

Trusting God with Your Seatbelt On
Psalm 148:1-14, Isaiah 28:23-29

Well brothers and sisters, our shared common experiences that have made the headlines for 2020 thus far are changing quickly and rapidly.

We've gone from rail blockades in February protesting Indigenous issues, to the Coronavirus and Covid-19 in March, April and May and now in June we are back to protests again and rioting and as well as our society is grappling with racial tensions.

But however much racial tensions have dominated the headlines in the past couple of weeks we are still very much living with the reality of the Coronavirus and this Covid-19 pandemic and I have no doubt that it will continue to be a source of common experience for us in the months ahead.

And such shared experiences offer great potential as objects lessons. They can be used as significant and poignant

examples to give us greater understanding and appreciation for other issues which we may struggle to comprehend.

So – you may recall, all the way back in March, the issue that was dominating the headlines and our social media feeds was pastors and churches who refused to comply with the public health orders to stop meeting for worship.

Now I won't fault you if you can't recall the specifics, I couldn't either – so I looked up couple of the cases that made the headlines.

Remember Pastor Rodney Howard-Browne, the minister of River at Tampa Bay Church down in Florida? He was arrested and charged for defying the local county ban restricting public gathering to less than 10 people as he continued to host services in his 4000-member mega-church. He was quoted as telling his congregation prior to the lockdown that "*church was the safest place to be*" and that the church would only close "*once the rapture had taken place!*"

And just a bit further west in the State of Louisiana, Pentecostal preacher Tony Spell from Life Tabernacle Church in Baton Rouge didn't just get up to preach in front of his congregation - after State orders to cease gathering and stay at home were issued – the news reported he *“leaped into the pews, paraded, hugged and laid hands on worshipper’s foreheads in prayer”*

“We’re free people.” the Rev Spell said *“We’re not going to be intimidated. We’re not going to cower; we’re not breaking any laws.”*

And Life Tabernacle not only continued to meet for worship, they continued to operate their bus ministry – twenty-four busses that bring in hundreds of congregants from the surrounding neighborhoods and housing projects for church programs up to five times a week.

As the time this made headlines on March 29 their Sunday morning service attendance was over 1200 people.

And then there was the tragic and ironic case of Rev. Bishop Gerald Glen from Richmond Virginia, the pastor of New Deliverance Evangelistic Church who continued to hold services after the State had urged people to avoid non-essential gatherings of more than ten.

On March 22 Glenn told his congregation that *“I firmly believe that God is larger than this dreaded virus”* and then tragically he ended up getting infected and a couple weeks later, just before Easter, passed away from Covid-19 complications.

And the actions of these particular pastors and their churches, and there were many other pastors and churches who refused to stop meeting as well, was swiftly condemned by public officials and it drew harsh criticism from the media and of course... it blew up all over Facebook and Twitter where public sentiment quickly turned nasty and vitriolic against these Christians.

They were accused of being ignorant and endangering public safety for the sake of their religious freedoms, and many

people just couldn't understand why they were denying the very real danger that the coronavirus posed and how it could spread.

And while I couldn't remember the details of the cases that I just shared with you – I do remember a news feature on TV where a reporter was getting soundbites from congregants who were arriving for a worship service and one how one lady proclaimed that she was not afraid to attend worship *“because the blood of Jeeeesus heals all our diseases!”*

Of course, the media was just eating this up and the poor lady had no idea how foolish they made her look and how this just fed into the stereotype that Christians are all a bunch of superstitious nut-jobs who have no idea how science works.

Now I'm not sure how this whole 'coronavirus worship service shut-down' issue makes you feel but I do know that the ways in which these pastors and their congregations responded is the perfect example for us.... that highlights why Green

spirituality and Green worship are so important and have real life practical applications and consequences.

Now if you are visiting us online this morning and you are wondering what in the world is Green spirituality and Green worship? Is that some sort of religious version of the New Green Deal??

Well don't worry- as we use the term “green” at Valleyview – it has nothing to do with any left-wing political or environmentalist agenda... and everything to do with understanding how God reveals Himself as the Creator through His creation and how worship is so much more than meeting on Sunday morning but is something we do every day! All of our life is worship!

