

This morning we are leaving our journey through Luke to address the situation in our nation and the world. We shouldn't be surprised at what is happening. We live in a unique time in history since the end of World War 2 when things have been reasonably stable around most of the world. Surely, individual countries have suffered, Korea, Vietnam, Syria, Venezuela, and others, along with a few pandemics like the Spanish flu, but for most of the world things have vastly improved. I'm amazed at the improvements I've witnessed in South Korea and India. However, this long period of peace and prosperity is relatively rare in history. That has resulted in an end-time scenario predicted by Peter. <sup>3</sup> *knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires.* <sup>4</sup> *They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.* 2 Peter 3:3,4 "All things are continuing as they were" is the scoffer's mindset. It should not be ours.

We should realize that life is short and fragile. The author of Hebrews reminds us: <sup>26</sup> *At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens."* <sup>27</sup> *This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain.* <sup>28</sup> *Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe,* <sup>29</sup> *for our God is a consuming fire.* Hebrews 12:26-29 What can't be shaken? -The kingdom of God, the truth of the Gospel, what Jesus has done for us, and God's Word! All else will be shaken! Jesus predicted wars and pestilences would come (Luke 21:11<sup>i</sup>). The shaking is historically more common than our long period of peaceful prosperity. And the reason God allows natural disasters and the wars that mankind creates is that it stops us in our tracks and makes us consider what is lasting – what cannot be shaken.

I think the majority of people walk around in a routine of trying to make ends meet while having as much enjoyment in life as possible. There's nothing wrong with that (Ecclesiastes 9:7-9<sup>ii</sup>). But when that is the priority and there is no relationship with God, no gratitude for all that has been given to us, no conviction of sin, then there must be some shaking for us to stop long enough to see that something is wrong. We've forgotten what life is about. Something must jolt us out of our stupor and get our attention before it is too late. Dr. John Piper writes, *"All natural disasters are a thunderclap of divine mercy... calling all people everywhere to repent and realign their lives, by grace, with the infinite worth of the glory of God."*

We see this pattern throughout the history of Israel. They turn to God and are blessed. The prosperity becomes their priority and they gradually forget God and turn to idols. God allows a disaster. They turn back to God. They are blessed, and the cycle repeats. It's been a pattern in our own history as a nation. Natural disasters are a consequence of living in a fallen world (Luke 13:4,5<sup>iii</sup>). The world is in this state because of man's sin. But God uses the disasters as a wakeup call. He shouts to us in our pain so that we lift our eyes from the mundane and look to the eternal (2 Corinthians 4:18<sup>iv</sup>).

The world apart from Jesus lives for temporary pleasures and comfort. So, when calamity strikes, the things they live for are threatened. They immediately hoard all the

creature comforts because they are fearful that they won't be able to get them. They fear the possibility of losing their lives because to them *this* life is all there is. The natural response from those with that mindset is to look out for number one. What can they do to preserve their comfort? Hanging on to their position and possessions becomes their priority. Fear of losing those things becomes overwhelming.

The Believers' reactions should line up with what we live for. **A genuine follower of Jesus Christ lives to let the life of Christ flow through them to a hurting world (2 Corinthians 4:10<sup>v</sup>).** We are naturally concerned about basic needs for our family, but the first priority is to know what God would have us do in our given situations (John 12:26<sup>vi</sup>). We realize that all we have comes from God (1 Corinthians 4:7<sup>vii</sup>). We have no ability on our own to provide or keep those things. If God is going to remove those things to cause us to trust more in Him, so be it. We will mature and be more like Christ who was completely dependent on the Father (John 5:30<sup>viii</sup>). He fed a million Jews in the wilderness, and He cares for each sparrow. Why should we worry? We will know Him as our great provider (Philippians 4:19<sup>ix</sup>). We will realize how truly faithful He is.

