

Once in a Lifetime but not Unprecedented

Various Scriptures
(Sunday, March 22, 2020)

Opening Prayer:

*We beseech thee, Master, to be our helper and protector.
Save the afflicted among us; have mercy on the lowly;
raise up the fallen; appear to the needy; heal the ungodly;
restore the wanderers of thy people; feed the hungry;
ransom our prisoners; raise up the sick; comfort the faint-hearted.
(Clement of Rome, 1st Century)
In Jesus' name we pray,
Amen.*

Introduction:

1. As the clock struck midnight on December 31, 2019, and we looked with optimism into 2020, none of us thought we would be where we are, experiencing what we are experiencing.
2. In a few sentences, describe how you have been feeling over the last week or so.

There is no doubt what we are going through is a once in a lifetime event; but it is not unprecedented. The world has been through this before. Churches have survived similar circumstances. Christians have lived, and died, through similar circumstances. We can learn a lot about faithfully following Jesus today, from faithful followers of Jesus in the past.

Church History:

- Read Matthew 6:16-19
- What do you think Jesus meant when He said He would build His church and nothing could destroy it? How does that apply to what we are going through today?

The church was birthed in conflict and has thrived in trials and tribulations. The church, throughout her history, has cared for the poor, the widow, the orphan, the immigrant, the prisoner, the sick, and all who are outcast, living in the margins of society. Often times

endangering their own lives to do so. Often times, becoming the poor and marginalized themselves.

- Read Luke 9:23-25; John 15:13; and Matthew 7:12
- What can we learn from those verses that will help us as we live through the coronavirus?

Throughout her history, the church has ministered in and through various natural disasters, wars, plagues and pandemics. The overriding principle for followers of Jesus during these dark times was that one's life must always be regarded as less important than that of your neighbor. In other words, for the follower of Jesus, sacrificial service is of higher value than safety and security. Among other things this means instead of fear, I walk in hope; instead of hoarding, I give.; instead of fleeing, I stay; instead of isolation, I live in community.

- Read Philippians 3:7-11 and write down your thoughts on what Paul says: _____

Examples from church history: (Three examples are given below. Over the next few days, do an internet search on the plagues, especially how Christians acted during those plagues.)

1. The Antonine Plague.
2. The Plague of Cyprian.
3. The Bubonic Plague.

- What did you find the most surprising thing about how the early church responded to the plagues? Do you think the modern church would respond the same way? Why or why not?

More could be said about other plagues throughout history, and even about Mother Teresa's care for the sick and the poor in Calcutta, India, but I think you get the point. Throughout history, followers of Jesus have stepped into trials and tribulations instead of running from them or hiding from them.

Temporarily, social-distancing makes sense and will prayerfully stem the tide of this present pandemic. Temporarily, ceasing public worship service to control the spread of the pandemic through large gatherings of people, is a way to love our neighbors as ourselves. But ultimately, if it continues and if it gets worse, we should be the first one's back out in the community, caring for those with the greatest needs, and meeting together to give praise to God, regardless of personal costs or fears. Remember: *The way we serve a God we cannot see is by serving those we can see. The way we love a God we cannot see is by loving those we can see.*

FOUR TAKE-AWAYS: *What should Christ followers do during pandemics?*

1. Sacrificially Serve.
2. Take Necessary Precautions.
3. Stay in Community. (Self-quarantine, but don't self-alienate.)
4. Model peace, calm, and courage; not panic, anxiety, and fear.

1 Peter 3:15 – *“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”*

- What are some other take-aways you see from today's lesson? Of the four mentioned above, which one do you think is the most important? Why? _____

- Prayer of Healing:

*Dear Heavenly Father, the Source of all healing,
Cast the light of health and well-being on those who've been exposed to coronavirus,
those who have contracted the disease,
and those — God forbid — who contract the disease in the future.
Bless them, protect them and bring them speedily to full recovery.
Bless all who are ill with healing of body, healing of soul, and healing of spirit.
And Father, heal our anxiety and fear.
Replace it with love, faith, and courage.
We praise this in the name of Jesus, Your Son, who took all our sicknesses on Him at the cross,
Amen.*

- FCC's Prayer for 2020

As we leave this place of worship and fellowship,
may our prayers be the same as the prophets of old:

From the prophet Amos, *"Let justice role on like a river,
righteousness like a never-failing stream."*

From the prophet Micah, *"And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."*

And may we put feet to our prayers like the prophet Isaiah admonished,
*"Stop doing wrong, learn to do right!
Seek justice, encourage the oppressed.
Defend the cause of the fatherless,
plead the case of the widow."*

As we do these things, enable our lives to be *"light"* that *"will shine before men,"*
so *"they may see our good deeds and praise our Father in heaven."*
(Amos 5:24, Micah 6:8, Isaiah 1:17, and Matthew 5:16)