

“Responding to the Pandemic – Part 1”
Proverbs 1:1-7
(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. We are returning after exactly two months of quarantine, a stay at home order that demanded that everyone shelter at home while the invisible enemy known as COVID-19 moved upon our nation.
2. Most of us have never faced anything like this in our lifetime. It has been devastating in many ways. All of us are hoping to put it behind us and look to brighter days ahead. But what about the future? What about future pandemics? In this global age the world has become very small. Travel across the globe has become easy and common. Our economies are interconnected. It isn’t a matter of if we will face another pandemic. It is when. And we shouldn’t pretend that this one is over. We are only in the first wave. If history is an indicator, there is more to come.
3. How are we to respond to the next crisis? And how do we evaluate the current response? This is a good question.
With every crisis, every emergency there are decisions to be made. There are missteps, underreactions, overreactions. There are responsibilities placed upon us. This is true of both individuals and governments.
This is when it is important 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."
 - A. The word for “prove” (δοκιμάζω) means to analyze, test, examine
It describes being able to rightly discern the right course. How do we discern such things?
 - B. We must guard against the status quo – the mindset of this world. Instead, our minds must be shaped by the Word of God.
 - C. 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.
 - D. I want us to consider this subject. I title this sermon, “Responding to a Pandemic.”
It can also be applied to the countless decisions that impact our future.
4. First of all, what is the proper response of our civil authorities?
Civil authorities or governments have a duty to respond. There has been much discussion and dialogue regarding our civil authorities during this time. There have been some abuses of power but also a wonderful time for evaluating and reinforcing the liberties guaranteed by our Constitution, which is our ultimate civil law. Samuel Rutherford developed the principle of *Lex Rex* in a book by the same name published in 1644. *Lex Rex* refers to the law as king emphasizing the rule of law. Our laws have been reinforced during this time and there will be further reinforcement in the days ahead.

5. Every human being is to be under civil authority – **Romans 13:1-7**
- A. The chief duty of civil authorities is to administer justice – to maintain the order established by God. Civil authority is one of God’s blessings of restraining grace upon sinful men.
A secondary duty of civil authority is to protect the lives and property of those under its dominion. Under Calvin’s Geneva both hospitals and prisons were a part of the social reforms he promoted.
 The civil authority wields the sword both in administering justice and in protecting those under its care. Civil governments are to reflect the goodness and provision of God. Our civil authority reflects this duty to protect in many ways. The FDA for example helps assure the safety of the food and drugs for sale in the U.S.
 Various regulations have been established to protect the public safety. The Fire Marshal determines whether or not we are permitted to occupy this building. There are building codes – electrical, plumbing, mechanical. Years ago, when I owned a restaurant, I would dread our monthly inspections by the health department – they had the authority to shut down my business.
- B. It is also essential that civil authorities bow before the sovereign reign of God. God is supreme. He must be worshipped and His Laws must be obeyed.
1. The authority of the civil government is not absolute and it must be shared with the other realms of authority that God has ordained. For example, the civil government should not infringe upon parents raising their children unless there is clear violation of civil laws. Many civil governments have difficulty sharing their power.
 2. Nor should they infringe upon the church. The church is not a non-essential appendage but maintains God granted ecclesiastical authority. Our Constitution recognizes this and protects it.
 3. It is important that the civil authorities do not abuse those under their care through heavy handed control or acts of injustice.
 These principles should be maintained even during times of crisis although extreme circumstances sometimes call for extreme measures.
 - a. I believe vaccines should be left to the liberty of the individual, but the Supreme Court ruled in the late 1800’s a city had the authority to demand the smallpox vaccine for the public good.
 - b. The President can declare a state of emergency which signals the implementation of emergency provisions.
 - c. In extreme cases martial law has been implemented. Martial law is when the military assumes power and certain liberties are suspended. It has happened on numerous occasions – the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the Great Chicago Fire, the San Francisco earthquake.
- C. Even with heavy-handed control, it seldom justifies civil disobedience.
Romans 13:1 NAU - "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities."
 1. This has been a question debated by Christians from the beginning. When is it lawful to disobey our civil authorities? Godly pastors debated this at the start of the Revolutionary War.

