

**Pandemic Theology - A Theory about Conspiracies**  
**Isaiah 7:1-7, 8:11-18**

Brothers and sisters in Christ, as we continue to endure living in these pandemic circumstances, I am sure that we've all experienced our deep-seated human need to understand and make sense of what has been going on all around us.

Ever since we heard the first reports that an infectious new virus had shown up in Wuhan China, we have been working to understand where it came from, how it spreads, how it affects humans, how we can to treat those who are infected with it and what we can do to prevent it from spreading.

Now based on what we already know through scientific study and modern medicine it has not been terribly difficult to establish some basic facts that provide answers for these questions.

To be sure – it has not been instantaneous, and it's been more than a bit disconcerting for the public to discover that scientific inquiry is a process and that it involves studies that

produce contradictory findings, that scientists don't often agree with each other, but over time a consensus begins to emerge about what we can say is factual with a degree of certainty.

But here's the challenge brothers and sisters, the kind of factual knowledge that scientific inquiry gives us... answers the question of how – but not why. Now often times we will inquire into something using the term “why?” when we mean “how?” “*Why does the virus do this, why does it do that*” – but what we really mean is “*what mechanism or process or variables are contributing influences and how do they affect the outcome?*”

For example, the question of “*why does the virus make some people very sick and not others?*” is really a question of “*how does the virus interact differently with people and what mechanisms contribute to this?*” Do you see the difference? Science answers how – but not why.

Facts are good, but facts alone do not provide us with the kind of understanding that we are really looking for, because they do not speak to the “why?” which addresses the big picture or our sense of ultimate.

The truth is that we all need to have some sort of grasp on the big picture and what is going on around us and what its ultimately all about – nobody lives on bare factual knowledge alone.

We take in the facts, and we organize them into how we already make sense of the world and what is going on around us and how we view things... and that is why – in spite of increasing factual knowledge about the virus and our pandemic circumstances – we continue to see the proliferation of conspiracy theories which are influencing people’s behaviors and actions.

Now its important to clarify what conspiracy theories are, so let me offer you what I’ve put together as a definition.

A conspiracy theory is a theory about what really going on around us and how we can make sense of the world that is centered on a conspiracy.

There is some sort of nefarious plan in place, that is being carried out behind the scenes, by some group or figure who is pulling all the strings and making things happen, working towards the goal of being able to control every aspect of our lives to their benefit, and the vast majority of people are unaware that this is what is really going on.

In fact, what everyone else actually thinks is going on is part of the conspiracy - it’s what THEY *want* you to believe! Those who accept the official explanation, who don’t question the status quo, or who would defend what the experts are saying... are unwittingly becoming complicit in helping the conspiracy achieve its nefarious goals.

And so, in our current circumstances we hear theories which claim this pandemic is a conspiracy, that it was planned, that it is providing cover for gov’ts to roll back our rights and

freedoms in order to take control according to some globalist agenda in the United Nations, that vaccinations are part of a plot to insert tracking chips into the population and control them through the activation of the 5G cellular network... and on it goes.

Do you know what I'm talking about? I'm sure you've heard these and a dozen more like them...

And the appeal is not on the factual basis brothers and sisters – the appeal is that it provides something that seems like a coherent answer to the question of “Why?”

Why are we in a pandemic? Because there is a plot to control us, because our gov't is being influenced and pressured behind the scenes to go along with this hoax.

Why do we have to have lock-downs and restrictions?

Because the gov't wants to destroy businesses which are the heart of resistance and take everything over for themselves... so they are in control!

The truth is that when we go through the kind of disruptive, unsettling, and life-altering circumstances and events that we've experienced for the past year we want to know why? We need to know why - we have to make some sense of it all.

Conspiracy theories offer a way for people to make sense of the how these disruptive things come about and upend our lives, who is responsible for that, who we can direct our anger and frustration at, and whom we can resist or retaliate against- in order to regain a sense of control.

Because as the saying goes – knowledge is power, and being able to know “Why” might not reverse the circumstances or events that have taken place but... it gives you a small sense of power in the face of a situation or an event where it seems you are powerless.

So if we ask why we need to know why – I think it gets down to retaining some sense of control and power when it feels like our agency has been taken away from us. At the very

least – nobody is going to control how you think about what’s really going on!

So, as we continue our Pandemic Theology series today – looking at how our experience with current theories about conspiracies can help us relate to similar situations in the scripture - let’s keep in mind that if we have not yet entertained some theory about conspiracies in regards to what is really going on – perhaps its because we have not yet been put in a situation where we feel completely powerless and out of control.

And... lest we think that we would never have to deal with that because we’re Christians – I would point out that unfortunately the facts show Christians are buying into conspiracy theories just as easily, if not more so, than non-Christians, and in fact the most ardent theorists I know... are Christians.

Now this is not the first time that God’s people have struggled with a sense of powerlessness or a loss of control as they

faced life altering circumstances and threats. This is not the first time that conspiracies have been offered as explanation for what is really going on.

