

The New Testament Church
The Coronavirus in Context
Pastor Paul Jehle - May 13, 2020

“...the sons of Issachar... had the understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do”
1st Chronicles 12:32

As States begin to re-open their economies and nations around the world awake from the unprecedented lock-downs and advisories that they have endured for the past two months; questions linger. Is this *just* a health care pandemic or something more? Are we going to return to the same amount of liberties we had when this started? Is the “new normal” going to include a required vaccine? Are these the final “signs of the times”? Even though the number of deaths, however they are calculated, are far below what was projected, some civil government officials continue arbitrary and in some cases targeted lock-downs against believers and/or the church, leaving all of us to ponder *what is really going on*.

The verse above is tucked in a list of the mighty men who helped lead King David’s army and provides a prophetic word for the church in this day. Beginning in Ziklag, where David recovered all that was stolen by the Amalekites, chapter 12 of 1st Chronicles identifies the warriors in Hebron who were now following him instead of Saul. These individuals and their tribal warriors *were to make sure there was a peaceful transition of power from Saul to David*. Whether we like it or not, God has put His people in a squeeze play to prepare them for a massive spiritual transition in the days ahead as well.

These sons of Issachar were in a generational line more than 800 years in the making! The original Issachar, son of Jacob and Leah, whose name meant “*he brings wages*” was given a prophecy by Jacob that he would “*lie down between two burdens*.” (Genesis 49:14-15) Four hundred years later, his descendants were blessed by Moses to be “*in your tents*” meaning scholars of the Torah, or God’s Law. This brings us to 1st Chronicles 12, another 400 years later, and the twin burdens become clear. As His Church, we carry the same two burdens the sons of Issachar did in their day. First, we must “understand the times” or the current events of our day. Second, we must know how to apply the Word of God to the crisis we face; leading people clearly with priorities as to *what to do*.

It has become obvious that some government leaders are capitalizing on the unprecedented shut down of the world to seize more power. We’ve not been here at this level before. The enemy is serious, and more dangerous than the virus. But God is more serious and more powerful than the enemy. He is calling His Church to rise to a level of maturity that we have not embraced previously. We can’t be spectators, enamored with the wrong team, and hoping to get off the field of play. We can’t simply inspect current events as a window for the rise of Anti-Christ. We should be looking to our coach; Christ, to train and release us to get in the war at the level we are trained to fight. *We have forgotten that the main focus of God in the end-times is to prepare His bride to be a city of refuge*. (Revelation 19:7; 21:1-3)

We must shed the goal of being an isolated church rather than one that advances Christ’s Kingdom by occupying until He returns. We occupy by being salt and light. We need a paradigm shift that comes from deep repentance to pick up our responsibility as “sons of Issachar” *in order to* be a city of refuge for those around us. How does that happen? Repenting of our sin, secret or public, is the beginning but corporate repentance and declarations of the *ekklesia of God* must also follow. Consider this:

(1) *It is time to restore a higher view of the Bible*. Though we may read the Word and hear sermons from its pages, we need to apply it to every area of life. The Word equips us on everything, including how to relate to public officials, providing wisdom for the crisis at hand. For instance, as a church we must be clear on when and how God’s Word might require us to disobey civil authorities. In short, the Word is our “*more*

sure word.” (2nd Peter 1:19) The Coronavirus has revealed the vacuum of Biblically applied truth in our land with “people tending to react in whatever way that seems right in their own eyes.”

(2) *It is time to recognize that God’s purpose of sanctification is to prepare the believer to exercise a greater degree of self-government.* The Coronavirus has exposed the world’s insatiable idolatry of civil government. National, state and local officials strain under the weight of having to be “god” in providing jobs, resources, and cradle to grave security. Public officials serve as counselors, psychologists and resource managers. Some love that power and conceal that they can’t deliver on their promises. But God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, is focused on doing a work of repentance in the heart of the believer in proportion to what He desires to do in the earth; for *judgment begins at the house of God.* (1st Peter 4:17)

(3) *It is time to affirm our belief in the Sovereignty of God.* We ought to spend more time focusing on the greatness of God and His plan than on what the devil is doing, though we must be informed. No work of man will save us, “...for the Lord is our king; he will save us.” (Isaiah 33:22) We are at the mercy of God who is far superior in power to the enemy and His plan and will lure the enemy in to be ambushed! Regardless of the difficult times ahead, the Coronavirus has provided an opportunity for us to expect God to expose evil on a global scale and give us an insatiable hunger in prayer to see God intervene.

(4) *It is time we took greater individual responsibility.* God started creation with an individual and from that one person in formed groups such as marriage, family, business, the priesthood (church) and civil government. One person fulfilling their own responsibility sets an example that inspires many more to do the same. The Coronavirus has revealed the creativity and ingenuity of the individual in spite of the pressure for forced socialism and group-think. Creative small businesses reminds me that “*the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.*” (Luke 16:8) The private business sector has become a model for the Church! If public officials looked to God they could make the liberty of individual businesses the focus for the “cure” rather than over-regulating and quarantining everyone.

(5) *It is time for us to be productive rather than remaining as consumers.* Our conscience is God’s property and we ought to make sure we are right before Him and one another. Preferring one another is in order. God gave us everything we need (gifts and talents) to be productive. This reflects the spiritual, for when we were converted, “*His divine power gave us all things that pertain to life and godliness.*” (1st Peter 2:3) Thus in Him we have the creativity to be productive, for “*it is more blessed to give than to receive.*” (Acts 20:35) In the midst of this Coronavirus pandemic, we ought to ask: “Lord, what would you have me to do?” and “How could I be part of the answer to this dilemma?”

In conclusion, is this *just* a health care pandemic or something more? Though I believe it something much more I believe God is using this time to make a great transition from worldly rulership (Saul) to a greater measure of godly influence (David). Are we going to return to the same amount of liberties we had when this started? Probably not initially, but God may be preparing the world for a massive awakening! Is the “new normal” going to include a required vaccine? I pray not, but if it does, we will clearly know that we must draw the line and say “*we must obey God and not man.*” (Acts 5:29) Are these the final “signs of the times”? No, I don’t believe so, but we must be ready to occupy until He does return. God is in charge.

God does not plow without a plan! Watch as the centralized power of those who are intoxicated with themselves implodes and power is forced to the bottom. Guess who lives at the “bottom”? We do! So don’t dwell on your feelings, fears, or anxiety. Spend time in God’s Word with an open heart freshly plowed to receive seed. Study to see how the applied Word can give wisdom. Focus on God’s character and not the enemy’s devices. Train your mind to concentrate in prayer and govern your emotions. In our time, we face currents of cultural shifts that could leave our world quite different than the one we grew up in. Don’t fear, ask God for a crash course to become mighty in Him!