Even when I was off base in my understanding of Scripture, when I acted in faith on what I believed God wanted me to do, He always provided. I was hungry at times, but I never starved or was malnourished. I remember desperately praying for food for a team of six people, two of whom were children. There was a knock on the door and a person we never met told us God wanted her to deliver bags of groceries to us. We helped her unload the bags and before we could thank her and find out the story behind it, she drove away. I could tell you a lot of stories, but they all simply declare God knows our needs and will provide when we act in faith.

Many Christians today have unbiblical expectations that all should go well, that we shouldn't be sick or hungry, that God wants to prosper and bless us in all our ways so we can be happy, comfortable, and respected. Paul addressed this to some of the churches he started. Listen to what he tells us. *<sup>8</sup> Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you! <sup>9</sup> For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. <sup>10</sup> We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. <sup>11</sup> To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, <sup>12</sup> and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; <sup>13</sup> when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.* 1 Corinthians 4:8-13 Then a few verses later he tells them to follow his example (1 Corinthians 4:16<sup>x</sup>).

That is just one text out of a number we could read about the difficulties of following Jesus (2 Corinthians 11:24-27<sup>xi</sup>; Acts 14:22<sup>xii</sup>). A little later in that letter Paul tells the Corinthians that if in this life only we have hope, we are of all men most miserable (1 Corinthians 15:19<sup>xiii</sup>). And yet, many of us place our hope in this life. Then when these calamities come, we become desperate, because we are living for the wrong reasons and with the wrong expectations! We start praying for God lift the trial when it is the trial that God is using to take us to a deeper place in Him, a richer more rewarding place (Psalm 119:71<sup>xiv</sup>; James 1:2-4<sup>xv</sup>).

That is what the Apostle Paul experienced when he had his eye affliction. He prayed three times that God would remove it, and finally he got an answer (2 Corinthians 12:7-9<sup>xvi</sup>). God said, “No! It is there to keep you humble and dependent completely on me. My grace is sufficient for you as my strength is made perfect in weakness.” So Paul went on with his eye affliction until he finished his course when a Roman sword took his head off his shoulders.

And then do you know what happened? Well, I can only guess a biblical based answer for what followed. He entered into glory and received a crown of life from his Savior (James 1:12<sup>xvii</sup>; 1 Peter 5:4<sup>xviii</sup>). He heard Him say, “Well done good and faithful servant! Enter into your Master’s joy” (Matthew 25:21<sup>xix</sup>)! And Paul asked, “Lord, why did you leave me rotting in that jail cell in Caesarea for years?” And Jesus answered, “So you could write those letters you dictated to Luke which will inspire and direct the church for millennia to come and lay up for yourself a greater reward than you would otherwise have”(Matthew 6:19,20<sup>xx</sup>).

You see, sometimes the things we would complain about are the very things that take us down the path God has planned for our good. That’s why we should give thanks in all things (1 Thessalonians 5:18<sup>xxi</sup>). While the enemy of our soul wants us to murmur and go backward when things get tough, God is asking us by faith to praise and glorify Him because we know He loves us and is working all things together for our good. But we must walk by faith and not by sight to believe it. I have trouble with that. My head knows it, but I often have to speak the Word to my heart before I act on it.

We can look at this pandemic and get worried and fearful and focus on the suffering and loss, or we can look for what God is doing in the midst of it and avail ourselves to be His instruments to help those in need. We can be there to point them to Jesus so that they too need not fear. This is the time people are more likely to read that gospel of John that you hand them or to listen to your testimony. Of course, the enemy is using it to take lives and make people fear, but even more importantly God is working in it to save souls for all eternity.

How are we to respond to this pandemic? The same way the saints before us responded. Did you know a major part of the conversion of the Roman empire was due to the fact that when plagues struck, the Christians stayed behind to help the sick? Some of them died in doing so, but when the town’s people returned, they found their recovered loved ones had become Christians. Selfless service was the tool that God used to touch the hearts of the Roman people. That took courage and faith. That is what we need today. And we find it in the Holy Spirit. He makes us courageous. He gifts us with faith. We don’t have to intentionally put ourselves in danger, but we can do what God leads us to do right where we are. Our sovereign God has placed you where you are for a reason. Maybe that reason is to pray for people. Maybe it is to get out and serve them. Maybe it is to volunteer. Your courage and joy will touch lives.

