

Coronavirus Positives – A Spiritual Perspective

Priorities – Chasing the Hat



**“For what profit is it to a man
if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?” (Matt.
16:26)**

The coronavirus like all earthly things, will eventually pass, however, the lessons that God is teaching us as He works this out for our good can have a lasting effect, if we recognize them and apply them to our lives (Rom. 8:28). Today’s thought: Understanding priorities.

One coronavirus positive from this crisis is the opportunity to re-evaluate our priorities, the things that we put most of our focus, time and efforts into. As our daily activity has slowed, our capability to see the truly important things of life more clearly has increased. God has given us a rare chance to re-assess our current priorities, and with each God-given moment moving forward, make better choices. If our priorities are in line with God’s, they will benefit us immeasurably, not just in this life, but in the one to come (1 Tim. 4:8).

We all know of the patience of Job, but have you ever stopped to consider how the Bible introduces Job? “There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God, and shunned evil. And seven sons and three daughters were born to him. Also, his possessions were 7000 sheep, and 3000 camels, 500 yoke of

oxen, 500 female donkeys, and a very large household, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the East.” (Job 1:1-3) This description of Job is very enlightening: God first, family second, possessions third. Hopefully, God would also describe our priorities in this order, but how many times do we re-arrange this list? And how many times do we suffer the consequences of doing so?

Consider Abraham’s nephew, Lot (Gen. 13:5-13). Due to the strife between Abraham and Lot’s herdsman, Abraham graciously allowed Lot to choose which lands he would take for himself and his cattle, and Abraham offered to take the remainder. As Lot surveyed the land to make his choice, he focused on the physical, rather than the spiritual, aspects of the land. Lot noted that the plain of Jordan was well watered and good for pastureland, and so, he made his choice. Apparently Lot never considered the wickedness of the nearby cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Due to Lot’s lack of spiritual vision, his family would later suffer greatly. But it all began with the misplaced priorities of Lot and the choices he made as a result.

Consider the wisest man who ever lived, Solomon. He was in a position to try all the things that the world constantly tells us will bring us pleasure and satisfaction. If we assume Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes, Eccl. 2:1-10 lists many of the things that He tried, including houses, vineyards, gardens, orchards, pools of water, servants, livestock, silver and gold, singers, musicians. He did not withhold anything that he desired if he felt it would give him pleasure. He was materially rich beyond measure. What was the result of his obtaining and experiencing all the things that worldly wisdom tells us would bring happiness? Satan whispers and the world screams to us that if we will just obtain material wealth and all the things that it can buy, then finally, we will find contentment. But one of the fundamental problems with indulgence is that enough is never enough. The more we indulge ourselves in the amenities of wealth, the less we will enjoy them. “He who loves silver will never be satisfied with silver, nor he who loves abundance with increase. This also is vanity.” (Eccl. 5:10) After obtaining all these things, what did Solomon find? “Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun” (Eccl. 2:11, NIV). Why did he feel this way? Solomon understood that, despite all his worldly efforts and accomplishments, despite all his wisdom, the same thing awaited him that awaited the fool, death (Eccl. 2:13). When he died, he would leave all his earthly possessions to another, one who had not worked for it (Eccl.

2:21). Solomon understood that, despite all his wisdom, he would never know if the one he left it to would be wise or foolish (Eccl. 2:19). Life is like a game of Monopoly. Like Solomon, you may own hotels on Boardwalk or, instead, you may be renting on Baltic Avenue. But, in the end, the game is over and it all goes back into the box. The entire book of Ecclesiastes is Solomon's struggle with the vanity of this life "under the sun", however, by the end of the book, he discovered the true purpose and priority of life, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" (Eccl.12:13). This priority not only rings true for Solomon, but for all men created in God's image. "Bring all who claim me as their God, for I have made them for my glory. It was I who created them." (Is. 43:7, NLT). Man's primary purpose and priority, our primary purpose and priority, is found here: we were created for God's glory.