And brothers and sisters – if we as Christians have a good grasp of these two theological truths and we have allowed them to shape how we live our Christian lives... then we do not need to be threatened by any restrictions that are placed on gathering for corporate worship.

Nor do we need to be afraid that obeying a Gov't health order is somehow compromising our obedience to God's Word – but we'll see how its actually working in cooperation with God's Word in Creation.

Now please don't misunderstand me. This is not advocating that Churches and Christians blindly trust and obey whatever the Gov't says and mindlessly go along with whatever is taking place in society.

The reality is that Gov'ts are not always friendly to the Church and the gospel and the Enemy often uses them to persecute the church in order to stop the gospel message, and we must always be resistant to the subtle and sneaky ways that society pressures the Church to change and compromise on biblical truth.

And the particular pastors and churches that I've mentioned this morning were very aware of these dangers and they've have worked hard to stay faithful to the scriptures, they have

definite strengths in this regard, and we need to commend them as fellow Christians for that.

But if we were to describe them in terms of the various spiritual styles and the corresponding colors that we've learned about back at the beginning of the year – they wouldn't be Green, they wouldn't be Rational style, they would be Blue or Red, they would be the Enthusiastic Holy Spirit's power style or the Scripture-Driven style.

Now for those who are visiting this morning, and for those Valleyview-ers who need a reminder, back in January and February we learned how God has revealed Himself as a Trinity and about the various ways we are wired to receive and respond to God's Trinitarian self-revelation.

Now if that sounds pretty-theological and complicated... it is, but it becomes much easier to understand and apply when we talk about it in terms of spiritual styles and 3 colors, which is why we did the series on that - and if you want to learn more about that, or you need a reminder of it, you can visit the

sermon archives on our church website and look up those messages.

And one of the principles that we learned in the series is that our strengths will become our weaknesses if we do not undertake the unpleasant and difficult task of engaging with and growing in our opposite styles.

And we learned that we neglect or avoid doing this because we're only focusing one person of the Trinity, or we ignore a person of the Trinity, and we can't do that because God is One. Yes there are three persons, but they are One and so we can't pick and choose which persons of the Triune God we like best and which ones we would rather ignore.

But that's not theologically correct, it's offensive to who God wants us to know All of who He is, and to experience Him as a Three in One God, and... it has very real consequences in our lives.

And here we have a perfect example of how the strengths of these Blue pastors and Red churches, turned into a weakness

due to focusing solely on the Holy Spirit's power or exclusively on the Scriptures and neglecting to engage the opposite style of Green spirituality where they would have learned how to discern the Word of God in Creation and known how to respond appropriately in these pandemic circumstances.

And I think the what God would say through His Creation to those of us who may be far more comfortable with Red and Blue spirituality, who may even be a bit hesitant or suspicious of anything Green... The Word of God that we need to hear comes through a particular meme that I saw posted on Facebook which said *"I trust God... but I still wear my seatbelt!"*

That's a good way to summarize how those of us who are Red and Blue need to engage with Green.

But brothers and sisters, my goal in using these particular pandemic circumstances as an object lesson this morning is not to turn us into Christian pragmatists with a greater respect for public health authorities - but to inspire us to grow in our

desire and ability to experience God through His Word in Creation so that our meme on Facebook would say “*I worship God by wearing my seatbelt!*” Do you see the difference?

We don’t simply want to just be smarter about how to live in God’s creation – we should want to grow in our experience of how it reveals more and more of who God is to us. So, I hope and pray that the Holy Spirit will use these very real negative consequences of neglecting green spirituality and worship to inspire us to embrace the very positive benefits of engaging with it.

So, lets take a quick look at how Isaiah 28 reveals how we can experience this. We start with vs. 23 which has God saying; “LISTEN and HEAR my voice; PAY ATTENTION and HEAR what I say!”

Now we would think what follows this headline introduction would be something super spiritual, or powerfully prophetic, or really really religious (Blue or Red) – but what follows is God talking about agriculture. (Green)

And specifically God is saying that a farmer’s knowledge to plow a field, and use different methods and locations for planting different crops, and the knowledge of the different ways these crops must be harvested and threshed out – that this knowledge about the right way to farm is taught to the farmer - by God Himself!

