

Pandemic Perspective Part 3

I kept praying about what I was to share this morning. I was going to look at another encounter with Jesus from the gospel but every time I started down that path, I felt a check in my spirit. I couldn't seem to find clarity. I wrote part of this Friday as I always do and Saturday morning I looked at something I had written, "I don't remember a more divisive time in my lifetime. Everyone seems to be at odds...As a nation, among neighbors, among family and friends there is division..." I stopped and thought, "Wait. I don't think that's the truth." I was a teenager in the late 1960's and early 70's. I've seen cities in flames before, deadly rioting and looting and violence and mass protests much larger than anything we've seen this summer. Some of you remember. Our nation was torn apart by Viet Nam and Civil Rights. There was a generation gap we called it, parents and teenagers at odds, the rise of the drug culture, Hippies, there was talk of a revolution, an overthrow of the government. Anyone remember the Weathermen Underground, the SDS, The Chicago Seven, the Black Panther Party? There was division believe me.

One difference was we didn't have social media where everyone weighed in on every subject without the advantage of nuance. Nuance, degrees of difference perceived by the senses. Reading your post on social media I can't tell if you are kidding, if there is a twinkle in your eye, I can't tell if you are being sarcastic or just aggravating. And we didn't have access to 24 hour media influence other than "news on the hour every hour" on your transistor radio.

We wondered then as now, is this the beginning of the end? I found a copy of *The Day The Dollar Dies* by Willard Cantelon. He described how a one world government was going to take over, a cashless society, the rise of the computer. The book was published in 1973, almost fifty years ago. We've been here before, but it's later now than it's ever been. What's going to happen? How will this end? Well, let me remind you of something that came out of the turbulence and upheaval of the 60's and 70's. The Jesus Movement! Instead of revolution we wound up with revival! Revolutions always lead to disappointment. Things don't turn out the way the revolutionaries promise. Ask the anarchists in Seattle in the CHOP zone. "We don't need police or government." It's all good until the tolerant become intolerant and the oppressed become oppressors and human nature starts murdering and raping and we realize we need order and law to reign in the sinful human heart. The disillusioned start wondering if there is any truth and any hope and guess what? There is truth and there is hope and you will find both in Jesus!

He is the answer! So what do we do? I think it's time for the church to examine our heart and repent, because that's how we approach God, humbly, in repentance, and in surrender, and then we begin to pray for another great awakening, another revelation of Jesus and his mercy and grace to sweep this nation and heal our land! Don't give up. There is still hope! You'll find it in Jesus! America! Don't give up. Look to Jesus! So with that said. Let me share three words I felt the Lord speak into my heart to help us move forward. The first word is...

Honor. I talked about honor last year on the 4th of July. The bible says, **“Give everyone what you owe him: if you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect, if honor, then honor.” Romans 13:7** Paul wrote this in a section of his letter where he is addressing the responsibility we have as citizens of the state to honor as best we can the governing authorities. Earlier in that chapter Paul states that the authorities that exist have been established by God. Remember he is writing this to people who were living under the thumb of a wicked and immoral Emperor who was demanding to be regarded as a god. Paul would have no problem with civil disobedience, disobeying a law or demand that was immoral or unbiblical, but as much as possible he expected us to show honor and respect to those in authority over us. Honor your father and mother, honor the governing officials, honor your boss, manager, coach and teacher, those who have been placed in positions of authority over you.

We all know what has happened in America in recent weeks regarding law enforcement. We have members of our church that are law enforcement officers and we know they are men and women of integrity and faith, doing a difficult and dangerous job in the best way they can. Are there bad cops in law enforcement? Of course there are, just as there are bad folks in every profession, but to paint all law enforcement with the same broad brush is unjust, unfair and unwise, just as it would be for any profession. (All preachers, all doctors, all repairmen, etc.)

Tulsa experienced a tragic loss in the death of Sgt. Craig Johnson. From all reports he was an outstanding officer who cared deeply about his community, about our city and all of its citizens. The bible says **“Greater love has no man than this, that he would lay down his life for his friends.” John 15:13** Sgt. Johnson, in the line of duty, trying to protect this city and keep its citizens safe, laid down his life for us. Honor to whom honor is due.

I want us to take a moment to honor those who serve and have served to protect us and our freedoms in this country. If you now or in the past have served in the military or in law enforcement or in the Fire Department, would you stand so we can honor you.

It would make a difference in the future of this nation and in the future of the church if everyone would show respect and honor to one another. Think of how different it would be if politicians from the President on down spoke and showed honor to whom honor is due. We can't do anything about politicians except vote them in or out, but there is something we can do as believers. We can act differently than the world, different than the politicians and the pundits that constantly berate and belittle anyone that opposes or disagrees with them. People today don't just disagree with an idea, they feel the need to demonize or belittle the person. That's not how Christians are supposed to behave.

