

### Don't Waste This

With all the unrest in our nation, I'd like to pray before we get to the sermon.

We need to seek the Lord. And having laid this prayer on my heart this morning, I'd like to offer it up.

Father, you well know that there are times in our lives when we say with the Israelites of old, "We don't know what to do, but our eyes are on you." (2 Chron 20:12)

This is one of those times in our nation.

So God, we pray these things in the name of Jesus:

We pray that the voices of violence will be silenced, and the voices of peace will be amplified.

We pray that the voices of hate will be rejected, and the voices of love will be embraced.

We pray that the leaders of looting will be abandoned, and the leaders of protest followed.

We pray that riots will dissipate, and churches will congregate.

We pray that law and order will prevail, and disorder end.

We pray that voices of frenzy will fade, and voices of reason will rise.

We pray that hotheads will cool, and cooler heads prevail.

We pray that confusion will reign among detractors, and wisdom among our leaders.

We pray that fear will be replaced by courage, and folly by wisdom.

We pray that foolishness will be exposed, and godliness exalted.

We pray for an end to senseless death, and the beginning of mutual respect.

We pray for an end to riots and looting, and the restoration of law and order.

We pray that the abuse of power not be lost in the abuse of freedom.

We pray that the powers of darkness will be defeated, and the people of light will shine.

We pray for peace in our nation and love in our hearts.

We pray, in Jesus name, amen.

- Let's turn to [Prov 4:5](#), and I'll meet you there in a minute. (Children's print-outs)  
When this pandemic first began and we had to stop meeting as a church, I thought our reunion was going to be big. Like Easter.  
Confetti cannons, streamers, hugs, you name it.  
I even planned on calling it "Homecoming: A Little Taste of Heaven."

But as the weeks went by, it became apparent that wasn't going to happen.  
And after 3 months of being separated, I didn't care *how* it happened.  
I just wanted to see your faces. I felt like I was living my own version of "I Am Legend" with Will Smith.

- Needless to say, this has been difficult. For all of us. (**Intro**)  
But God's people have been making the most of difficult situations since the beginning of time. Instead of *wasting* the opportunities that accompany hard times . . .  
We've taken *advantage* of them.

Like **Adam and Eve**. Despite being banished from the Garden of Eden in the midst of their *own* pandemic, a pandemic of sin . . .  
They didn't waste the opportunity for a second chance.

Or how about **Daniel**? In the midst of Babylonian captivity he didn't waste a thing.

He seized every opportunity he could. To learn, serve, speak, and pray.

And then there's the **Apostles**. Who seized the opportunity to spread the word despite the absence of Jesus. Talk about a difficult situation.

And **Paul** the same. Who preached the gospel and planted churches despite the difficulties of storms, shipwrecks, and famine. Sometimes combined.

But *most* significant is **Jesus**. Who didn't waste the opportunity to declare the kingdom of God and bring it to bear, despite his rejection and death.

Instead of *wasting* the opportunities of hardship, God's people have made the *most* of them. And we should too.

So let me give you 3 ways to do that. 3 ways to ensure that you don't waste this. Here's the first:

### Don't waste this by forgetting what you learned. (Prov 4:5)

As things return to normal, our tendency will be to forget everything we learned.

It happened with 9/11. It happened with Vietnam. WWII. The Spanish Flu. And every other crisis or upheaval in the history of the world.

Most people forget the things they learned as soon as life returns to normal.

The crisis is out of sight out of mind, and they revert back to ruts. Ruts and routine. Physically *and* mentally.

And it will happen with this, unless we purpose otherwise. Like it says in **Proverbs 4:5**.  
*Get wisdom* [Solomon says; as in learn what's best and right and how to apply it]; *get insight; do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my mouth*.  
Don't forget the wisdom and *insight* you glean in the course of life. Especially from times of difficulty. Get it, keep it, and live accordingly.

The question is, what is that? What *have* we learned in the midst of all this? Or what *should* we have learned?

Two things at the very least.

