

## Culture Shock - Part 2

Covid Christianity

*Luke 21:10-12*

*Memory Verses: Galatians 6:9*

### MANUSCRIPT

#### Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

Last week we started a new series called, "culture shock." As we saw, we live in a very shocking culture, and it's hard not to get caught up in all of the fear and frustration, And, so, last Sunday, we laid a biblical foundation for this discussion in *Matthew 24:1-14* where we saw that there are three main things we can do to avoid being shocked and shaken; don't be led astray by the culture, don't be alarmed by the culture, and don't be ashamed of Christ. If we can avoid these three mistakes, we can possibly avoid culture shock.

Now, there are dozens of cultural issues we could focus on in this series, but I feel that we need to cover the ones that are the closest to our current situation. We want to touch on the all-to-familiar issues that are weighing on our hearts and minds right now. And, today I feel that there isn't an issue that has weighed more heavily on our hearts this year than the topic for this morning.

In November of 2019 events transpired that are still mostly a mystery. As of now there are two main theories. The first suggests that a naturally occurring coronavirus mutated from animals to humans at the Wuhan China fish market, perhaps through a bat. The second suggests that Covid 19 was created in the Wuhan laboratory. Regardless, the virus was spread and on December 31<sup>st</sup> China reported a cluster of pneumonia cases in the city of Wuhan caused by a novel coronavirus. Due to the virus spreading to 100,000 people worldwide, on March 11<sup>th</sup> WHO declared the virus a pandemic, and on March 19<sup>th</sup> stay at home lockdowns began in the United States. Now, here we are 170 days later; the death toll sits at 800k worldwide, the unemployment rate is up to 10%, our children are attending school on-line, an estimated 100,000 companies have gone out of business, and we are under a very strict mandate to wear masks at all times in public.

There is no doubt that the pandemic is the core issue of 2020. It has reeked havoc on our society, it has wrecked our economy, and it has ruined our plans in ways we could never have imagined. Nothing like this has ever happened in our lifetimes. And we can choose to let it discourage us and defeat us, or we can allow it to be used for something greater than our misery.

And, this is where we are confronted with one of our greatest personal conflicts of this year. Here's where the real struggle lies. Many

of you may feel that you have been treated unfairly by God. Many of you probably feel that you have been oppressed by the government. We say things like, how could God allow this to happen, or how could our government be so restrictive and take away our freedoms?

And in the midst of it all we are left simply thinking of ourselves. We are throwing our own private pity party. Isn't it a shame that some of us have been so focused on how this has affected us that we have neglected to see the struggles and the afflictions of those outside our homes? Or worse, we have grown bitter and disenfranchised to the point of blaming and then abandoning God.

And, so, that leaves us with a important question this morning; in the midst of Covid-19, how can we take our eyes off of ourselves, and our struggles, and focus on what God says in his Word? Which leads to another important question; what does God's Word say about Covid-19? You may be surprised to learn; a lot. Look with me if you would at *Luke 21:10-12*. Here we find an amazing clue; in *verse 11* there will be pestilences (along with a lot of the other things that we will be talking about in this series), but it ends in *verse 12* with... "for my name's sake." So, let me say that again; "There will be pestilences... for my name's sake." Words describing pestilence or plagues are used in the bible somewhere around 130 times, and just as with all things, God has a purpose for these diseases. Covid-19 is no different. It is for his name's sake. This morning it is my goal that, as we dive into scripture, we discover what our reaction as believers should be to our God, to the government, and to our neighbors as it relates to this pandemic. This morning I want us to see that.. **The Way The Church Responds To Covid Could Determine The Way The World Responds to Christ.**

#### Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

The first thing I want us to talk about is the fear we've all experienced because of the pandemic. I believe that... **Covid Gives Us An Opportunity To Practice Faith Over Fear.** Our go to verse here of course is *2 Timothy 1:7* which tells us to not have a spirit of fear but of power and love and self-control. When you are a believer of Jesus Christ you are being empowered by the Holy Spirit with power, and love, and self-control... but guess what the Holy Spirit is not giving you? Fear. In fact, because of the Holy Spirit living in you, you have a powerful ally against fear. You should not be pre-disposed towards fearlessness. *Joshua 1:9* reinforces this; "do not fear for the Lord is with you wherever you go. We have no reason to fear if the Lord is our God. Or what about *Deuteronomy 4:7* which says: "for what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us whenever we call upon him."

I have never experienced this much fear in America in my lifetime. There are so many things to be afraid of and the Covid-19 virus is at the top

of most people's lists. Since February the media has been pushing, what Steve Deace calls, panic porn concerning the virus. Everyday telling us that we are all going to be infected, we are all going to get sick, and if we dare go outside we will most certainly die. I don't know if you remember back in March we were told that the virus could kill up to 2 million deaths in the U.S.

Now, thank God those numbers were highly exaggerated, and the more we learn about the virus the more we realize that we aren't in as much danger as they originally thought, but that doesn't mean that we shouldn't still treat the threat of infection seriously. Yes, Covid is serious, yes Covid can be fatal to a select group of people... but no, we should not fear it the way those without God fear things like this.