During the time of the Prophet Isaiah conspiracies were running rampant as well.

If you have your bibles open you can turn to Isaiah chapter 7 and get the backstory on the political situation that was happening which sets the context for what we read from chapter 8.

King Pekah of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and King Rezin of Aram, which was north of Israel had decided to come and attack the Southern Kingdom of Judah – in all likelihood because King Ahaz of Judah had made an alliance with the expanding Empire of Assyria, that was located even further north than Aram.

King Pekah and King Rezin realized that if Judah was allowed to be allied with Assyria it would mean that they would have

to resist the Assyrians to the north and from behind them in the south, so they hoped to topple King Ahaz and put someone else on the throne who would make an alliance with them against the Assyrian Empire, and apparently, they had found a willing accomplice in the son of Tabeel.

So, you can imagine all the political intrigue, the suspicion, mistrust, false fronts, double deals and conspiracies that were going on at this time. Who could you trust? who was looking out for you? Who would be loyal and who would stab you in the back? As a King, who could you trust to tell you what was really going on – which advisors would give you the truth and which ones were being fed false information or worse yet, conspiring against you?

Now, I'm not certain how far these conspiracies reached into the general population – but I'm sure that things got around, rumors about conspiracies going on in Jerusalem, rumors about conspiracies coming from Samaria... How strong is the King? How secure is the throne? How effective would he be in ruling the nation, upholding justice – who would take

advantage of their neighbors with a weak King in place? Were the subjects supportive of their King or would they turn on him and support the invaders? Were the invaders promising a better life for the people under their rule?

All these questions about the events that were taking place are needing an answer of “why?” and so, theories about the conspiracies what was really going on were rampant during this time of political uncertainty.

In fact, these conspiracies had become so influential that when God sent the Prophet Isaiah to give a word of encouragement to King Ahaz... giving him inside information about what was actually going on, and a promise that their attempted invasion by Pekah and Rezin would not succeed and their kingdom would both come to ruin in the near future... Ahaz, he wouldn't believe it.

He refused to receive this Word from the Lord, suspecting that Isaiah is perhaps a part of these conspiracies which seek to undermine Him. The conspiracies had grown so powerful that

the King couldn't discern the difference between the political intrigue surrounding him and a genuine Word from the Lord through the prophet Isaiah.

And sadly, brothers and sisters this is where many Christians and churches are at right now as well. Mixing conspiracy theories in with scripture, thinking it somehow this is all part of God's plan for that false dispensational understanding of the "end-times."

Sure, they've got the correct theological facts in place about sin, and salvation through Jesus' death on the cross, but even theological facts such as these don't address the big question of "why?" and there are many of our brothers and sisters who are falling victim to conspiracy theories because they do not have the scripture's big picture in place in their lives.

And even when we do brothers and sisters, conspiracy theories are powerful, they are tempting, they appeal to our sinful nature, and when the events and circumstances around us upend our lives, it is easy enough to think that God has

abandoned us and so we abandon what we know and go along with the conspiracies - even the prophet Isaiah was tempted in this way!

And that's why, in Isaiah 8:11, which we read this morning, Isaiah says "*This is what the Yahweh says to me with his strong hand upon me, warning me not to follow the way of this people!*"

Brothers and sisters, when a major prophet like Isaiah – who has had a vision of the Lord in the Temple, who has had a Seraphim come and put a burning coal on his lips, who hears audible words from Yahweh – when Isaiah says that the Lord has warned him personally about something *with His strong hand upon him* – we need to pay attention to the warning as well.

If God was texting this Word to Isaiah – The strong hand of the Lord would mean it would be in All Caps "*DO NOT, CALL CONSPIRACY, EVERYTHING THIS PEOPLE CALLS A CONSPIRACY!*"

In other words, when you are looking around you at the events that are happening, at the political decisions that are being made, when you hear rumors about who is supposedly calling the shots and making things happen, or when someone claims to know what's really going on... DO NOT call it a conspiracy!

Do not give it the big picture credibility, do not give it standing as an explanation of "why?" Do not attribute to it the ability to give you a sense how you are to see the world and what is happening and who is making it happen. Do not do it.

To do so brothers and sisters is to sin against and deny God's sovereignty.

Because the reality is that God is the ruler over all, He is the one that is really calling the shots, He is the one who makes things happen, He is the one who determines what is really going on.

Yahweh has the ultimate plan in place and whatever political intrigues are occurring, whoever has a hidden agenda they are plotting to carry out, whoever wants to claim power for themselves and use it for their own advantage... these people will end up with the unpleasant surprise of finding out that they themselves were actually being used to carry out God's plans.

