

The Greater 19s



That You Need to Know

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Introduction

I pray that wherever you are, you too have had the opportunity to just spend some time in worship and in praise before God. That is what is most important as we look forward to seeing the end of this pandemic. I don't know when the end is going to be; none of us do. But we know that the end will come and so we're thanking God for that.

I want to share with you in light of our current challenge with COVID-19, the novel coronavirus. I want to review a little bit of information as the introduction to my message today.

The COVID-19 pandemic is caused by the new coronavirus that emerged in China in 2019. It is diagnosed with a laboratory test. Clinical trials to develop a coronavirus vaccine are underway. Generally, COVID-19 is passed from person to person primarily by droplets/aerosols from unmasked coughing, sneezing and close-contact talking. It has been detected in all regions of the country. It appears that symptoms develop within 2-14 days of exposure. The virus is named Coronavirus because under a microscope it appears in structure with little pointed crowns or pointed thorns around it that look like a crown or corona.

What are the main symptoms?

According to the CDC, symptoms of COVID-19 include:

- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fever
- Chills
- Muscle pain
- Sore throat
- New loss of taste or smell

Other less common symptoms have been reported, including gastrointestinal symptoms like nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea.

It is recommended that you seek emergency medical care immediately for any of these signs:

- Trouble breathing
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- New confusion
- Inability to wake or stay awake
- Darkening lips or face

How do you protect yourself?

- Wash your hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
- Use hand sanitizer (with at least 60% alcohol content).
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces frequently with soap/approved disinfectant.
- Avoid close contact with others (outside of immediate family).

This is why most of us are staying home - because we want to stop the spread. While some people may say that it's not as damaging as some other diseases, it seems to be deadly and to spread very quickly. This is why our government and other persons in leadership have asked us to stay at home, to avoid contact with others if we can, particularly because there are people who are carrying the virus without even knowing it.

What has been the impact?

We have had to do what's called “social distancing,” which means that we don't get physically close to each other anymore. We have had the closure of nonessential businesses. There is what's been introduced as “shelter-in-place,” meaning that you shelter in your own house. Schools are being closed. There have been many deaths, and now we're dealing also with economic instability. Just the other day the US Congress and the President signed a trillion-dollar bill to help with the economic effects of COVID-19. So, the impact has been very great. Yet as great as the impact of COVID-19 has been, there are some greater “nineteens.” That's the title of my message: **The “Greater 19s” That You Need to Know.**

There are some things that are greater than COVID-19. I want to introduce in this message the fact that temporary, natural things have a way of pointing us to eternal, spiritual things. Romans 1:20 teaches us that the invisible things of nature that can be seen point to some things of God that cannot be seen. There is a principle involved. The principle is that everything you can see, particularly the things in nature point to something spiritual, something greater. I believe COVID-19 is one of those things that's pointing us to greater eternal and spiritual truth. I want to pinpoint some of those greater, weightier, spiritual “19s” that the COVID-19 virus is pointing out to us.

Chapter 1

Mark 5:19

As you may have guessed, all of the verses I will use are going to end in “19” to coincide with COVID-19. Follow along as I expound upon not only what the verses say, but how they help to point us to a greater revelation. I believe that God can use everything that comes in our lives to point us to a greater spiritual truth. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:17, that “our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

To be clear, I'm not saying that God causes these things—because Proverbs 19:3 says this: “The foolishness of man perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth against the Lord.” There are things that *we* do that cause circumstances in our life, but God can and does use them.

“Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee” (Mark 5:19).

The first “19” that is greater than COVID-19 is this: **We need to come back to understanding that our greatest ministry is at home.** For those of you who don't remember the details of this story, it is about a man who was called the Gadarene demoniac. This man's condition was so terrible that he lived in tombs. They had tried to bind him with fetters and chains and could not. One version of this story says that people would not even walk by the place where he was. He was in the tombs, day and night, crying and screaming and cutting himself. Jesus comes along and casts the legion of demons out of him and he is healed. The man is so thankful, so grateful. He says to Jesus, “I want to go where you go.” Jesus gave him a “19” that all of us need to remember. I believe this virus is helping us to remember this—the greatest ministry you have starts at home.

One of the things we have done as a nation is that we have taken things out of the home and put them on the state. We have taken education out of the home, put it on the state. We've taken Bible study out of the home, put it on the church. We've taken discipline out of the home and put it on someone else. We've taken support out of the home and put it on someone else. This virus is helping us to learn that the greatest ministry we have and the thing that we should be spending most of our time doing is building up the home.

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You cannot have a strong church if you don't have a strong home. You cannot have strong schools if you don't have a strong home. You cannot have a strong nation if you don't have strong homes because the church is built up of the homes; the school is reflective of the home; the nation is reflective of the home. If we let the home go, we might as well throw out the rest of it because all we're doing is spending more and more money trying to get something done that is best done in the home.

I guarantee you that if we spend this time of isolation in our homes, fasting and praying before God, when we come back together, our churches are going to be on fire. Paul asks in 1 Corinthians 14:26, how is that when you come together, everyone has a song, everyone has a hymn, everyone has a tongue, everyone has a doctrine...? And the point he makes is that when we spend time alone with God, when we come together, it makes our church all the better.