2. Even when wicked and insane Nero was the emperor Peter wrote:
1 Peter 2:13-15 – “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.”
 God often gives a nation the ruler they deserve. He told Israel regarding Nebuchadnezzar:
Jeremiah 27:17 NAU - "serve the king of Babylon, and live!"
3. Paul instructs the church to pray for kings in their public assembly that they might lead a quiet and peaceful life.
 Calvin tells us: “In these words, he recommends the condition of the Church to their protection and guardianship.”
4. Civil disobedience is only justified when obedience to the government demands disregarding the commands of God.
 John Brown of Edinburgh wrote: “When the human ordinance contradicts the Divine ordinance, requiring us to do what God forbids, or forbidding us to do what God requires, the rule is plain: ‘We ought to obey God rather than man.’ Nothing short of this, however, can warrant a Christian to withhold obedience from a law of government under which, in the providence of God, he is placed; and even when conscience may compel him to non-obedience, he is quietly and patiently to suffer the penalty which the law imposes in his non-obedience.”¹
5. The Bible does not command a particular form of government.
 There are monarchies, aristocracies, dictatorships, communism, democracies and so forth.
 We have been particularly blessed to live under a constitutional republic. We are governed by rule of law. Our constitution provides guarantees that must not be infringed upon.
 We have the right of appeal to judicial review and the right of protest. We have the freedom of assembly, freedom of speech, and a free press help to protect our freedoms.
6. Our Constitutional rights can be difficult to evaluate during national emergencies. During this pandemic the federal government and every state have declared a state of emergency. During such emergencies the government has the right to order restrictions that impede our liberties. They can impose curfews limiting our normal movements. Quarantines are another example. A quarantine is basically incarceration without due process. The stay at home order was not an infringement upon our constitutional rights. And suspending our worship services was not in violation of the Law of God.
7. Suspension of law by executive order is not without limits.
 At the core of our constitutional republic are restrictions on the king’s power and authority.

¹ John Brown, *1 Peter, Geneva Series Commentary*, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), Page 350.

6. Knowing the reality of future pandemics, how should our government respond?
How should we as individuals respond?
The answer is the same for both the civil government, as well as individuals.
How should we respond?
 7. This is a serious question and it basically has a two-fold answer. Considering this question not only helps us to understand our current pandemic – which has not come to an end; it will help us understand future times of crisis of all sorts.
We must respond with caution (wisdom).
We must respond with confidence (courageous trust in God).
- I. We must respond with caution – wisdom and prudence – **Proverbs 1:1-7**.
- A. There are difficult decisions that often confront us in life
 1. How do we know the proper course of action?
 2. Often, we are brought to the end of ourselves. Sometimes there are no easy answers. We cry out, Oh God, what should I do?
 3. We pray for wisdom that exceeds our understanding
 - a. Our problem and challenge is we don't know the future.
There are often many facets of a situation we cannot know.
So often after the fact we find people launching their attacks as if they knew the future the whole time. They complain why did you do it that way? The saying, "Hindsight is 20/20" rings true.
 - b. Even when we think we are pursuing a proper course of action we understand the rule of unintended consequences—outcomes that we did not foresee.
 - c. We hate those times we look back and ask, "What was I thinking?"
 4. Solomon understood the need for wisdom beyond ourselves
Proverbs 1:1-7
Proverbs 1:2 NAU - "To know wisdom and instruction, To discern the sayings of understanding"
Proverbs 1:4 NAU - "To give prudence to the naive"
 - a. While his focus is upon ethical wisdom, it applies to practical wisdom as well. They often intersect. Wisdom was Solomon's greatest treasure. He equated wisdom with knowing God.
Proverbs 9:10 NAU - "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."
 - b. Wisdom is ultimately found in knowing Christ
Colossians 2:3 NAU - "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."
 - c. Without a Christian worldview shaped by Scripture we are doomed to continually arrive at wrong conclusions.
 5. We trust our lives to God, who works all things according to His holy will.
 - B. Trusting God's Providence does not excuse us from careful planning and wise decisions.
 1. We cannot simply step back and say, I'll trust God. Of course, we trust God, but God expects us to carefully evaluate every situation and move forward with the appropriate caution.
It would be irresponsible for us to ignore threats upon our lives.

2. John Calvin: “For he who has fixed the boundaries of our life, has at the same time entrusted us with the care of it, provided us with the means of preserving it, forewarned us of the dangers to which we are exposed, and supplied cautions and remedies, that we may not be overwhelmed unawares. Now, our duty is clear, namely, since the Lord has committed to us the defense of our life, - to defend it; since he offers assistance, - to use it; since he forewarns us of danger, - not to rush on heedless; since he supplies remedies, - not to neglect them.”²
- C. So how do we evaluate present decisions that impact the future?
1. We can’t afford to take the proverbial ostrich approach as we go through life—the approach where we hide our head in the sand—pretend it doesn’t exist. We can’t dismiss or underestimate threats hoping they will go away.
 2. First and primary, every situation and every decision must be held under the scrutiny of God’s Word. The Bible shines brightly upon our life.
Psalm 119:105 KJV - "Thy word *is* a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."
 3. As Christians we seek Scripture first. We seek God’s wisdom and guidance. We seek counsel from those who can help us rightly apply the Scriptures.
After seeking Scripture we turn to earthly knowledge. We seek counsel from those who have gone through similar situations and glean from their experience. We examine the available data, knowing that models and forecasts can be notoriously unreliable.
 5. We can’t know the future with certainty, but we can gain wisdom from the past. We learn from past successes and failures. Have there been other pandemics? Indeed, there have. What wisdom can we gain from history? 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic was caused by an H1N1 virus. It is estimated that 500 million people or 1/3 of the earth’s population became infected. The number of deaths is estimated at 50 million worldwide with about 675,000 in the United States. It was a novel virus with little immunity among the population. The response to the virus was sorely lacking with devastating results.
 - a. On September 28, 1918, Philadelphia officials refused to cancel a parade that drew 200,000 spectators, many of whom contracted the Spanish flu – 12,000 Philadelphians died of it.
 - b. On Oct.1 *The New York Times* quoted the city’s health commissioner, Royal Copeland, saying the pandemic “has been checked.” This turned out to be erroneous – the disease killed 30,000 New Yorkers.
 - c. WWI was coming to a close and they were careful not to distract from the war effort, even while thousands were dying from the flu. In his speeches President Wilson never mentioned the pandemic.

