



**An Encouragement Message from the Elders
April 1, 2020**

Hello Johnson Avenue Family,

Although these are strange times, it is so encouraging to go online and worship together as we can. It's great to see who is watching online and of course the amens and good comments. Hopefully we can use that in our class session tonight at 7PM. We are getting better at things and will be trying additional technology to do classes and other items as we figure them out. Two of the things we have difficulty with are singing and giving. We can't play copyrighted music on Facebook so we're trying to find a way to do something. Another thing that is harder is giving. For many of you giving is no issue because you are tuned into Pay Pal, Samsung pay, Apple pay, Venmo or whatever you use. For some of us "more traditional" (read older) folks, putting a check or cash in the basket is just the way we've done it for years and we're more comfortable with that. We also enjoy watching parents training their kids to put a dollar in or a percentage of their allowance or however you do it. We all enjoy giving and seeing others give. Doesn't it warm your heart to see the good side of people in situations like we have today. For all the negative stories regarding price gouging or hoarding or stealing, there are tons of good things. Neighbors helping neighbors with groceries or supplies, all of a sudden, we appreciate our first responders and health care workers, and believe it or not some Democrats and Republicans are working together. There was a lady in a Texas town who left a tip of over 9,000.00 for the workers of a small restaurant that she knew was going to have to close. It's amazing what is important and essential when we get all the noise out of the way! To do our best to adapt during this time there are a number of ways in which you can give to the church. You can mail a check. You can set up the church like any regular bill with your bank for auto pay. You can use the Give +Plus app that is shown on our web site. If you give in cash you can put it in an envelope and drop it at the building, give it to one of the preachers, or save it up for when we are able to all meet together again.

As always there are so many other ways that you can give too. We are so fortunate that currently there are no immediate needs among our members. The Deacons and Preachers have been contacting as many as possible to make sure. However, it may not always be that way. Andrew Lemus is collecting and coordinating a list of volunteers. Please

contact Andrew or one of the Deacons if you are able to assist in any way. Go pick something up for someone who is sick, help out with someone who has run out of something, order a meal for someone and have it sent if you can't get out, etc. etc. All kinds of things help as you know.

Matthew 10:42

⁴² And whoever gives just a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is a disciple—I assure you: He will never lose his reward!”

One of the things that we know is that we all miss getting together. That smile, that handshake, that hug, that laugh, that tear and that prayer are all things we are missing. The Elders or Preachers are available to meet with you for consolation, encouragement or prayer. We don't want to meet in a large group at this time, but we will meet with you individually and we'll stay 6' apart! If you want a prayer or other discussion let us know. Obviously, you can call us, email us or text us at any time if you want to communicate other than face to face.

We wonder during these times how much and what to do. We are not being persecuted as Christians or for following God. The current situation is affecting everyone in the same way, saint and sinner, Jew and Gentile. Even if we were being persecuted, Paul gives us the example of trying to avoid it if possible. I know we usually talk about Paul's courage after being called a god and then stoned in Lystra (Acts 14). He gets right back up and goes back into the same city. He also stops by there again later in his trip. Obviously a time to stand up and show those that persecute that it won't work. I'm talking about that time that Paul feared for his life. He was converted and has been teaching boldly in Damascus. So much so that it irritated the Jews and they plotted to kill him, wouldn't be the last time! Here's what happened.

Acts 9:23-27

²³ And when many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel together to kill him:

²⁴ but their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates also day and night that they might kill him:

²⁵ but his disciples took him by night, and let him down through the wall, lowering him in a basket.

²⁶ And when he was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: and they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple.

²⁷ But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.

God had great things for Paul to do. At this point he purposefully and with the assistance of his disciples, avoided a confrontation and certain death. There are times when it is good to be wise and avoid a known situation. There are times like in Lystra where you need to face it. You each have to decide for yourselves when that time is. My recommendation during this time is to avoid it. It's short lived, we will get through it. It's also not a religious persecution it's a health issue. Seems like Paul avoided the Jews for his health! It's may also be helpful to understand that God invented quarantines. The book of Leviticus is full of reasons for people to be sent out of the camp for health reasons. Leprosy, a bloody issue, touching a dead body and many others. The people were put in quarantine for the health of the entire nation and to give them an opportunity to heal and then be cleansed and rejoined to the community. What did those people do while quarantined? They couldn't come to the temple and sacrifice. They couldn't participate in group religious activities. They were isolated and had to do the best they could to worship God alone or with the small group they were with. Sound familiar? We are all having to do the best we can to work through this time of isolation, illnesses, and loss of community. But like those who were healed, we have the faith in our Father that he will restore. We will be united in person again. We pray for that time and look forward to it with great anticipation.

Depending on how this goes you will most likely have an opportunity to sacrifice and help. We are to be people of compassion. Although this is directed at our members and their families, the same can be said for you as a member of our community and nation. What are you doing to help? Sometimes we do pretty well at the "especially" part. How do we do on the "all" part?

Galatians 6:10 (ASV)

¹⁰ So then, as we have opportunity, let us work that which is good toward all men, and especially toward them that are of the household of the faith.

God Bless you all,

The Elders