

Covid Church: The Non-Social Distancing God

++In 1918, when the Spanish flu struck the US and World, killing 50 million worldwide, churches didn't close...in fact, many churches saw an increase in attendance--not by worshippers coming to celebrate the risen Lord, but by the sick and dying who were being brought to churches that had become makeshift, temporary hospitals. That pandemic opened the eyes of many Christians as to what "attending to the sick" looked like. Trials bring heat, heat brings change, change is good.

++We are in the middle of our Covid Church series - church doesn't and shouldn't look the same right now.

++I have been very clear about how returning to normal isn't what we need, we need to run headlong into the supernatural.

++Today and next week we will be looking at the churches of the 1st century, their plight--and how it relates to us today, in the middle of our cultural and epidemiological pandemics.

++Yes - you heard right. We are suffering a global health related pandemic, but the church (His body) is suffering in the midst of a cultural pandemic.

++We are called to be conformed to the image of Christ, not the culture of the world around us.

++We've made our relationship a religion, our meetings on Sunday about programs, and our teaching and preaching about conforming to culture in order to change it - as if that could ever happen.

++Jesus didn't come to change the culture, He came to change the lives of people dominated by it.

++There is Good News (this is not doom and gloom) as you'll soon discover.

++Today we are in I Peter 4 (turn there)

++This chapter is split into two distinct sections: part 1 is instructions on living in Christ - what DL would call the "practice" that can be done individually as the church (body of believers) progresses individually into maturity in faith/dependence on God.

++Part 2 is a message of hope for those suffering. In the first century it is persecution and death, in the 21st century it is malaise and humanism - both are equally stunting to a church body - but both can, are, and will be overcome by the power of Christ in His people.

++Looking at 4:1-11, we see 6 instructions that Peter gives to the readers (and us) for daily Christ-like

living: - not a set of rules to maintain or increase your holiness

++4:1 "you must arm yourselves with the same attitude he had" regarding suffering/trials - humility.

++4:2 "you will be anxious to do the will of God" when you refrain from chasing hollow, empty desires and experience God's will/best life instead!

++4:7 "be earnest and disciplined in your prayers." -literally "God-controlled prayer"

++4:8 "continue to show deep love for each other" -love covers a multitude of sins, promotes unity,

Peter says this is most important of all

++4:9 "Cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay." -a reminder that all we have is God's anyway

++4:11 regarding God-given gifts: "Use them well to serve one another." God gives gifts, we use the gifts to serve each other, we can't do that in isolation - one day our isolation will end!

++But our isolation can help us direct our focus and allow the Spirit to form us into what He wants as we move into a new era of church life

++In 1832, French engineer Ferdinand Marie Lesseps was traveling in the Mediterranean when one of the passengers became sick and the ship was quarantined. The many long hours gave him time to read the memoirs of Charles le Pere, who wrote of the possibility of a canal from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean. This prompted Lesseps the time to devise a detailed plan for the construction of the Suez Canal. This canal brought invaluable service to the world. That quarantine (although frustrating and uncomfortable) had proven to be immensely profitable and brought change!

++This whole quarantine, social distancing, germs lurking around every corner, can cause fear, anxiety, doubt, and panic at every turn. It has affected some of us more than others. Each person in this room, watching this service online, and everyone else has had a different experience - in a word, an *ordeal*.

++Peter uses this same word in his letter in verse 12: "Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you."

++Let's shed some light on this sentence:

++The false first:

-God caused it

-It was related only to persecution/arrest

-It doesn't relate to us

++Peter's use of the word trial:::

++trial-peirasmos-specifically, the trial of person's fidelity (faith), integrity (goodness), virtue (reliance on truth) - It's where we get the word "tempted," where we get the idea of the satan being "The Tempter" - same word, same usage. Matt 4:3-The Tempter.

++Ordeals/Trials don't come from God, but He gives us all we need in order to resist, win, and overcome the trial that we're put on by the tempter:

++"You're not good enough, He doesn't love you, He didn't really say that, you're suffering because He isn't protecting you, you must have done something wrong, you are getting what you deserve"

++Peter wants his readers and the Spirit wants us to connect with Christ in trials and suffering - and how they are overcome!

++The issue isn't the *trial*, it's the choice in how we perceive and meet it - will we meet our trials by trusting in ourselves or Him. Will we meet this "corporate trial" of global and cultural pandemic as the church by trusting in ourselves, or by allowing Him to let us rise above the noise, resentment, and fear and solely trust in Him alone for all we need?

The Non-Social Distancing God

++Christ's Partners

++"Instead, be very glad—for these trials make you partners with Christ in his suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world." 4:13

++For the first century Christians, they were given hope that their temptation to trust themselves was unwarranted...by suffering trials/ordeals/persecution, they were walking hand in hand with Christ - the one who was all too familiar with it.

++Have you ever been lied about (your partner has), have you ever been betrayed (your partner has), wronged, hurt, despised?

++Literally, the word for partner is the Greek word that means "fellowship and connection." When we endure hardships because we are different - we are finding ourselves connected to Him ways that go beyond friendship. When Sophie got old enough to start playing soccer, we were accosted by many parents that asked us to join a team that played on Sundays. We had to decline, not because we didn't love Sophie, but because we love Sophie. We want her to know that culture doesn't dictate our schedule,

He does. Did it cost us...you bet - (especially socially) - but God continually uses it to teach our family about cultural influences.

++When you are faced with trials, when our church is faced with trials - we can have joy because we are becoming united with Christ in that pain. Not to celebrate the pain, but the joy that comes in the morning.

++Christ's Privileged

++14 If you are insulted because you bear the name of Christ, you will be blessed, for the glorious Spirit of God rests upon you. 15 If you suffer, however, it must not be for murder, stealing, making trouble, or prying into other people's affairs. 16 But it is no shame to suffer for being a Christian. Praise God for the privilege of being called by his name! 17 For the time has come for judgment, and it must begin with God's household. And if judgment begins with us, what terrible fate awaits those who have never obeyed God's Good News? 18 And also, "If the righteous are barely saved, what will happen to godless sinners?"

++Peter tells these Christians that they are privileged -literally, envied! What! How?

++Envied because we don't face trials alone. Envied because we understand that the Spirit is groaning with us in trials. Envied because even though things might look dire, the Spirit of God is alive and is working--not just in you and me, but collectively as His church. He is literally fanning the flames of zeal among His believers...we can't and will not go back to what we had. We must individually let the trials of Covid, socially distancing, not meeting change us into what He wants--a blessed and envied people who walk in peace because we are His.

++Christ's Protected

++19 So if you are suffering in a manner that pleases God, keep on doing what is right, and trust your lives to the God who created you, for he will never fail you.

++More tough language here "suffering in a manner that pleases God." Ouch.

++What does that mean? IS there suffering in the world? Are there pains in this world? YES.

++The way in which we meet these are with Him. In His will, His way.

++Let's glory in the last sentence of this chapter: "trust your lives to the God who created you, for he will never fail you."

++MSG - ++”So if you find life difficult because you're doing what God said, take it in stride. Trust him. He knows what he's doing, and he'll keep on doing it.”

++He knows what he's doing...God saw Covid coming, it didn't catch him off guard. He saw the struggles and trials that we all face...in fact, He's already in the ones we'll face in the future. He's a proactive God.

++Take heart, friends, He will never fail you or us, and He knows what He is doing. Let's let Him do it in us, with us.