We have more reason than anyone to be positive about each day. In Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians he wrote, *<sup>16</sup> So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, <sup>18</sup> as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.* 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

We are aging. Sorry, but we can't stop it. Thank God we can't, or we'd be stuck here in this sin sick world. But even though our bodies are aging, slowly falling apart, we don't lose hope. That's because we are spiritually growing, being renewed over and over by the Spirit of God as we fellowship and get in the Word (Romans 12:2<sup>xxii</sup>). And the cost of our service to the Lord now is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. In other words, we have nothing here to compare to what will be ours in that day if we stay faithful (Romans 8:18<sup>xxiii</sup>). And that is why we don't focus on this passing world, on coronavirus, on our bank account, or our bodies. That is all transient, here today and gone tomorrow. Our eyes are fixed on the unseen which is eternal. If you are in fear and anxious it is probably because your eyes are fixed on the wrong things.

Our loved ones won't be here forever, nor will we. Our possessions will be left to others. But Jesus is mine forever and I am His (Song of Songs 6:3<sup>xxiv</sup>). It doesn't get any better than that!

Consider the greatness of God who uses all these things in this fallen world to draw each person to Himself. If you talk to someone about Jesus or share your testimony, you can know that God has already been working on their heart. The enemy of our soul seems to have free reign and is wreaking havoc everywhere, but God is working in it all, even using it all to turn hearts to what really matters. That is the awesome God we serve. That is why we need not fear and why we can always trust Him (Psalm 62:8<sup>xxv</sup>).

Jesus is always the ultimate example. Look at everything that was against Him. The religious establishment wanted Him dead. The Romans feared He would lead an uprising. Herod the Great tried to kill Him as a baby. Herod's son tried to capture Him during His ministry. Finally they all got what they wanted in nailing Him to a cross, and He was still victorious. **COVID Christ Only Victorious In Death.** No one else conquered death. No one else could.

Talk about a pandemic. The worst pandemic to ever hit the earth was when Adam and Eve sinned. It kills 100% (Genesis 2:17<sup>xxvi</sup>). Today the epidemiologists are saying that plasma from a person who has overcome the virus can save someone with the virus. The only One who has overcome the virus of sin and the resulting death and then inoculate us with His own sin eradicating plasma is Jesus! He is the only One who promises eternal life and proved it by His own resurrection! Brothers and sisters, we are victorious in Him! Paul writes *<sup>14</sup> knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.* 2 Corinthians 4:14 That's why we are free of fear's grip. Death isn't our passage to judgment but our graduation to life eternal!

Knowing that is the case, you will want to be sure that you have been inoculated. The Scripture I read before the message tells us that if we have the Spirit of God living in us, we know we are living in Christ and He is in us. If we confess Jesus is the Son of God, we can know He lives in us. That is the assurance that we have been inoculated against the penalty of sin. *<sup>16</sup> So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.* 1 John 4:16

That is another way we can be sure the Savior has saved us. If we are living in love, we can know we are living in God and God is living in us. Otherwise we are living selfishly, not caring for others. It isn't just our own effort, but the love of God that has compassion for others which flows through us. That gives us confidence that we will be

fine on the day of judgment. Because just as Jesus lived a life of love, we are doing the same because of His life in us.

Verse 18 is the key I want you to really understand. <sup>18</sup> *There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.* 1 John 4:18 We fear because we know we have done wrong and there will be a day of reckoning. But if we are living in love, that fear is expelled. That's because we see in that love the life of Christ in us. If you are still afraid, afraid of the virus, afraid of judgment, afraid of people, you haven't yet experienced the love of God that eliminates all fear. To know His love is to have the assurance that everything will be okay. No matter what comes your way, the One who loves you will see you through. Then you are not focused on this world and what things you might lose. You won't fear death and punishment. God's perfect love has assured you of His grace and welcomed you into the family of God (1 John 3:1<sup>xxvii</sup>; Romans 6:23<sup>xxviii</sup>).

