

“From This Time Onward”

Life has changed a lot in the past few months, weeks, and even days. As efforts to contain the coronavirus ramp up, it's going to change even more.

We've had to adapt to a changing climate on the fly. Here at Open Door, we've had to become creative as we attempt to comply with stricter regulations on the number of people allowed in the same workspace.

But we're still here and desirous to encourage you and challenge you so you can face another perilous week trusting God to see you through it.

Now I know we're all pretty tired of being stuck at home all the time. We miss our friends and families, everything's been canceled, the economy is tanking, and we're just waiting for somebody to come up with an easy fix.

We just want this to be over. We're making plans for what we'll do when things go back to normal—and a lot of us are banking on that happening.

But what if life never fully goes back to how it was pre-coronavirus? What if this epidemic is a turning point, and after this the world is never the same?

More importantly—or, at least, more optimistically—what if the world could come out of this crisis better than it was before?

I think our new normal **could be** a good one if we'll learn from our current situation.

“FROM THIS TIME ONWARD,” things may continue to get more challenging, but on the other side of this crisis, our new normal could be good.

History repeatedly says this is possible!

For many of us, the most life changing event that's happened during our lifetime was the terrorist attacks of **9/11**. The world changed that day, and it's never returned to how it was before. Just go through any airport in the world.

In 1940 the **World** was at **War II**. The outcome of the war wasn't certain. Much of Europe had fallen to the advancing German Army and Great Britain was barely holding its own. Many Americans remained committed to stay out of the war, but President Roosevelt understanding the need attempted to convince the American people of the gravity of the situation.

In his State of the Union Address on January 6, 1941, he presented his reasons for American involvement, making the case for entering the war, that United States was fighting for **4 Universal Freedoms**; *the freedom of speech, the freedom of worship, the freedom from want (a peaceful economic existence for a nation's inhabitants), and the freedom from fear.*

It was these principles that gave hope in the following years to a war-wearied people because they knew they fought for freedom. They are principles that have changed our world!

Have you felt afraid these last few days and weeks? I sure have. People are getting sick, people are losing their jobs, the economy is tanking, and we don't know how long it's going to last. **A lot of unexpected things are happening.**

And the probability is, that the world isn't going to go back to being exactly like it was before this crisis. Many things, **from this time onward** will be different. There will be a new normal; it could be better. The world might come out of this better prepared to face pandemics in a now globally connected society.

History has shown that on the other side of a seemingly hopeless crises, we can emerge better equipped for **living happier, more secure lives.**

And that's really the message Jesus gave to His disciples in the weeks just before Easter. He had walked with them day after day for over three years, doing glorious things together: *healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, preaching love and peace and hope – and making a difference wherever they went!*

Then, all of a sudden, nearing the end of His ministry on Earth, the week before He enter Jerusalem triumphantly, the focus of His message changes. He begins to prepare them for a crisis they weren't expecting, **Matthew 16:21-22 says,**

“From that time on, Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”

Did you note the words that open this paragraph? ***“From that time onward.”***

This declaration constitutes the key to the final portion of Christ's earthly ministry – in the weeks leading to His crucifixion and resurrection!

“From that time onward” Jesus refocuses His energies and teachings on the specific reasons for His coming to Earth as a man. His mind and heart are fixed on Jerusalem and on preparing His disciples for the tragic circumstances that they would face there.

He was going up to Jerusalem to die a gruesome death. It was a message that was difficult for them to hear.

But Jesus' resolve to move forward with this plan was fixed. He knew why He was born; the reason for His existence on planet Earth.

Like Jesus: We all have to come to a point where we refocus and get to the primary reason for which we were created.

This statement in Matthew 16 is the preface to the rest of the Book of Matthew. Everything that follows from this point on in Matthew is mirrored in the scene described in this very passage.

We see principles here that will be in operation until the end of Jesus' life on Earth. And our understanding of these principles is absolutely crucial if we're to understand the Lord's plan and purpose for our lives too.

Matthew 16:22-23 continues, *“Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!” Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the **concerns of God**, but merely **human concerns**.”*

Note the contrast between *“The Concerns of GOD”* and *“Human Concerns.”*

This is so important. Don't miss it! Jesus began to tell them the facts: that He **must** suffer and Peter objects. Look at Peter's **opposition** here. *“Peter takes Jesus aside and **rebukes him!** “No way, it's never going to happen, Lord!” “This will **never** happen to you!”*

The **principle is this**, **“The Concerns of God”** were a **necessity** for Jesus.

Jesus said, *“I **must** go to Jerusalem and I **must** suffer, and I **must** be killed, and I **must** be raised up.”*

“The concerns of humans” are revealed in Peter’s response – **“No way, never going to happen, Lord have mercy on Yourself, far be it that anything like this should ever happen to you!”**

First, let’s look at **1. “The Concerns of God”**

Christ said I **must** go into Jerusalem – the place of danger and peril! **I am compelled to go** to Jerusalem. It is my mission in life!

It didn’t He mean that He had no choice in the matter. In His garden prayer before He was betrayed, He chose the Father’s will over his own. He willingly made the choice to follow God’s plan **instead of an alternative one.**

But why couldn’t He just accommodate Peter; lower His ideals; compromise?

