don't know.

CONCL: I close with an account from the OT where Nero and Christ met. It is an old story, well familiar to you. Joseph, the boy with the coat of many colors, had become president of Egypt. And because of the drought, eventually his family moved and Joseph saw to their well-being. They multiplied greatly in the land and Pharaoh began to fear they might become a danger to him in case of a war and so he put them to hard service. Pharaoh loved all this free labor of an industrious people. But when fear came that they might revolt, he required of the Hebrew midwives to kill all the male babies. Pharaoh had overstepped his authority.

Now it tells us that the midwives feared Christ and so they disobeyed Nero. Let us let it be our fear of God that causes us to become disobedient to our government, not personal likes or dislikes, or pride.

Well, Pharaoh called the midwives to a meeting and said, "Why have you disobeyed me and saved the boys alive?" And the midwives said, "You see Pharaoh, our Hebrew women are not like your Egyptian women. They are lively and before we know it, it is too late and a boy has been born."

Do you know what the Bible says to that? I am reading Exodus 1:21-22:

20 Therefore God dealt well with the midwives, and the people multiplied and grew very mighty.

21 And so it was, because the midwives feared God, that He provided households for them.

May my life be guided by a fear for God that exceeds my fear of the consequences from the government. Let it not be guided by personal likes or dislikes, or by pride. Let it be guided by a calm trust in the One, who even if I should lose my life, I will fear no evil, for His rod and His staff comfort me.

The rules set upon us have not yet reached the extent of the laws Pharaoh required of the midwives or as someone reminded me

this week, the rules that Nebuchadnezzar required in Daniel's time or that the Catholic church required of our early Mennonites, but where is the line? We are in the murky stage.

Do you know what the very worst thing is the government can do to me or you? They can send us home to glory a bit earlier than it would otherwise have been! Their other alternative is to not step out of God's parameters.

So let me make some concluding suggestions:

- Read your Bible and stay alert spiritually. Jesus may come today.
- Pray daily. Pray for our governments.
- Be careful how you speak about elected officials.
- Thank God for what we have, we have so very much. Sit down and count your blessings.
- Thank God for the government we still have. It may be the past that is keeping it where it still is, but thank God for what we have. Thank God that your hope is not in government.
- Don't waste the good days we are in, worrying about the future.
- Always remember, today we may be out of here.
- Thank God that He has not appointed the Church to wrath, but to salvation from wrath.
- Rejoice in the Lord. If you read of other countries, North Korea, China, Iran, many places in Africa, you will rejoice for what we have. If you know an attribute of God you already have something to rejoice in. I would encourage, listen to our series on God. You can only rejoice in Him as much as you know Him.
- And I recommend that for the next seven days, do not let one day go by without thinking of something new to thank God for in our country and in our government. You won't run out.

And last but not least, "Fear not." Do not let present world situations govern your life or get you down. If the news is too depressing, turn it off and read the Bible.