But if we don't spend time building up the home, and if we come to church trying to get something that we should have gotten at home, the church becomes bogged down. Sometimes even in simple things, when we try to get out of the church what we should be getting at home, the church is bogged down. Unfortunately, sometimes even in ministry, we come to church to try to get the respect that we want to get at home. We want to have the kind of leadership in the church that we should be getting at home. The whole church then is held captive because instead of ministering your gift out of a free heart, out of love for God under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, we're trying to be discovered. We are trying to get people to build us up and lift us up, and that should have happened at home.

COVID-19 is pointing us to a greater thing, to a more spiritual thing, and that is the greatest ministry is at home. One of the things our elected officials have often said is that you are best protected at home. That is a spiritual principle. You are best protected at home. You're best protected in the home when you leave every morning and you pray together as a family, and you hug and kiss each other, and tell each other that you look good. So that when you go out into the world, you're not looking for anything else. You're looking to give. I believe that's one of the things God is pointing to in this time.

Let's look at some other witnesses in Scripture. In 1 Timothy 5:8 Paul tells Timothy that the person that does not care for especially those of his own household is worse than an infidel and has denied the faith. The greatest ministry begins at home. Charity starts at home. Being good to people starts at home. Living the Christian life starts at home.

So, you are tired of being at home, stuck with someone that you don't like? This is the time to get over that hump. If you can't like the person that you lay down with every night, or the person that you sit at the table with every day, or the person that hopefully you speak to every morning, it's going to be tough to genuinely minister to someone else. Your ministry begins at home. In Genesis 18:19 God says of Abraham—I know him. He is going to teach his children. I can reveal things to him because he is the priest of his home; he is the teacher at home. He is someone that's going to lead his home first.

It is important during this COVID-19 pandemic that we learn that our greatest ministry is at home. We have to build up the home. The church needs to be built up, but the church needs to turn around and try to build up the home. That's why it's important that we do things to keep fathers and mothers doing well. That's why it's important that we have programs that support the home (not take the place of the home). I know that there are times when the home

doesn't do what it's supposed to do, and the church has to step in but let that be a second or third resort. Don't let that be the first thing. Build up the home.

In Mark 7:11-13 Jesus says something that people did not like. They were talking about bringing gifts, tithes and offerings to the church, but Jesus denounced the way they did it. What they did was say, "Mom and Dad, I know that this extra gift that I have may be useful to you but I dedicated it to the church. I know you need it, but I dedicated it to the church, and you can't have it." What Jesus is saying to them is this, "Look, you have made the word of God of none effect because you do not honor your father and your mother."

Again, the point goes back to this: we want to do things outside the home, but we have to make sure home is taken care of first. It is great to give things to the church. It is great to come out to church. It is great to bake pies and cakes for your pastor or for other ministers of the gospel. But you know what? If your family is hungry, try to feed your family first. There's a time when God says make a cake for the man of God first (1 Kings 17:13). There is a place for that, but those times are "few and far between." If your family is hungry, take care of your family. Don't try to be super-spiritual outside of the house. Take care of the home first.

COVID-19 is helping us to see that the greatest ministry we have is in the home. While you are at home, while you are "stuck at home," build up your house, make it a home, make it a place of love. Make it a place to which you are glad to return. Make it a place where you have all that you need. Make it a place where you maximize all that's there; a place where you get to know people who are there rather than just living with a bunch of strangers. The "greater 19" is that the greatest ministry starts at home. Before leaving earth, Jesus told his disciples, start your ministry first in Jerusalem, then Judea, and then go to Samaria (Acts 1:8).

Chapter 2

Luke 5:19

“And when they could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus” (Luke 5:19).

Here is the background for those of you who may not be familiar with the Scripture. There are four men that have a friend. This friend has the palsy—he is paralyzed, and Jesus is in a house teaching. There are so many people around Jesus that the friends cannot get in through the front door. So, they get a brilliant idea. Rather than just letting their friend remain paralyzed, they said, let's go perhaps up the stairs and open the tiles in the roof and lower him down through the top of the ceiling. The greater thing is this: **Faith often has to overcome convenience in order to get the job done.**

How does COVID-19 show us that? As a nation we have been so used to convenience that we don't know what to do with ourselves. We are so used to having everything at the tip of our finger. We're used to getting in our car and going wherever we want to go; to doing everything at work; to having people wait on us. We are used to having everything we want, whenever we want, however we want and now COVID-19 has a lot of us on lockdown. Things are not as convenient as they used to be. We can't do all that we want to do.

Sometimes God has to allow inconvenience so that our faith will kick into action. Because as long as things are easy and convenient; as long as things are such that we can do whenever we want to, we take things for granted. I've never heard so many people talk about wishing they could go back to church. Some people (not those that are saying that) wouldn't go to church when they could because it was so convenient to go or not go. Sometimes God has to allow inconvenience so that we can kick our faith into action and to we realize that we can't just slide through life, as the old song goes, “on flowery beds of ease.” We have to keep our faith sharp. We have to keep our faith up. We have to keep our faith going. No matter if you have a job or not, you have to keep your faith going. Even if you can go to the grocery store, you need to keep your faith going. Even if you can do everything you want to do, you must keep your faith up. Don't ever get to a point where convenience in life robs you of your faith. Faith gets the job done. And so sometimes there has to be an inconvenience so that you will know that, and so that you can show God how much you really want something.