Look at how the threat of this virus has affected Christians in general. Fear of the virus has caused us to stop coming to church, stopped small groups, stopped children's and youth ministry, and stopped various forms of outreach. The fear of this virus has basically put church as we knew it out of business for the time being. Is this what God wanted? Is this what Jesus would have done? I simply do not know. But what I do know is this; at some point our faith in God should outweigh our fear of Covid, and our obedience to gather should outweigh our fear of crowds. Don't hear what I'm not saying; smart precautions are not a bad thing, and there is nothing wrong with skipping out on church for a short time to keep you and your family safe, but at some point we must practice our faith over fear. At some point we must realize that obeying what God has commanded of us and desires of us is more important than evading a deadly disease. And, at some point living the life that we've been called to in Christ is worth the risk of possibly dying to a virus that God created. At some point we must recognize that **Covid is not greater than, nor more worthy of fear than our God.**

I've told this illustration before, but it bears repeating again. When we look at the difference between living in fear and living in faith we should observe the difference between Bison and Cows. When a storm is coming towards a herd of Bison, the Bison will run towards the storm. When a storm is coming towards a herd of cows the cows will run away from the storm. Why the very different strategies. Well cows are afraid. They are ruled by fear. They are scared of the storm and so they try to run away from it. The problem is that when they run away from it they actually prolong their exposure to it because they are now running with the storm. By running away from it they have actually gotten the opposite result that they desired. Bison on the other hand run towards the storm because they know the faster they run towards it the faster they will be out of it. Bison have a faith that by engaging in the storm they will actually be better off.

Now I know everything in this illustration doesn't have a direct

correlation to our situation with Covid, but I wonder... have we prolonged our exposure to this virus as a nation by trying to run away from it? There are many studies coming out now that say yes. What about you personally? Have you prolonged your fear of this thing by not approaching it with a greater faith in God?

We can respond to Covid better than the world simply because as believers we have a faith in a God that can do anything. So, have faith. Have faith that God is in control of your life and that he delights in your desire to embrace him by faith rather than cowering in fear. Choose faith over fear and by doing so show the world that your God is greater than Covid-19. **The Way The Church Responds To Covid Could Determine The Way The World Responds to Christ.**

So, as Christians we respond to Covid with faith, not fear, but the second thing that I think we need to address when it comes to Christians and Covid is that... **Covid Gives Us An Opportunity To Exercise Obedience.** Obedience to our authorities. Listen, I get it, you may, and probably do, disagree with our governing authorities on a variety of covid related issues; wearing masks, lockdowns, closed businesses, restaurants, movie theaters, funeral regulations, and hospital visitations. You probably have recently grown even a little more irritable and angry at our local government concerning things like schools being virtual, and sports being canceled or delayed. None of these are fun and convenient. So how do we respond?

Let's turn to **Romans 13:1-7**, where we see that God has put us in subjection to our governing authorities. We are called, by God and his Holy Word to.... I know it stings a little... be subject to government. To submit to them even when it's not fair. And you have to remember this verse was written to Christian under the Romans government. Saying that these brothers and sisters were oppressed would be a serious understatement, and yet they were called to be subject to their oppressors.

The Bible clearly states that we resist God when we resist the authorities that he has placed over us. The Bible also says here that our governing authorities are worthy of honor because of their position given by God. This isn't a democrat verses republican thing. This is a, what honors God, thing. You see, God will often ask us to do things we don't want to do because he wants to see if we are willing to obey him when it's hard to obey. For many of us, this is a test to see if we will do it our way or God's way. It's an exercise in obedience. You don't have to like your authorities, you don't have to agree with your authorities, you can even protest your authorities, but as a way of submitting to God and his sovereign plan, you must submit to those he has put in leadership positions over you. I think many of you think you are fighting the American cause for freedom... and in some ways you may be right, but your first responsibility is to God and not America.

Listen, your salvation guarantees you freedom from sin and hell... not freedom from tyranny and injustice. Listen, it is very likely that you will have to go through tyranny at some point for the cause of Christ. And that's alright, because we are fighting for eternal freedom not temporary freedom in this life. We should always remember, there is a bigger fight at hand, a spiritual fight.

So what can we do? We can negotiate. We can find compromises. We can make our voices heard in respectful ways. And, we can pray for God to change their minds. But we must not resist unless we are put in a position where it compromises our values and faith in Christ. When we resist we drive a wedge between us and the people who can either help our cause or shut down our cause. But, when we negotiate and find compromise with our authorities instead of rioting and rebelling against them we create relationships that foster Gospel opportunities. Think about all we've been able to do through Engage Danville, Better together and school tutoring, Good News in the jails and prisons, Transitions with pregnant mothers, and on and on. All of these organizations have been effective at sharing the Gospel because they have found ways to work within the government instead of against the government. And we must continue to do the same concerning Covid. Remember, **The Way The Church Responds To Covid Could Determine The Way The World Responds to Christ.**

So as Christians we respond to Covid with faith rather than fear, and by working under the authority of our government rather than against it. And the last thing I think our church needs to discuss concerning this pandemic is this; **Covid Gives Us An Opportunity To Love our Neighbors.**

Every disaster gives opportunities to serve our communities and world. But not everyone can go to Louisiana to help clean up after hurricane Laura. Not everyone can go to Colorado to help those who have been effected by the forest fires. Not everyone can go to India to help with Malaria outbreaks. So God has given us a natural disaster that effects every single place on the planet... giving every Christian the opportunity to help those in need through it. We can do this in two specific ways; 1) serving the fragile & helpless, and 2) by submitting to the faint of heart.