### 1. We are not immune to the ill-effects of our fallen world.

As secure and knowledgeable and advanced as we are, life is still precarious. It's still fleeting. We've learned that.

Despite our best efforts to inoculate ourselves and protect ourselves, we will fail. We will die. Sometimes prematurely.

I don't care how protected you are. How isolated. How much you live in denial.

And some of you are. You're living in denial.

You either think you're *immune* to the ill-effects of this world, and walk around all cavalier; or you think you can *protect* yourself.

When the fact is, the entire universe groans under its bondage to corruption and decay, and adversely affects every single one of us. No exceptions.

Oh sure, you might dodge *this* bullet. But the next? When you don't even know what the next bullet *is*? I don't think so. And we'd do well to remember that.

We're not immune to the ill-effects of this world, and the only cure, the only safety net, is the Gospel. Putting our faith and trust in Jesus to save and keep us.  
Don't waste this by forgetting that.

Second, the second lesson we ought never forget, is that . . .

## 2. In every crisis there's an opportunity.

Just like we see in the people of the Bible.

In every crisis there's an opportunity, and most of the time, more than one.

Like the opportunity in *this* crisis to slow down. To stay home. Because we *had* to.

Which gave us the opportunity to reconnect with our kids. And them, us.

Not to mention read a book, do a project, or learn something new.

In every crisis there's an opportunity. Opportunities waiting to be seized.

➤ I love the example of **Isaac Newton** in that respect.

He was a student at Cambridge when the Great Plague of London struck the city. 1665.

Forcing all the students to go home and quarantine for a year. *A year!*

You think we had it bad.

And while most of the students squandered their time – eating, sleeping, lounging, and playing – Newton developed his early theories of calculus and optics.

Discoveries that literally transformed science and changed the world. Even leading to his explanation of gravity.

In fact, they were discoveries so momentous, that later on he referred to that time as his “year of wonders.”\*\*\*\*\*

I wonder what we're going to call *this* time in hindsight. What *you're* going to call it.

A time of wonder or a time of waste? A time of learning, or laziness? *Missed* opportunities, or seized ones.

➤ I got this sweatshirt for my birthday last month, because at the beginning of all this, Becky and I watched a new show called **The Chosen**.

It's an 8 episode miniseries about the life of Christ, and it's awesome. I can't say enough about it.

There were episodes where we were laughing, crying, and cheering all in the same hour.

It's crowd *funded*, and available via their app. Just download it and cast it to your TV.

With one season complete and 7 more planned, it's worth the cost.

The point is this: had it not been for the pandemic, and the extra time at home it forced upon us, we might never have watched it.

Had we not been intent on wisdom and insight, we might have binged on something else.\*\*\*\*\*

In every crisis there's an opportunity, and what you do with it makes all the difference.

So binge Jesus instead of Netflix. Instead of Facebook, read a real book. Grow in maturity. Learn something new.

And whatever you do, don't waste this by *forgetting* what you learned.

Second . . .

## Don't waste this by taking church for granted. Acts 2:42,46-47)

Remember how you feel right now. Whether you're back in church for the first time in 3 months, or still at home yearning for it.

Lock it in, write it on your heart, and never take church for granted again.

Never take the joy of fellowship for granted again. Never take corporate worship for granted again.

From now on, purpose in your heart to get here every time the doors are open, and take advantage of it. Purpose in your heart to adjust your budget, and support it.

Adjust your schedule, and serve it. Don't waste this.

**Acts 2:42** says – *And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship [their gatherings for mutual encouragement and partnership], to the breaking of bread and the prayers [corporate gatherings for worship]. . . . And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, [47] praising God and having favor with all the people.*

That's church. Fueled by a devotion and desire to sit under the teaching of God's Word, gather for encouragement, share in communion, and worship together.

Just like we do on the weekends. And in our homes throughout the week.\*\*\*\*\*

And one of the worst things you could do after all this, is return to a state of complacency where church is easy come, easy go, and easy to avoid.