There are many times in Scripture when God seemed to be testing people. James says, “God does not tempt people with evil” (James 1:13), so we're not talking about evil things. We remember the Syrophenician woman (Matt. 15:21-28) who came to the disciples and said, I need some help with my sick child. The disciples wanted to send her away. She came to Jesus

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and she said, “Lord, help me.” And Jesus said something to her that we might consider to be a racial slur. He said, “it is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it unto the dogs.” And she replied, “that's true Lord. But even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.” What did Jesus say to her after that? “Oh, woman, great is your faith.” It is not convenient, but your faith was great. The inconvenience of the time pushed her faith into action. What about Naaman the leper (2 Kings 5)? The Bible says a little maid told him, to go to Elisha and he will be able to cure you of this illness. Naaman came to Elisha's tent and Elisha sent someone tell him to go and wash in the Jordan River.

Naaman was angry and he said, “I thought surely he would have come to the door and said something to me, or prophesied, or laid hands on me, or anointed me with oil or something.” But it was the inconvenience of going and washing in a dirty, nasty river that kicked his faith into action. And sometimes ladies and gentlemen, particularly in our country, convenience has made it such that we have no faith. Now that things are not as convenient as they once were, we're “pulling our hair out;” we're screaming; we're crying; we're doing and saying all kinds of desperate things. But faith often has to overcome convenience in order to get the job done.

Second Kings 7:3 tells us of four leprous men outside of the gate of Samaria, and there was a famine in the city. Lepers, at that time, were not allowed to be in the city with everyone else. So, they were sitting outside the gate and they asked themselves one question that changed everything for them and the city. That question was “why are we sitting here until we die?” If we go in the city, we may die, or they may kill us. If we stay here, we're going to die. Let's get up and do something. We've got to go pass convenience. Let's go pass the fact that we're lepers and let's do something.

John 9 records the story of a man that was born blind. Jesus put some mud on his eyes, and said to him, “Go wash in the pool of Siloam.” Now, if you are born blind more than likely you have no any idea where the pool of Siloam is, or if you do, you have to tap your way along and sort of figure your way out. But that's what Jesus told him to do. That's what activated his faith—getting to the point where he had to get past his convenience. You may be in a situation where things are not as convenient as they should be or as they used to be, but you get everything done. Maybe you are a single mom who is at home with all of your kids and it is difficult to deal with everyone being stuck in the same house. It is not convenient. But sometimes faith has to kick past convenience. Sometimes God has to allow our crutches to be taken away in order for us to walk. Sometimes God has to allow those crutches that we were leaning on to be pulled out from under us so that we use our own legs. It is time to use your own legs; to put your faith into action. Let God do what He said He would do in your life. Don't just sit or lay there and feel sorry for yourself. No, it's not convenient being there by yourself. But if you have a pencil, if you have a piece of paper, if you have a computer, start writing people that may be in a worse situation than you are. If you have nieces or nephews or grandchildren, start writing them letters. Start documenting your life in letters. Let the inconvenience of where you are now force you to do something that you should have been doing already. Faith often has to overcome convenience in order to get the job done. COVID-19 is teaching us that there's a “greater 19” and that is that we need to do what we need to do in order to get things done.

Chapter 3

Acts 10:19

“While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee.” (Acts 10:19).

Peter is on the house-top where he had seen a vision. In the vision he saw all kinds of four-footed beasts on a sheet. These beasts were typically considered unclean to the Jews. The Lord told Peter to arise and eat. Peter said, “not so Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean” (Acts 10:14). Then in verse 15 Jesus tells him not to call unclean that God has cleansed.

In verse 19 Peter is doubting what this vision meant. So, God sends Cornelius’ messengers to him. This is one of those “greater 19s”. Peter thought on the vision, and the Spirit said unto him, “Behold, three men seek thee.” Now, what is the “greater 19” that God is pointing us to in this period of isolation? Simply this: **God speaks His revelations to us when we get quiet enough to hear Him.** For some of us, this is as quiet as we have been probably in years. This is as long as you’ve stayed at home in years. This is the longest time you’ve spent with your family in years and the longest time you’ve spent without running here and running there, being at the office until midnight then getting up at six o’clock in the morning to do it again. This is the longest time you’ve spent without working double shifts or whatever it is that you do. Maybe it’s hanging with the boys or being at the club. This is the longest period of isolation you have had in a long time and it’s about to drive you a little bit “stir crazy.” You can’t wait to get out. Some of you may be in a cabin somewhere or up in the mountains. Some of you may be in a small town somewhere and you are stuck inside. But sometimes God allows things like these so that He can get you quiet enough to hear what He has to say. Because as long as the roads and the restaurants are open, as long as things are going on, we will keep running, going “ninety to nothing.” We always have something to do. We’re on our cell phone, or on our watches. We have to communicate with everyone, so we never get quiet enough to hear what God is saying.