Let's look at the first one; serving the fragile & helpless. N.T. Wright in his new book; "God & The Pandemic," claims that the main reason for the Covid Virus is for Christians to show the love of Christ to those in need. He says, "The call to Jesus' followers, then, as they confront their own doubts and those of the world through tears and from behind locked doors, is to be sign-producers for God's kingdom. We are to set up signposts – actions, symbols, not just words – which speak, like

Jesus' signs, of new creation: of healing for the sick, of food for the hungry, and so on. This means things like running food banks, working in homeless shelters, volunteering to help those visiting relatives in prisons, and so on. These can be rewarding tasks but they, and all similar things, are also demanding. For them we will need, as Mary, Thomas and the disciples in the upper room needed, the living presence of Jesus, and the powerful breath of his Spirit. That is what we are promised." His primary evidence to support this; that our calling in this pandemic is to serve and show Christ comes from **Acts 11:27-30**. Here Agabus, a prophet, comes to Antioch and shares that there was coming a great famine over the whole world. The church responds by asking three questions. Who will be effected? Judea. What can we do? Send relief. And, who can we send? Barnabas & Saul. And this is how we must also respond. **When God sends a natural disaster, he is sending us an opportunity to mobilize as the church to help those in need.**

Did you know that the church grew to such great heights under the Roman empire mostly because of the way they helped serve the needy during times of plague? During the plagues of 170 A.D and 250 A.D the outside world couldn't believe that Christians were willing to risk their lives to help those dying of terrible diseases. But that's what we do. And it's what the world takes notice of.

But we don't just serve the fragile and helpless; we are also called to submit to the faint of heart. The CDC has told us that we can help prevent the spread of this disease by following a couple of guidelines; wear a mask, remain 6 feet apart, and wash & sanitize our hands. And, I know there are a variety of feelings on these guidelines... but regardless of how you personally feel about the effectiveness of these you should do your best to submit to your neighbors as to show them Christ. Listen, you are probably right; most of the data suggests that wearing a cloth mask is not very effective in stopping the spread of this virus, but the faint of heart are put at ease when you wear a mask. What message are you sending to someone who is concerned about this virus when you refuse to wear a mask around them? Are you okay telling them that your feelings are more important than their health? **Matthew 5:40-42** says that we should not refuse those who ask something of us. **Ephesians 5:21** says that we should submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. We can show the love of Christ by simply doing something as simple as wearing a mask when we don't want to. It doesn't matter if you are right on the data... it matters if you are showing love to those in need. I've said it before and I'll say it again... **it's always better to be righteous than to be right.** Listen, you probably won't lead someone to Christ simply by wearing a mask but you most certainly can turn them away from Christ by refusing to. **The Way The Church Responds To Covid Could Determine The Way The World Responds to Christ.**

## Application

So where does all of this leave us today? What is the takeaway? When Covid Is over and you evaluate how you handled it as a Christian you should be able to look and see that you brought God glory. You should be able to proudly admit that through it all you... had faith, obeyed God, and served those in need for his name's sake.

Have you kept your faith in God strong. Has it allowed you live with courage amidst these trying times? Hopefully by putting your faith into practice your faith has grown even more during this time.

Have you obeyed God. You may have had some strong disagreements with the way your government handled the pandemic and suspended some of your freedoms, but have you subjected yourself to the law and obeyed as unto the Lord. By being obedient when you don't want to you will grow more mature in Christ and possibly create avenues by which you can be used in your community for his glory.

Have you stepped up and helped those in need? By sharing your time and resources with those who are struggling during this time you can share the love of Christ with someone else and begin a relationship that may lead them to Christ.

## Conclusion

The only reason Covid-19 exists is to bring glory to Christ; it is for his name's sake. The short of it is that we may never know exactly why God allowed this to happen. There are probably a billion different variables or things that God saw that needed to be accomplished through this virus. We aren't called to know why, we are called to accept his will. His will is that we use every opportunity to grow in discipleship and share his Gospel. [Carriers Video](#)

Covid Christianity is simple. [Galatians 6:9](#) says, do not grow weary in doing good. God's desire, and our desire is that you would not grow weary. Rather allow this once in a life-time pandemic to be an opportunity for you to share the love of Christ with those around you. Remember, that he has allowed Covid -19 for his name's sake.