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“When Will This End?”

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Matthew 12:22-28

22 Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. 23 All the people were astonished and said, “Could this be the Son of David?”

24 But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons.”

25 Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. 26 If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? 27 And if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. 28 But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

New International Version

The number one question on folks’ minds right now is when is this shelter in place going to end? Before March of this year I had never read anything that I could remember about the Spanish Flu that shut down our country in a similar manner in 1918. In October of 1918, one would be fined \$140 if caught on Main St. in Manteca, California without a facemask on. That would be like over a \$1,000 today. They even closed all the churches in town. I just couldn’t imagine in this day of medical advancement, churches not meeting publicly for worship because of a virus. I couldn’t imagine restaurants not opening or high end stores being boarded up. This is so far

beyond all of our past experiences.

When will it end and who decides? Recently there have been protests in California, Michigan and a number of other places demanding governors lift the shelter orders. Consequently there have been counter protests by the medical field protesting the protesters and begging us not to fight the shelter orders.

The President is being pressured by the medical community who want the shelter orders to remain and some economists who say the possibility of dying of poverty is worse than dying of covid-19. Despite this being an important election year, covid-19 is not a political issue. This is truly a life or death issue.

So who decides when this thing ends? Covid-19 does. I mean if you want you can practice civil disobedience meaning you can defy the shelter order but you have to be willing to suffer the consequences. In this case the consequence might be jail time for disobeying the governor's orders or worse, contracting the virus and passing it on to someone more vulnerable than yourself and they die.

If you're a follower of Jesus Christ, the number one question you need to be asking these days is "Lord what do you want me to do?" The second question you need to ask is "will my actions today hurt or help someone else?" God's will is never that we hurt someone. But that needs to be clarified.

When someone is doing something harmful to another they need to be stopped. Hitler's Nazi's were hurt when we shot at them. They needed to be hurt. They were inflicting a lot of hurt on innocent people. God's will is that we never inflict harm on another and those who do need to be stopped. It's pretty simple.

Now we know that covid-19 is an inhuman virus that's inflicting a lot of harm on a lot of good people. God's will is that it be stopped and it will be stopped. Some would say if that's God's will why doesn't he give us an instant cure? But then I also have to ask why God still allows cancer and hurricanes and earthquakes to destroy innocent people. We don't know.

What we know is that God has given humans an amazing resilience to

overcome the worst atrocities committed against us. We overcome the worst atrocities with our faith in God and with one of the greatest advantages of God's human creation, that ability to pull together in times of adversity.

I grew up with my parent's stories of surviving the Great Depression and World War II. They often talked about people pulling together and sharing what they had. As a pastor to senior communities I've known a lot of WWII vets over the years and they've told me about America's ability to pull together through that adversity. We worked together and that is what stopped tyranny.

In the 70's and 80's I watched a large Vietnamese immigrant community come to my hometown after the fall of South Vietnam arriving with little or nothing in possessions. What impressed me about them was instead of blaming the communists for destroying their lives, they pulled together, sharing tiny apartments until they could afford to buy their own homes. Just like in the sports world, teams that can work and play together are the teams that ultimately win.

When I hear of Americans saying things like "Free Michigan" regarding overthrowing the shelter in place there or "Lock her up" referring to their woman governor whose orders keep the shelter in place, it means the God given ability to pull together has been abandoned by those folks. Jesus said "a house divided against itself cannot stand."

Republican Senate candidate from Illinois, Abraham Lincoln quoting that verse in 1858 said *"A house divided against itself, cannot stand." "I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved — I do not expect the house to fall — but I do expect it will cease to be divided."*

His opponent, the incumbent Democrat Stephen Douglas had long promoted the belief that each new territory or state should be able to decide its own status as a slave or free state and should allow Northern and Southern states to resume their peaceful coexistence. That proved not to be a very tenable solution and we lost over 620,000 Americans in the Civil War. So deadly a conflict that only as recently as the Vietnam War did the number of American deaths in foreign wars eclipse the number who died on our land in the Civil War. To put that in perspective, as of earlier this week over 44,000

Americans have died of covid-19 with almost 200,000 having died worldwide.

When Jesus made the statement about a house being divided not standing, he had just brought healing to what they called a “demon possessed” man who was both blind and mute. We don’t know anything else about the man or what he did to prove he was demon possessed. It wasn’t important for the story. What was important for the story was the political discussion that followed the healing.

I say political because the source of the healing was being defined by one’s political position. No one was disputing that the man was healed just how he was healed.

If you were politically leaning toward Jesus being a legitimate religious leader you would ask “*Could this be the Son of David?*” after you had seen the blind and mute man healed. If you were politically leaning toward the belief that Jesus was dangerous to your cause, your explanation would be that he was demonic like the way they described the man who was healed. Today we don’t use that term demonic in America as much. Instead we’d say Jesus was a Democrat or a Republican depending on what side of the fence we were on. And that would settle for many what we believed about him. “He did what he did because he was a.... and you could fill in the blank with your opponent’s party.

But politics can be dangerous if it masks the reality of our threat. For the Pharisees Jesus was perceived as a real threat. If people started following him, they reasoned, people wouldn’t follow them. They’d lose their political advantage. All they had stood for might be gone. But instead of dealing with the perceived threat, the Pharisees labeled it demonic. Once Jesus was labeled as being on the other side of the political divide, the side of the dark, they no longer had to wrestle with who he was and how he did what he did.

Covid-19 is scary in so many ways. If you don’t sense the danger to your health you may be feeling its economic impact. Or its political impact. Fear is a legitimate emotion. And one of the by-products of fear is anger. Anger strikes out where it can. If I lost my job and my family’s only sense of financial security because of a governor’s orders to shelter in place, I too would be very angry. But the enemy is not the governor whether she’s a Democrat or a Republican. And it’s also not China just because that’s where covid-19 started.

No, the enemy right now is covid-19 and we're all its victims in one way or another.

Misplaced anger is understandable but it's dangerous. Just like when a loved one dies suddenly or dies young there's understandable anger that gets misplaced. It's one of the stages of grieving. It's not uncommon at some point to blame the doctor or the hospital or the nursing staff or even the pastor who perhaps wasn't there for them as often as they would have liked.

But healing only comes when we can finally put the loss in perspective and begin the long road back to health. What I'm finding, and you probably are too, is that our news media, both left and right are having a hard time putting things in perspective. We're easily incited by Tweets or comments that get printed or mentioned in our news sources because we have nothing else to report. We don't even have sports scores to distract us.

What we're longing for is someone to be a calming influence for us who in a press conference can encourage us to hang in there, we're going to get through this by sticking together. A house divided cannot stand and more than ever we need a house united right now. May Jesus be that voice for us today. And these are the words he spoke that are most relevant for us today: *28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."* Amen. (Matthew 11:28-30)

IF YOU'D LIKE TO KNOW HOW TO GET STARTED IN FAITH

- 1. Recognize that everyone has sinned and fallen short of God's ideal
Romans 3:23-24**
- 2. Know that the wages or payment for sinning is death**

Romans 6:23

3. But God loved us so much that He sent His only Son to die for us

Romans 5:8

4. It is our responsibility to accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and allow Him to become the master of our life

Romans 10:13

Invite Jesus into your heart by praying something like the prayer below...

“Dear Lord Jesus, in many ways I have sinned against you. I am sorry and want to turn from my sinful ways. I invite you to come into my heart and begin to make me like yourself. I commit my life wholeheartedly to you now. Thank you for saving me.”