God’s revelations come when we get quiet enough to hear them. Peter is praying on top of a house. He is finally getting quiet enough and God is beginning to reveal to him that there are people down there waiting to say something to him. God is saying that there’s something I want to say to you; something I want to do through you. There’s a direction in your ministry that I want to change. And again, I understand sometimes you are so busy doing things that you don’t take the time to realize God is getting ready to make a shift in direction. You have to be quiet.

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In 1 Kings 19, Elijah is running from Jezebel. He had run for a long time, gets tired and decided to rest. He wakes up, the angels feed him, and he runs again and ends up on a mountain, in a cave. The Bible says there was a wind among other things, that came but God was in none of those things. Then it says, there was a still small voice that said to Elijah, “What are you doing here?” And Elijah lays out his complaint and God says to him, “Okay, now when you go back, I want you to anoint Jehu to be King. I want you to anoint Elisha as prophet in your stead; and I want you to do this and I want you to do that. What was God doing? God is shifting his (Elijah’s) ministry. But if he had never gotten to that desperate place in life, if he had never been run out of town by Jezebel, he never would have gotten to a place where he was quiet enough to hear what God was saying. You’re isolated now. You’re at home now. You can’t run like you’re used to. You can’t hang out like you used to. Let this be a time when you allow God to speak to you. Maybe God is trying to give you a revelation of something.

Whatever period of time this COVID-19 lasts, be it a month, two months, or if it spreads out to six months—if it goes to the worst extreme, may that six months of time be the greatest period in your life because you finally were still enough for God to speak to you.

At one point the apostle Paul was in Arabia for a long time. He didn’t talk to anybody, but he says during that time “I received this gospel. To make sure that what I was receiving was right, I went to Peter and some of the other apostles and shared with them what God had shared with me. They could add nothing to it because what God had given to them, God had given to me. They did it in a group. God did it with me in isolation.”

John was on the isle of Patmos because he was being persecuted. History has it that he was boiled in oil and thrown out on the isle of Patmos to die. But then Revelation 1:9 says this: “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day.” Then he said, “God began to talk to me,” (and I want to add one part though this is not in scripture), “You’re not out here to die, John. I’ve got something to say to you. Write to the churches.”

You are not going through this to die. You are not being isolated to die. You’re not being separated to die. You are not being put where you are to die. There’s revelation coming. Be quiet enough to hear what God is saying. Be sensitive enough to know what God wants to say to you because God’s revelations come when we get quiet enough to hear them. And sometimes God has to allow everything to be shut out the way it should be.

I remember when I was a child growing up in the rural South, there was a time when the TV used to go off around 10 o’clock. But then there were times when tornadoes would come, and we would turn the TV off and we would just sit quietly. Some of the older people would say, you need to be quiet because God is talking. And the point they were making is that sometimes everything needs to be shut off. I love the country, so I’m not saying this in a derogatory manner. If you can just be quiet and hear what God is saying, I say to you, America, and I say to you, church in America, and churches across the world—be quiet because God is talking.

Chapter 4

Acts 19:19

“Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver” (Acts 19:19).

Now, what's the “greater 19” that God is showing to us? **Moving forward sometimes involves actions that cut you off from your previous path.** As a nation, and even as Christian people, we have been stuck in a rut. We have been on a path that is the road to convenience. We're on the road of doing everything like we've always done it. We've gotten into a mold and we just want to stay in that mold. We think church is the building. I believe what God wants to show us that even if the building is closed, the church should never be closed. There's always something going on in the hearts of God's people. There's always something that the Spirit of God is doing. It is great to come together, but we don't always have to be together for the church to be alive. This is a time for the church to come alive. This is a time for the church to take the gospel back to the streets, but we have to first be cut off from our previous path.

The church started by being in the streets; by going door to door. The church started by being in the public arena. The church started by people meeting in houses, in small groups. It was never about massive cathedrals. There is nothing wrong with a massive cathedral where people come to worship, but sometimes we need to be cut off from the convenience of coming to a big building with masses of people so we can sit and do nothing and say, we've been in church.

Well, right now we're cut off from that previous path and the reason is so we can move forward; so that we can see that the church is more than just Sunday morning at 10 or 11 or 8 or whatever time you meet. It is so that we realize that church is more than just coming to a building and doing a few things. Church is living the gospel of Jesus Christ every day in our neighborhood, with the person next door, and as I mentioned before, with the people at home.

We've had to be cut off from the old works so that we can do the new works. We have to be cut off from old ways so that we can do new ways. When we were born, we had to adjust to a new way of getting sustenance. When we were in our mother's womb, she fed us. The umbilical cord had to be cut so that we could breathe on our own and could feed ourselves and grow. We can only grow so big as long as the umbilical cord is tied to our mom.

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Now the umbilical cord is being cut and we've got to get into action. The church has to be the church. In Acts 19:19, when the gospel came, these people brought all the things they used to live by—all of the curses, the incantations, the spells, all of the voodoo and everything else—and burned them. They realized the only way to move forward was for them to get rid of all of it.

