

“Responding to the Pandemic – Part 2”
Proverbs 3:5-6
(Preached at Trinity, May 17, 2020)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Today we have returned after two months in quarantine. It didn't seem appropriate to jump right in to our expository series in Samuel and Thessalonians as if nothing has happened. The truth is our world has been turned upside down. What are we to think of it? And what about the future? Future times of crisis? Future pandemics? It isn't a matter of if we will face another pandemic. It is when. And we will face other times of crisis.
2. This morning I set before you the important question. How are we to respond—to this crisis or the next? And how do we evaluate the current response? There have been missteps, underreactions, overreactions. This is the nature of our life. It describes how we've handled the scores of situations that have demanded a response, a decision, a course of action. There have been missteps, underreactions, overreactions. And we've all had those times that we've looked back and said, “What was I thinking?”
3. It is important for us to have a Biblical mindset. Paul counsels us in Romans 12:
Romans 12:2 NAU - "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."
This will enable us to rightly discern, to make wise decisions.
This present crisis demands clear thinking based upon Biblical principles.
This is true for individuals. It is true of our civil authorities.
4. This morning we looked at the response of our civil authorities. I described the two-fold purpose of civil authority—to maintain justice and to provide for the health and safety of its citizens. In our form of government, the actions of our leaders must conform to the rule of law established in our Constitution. They have authority delegated by God. They are accountable to Him.
5. It was essential that our civil authorities respond. How do we evaluate the response? And what about our own response? The coronavirus has not disappeared. How do we move forward?
How do we evaluate present decisions that impact the future?
 - A. As I pointed out this morning, the Bible is our guide and authority. Every situation and every decision must be held under the scrutiny of God's Word. The Bible shines brightly upon our life.
Psalms 119:105 KJV - "Thy word *is* a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."

- B. Second, we must use earthly prudence and caution. We seek counsel from those who have gone through similar situations and glean from their experience. We can gain wisdom from the past. We learn from past successes and failures. Have there been other pandemics? Of course, there have been many. What wisdom can we gain from history?
6. Unfortunately, too much of the response has been driven more by fear than by reasonable action. This morning I shared the three primary motives behind the pandemic response we've witnessed with our governmental officials.
- a. First, there are those who had legitimate concerns, both as individuals and as civil leaders. I think most of our leaders are in this category—people in a difficult position trying to do the right thing. But without Christ, without the light of His Word, the best of intentions will be deficient.
 - This needs to be instructive for us. We can't rest upon our good intentions. We need the wisdom that only God can provide.
 - b. Second, there are leaders who are power hungry. They see this as an opportunity to seize trillions of dollars to use for their projects. Governors of bankrupt states see it as an opportunity to solve their budget crisis. Some have been abusive with their power robbing citizens of their constitutional rights.
 - We also need to give careful consideration of this. We need to pray for them. This is sin that can infect any of us. It's a motivation of greed, selfishness and pride.
 - c. Third, there is the response of fear. Some of the direction of our leaders has been motivated by fear, from exaggerated models, from an expectation of doom. One model projected 1-2 million deaths in the US. Such data can be terrifying, and fear was the result.
 - Even Christians have been infected. This has had an impact upon the response of many of us and it threatens our return to normal.
7. Fear has been called the second pandemic and it can do more harm than the actual threat. President Trump said after three weeks into the quarantine that the cure was worse than the disease, and in many ways he was correct. What can protect us from this fear?
- I. We must respond with confidence (courage). This is my second point. We must respond with caution – but we must also respond with confidence.
- A. This is the right response, the response with the absence of fear.
 1. We face many decisions in life. Some are serious, some could have a major impact upon your life or the life of your family. You must guard your heart against fear.
 2. It is the trust response – Proverbs 3:5 – “Trust in the Lord”
In the Imperative
בַּטַּח batach – trust, to have confidence, to rest secure, to be bold
 3. We admit we don't have all the answers, but we rest in God's kind Providence. Fear comes when we give greater attention to our own thoughts and the latest headline than we do upon the sovereign reign of Christ.
 4. We don't trust in our own understanding, but this doesn't mean we don't exercise caution. We make our decisions based on caution, prudence, and wisdom, and Biblical truth. We don't operate on the premise of fear.

5. By April 19th fewer than 4% of U.S. churches were meeting in person.
 - a. By far, most have chosen to do this out of love for neighbor and cooperation with our civil authorities.
 - b. Some churches have decided to postpone services for a few weeks even after the stay at home order has been lifted, mostly from the abundance of caution. But we must guard ourselves from fear.
 6. Churches suspending services is not new to this pandemic—not out of fear, but out cooperation with our civil authorities and concern for others. Again, history is instructive.
 In the 1600’s, facing yet another pandemic, the English Puritan Richard Baxter wrote that Christians should obey civil authorities if they forbid church assemblies during pestilence: “It is lawful to do that secretly for the present necessity, which we cannot do publicly, and yea, to omit some assemblies for a time, that we may thereby have the opportunity for more.”
- B. Again, far too much of this pandemic has been driven by fear
1. This doesn’t diminish the need for caution and prudence.
 But there is a great difference between prudence and panic.
 Human beings are often drive by fear and panic.
 On 19 October 1856, as Spurgeon was preaching at the Surrey Gardens Music Hall for the first time, someone in the crowd yelled, "Fire!" The ensuing panic and stampede left several dead. Spurgeon was emotionally devastated. Multitudes were panicked by a danger that did not exist.
 2. We’ve been witness to the hype we’ve often seen in other viral pandemics. Last fall there were 10 cases of Ebola in the U.S. but many were panicked. The media coined it “fearbola.”
 One professor commented: “The minute the Ebola threat was communicated, it hit all of the hot buttons: It can be fatal, it’s invisible and hard to protect against, exposure is involuntary and it’s not clear that the authorities are in control of the situation.”
 This has been the response of many to COVID-19
 3. At the end of March they told us if we didn’t social distance we would see 1.2 to 2 million deaths. People who are afraid are easy to control.
 4. The governor of Michigan called this a war which merits a wartime response. She spoke of sacrifices made during WWII and criticized “selfishness” of those who disagreed with her orders. Such hype was designed cause fear to justify her heavy-handed approach.
 5. We’ve read reports of fights breaking out in lines outside grocery stores. There are frequent reports of people being assaulted for not wearing a mask. These are things people do when they are afraid.
 6. Prudence and caution might lead a person to stock up on essential goods in short supply.
 Fear leads a person to hoard goods they don’t need – like the run on toilet paper at the beginning of this pandemic.
 7. Prudence leads us to be cautious, to practice good hygiene, to avoid large crowds. Fear causes us to look at everyone with suspicion, presuming any contact will lead to a life-threatening disease. Fear leads to anxiety and unreasonable behavior.