² John Calvin. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 1, Chapter 17 (Kindle Locations 3556-3560). Kindle Edition.

- d. These historical facts are well-known and history warns against repeating an inadequate response.
The consequences were horrific. Hospitals were overwhelmed and only the most-sick received treatment. The rest were forced to die at home.
Well intentioned leaders today feared to repeat the under response.
5. 1958 Pandemic (H2N2) – 1 million deaths worldwide, 116,000 in the U.S. This strain originated in East Asia. This one is also well-remembered.
6. 1968 Pandemic (H3N2) – 1 million deaths worldwide, 100,000 deaths in the US. It was also called the Hong Kong flu. It continues to circulate today as seasonal influenza. There is now widespread immunity to it as well as seasonal flu shots. But it is continually mutating.
- a. These mutations are referred to as Antigenic drift meaning there are changes to surface proteins of the virus. They are antigens still recognized by our immune systems and capable of triggering an immune response.
- b. On occasion the mutation brings about an Antigenic shift – an abrupt major change resulting in new proteins which are unrecognized by our immune systems.
7. One such mutation brought about the H1N1 virus of 2009. It was a major mutation, but it was still influenza. Most people had little immunity to this new strain, although most older adults had some degree of immunity. There were over 60 million cases in the U.S. and 12,469 deaths. With this pandemic there was much over-hype and the total was far less than the predicted 65,000.
As the outbreak spread, CDC began receiving reports of school closures and implementation of community-level social distancing measures. Measures included staying home when ill unless to seek medical care, avoiding large gatherings, and telecommuting).
Most people in the U.S. who had become infected did not become seriously ill and recovered without hospitalization.
8. December 31, 2019 – the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission reported a cluster of pneumonia cases. A novel Coronavirus was eventually identified. It was called novel because it was formerly unknown. It was not influenza. There was no immunity across the human population and it was capable of unrestrained spread.
January 22 – the WHO issued statement that there was human to human transmission in Wuhan.
January 30 – WHO reported 7818 cases worldwide.
February 26 – first recorded case in the U.S. in California
Feb. 29 first death in Washington State
March 11 – COVID-19 was classified as a pandemic
There were six cases reported in New Orleans – 2 weeks after Mardi Gras
By March 19 there were 392 cases.
By March 23 the number of cases had passed 1000 and we were put in quarantine.
By March 26 the number had climbed to 2300 cases.
Five days later the number was 5300 – it seemed out of control.

9. Obviously, this is a threat that needed to be taken seriously.
 - a. It is novel – unknown before December. This isn't influenza that has been around for 100 years and our bodies respond quickly to it. This virus could spread like wildfire. There was no way to know. Mortality from influenza is around 1%. We have vaccines. Mortality from COVID-19 is hovering at around 6%
 - b. There were too many unknowns. We still don't know what the second and third waves will look like. Where influenza infects around 1.3% of the population annually COVID-19 is currently running about 3.5% but no one really knows. 25-50% of infected people are asymptomatic.
 - c. Like any other situation where we have limited information the proper course of action is to proceed cautiously.
What is the proper course of action?
10. Unfortunately, too much of the response has been driven more by fear than by reasonable action.
There have been three primary motives behind the pandemic response
 - a. First, there are those who had legitimate concerns, both as individuals and as civil leaders. I think in the interest of grace, most of our leaders are in this category—people in a difficult position trying to do the right thing.
 - b. Second, there are leaders who are power hungry. They see this as an opportunity to seize trillions 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. Thankfully, they are in the minority, but many are in high places.
 - c. Third, there is the response of fear. This is the secondary pandemic—a pandemic of fear and it has infected multitudes. Even Christians have been infected. This has had an impact upon the response of many. Even with the relaxing of restrictions, our economy will be slow to recover because of the fear of people to move forward.
Tonight, we'll look specifically at the need for us to face this courageously.

Conclusion:

1. Life upon the earth is often complicated. We are continually confronted with difficult situations that demand difficult choices and difficult decisions. It demands caution and a Biblical mind.
2. Most important, it demands a Christ-centered heart that sees Him seated upon His throne. It is too easy for us to become blinded by the affairs of this life and forget our chief focus. “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. . . “
3. Our ultimate response in every situation of life must always be, How can my life bring you the greatest glory this day?