While we are at home and we are examining what the church is doing and has done, I firmly believe that there are some things God is going to tell us we need to cut out because they have no life and do not add anything. They're just things we've done because we've always done them, but they are adding no life. And in order for us to move forward, we need to do some other things. Pastors are learning that in order to pastor the sheep, we have to know them and stay in touch with them. We can't just come and pontificate and enunciate. We have to get to know them. So, we're learning now, we have to touch base with you; we have to call you and ask you how you're doing. We have to text you. We have to email you. We have to stay in touch with you because that's what church is about. Shepherds feed sheep; they stay in touch. They even know their sheep so well that they can call them by name.

Moving forward sometimes involves actions that cut us off from our previous path. Two great illustrations of this are found in Exodus 14:13-22 and Acts 22:17-21. In Exodus 14:13-22, God is leading Moses to take the children of Israel out of Egypt. They have come to the Red Sea. God parts the Red Sea and they walk across on dry land, but then God closes the Red Sea. You'll notice, as they get over and things get hard, had the Red Sea still been open, they would have gone back to Egypt and said, "here we are back again. Please take us we're your servants." But God cuts that way off so that they either have to go forward or they have to die. It's a hard thing for us to realize that God does this in our lives, but sometimes that's the way it happens. Sometimes when a parent leaves either through abandonment or death, we realize that we either have to grow up or we're going to die. If you're facing bankruptcy, you have to realize you have to go forward or you're going to die. Or if you're in a situation where you're fighting for your life, you realize you either have to be a fighter or you're going to die.

Moving forward sometimes involves actions that cut you off from your previous path because as long as you can run back to mommy and daddy, you're going to run back to mommy and daddy. But if mom and daddy "break your plate" and turn your room into a recreation room, then you know you can't go back. You have to figure it out with your spouse perhaps on your own. You have to make it work.

If you know that you have a family to feed and that you only have one job, even if you think nobody likes you at work and you don't like them, you have to make it work because you don't have any place else to go. Sometimes God has to allow us to be cut off from our past so that we can find new roads, new paths and new ways. That's what He did with Israel. You either have to walk with God, or you will die in the wilderness. Some of them walked with God. Most of them died in the wilderness.

In Acts 22:17-21 Paul is writing about going to the Gentiles:

"And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy

testimony concerning me. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee: And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him. And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles.”

For the first part of his ministry Paul had tried to spend most of his time winning the Jews. When God first called him, God told him He was sending him to the Gentiles. But Paul kept trying to go back to the Jews. He starts off Romans 10 by saying, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.” So, he loved his people, and it’s great that he did, but God sent him to the Gentiles.

Yet, Paul keeps trying to go back to the Jews. He keeps trying to witness to them because he thinks surely, “they remember me. I was the one that persecuted the Christians. I was the one that put them in prison. I was the one that went to the synagogue. I did all these things. They know me. Gamaliel knows me. They know my heritage. They know my pedigree. They know I was a Pharisee among Pharisees. Surely, they will accept the testimony of Jesus if I come, because they know me.”

But God had said to Paul, “I’m sending you to the Gentiles.” What he experienced in Acts 22 is basically one of the “final straws.” God had to cut off his relationship with many of his brothers so that he could finally go and do what God told him at the very beginning through Ananias. Moving forward sometimes means cutting off your previous path. It is a great motivation to go forward when you have nothing to go back to.

I remember feeling that way after my mom passed. Even though my father was still alive when my mom passed way back in the nineties, I really felt that I had to fight for myself. I felt that my mom was a very nice woman and she was a person in whom I could confide. But when mom died, I just felt like I had to fight everyone now; I have to make it in life. And that pillar of my life was cut off, not so that I would be weak, but so that I would find a greater pillar in Christ. I got to know my dad a whole lot better after my mom passed, although he had been there all the time. But if my mom had not died first, I would probably not have moved forward and gotten to know my dad as well as I did even though we were in the same house.

Now COVID-19 is teaching us that sometimes in order to move forward, you’ve got to make a radical cut with things that were in your past. I believe that once this is over, we’re going to see some changed lives because some of the things that we had been doing have now been cut off. I think we’re going to see some radical changes in the way we live and the way our nation is governed, because some of the things that we’ve depended on have been cut off. People who were not incentivized to save before will now save after this is over. When they get their hands on another check, it’s not going to be, “I’m spending all my money. I don’t care how great the sale is. I don’t care if they are almost paying me to take this stuff. I’m going to put some money aside.” My father, who was born right after the Great Depression said, “I promise myself I am never going to be broke again.”

Our convenience had to be cut. Our laziness had to be cut. The opportunity to do whatever we want to whenever we want to, had to be cut. And there’s nothing more motivating

than realizing that you're running out of time and you have one last chance. It's like being on your death bed and you have a son or a daughter that you've never made up with or that you've never spoken good about and you realize you've got one last opportunity. So, you spend that time putting all the pride aside, putting all the hurt aside, putting all the disappointment aside, because you know that's the only time you have. Nothing motivates us to move forward more than cutting off the path to our previous acts.

Chapter 5

Acts 28:19

“But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Caesar; not that I had ought to accuse my nation of” (Acts 28:19).

COVID-19 has taught us that **things beyond our control often force us to do things within our control that are sometimes neglected.** We can't necessarily control how the virus spreads and how quickly it spreads. But it has forced us to wash our hands and to examine what we're touching. It has forced us to do a lot of things that normally we wouldn't do—eat right, get a little exercise, do some other things that are within our control. So, there are some things outside of our control that force us to do things within our control.