8. Fear leads us to presume every cough or sneeze is COVID-19. Out of 260,000 tests in LA less than 35,000 have been positive, only about 13%.
9. Fallen man runs in fear even when there is no one chasing
Proverbs 28:1 NAU - "The wicked flee when no one is pursuing, But the righteous are bold as a lion."
10. This is not the response of God's people to the dangers and uncertainties of life.
Deuteronomy 31:6 NAU - "Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them, for the LORD your God is the one who goes with you. He will not fail you or forsake you."
1 Chronicles 28:20 NAU - "Then David said to his son Solomon, "Be strong and courageous, and act; do not fear nor be dismayed, for the LORD God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you nor forsake you until all the work for the service of the house of the LORD is finished."
- When our Lord's disciples were caught in a storm they feared for their life even though Jesus was in the same boat with them.
Matthew 8:24-26 NAU - "And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being covered with the waves; but Jesus Himself was asleep. ²⁵ And they came to *Him* and woke Him, saying, "Save *us*, Lord; we are perishing!" ²⁶ He said to them, "Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?" Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and it became perfectly calm."

C. What is the solution to this fear?

1. The cure for fear in this or any other danger is trusting God's infinite care of us. We must never forget that fear is consistent with unbelief.
 - a. I've often reminded us; can you truly love God when you question His intentions and doubt His provision?
1 John 4:18 NAU - "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear"
2 Timothy 1:7 ESV - "for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control."
 - b. We must not fail to trust our great God – every hour of every day.
Jeremiah 17:7 NAU - "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD And whose trust is the LORD."
 - c. Strong faith makes us bold as a lion.
Proverbs 28:1 NAU - "The wicked flee when no one is pursuing, But the righteous are bold as a lion."
2. If strong faith crushes fear we should do those things that serve to increase our faith.
 - a. We must be people of the Book – we must be saturated with the Word of God
Romans 10:17 NAU - "So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ."
 - b. Without our sharp sword we will be unarmed for our warfare.

3. We must not forget to pray without ceasing.
Dale Ralph Davis – “Sometimes the Father may box us in, place us in a situation in which, one by one, all our secondary helps and supports are taken from us, in order that, defenseless, we may lean on his mercy alone. More and more God’s people must walk the way of desperation—prayer. Once we see this, we will no longer regard prayer as a pious cop-out but as our only rational activity.”¹
- D. We must not forget that everything in this life is temporal
1. Our greatest fear is the fear of loss. We fear losing the things we love – our loved ones, our own lives, our health, our possessions. That is what is terrifying about this pandemic. It is an invisible enemy that can rob you of your health and even your life.
 2. Everything in this life is ending. Everything
 3. Everything on the earth is in a state of decay or a state of passing away
Jesus reminded His disciples:
Matthew 6:19-20 NAU - "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ "But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal;"
 4. James reminds us that our life is just a mist – a vapor
James 4:14 NAU - "Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away."
 5. Everything is heading for final destruction
2 Peter 3:10-12 NAU - "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. ¹¹ Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹² looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!"
- E. Fear is a self-centered focus – The Bible teaches us that love is a self-denying grace. If our first love is directed to ourselves our first concern is our own welfare. We fear anything that threatens our world.
1. Love allows us to place our attention upon Christ and His people
 2. If we love Jesus supremely, whether we live or die we belong to Him.
Romans 14:8 NAU - "for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's."
This gives us great confidence in any situation
 3. Love will lead us to take risks for Christ’s sake – to sacrifice ourselves – to live boldly, fearlessly

¹ Davis, D. R. (2000). *1 Samuel: Looking on the Heart* (p. 76). Scotland: Christian Focus Publications.

Conclusion:

1. These are the things that should guide us in this pandemic and other times of uncertainty where careful thinking is a necessity.
We need to consider the details carefully and confidently.
2. This is the life of the believer. This is how we live. We engage our minds, but God's Word is our authority and Christ is our anchor. We fearlessly and confidently face every trial, and we navigate our way trusting the care of Christ.
3. In the coming days and months we need to evaluate our feelings, our actions. Is this a reasonable action based upon a fearless trust in God accompanied by wise prudence, or am I being pushed by fear?
There always has been contagious diseases. There always will be. We are always threatened by the common cold, which is one of over 100 viruses. We face the flu every year. COVID-19 is now a part of our lives. But we live our lives – cautiously, but boldly.