Paul writes, **“Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.” Romans 12:10(ESV)** As a Christian, are your words honoring? To honor means to respect, to revere, to fix value upon, to prize. That's your brother, your sister in Christ you are talking to. Are you honoring that person? Are you showing brotherly affection?

Humility. Here is another word I feel could make a difference in our culture and world. What if people approached life and each other with humility? Proverbs says **“Humility and the fear of the Lord bring wealth and honor and life.” Proverbs 22:4.** Biblical humility is seeing ourselves as God sees us, fully dependent on Jesus and his grace. We humbly recognize all we have and all we are comes from Christ alone. Biblical humility boasts in the Lord and not in our efforts or our wisdom. Humility allows us to realize we're human and fallible and we could be wrong, so we are willing to listen, to learn, to evaluate, but it also allows us to humbly rest in the Lord and truth of His word. We can doubt ourselves, but we trust in the Word of God and his truth. Biblical humility allows us to see that everyone is created in the image of God, everyone has worth and value, everyone is loved by God and is in need of His saving grace, including those on the opposing side of an issue. Biblical humility is putting our trust in the Lord and like him, being a servant to others.

What a difference it makes when we live our lives with biblical humility. Here is the recipe for surviving a pandemic and a presidential election and all the other divisive issues that may come up this year. The bible says, **“Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.” Colossians 3:12-14** Clothed with compassion, kindness,

humility, gentleness and patience. That's my outer garment and my inward character. The first thing you should encounter from a Christian is what he is clothed with – compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Is that what the world is getting or are we clothed with arrogance, pride, contempt, scorn? I'm just asking the question.

Peter writes, **“All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Humble yourselves therefore under God’s mighty hand that he may lift you up in due time.” 1 Peter 5:5-6**

There it is again, that instruction, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, preferring one another. The apostle Paul says it this way, **“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests but also to the interests of others.” Philippians 2:3-4.**

Graciously, humbly, care for each other, look out for one another. What a difference honor and humility can make. There is one more word I need to share with you if we are going to make it through all of this.

Hope. It feels a little hopeless some days doesn't it? Like this stuff is never going to end. What about the future? Several people have either asked me about or sent me the video of an A/G pastor in Kentucky who had three dreams that he shares on the video. He sees an apocalyptic event occurring in November and warns Christians to prepare, get gold and guns and get ready. What are we supposed to do? What do I think?

So let me tell you. Is all this a sign that the Lord is coming again? I've said frequently, everything is a sign the Lord is coming again. For 2,000 years we've been waiting for and expecting his return. There is no reason to stop now. We are closer to his coming than ever. “But is this the end?” What if it is? “Well, if these are the last days and the Lord is going to come back, then I want to repent and get right with God and get my house in order.” And if I don't think this is the end? “Well, then I'll just go ahead and keep living in sin the way I am.” Listen, you have no guarantee of tomorrow. Get right with God today! Right now! If some foreign government is coming to take over, or whatever is going to happen, what are you going to do? Move to the mountains and dig in? Watch Red Dawn a few times to get survival tips? What are we supposed to do? The psalmist said, **“Put your hope in God!” Psalm 42:5** This is what we do! I don't know what's coming, but I know where my hope lies – it's in Jesus! I don't

have to live in fear because I know Jesus. He's going to be with me regardless of what the future holds.

What is the basis of your hope? Having enough, money, food, guns and ammo? I'm always a little puzzled by preachers that tell us to stock up on gold and guns. I thought Jesus said something about not laying up for yourselves treasures on earth where thieves break in and steal, didn't he? And why do I need guns and ammo? In what are you placing your hope? In your arsenal? Politics? Getting the right people elected and appointed to the Supreme Court? Good idea, but it's not enough. Not if this is the end. The only thing to do is put your hope in Jesus.

Paul spoke of circumstances that caused him to despair of life. **“We are under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life...But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us...” 2 Corinthians 1:8-10** Don't despair. Rely on the Lord. Set your hope on him and know that he will continue to deliver us!

Jesus said, “Don't let your heart be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me.” Where's your hope? I don't know what the future holds but I know the Lord who is my hope. Listen to the old prophet. He lived through a pandemic. He saw everything go up in flames. He saw it, experienced it, lived through it, and here is where he landed. **“I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, ‘The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.’ The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him.” Lamentation 3:19-25**

How are we going to move forward? How are we going to make it? Let's believe God for a revelation of Jesus like never before. Let's be careful to honor one another with our words and actions, let's walk in humility and let's live in hope! Would you pray with me today?

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.