Jesus was saying this, *“I can never lower My standard, can never deny My ideals or abandon My purpose. Because of **My conviction**, I **MUST** go.”*

Jesus had to see His mission clear to the end. And Jesus’ dying was not the end of the plan – He **must** die so that He might also be **raised again!**

This **death to resurrection**, in order to offer new life to all was planned before creation. The Spirit of God was propelling and driving Him to **finish His work of redemption!**

Peter didn’t understand this at the time –**he later would!** On the Day of Pentecost, he preached this in **Acts 2:23**,

*“This man was handed over to you by **God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge**; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.”*

Peter had come to realize that what Jesus’ **“musts”** meant! Jesus saw beyond His bloody suffering and death and the brilliant morning of His resurrection. Peter finally understood what **“the Concerns of God”** were.

Now second, **“2. The concerns of Humans.**

What are “The Concerns of Humans?”

In Matthew 16, Peter couldn’t see the big picture of what God was doing. He was **living in** the small concept of the **“immediate”** – living in the power of **“things seen.”**

Later, in his writings, Peter speaks of, “*those who were too near-sighted and therefore practically blind!* But, here, in this passage ***Peter is suffering from this very thing – he’s near-sighted, living for the “close at hand!”***

His **outlook was limited** - so he ***missed the significance of the present.***

Take note! -- The reason that Peter feared the present was because **he was living the axiom of “ TO THINE OWN SELF BE TRUE!”** *Cover your own butt at all costs! Save yourself Jesus, at all costs!*

But Jesus was so absolutely void of self-centeredness that no matter what the suffering, He was willing to set aside His own will to embrace the will of God and the suffering it entailed **in order to achieve God’s ultimate victory!**

Hebrews 12:2 tells us, “*Jesus...who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame – and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*”

All Peter could see was the present pain and suffering – because of his affliction of “near-sightedness,” the last phase, “***and on the 3rd day be raised to life,***” didn’t even register.

*How would we have reacted under those circumstances, if the one we loved so dearly told us that the path we are taking was going to lead to their death? How do we react in the face of a suffering? Do we react with a “**self-focused**” limited mindset? I think we often do and I think we may have responded much like Peter.*

Self-centered people are controlled by immediate circumstances, **living life in their own self-made circle.**

God-centered people are led by God’s Holy Spirit – dealing with circumstances in submission to the Divine will - living for the things that have eternal results rather than immediate ones.

And here is the conflict Jesus saw between the **two ideals** “*The concerns of God*” are a stumbling block to the man who is tending to “*human concerns.*”

The principle is:

To the person who minds “*the human concerns,*” **the cross becomes a stumbling-block.**

– and –

To the person who minds “***the concerns of God***,” the human concerns **become a stumbling-block!**

Peter was a man who loved the Lord with all his heart, yet, because he ignored God’s methods, his reaction **was a stumbling-block to God’s plan and purpose.**

For that reason, Jesus rebukes him – and says get behind me Satan!

Because Peter was “*tending to human concerns.*” Jesus was saying, “*Hey Peter that rock I was talking to you about earlier, that rock upon which the church is to be built – well it should never become a stumbling block!*”

The church cannot not be so **focused** on the immediate that they miss the priority of the eternal.

The church does not exist to promote the concerns of humans; it’s purpose is to promote the concerns of God. And...

Yes, His concerns are for humans, but His kingdom can never be built without **the cross of Christ** and **without His sufferings** in plain view for sinners like you and I to look to for salvation.

When we attempt to offer folks an “*easier*” way to God, a way without the blood, suffering, and agony of Christ on the cross – we not only miss the point – but we ***put a stumbling block in the path of peoples salvation.***

When we believe the lie that our **primary** concern should be to serve people socially without their **eternal concern** in full view – we miss the point.

No one is saved by good works! Good works are good and good works are what God wants us to be doing – but they don’t offer eternal salvation.

When we become self-focused instead of God-focused, earthy minded rather than heavenly minded, concerned with the immediate over the eternal -we miss the point! We still need to serve people in times like these, but our primary focus should be to give them the whole package!

That’s why Jesus’ words to Peter are so drastic, “***Get behind me Satan.***” “***Me without suffering and the cross***” – *Peter that’s a mindset that opposes God! And who but Satan is the master of that opposition!*

The church must be built upon a stable Rock where people can find true assurance: that Jesus is God's Son who was sent as a substitute to suffer and die to pay for their sins so that He can give them a better life. And all who embrace this truth find that life!

That is the sure footing all of us need today.

A true disciple of Jesus Christ does not choose whether life is a song, or a time of crying; sunshine or shadow.

If our Master appoints for us blue waters, sunshine and summer, let's rejoice, but if He appoints us the via Dolorosa, with sunless sky, we should be willing to grab ahold of His hand and let Him walk us through it.

Matthew 16:24, *"Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."*

I am going to Jerusalem to suffer and die and three days later be raised to life. **Who will go with me?** Come on, follow me as I walk the path of pain and suffering for you.

And if you should choose to follow me. Realize this, you must deny your selfish tendencies, your self-preservation and pick up your own crosses of pain and suffering. **But I promise you this, my friends – there is a better tomorrow coming! Resurrected life!**

We don't have to wait for Heaven **to live a resurrected life folks**. The plan of God **fulfilled in Jesus** gives us abundant life here and a promise of eternal life after this one is over.

So set your mind on co-operating with God's will and purposes, whatever that may be. It may entail blue skies or cloudy ones, laughter or crying; sorrow or singing – From This Time Onward, you can live a happier life with God at your side to go through the tough times with you. Jesus and His Cross for you = life!

Pray with Me!