Now, Paul had just come off the island of Melita. They got what they needed and were now on their way to Rome. He called some of his fellow brothers, the Jews, together and he started talking with them. He started appeasing them, trying to help them to understand why he was doing what he was doing. His going to Rome, for the most part, constrained him to appeal to Caesar. He had to appeal to Caesar because if he had not done so he would have been condemned in the lower court. The people's persecution of him was outside of his control; appealing to Caesar was within his control.

Sometimes circumstances in life give us no option but to take an unpleasant step. But, be assured that God can use that unpleasant step for His glory and for our good. Sometimes life brings us to a point where we can't do anything else. Sometimes we have to go to the hospital. Sometimes we have to take in a sick family member. Sometimes we have to move back home to care for a mother or a father. We didn't ask for that. Life gave that to us. Sometimes you're out of college and you have to go back home. You didn't ask for that. It's an unpleasant step, but God can use those unpleasant things.

Let me give you a couple of examples of unpleasant things that God used for His glory and for our good. In Daniel 1:1-6, the first verse states very clearly that God gave the Jewish people into the hands of the Babylonians. Yet even though God gave them to the Babylonians, there were people like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. They could not control the fact that God gave them over to the nation they considered to be uncircumcised barbarians. But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the King's meat. He “purposed in his heart,” despite the fact that he could not control where he was—just like a lot of us have no control of the fact that the COVID-19 has placed us at home. It has placed us away from our friends, and away from our churches. But there are some things that we can control, and I believe God is saying to us that even though we can't control the broader spectrum, we should control what we can. If we do that, then God will use what we can control for His glory and for our good.

Things beyond our control often force us to do things within our control that are sometimes neglected.

You cannot control how people respond to you. You can control how *you* respond to them. You cannot control whether or not people like you. You can control *your* attitude. There's a "greater 19" than what COVID-19 is telling us.

In Judges 11:1-6 there's a man named Jephthah. He was born to a woman that was considered a prostitute. His brothers did not like him. But that fact helped him to become someone who had to fight. So, there was a situation that came up and his brothers, who didn't know how to fight, needed someone who had been fighting all his life. They called Jephthah and he got involved in the battle and won the battle. Then he made a vow to God that he would sacrifice to God the first thing he saw after winning the battle. Jephthah could not control where he was born. He could not control to whom he was born. But Jephthah could control what he did when his brothers came to him. And so again, COVID-19 has pushed a lot of us to the point where we have to do what we have to do. There are unpleasant things in life that we're having to deal with, but I believe God is helping us to understand this: control the things you can control and don't worry about the things you can't control.

Chapter 6

Ephesians 5:19

“Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:19).

COVID-19 has helped us to define worship as an essential function. Before this time, some people didn't think worship was a central function, but now we realize that it is. That's a good revelation, but there's a greater revelation that's found in Ephesians 5:19.

The “greater 19” that God has shown us from His word is that **true worship is not *just* listening when someone else is worshiping. It is the expression of your heart alone to God.** Some people think that because they can't go to church, they can't worship. God is showing us that true worship does not occur by merely being in the company of others who are worshiping. True worship is what's happening in your heart. You can be in the company of others who are worshiping, but if you are not worshiping, then worship is not happening in your life. Everybody else may be singing, lifting their hands and rejoicing before God, but if worship is not happening in your heart, you're not really worshiping. COVID-19 has taught us that. We've gotten to the point in our society that we have to do all these extra things to try to bring about worship. I don't want to sound insensitive and don't want what I am about to say to be taken as a criticism, but I do want you to observe the truth that I'm saying about this. We have to have synthesizers, pipe organs, the greatest pianos and organs. We have to have smoke, flashing lights, and psychedelic lights. We have to have a lot of things to say we're worshiping. But true worship does not take all of that although all those things are great.

We have great musicians. We have great instruments. But true worship is a simple expression of the heart. Sometimes I think we need all of those things to get people psyched up, but true worship doesn't need to get you psyched up. True worship is an expression of your heart. It's simply saying, “Lord, I thank you for another day. God, I thank you for the opportunity to be in this house with my family and to know that all my family is doing well.” True worship is just saying “Thank you Lord.” Psalm 103:1 says, “Bless the Lord, oh my soul, and all that is within me, bless his Holy name.” Psalm 34:1-2 says, “I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make her boast in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof and be glad.

I think we are learning that true worship is not just sitting in the building. In this time when we are isolated, we are learning that worship has to take place in our hearts or it's not worship, and that worship can take many forms. Sometimes we have gotten so arrogant in our own way of doing things that we can't worship if the genre of music is not to our liking.

True worship is not *just* listening when someone else is worshiping. It is the expression of your heart alone to God.

We have to have a particular kind of service. So, this group has one kind of service, and the other group with another kind of music or has a different kind of service because one group won't worship with the other.