And if this is true, then by extension we can say that the knowledge of an engineer, or a physician, a carpenter, a marketing specialist, a fashion designer, or an investment banker, or an epidemiologist is taught to them by God as well. And why wouldn’t it be - those are all parts of God’s Creation.

Now this challenges us – first of all because we know that engineers, doctors, and carpenters and so on, they all go to school and study and take training and go through apprenticeships to become knowledgeable and skilled in their profession.

And secondly because we’ve never heard about instructors in these fields saying to their students; “*I have a message from*

God for you today... about home renovation - thou shalt repaint and thin no more!"

Nor do we see professors choosing the Bible as their textbook for economics or fashion design.

And in instances where we do see people trying to use the Bible as a handbook of specific instruction for these sorts of enterprises it usually doesn't take very long for their enterprise to actually fail and come up short in some way.

But – here in this scripture we have God himself saying that He is in fact the chief agriculture instructor, and by extension the chief instructor for any other field of expertise we might find in His world.

In this scripture God is pointing out that whatever knowledge and wisdom we learn by studying the world around us, whatever skills are passed on from teacher to student, whatever we figure out through trial and error, this is in fact

God at work and it is part of how the creation reveals His Word to us.

So, when we discover and can see how any two bodies in the universe attract each other with a force that is directly proportional to the product of their masses and inversely proportional to the square of the distance between them...

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we're not just witnessing what we call gravity at work – we are discovering how the creation holds together in the Word, and how it's responding in obedience to that ever-spoken creating Word of God.

As Colossians 1:17 tells us ALL things hold together – they cohere; they exist – in God's Word – whom we now know as Jesus Christ.

And this applies to everything friends, whether it is $2+2=4$, or measure twice and cut once, or the fact that a cake takes longer to bake at higher altitudes than at sea level, or the fact that a particular style of dress really compliments your body

shape, or that a baseball thrown with a particular spin will curve, drop or seem to wobble in the air...

Or when public health officials learn how a contagious virus is spread and order people to stop meeting together in order to contain it.

ALL of creation is governed by the Word and responds to the Word and reveals God to us as it does this.

God's Word governs the heavenly bodies and galaxies far far away, it governs engineering and mechanics and technology, it governs the arts and aesthetics and athletics, it governs society and politics, and it governs education and thinking and logic, and it governs medicine and epidemiology...

Hebrews 1:3 says that *"the Word made flesh; our Lord Jesus Christ - sustains ALL things by His powerful Word."*

And the degree to which we are aware of this in our day to day life friends enables us to experience our relationship with God in a much broader and deeper way – Green spirituality

As we learn and grow in our education and our work and relationships with knowledge and skill and wisdom – seeing how the creation responds to the governing Word... We also begin to see how this is the Creation praising the Creator.

As David writes in Psalm 148:7-10 *"Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths, lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding, you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds..."*

And here's the Green worship part brothers and sisters, our response, our interaction to this knowledge and wisdom of the Word in creation is also considered praise and worship.

That's why I'm always saying that all of life is worship – its so much more than one hour on Sunday morning, and includes so much more than music!

And in an ironic twist – it means that being obedient to the public health orders to stop gathering together in person for corporate worship... is actually an act of worship!

So yes – we not only trust God and wear our seatbelt - we experience worshipping God through putting our seatbelt on.

Wouldn't you want to grow in your knowledge and relationship and experience of God so that such mundane and daily activities are a worship experience for you?

That is what is available to us brothers and sisters through engaging in Green spirituality and Green worship, and isn't that what we seek to receive from gathering together in person for corporate worship?

Are we not looking for something we can take with us from Sunday morning? That will give us a sense of God's presence and power in our daily lives throughout the rest of the week when we are at home, or at work, or in school?

And if we take the time to learn about how God's Creation reveals God's Word – our Lord Jesus Christ...

And if we do the hard work of engaging Green spirituality and worship experiences as our opposite style...

Then brothers and sisters we can avoid the consequences of neglecting God as Creator and reap the blessings which He has always wanted to give us through His Creation.

And as we experience worshipping God through something like putting on a seatbelt, or watching a commercial, or following public health orders, we will be able to proclaim along with Isaiah 28:29 that *"all this also comes from the Lord Almighty, whose plan is wonderful and whose wisdom is magnificent!"*

AMEN