Complacency where fellowship is so common it's no big deal.

Worship is so prevalent it's no longer valued.

➤ Fight that. **Fight the complacency of normal.**

Where you take it all for granted because “it's always been there and always will be.”

The complacency of thinking church just happens, and you're not needed. And you certainly don't need *it*. Fight that.

Don't waste the longing you have to *see* each other.

Don't waste the desire you have to *worship* together.

Don't waste the yearning you have for discipleship – to grow in your knowledge of God's Word, and your maturity as God's child.

Have you ever wondered whether this pandemic might be God's way of pushing the reset button in your heart? To bring you back to your first love, and keep you there?

Bring you back to church for *good*?

Don't waste it. Fight the complacency of normal.

➤ And second, **fight the tendency to isolate.**

The tendency to stay home and spectate, instead of coming to participate.

The tendency to value convenience over obedience. The convenience of staying home over the obedience of coming to church.

Fight the tendency to scratch the *surface* of church instead of diving deep.

The tendency to stay on the periphery instead of entering the core.

I have to tell ya, I'm concerned about that.

With the convenience of livestream and the experience of the last few months, there's a real risk that people will *continue* their isolation, and *avoid* community.

Don't go there. And don't stay there. Because the end of that is loneliness, depression, and self-absorption.

Don't waste this by taking church for granted as if you're not needed, and don't stay away as if it's non-essential.

Let the *absence* of fellowship and worship make your heart grow *fonder*, not wander.

And last . . .

**Don't waste this by failing to trust in God. (Ps 56:3-4a)**

Fear, or a lack of trust in God – two sides of the same coin – has been the most surprising aspect to me in all this. And troubling.

I can understand why *unbelievers* are afraid. Especially of death. They should be. They have no hope and no assurance.

But I don't understand it in believers; people who know better.

Except to assume that they don't really *believe* God's Word.

That when it says, *nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God*, it's true.

(Rom 8:39)

Or when God says, "*I will never leave you nor forsake you*," he means it. (Heb 13:5)

Or that *to die* [really] *is gain*. (Phil 1:21)

The only way fear makes sense – ongoing, irrational, debilitating fear – is if you don't believe any of that.

Meanwhile, King David said in **Ps 56:3-4**:

*When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. [4] In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?*

Whether the flesh of other men or the flesh of viruses. No fear.

That's what David said; as our example.

And Isaiah too (**Is 12:2**). "*Behold, God is my salvation* [he said]; *I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation.*"

The biggest pandemic in our world these days is not the coronavirus, it's fear.

And the worst possible thing we can do, as believers, is succumb to it.

Because fear, is a failure to trust. A failure to trust God.

➤ After **Francis Grimke** was emancipated as a 15 year old slave in 1865, he traveled north, eventually went to college, and then attended Princeton Theological Seminary. And after graduating, he spent most of his ministry as the pastor of 15<sup>th</sup> Street Presbyterian Church in Washington, DC.

And during that time, he preached and published a sermon in the midst of the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918.

A pandemic that killed 75 million people, worldwide, in the course of 18 months.

And toward the end of his sermon (**quote**), delivered on November 3, 1918, he said this:

*"If faith [trust] is to help us; if it is to put its great strong arms under us; if we are to feel its sustaining power under such distressing circumstances, it must be a real living faith in God. . . . It is a good time for those of us who are Christians to examine ourselves to see exactly how it is with us, whether the foundation upon which we are building is a rock foundation—whether our faith is really resting upon Christ, the solid Rock, or not."* (5 Minutes In Church History podcast, 4/21/20)

Don't waste this pandemic by failing to trust in God. (**Summary**)

Don't go another day gripped by fear. Join with David in saying, "*When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.*"

Join with the church and never take it for granted.

And by all means, don't waste any part of this by forgetting what you've learned.

**Prayer** – Father, *because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you* (Ps 63:3). And my heart trusts you. Thank you for sustaining us. Thank you for protecting us. Thank you for bringing us back together. We love you and worship you.