I understand that there are certain kinds of music that you enjoy, but as you learn to love God, you learn to love whatever is giving Him honor and glory. I'm so thankful that I have learned to enjoy many different forms of music. You may not believe this if you heard me sing today, but when I was younger, I was a song leader for our youth group. Back then, we sang all kinds of songs—spiritual songs, songs from the Bible, funny songs, and contemporary songs. As I grew older, when I became an elder in the Presbyterian Church, (which is the church I was born in) I had to call hymns. And so I learned, “When I can read my title clear to mansions in the skies, I'll bid farewell to every fear, and wipe my weeping eyes...”

I remember having to call hymns, and so I learned to do the call-and-response method of singing. When I got to college there was another youth group that I joined and they just sang songs from scripture. “Oh my God. I trust in Thee, let me not be ashamed. Let not my enemies triumph over me.” As I even grew older, I learned the value of hymns. “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name.” And then as I grew even older, I learned how to enjoy contemporary songs.

That is the “greater 19” that we're learning—that worship is not all the things; it's the expression of the heart. You can have the best of everything there is available; the greatest sound equipment, the greatest soloist, and the greatest choirs. You can have the greatest people singing and playing but if there's not a sincere expression coming out of your heart, you're not worshiping. Ephesians 5:19 has taught us that true worship is not just sitting in the building with someone who is worshiping, it's the expression of your heart. The Bible says we are to sing and make melody in our hearts to the Lord.

Chapter 7

Phil. 4:19

COVID-19 has taught us that the systems of this world will never adequately satisfy all of our needs. It is amazing the number of people that are stockpiling bathroom tissue, paper towels, food, guns and ammunition, trying to protect themselves and to make sure they have what they need to deal with this catastrophe. And even though we have tried to stockpile hand sanitizers and other things, it seems like there's never enough. There aren't enough ventilators to meet the need; not enough personal protective equipment for first responders and our health care professionals. Even though we have factories that can ramp up and produce them, they still seem like they're inadequate for the speed with which this virus is spreading. COVID-19 has taught us that the systems of this world are never adequate; they can never satisfy everything.

“But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19).

There's a “greater 19” that comes from Philippians 4:19. I know so many of you know this verse already. It says this, “but my God shall supply all of your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” Did you know that even though this world can never satisfy your every need, God is able to do just that?

Now, when Paul writes this, he is dealing with being imprisoned. The church at Philippi had ministered to him. They had supplied his necessities and even though some of them were impoverished, they did what they could to help him. The amazing thing that you will see during this time, as we stand in faith, is that God will bring the supply for your need from the strangest places. God will move upon people to meet your need. So yes, prepare as you can. If you're going to be homebound, prepare, get some food; get some bathroom tissue, some paper towels, and if you can find it, get some hand sanitizer. But realize this—that your greatest need is not physical. Your greatest need is the confidence that you're going to make it through this. Your greatest need is the faith that God is going to take care of you; to know that God “has not given you a spirit of fear, but a power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7). That's what we need more than bathroom tissue and hand sanitizer. What we need is faith in God's word to know that even if we walk in the midst of trouble, God will protect us.

COVID-19 has taught us that the systems of this world will never adequately satisfy all of our needs.

When Jesus first sent out the disciples, He said to them, “If you drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt you.” Now, don't go out and do anything stupid. Don't go out and drink something deadly in order to try to test God or your faith. What I'm saying is that the greatest assurance we can have is faith in God; that God is going to protect us as we go. As we minister as first responders, doctors, nurses—that is a greatest assurance you can have. Wear your mask; wear your gloves; do what you need to do; keep your physical distance; but have faith that even in the midst of this, God is going to take care of you. The “greater 19” in Philippians 4:19 is that God will supply all of your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. This is not the first famine to have ever occurred. Though this is not a famine, it is not the first virus that God has gone through. This is not His “first rodeo,” as they say out West. This is not His first time around; not His first opportunity to show Himself strong. This is not the first time we've had a worldwide problem, and it may not be the last; but God is sufficient. He has been, He is, and He will be sufficient. In times of human scarcity, God shows His sufficiency. In 1 Kings 17:9, when there is a famine over the land, God at first fed Elijah by ravens. But then He says, “I want you to go into another city because I have commanded a widow woman to feed you.”

David, as he learns to worship and to survive in the wilderness, pens these words:

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever” (Psalm 23).

In times of human scarcity, God shows His sufficiency. That's the “greater 19”. You need to know God will protect you.

COVID-19 has helped us to realize how poorly prepared we are for a national crisis. We found out that we don't have enough hand sanitizer; we don't have enough bathroom tissue; we don't have enough ventilators. Even though we have a very strong economy, just one little virus has gotten us to a point where a lot of us are looking at and thinking about things we never looked at or thought about before.

We have spent millions, perhaps billions of dollars on weapons to protect us in case of an enemy attack. We have “Star Wars” kind of technology. We have all kinds of missiles and nuclear weapons. But the thing that seems to be crippling our economy is not a missile. It's a virus. It's something that we can't see and something we haven't been able to control. Unfortunately, a lot of our nation is being brought to its knees by something we can't see. We have been brought to a point where we realize how poorly prepared we are. That's what COVID-19 has taught us. Let's see what “greater 19” Revelation 3:19 teaches us.

Chapter 8

Revelation 3:19

“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent” (Revelation 3:19).