This is written large all throughout the rest of scriptures brothers and sisters. Proverbs 21:1 *"The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Yahweh; he turns it wherever he will."* And Psalm 2:1,4 *"Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain?... The One enthroned in heaven laughs; Yahweh scoffs at them."*

And back to Isaiah again 10:15 *"Does the ax raise itself above the person who swings it, or the saw boast against the one who uses it?"*

So, brothers and sisters – *"do not call conspiracy what these people are calling conspiracy! Do not fear what they fear, and*

*do not dread it. The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread!”*

Do you know why? Because there might be a grain of truth to some of these conspiracy theories. The best deceptions always contain something of the truth in order to make it seem possible...

As Christians we know that we live in a fallen world and that there are wicked people who seek to do great evil, not to mention as Ephesians 6:11-12 says we must *“take our stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood...”*

In other words, there are legitimate threats and fears that we face in this world and we do have a spiritual enemy who is plotting against us.

Additionally... human beings are fallible, they make mistakes, we don’t always get the facts right, accidents happen –

vaccines can have side effects, every choice a leader makes can bring unintended consequences for others...

But the response to these realities is not to fear them or to dread them – but to fight that fear with the Fear of the Lord. If that sounds odd, consider that advice comes straight from Jesus himself in Matt 10:28 *“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Instead, fear the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”* That’s some biblical big-picture thinking brothers and sisters.

So, whatever you might be afraid of – don’t be... because God is so much bigger than whatever it is and its not worth sinning against God for – right?

Just think about how you’re going to explain that to Him when you stand before Him one day... *“Why did you embrace that conspiracy theory, and spread it around and tell others about and effectively deny my Sovereignty before others?”* What are you going to say?? *“God I was scared of getting vaccinated and the side effects... I was afraid that the gov’t was going to*



*spy on me, put me jail, or take away my freedom... I was scared they were going to make me stop believing in you..."*

How do you think that's going to go over??

Fear God brothers and sisters... and everything falls into place, and as He promises Isaiah in 8:14 He will be a holy place, a sanctuary – where you are set apart and protected.

Now if you want to learn more about that you can look up the sermon "Dealing with Fear and Anxiety" on the church website from the summer of 2014 and you'll get more insight on who the best way to fight our fears and anxieties is by Fearing the Lord.

Because we inevitably spread our fear around don't we. If we see something that is worrisome and concerning on social media... what do we do?? We share that post right? We want to warn other people about what we're afraid of... and that's how conspiracy theories spread as well.

But isn't it better if we are spreading the Fear of the Lord? You see that's the other part of how we're dealing with the things that we are afraid of in relation to other people – especially as Christians.

Psalm 34:11 says *"Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD."* And as Proverbs 9:10 says *"the Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding"*

So, if we have concerns, things we are worried about, if we see something that threatens us - part of fighting that fear is by applying wisdom and understanding and spreading that around.

Do you have concerns about vaccine? Then dig in and do the research - ask actual researchers who work in a lab - and ask them why there are so many u-tube videos circulating on the topic and how reliable that information actually is?

Are you worried about gov't overreach? Then be a good citizen and engage your MLA, your City Councillor, your MP, learn about our constitution and how things are supposed to operate and get involved with a local constituency group, be a voting member of a political party, attend a peaceful law-abiding protest to make your voice heard, or help fund a court challenge to clarify if something is constitutional or not...

You may find your concerns are addressed; you might find you have some influence in policy matters, and you might find that the people involved are not actually part of some nefarious conspiracy to take over the world.

You might also discover this is a way for you to GO OUT into the community and build credible connections (first step in discipleship process) and Bless others as a part of our calling to Go and make disciples.

Interesting isn't it that Isaiah responds to what God told him in 8:16 by saying *"bind up the testimony and seal up the law among my disciples"* Isaiah knows this way of thinking needed

to be instilled in those he was discipling so that they would not be deceived by conspiracies either.

And I would add that in our current context, we have to understand that the biblical big picture and the answer to "why?" that we work to pass on to those whom we are discipling, along with the theological facts about sin and salvation in Jesus Christ – these are already enough of a deviation from what most people believe is really going on, that our credibility is strained.

Why on God's green earth would we want to undermine ourselves and our mission to make disciples, by mixing in any hint of a conspiracy theory in what we are sharing with people?

It's already difficult enough for our society to listen to the biblical message and take the gospel seriously. If people hear us talking conspiracy theories and then reject the gospel message that we try share with them because they can't

discern the difference – like King Ahaz rejected God’s word – that’s on us brothers and sisters.

So let us heed God’s warning to us in his word, but let me close off with this word of grace. If you have struggled with conspiracy theories, if you are guilty of spreading them, if you are convicted that you have denied God’s sovereignty...

Then take heart in Jesus’ encounter with Peter, who denied the Lord three times for what he feared...

Let me read John 21:15-19 for you *“Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”*

*“Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.” Again, Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”*

*The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time,*

*“Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”*

*Jesus said, “Feed my sheep. Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!”*

Brothers and sisters, do not call conspiracy what these people call conspiracy, but fear the Lord – feed His sheep – and follow Jesus.

Amen.