The last verse in that passage reminds us that love must extend to others. <sup>21</sup> *And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.* 1 John 4:21 And that leads us to where we are today. While the world sees fear and dread, we see opportunities to show the love of God. We who are not in the risk category can go to grocery store or pharmacy for those who are at risk. Those who are at risk can give encouraging phone calls. We will see needs we can meet. And then we'll start to see God at work. Those who are seeking hope will see your shining examples and lack of fear and be drawn to you so you can point them to Jesus.

This Wednesday we had our first on-line Bible study. We had twice as many as usual. People who are in other towns joined us. We might have to change the time or start another group so people in other countries can join us for fellowship. Suddenly a whole new opportunity is opened before us. The Sunday service is simulcast so our winter visitors can continue to worship with us. I'm sure we'll continue to simulcast long after the virus has gone. That is just the beginning of what we will find of God working in this situation. God is forcing the church into the world wide web.

I believe we've only seen but a small portion of all that God has for us during this time and on into the future. Let us be courageous, hopeful, joyful, servants of the living God stepping into the opportunities He sets before us. Amen?

## Questions

- 1 What is the scoffer's mindset?
- 2 What is one way God gets our attention?
- 3 What does the world live for? What do they fear?
- 4 What should believers live for? Why don't they fear?
- 5 What should believers expect in this life?
- 6 How should we respond to trials?
- 7 How are we to respond to this pandemic?
- 8 Why should we be so positive in our outlook?
- 9 Review the analogy of the plasma cure.
- 10 Why do we have no fear?

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<sup>i</sup> **Luke 21:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.

<sup>ii</sup> **Ecclesiastes 9:7-9 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do. <sup>8</sup> Let your garments be always white. Let not oil be lacking on your head. <sup>9</sup> Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun.

<sup>iii</sup> **Luke 13:4-5 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup> No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

<sup>iv</sup> **2 Corinthians 4:18 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

<sup>v</sup> **2 Corinthians 4:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

<sup>vi</sup> **John 12:26 (ESV)**

<sup>26</sup> If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

<sup>vii</sup> **1 Corinthians 4:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

<sup>viii</sup> **John 5:30 (ESV)**

<sup>30</sup> "I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.

<sup>ix</sup> **Philippians 4:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

<sup>x</sup> **1 Corinthians 4:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> I urge you, then, be imitators of me.

<sup>xi</sup> **2 Corinthians 11:24-27 (ESV)**

<sup>24</sup> Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. <sup>25</sup> Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; <sup>26</sup> on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; <sup>27</sup> in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

<sup>xii</sup> **Acts 14:22 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

<sup>xiii</sup> **1 Corinthians 15:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

<sup>xiv</sup> **Psalms 119:71 (ESV)**

<sup>71</sup> It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes.

<sup>xv</sup> **James 1:2-4 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, <sup>3</sup> for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. <sup>4</sup> And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

<sup>xvi</sup> **2 Corinthians 12:7-9 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. <sup>8</sup> Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. <sup>9</sup> But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

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<sup>xvii</sup> **James 1:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

<sup>xviii</sup> **1 Peter 5:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

<sup>xix</sup> **Matthew 25:21 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'

<sup>xx</sup> **Matthew 6:19-20 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal,<sup>20</sup> but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

<sup>xxi</sup> **1 Thessalonians 5:18 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

<sup>xxii</sup> **Romans 12:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

<sup>xxiii</sup> **Romans 8:18 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

<sup>xxiv</sup> **Song of Songs 6:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine; he grazes among the lilies.

<sup>xxv</sup> **Psalm 62:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us. Selah

<sup>xxvi</sup> **Genesis 2:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

<sup>xxvii</sup> **1 John 3:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

<sup>xxviii</sup> **Romans 6:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

If you are joining church online: Don't just listen – SING; Don't just watch – RESOND out loud; STAND; ENTER IN PRAY; CLAP; WORSHIP; EXPECT Jesus to be with us; ALLOW the Holy Spirit to awaken us to hope, trust, obedience, and confidence!