What is the “greater 19” that we're learning here? **It is that arrogance and poor preparation are inadequate for earthly and spiritual judgment.** Repentance, a change of heart and a change of ways, is necessary.

I love my nation; I pray for my nation. I am thankful to be an American. But as a nation we'd gotten a little arrogant because we thought we had the best of everything. People are literally dying trying to get here because we have the best healthcare system, the best doctors, the best medicine, the best hospitals—the best of everything. Yet this virus has shown us how poorly prepared we are; how woefully inadequate even our best is. The spiritual lesson is that if something in the natural can bring us almost to our knees, then things in the spiritual can also bring us to our knees. If physical arrogance and poor preparation are inadequate for earthly crisis, what do you think will happen if there is a spiritual crisis?

In Revelation 3:17 Jesus is talking to the church of Laodicea. I believe that these churches were literal churches, but they also represent the ages that the church will go through. The Laodicean age is the last age. I believe it is the age that we're in. Listen to what the Laodicean church says of itself. This is what Jesus says to that last day church, which may be the church age that we are living in:

“And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. *Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked...*” (Rev. 3:14-17)

Here is the voice of God:

“I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent” (Rev. 3:18-19).

Arrogance and poor preparation are inadequate for earthly and spiritual judgment.

There's another verse I will use as a second witness. According to Luke 12:16-21

“... The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. [But Jesus remarked in the parable] Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

Spiritual arrogance and a lack of preparation are difficult, but this is being used as a time of chastening, as a time for us to repent. Chastening means to correct, and God corrects with His word primarily, but if you won't listen to His word, then He allows other things to come. We have an opportunity in this time to repent of our arrogance and to get prepared, not just for earthly crises, but for spiritual crises.

Amos 8:11 says there will come a famine in the land, and it will not be a famine of bread, but a famine of hearing God's word. I think we're in that place now that as churches we need to hear God's word. The verse that comes immediately after Revelation 3:19 is a verse that we have heard often and most of the time we think it is referring to the sinner, but it's not. It is God knocking on the door of His church. The verse says this: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.” Jesus is talking to His church, not to the world. He is talking to the Laodicean who says “I'm rich, I have everything I need.” I have \$20 million worth of properties in goods and assets. There's nothing wrong with that, but if you are poorly prepared spiritually and if your riches have made you arrogant, this is a time when God says, “Listen, this is an opportunity for you to be rebuked and to be chastened and an opportunity for you to repent.

When I was a young boy, I used to ride to school with my parents who were both teachers. We used to like to listen to secular radio, but my parents would not have it. They liked to listen to Christian radio or at least Christian programs. There was a Christian speaker on who is probably dead now, but his name was Parson Hurst, an Assemblies of God minister out of Tennessee. At the end of his broadcast, he said these words that I would like to repeat to you: “Wake up America, wake up America. America is too young to die.” As we look at the “greater 19,” I say to the church and I say to our nation, and I say to the nations of the world, wake up world, wake up church. The church is too young to die.

This is an opportunity; God is showing His love for us. You may ask, how can God show his love when so many people have died? God is showing His love in that this is not a catastrophe as we might measure catastrophes. Yes, it is a difficult time, but the good news is that according to what I've heard, the majority of those who get COVID-19 recover from it. So, in mercy and in love, this helps us to see that we are not prepared, and it also helps us to understand that just as an invisible enemy can attack, and we're brought to our knees, the same thing can happen spiritually. We're facing an enemy that we can't touch. We can't nuke it. We

can't throw bombs at it. We can't put it in a capsule and take it to some far-off island or put it in jail. We can't do any of that because it's invisible. But yet I hear in it the voice of God saying, be warned; be aware; be alert. Look at what you're doing. Consider your deeds. It is out of love that I'm allowing you to go through these things. This is not going to break you. I'm allowing you to go through it because I love you. I'm going to take you through it because I love you. But be warned; listen to the rebuke and heed the chastening.

Here's where I want to end. Be zealous; have a zeal for repentance. The next time you go to church, go to worship, not to speculate, not to spectate, not to do anything else. Go to church to worship. When you get a chance to hug someone, don't just look at them as if they have a “third eye” or something. When you have a chance to fellowship with the people that you miss so much, fellowship with them, hug them like you haven't seen them in a long time. Love them. Don't be so arrogant that you can't speak to people because you think they are beneath you. Be zealous. Don't let anything stop you from going to church. Don't let any little thing stop you from going to work or from doing things you need to do. Don't let any little thing stop you from ministering to people as you should.

The “greater 19” here, is that God says as many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Be zealous. The end goal of all that God allows is repentance because he doesn't want any of us perish, but that all of us should come to eternal life.

If you've never made a decision for the Lord Jesus Christ, or if you have just been playing around with your faith, now is a time to do what Revelation 3:19 says—first to be zealous, but also to repent. To come to the point where you put more emphasis on your spiritual development than you do on anything else. We have been brought back to the point now where we're focused on essentials. We're forced to look at what's critical in life and what's not. Your faith is critical. For those who have lost your jobs or who are on furlough, I pray that God meets your need. But I also want you to know that the greatest need that all of us have is for a relationship with God, to know Him as our Lord and as our Savior.

The Greater 19s

That You Need to Know

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