Many years ago, on a windy day, a man walks down the street. The wind gusts and the man suddenly found himself bareheaded as his hat blows down the sidewalk. The man chases his hat down the sidewalk, and just as he begins to reach down to pick it up, another gust blows his hat into the street. The man dashes out into the street, reaches down to grab his hat, is struck by a car and killed. A man's life over in an instant, all for the pursuit of an old hat! A tragedy, yet, how often in our own lives do we lose focus and pursue things, that in the long run, just really don't matter? How much time and effort do we spend accumulating the wrong things? How often does this pursuit cost us the very things that are most precious to us? Our relationships, our friends, our family, our health, our life, our soul? It is a fact of life that whatever we focus on and make the priority in our lives will eventually dominate our lives. Our lives are too short and eternity is too long to pursue the wrong priorities. We must ensure that our priorities are God's priorities!

Consider the rich young ruler (Mark 10:17-22). He had everything money could buy. He had his whole life in front of him. He made his own decisions. He had everything we think we want. Yet something was still missing in his life. He came running to Jesus and asked, "Good master, What shall I do, that I may inherit eternal life?" Although he had kept almost all of the commandments from his youth up, Jesus told him he lacked one thing. Jesus told him to sell all his possessions, give it to the poor, and then take up the cross and follow Him. His priority was misplaced, focused on his riches and all that it provided him. This wrong priority prevented him

from following Jesus. The story of the rich young ruler is one of the saddest in the Bible because he had so much upside potential. He could have leveraged his resources, his talents, his connections and his energy for kingdom causes, but instead, he chose to spend it all on himself. He thought this would make him happy, but, in the end, it was what made him miserable. **Our greatest assets will become our greatest liabilities if we fail to use them for God's purpose!** The rich young ruler eventually became a rich old ruler. As he lay on his deathbed, with all of the trophies of a lifetime of wealth surrounding him, do you ever wonder if he considered the moment that Jesus said "Follow me" and he refused? He was given the opportunity of a lifetime, but, due to misplaced priorities, he said no to the Son of God. Could the same be said of us? What has God gifted you with and how could you use these assets to serve him?

Does God use the events and circumstances of life to cause us to reexamine our priorities and attempt to draw us closer to Him? Yes. Has God done this with the coronavirus epidemic? Perhaps. Undoubtedly, much that we had relied on, as well as the priorities that we had placed in front of God, has been taken away, at least temporarily. Just as the vineyard owner prunes the vineyard in order to insure the best possible harvest, God, the divine vineyard dresser, often does the same in our lives. Listen to Christ's words in John 15:1-2, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit." God's overarching desire is for us to be more and more spiritually fruitful for Him. God knows us and the inner thoughts of our hearts. Although God is patient with us, these verses warn us that every fruitless Christian will be taken away. And even for the faithful Christian, as painful as it may be at the time, God will cut away the things that hamper the energy of our spiritual lives or that may diminish our spiritual fruitfulness, including our misplaced priorities.

Ps. 127:1-2 states, "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain that build it; Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman keeps awake in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to retire late, to eat the bread of painful labors; For He gives to His beloved even in his sleep." None of our efforts will be fruitful if we leave God out of them. God is to be the central priority of our lives. We often desire to separate our lives into neat little compartments: work, school, family, church, all distinct and independent of one another. But God desires that all aspects of our lives be integrated together, with him at the center and ever present in every part. Anything

less than the complete surrender of our lives to the lordship of Jesus Christ is robbing God of the glory He demands and deserves as well as cheating ourselves out of the eternal reward God has reserved for us. In our lives, either God is Lord of all, or God is not Lord at all.

Another coronavirus positive is that many now have a newfound focus on the brevity and uncertainty of life. Nothing has the ability to refocus our priorities more than when we realize our time upon earth is rapidly coming to a close. Perhaps this is why the Ecclesiastes writer stated, “It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart....The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.” (Eccl. 7:2-4) As the time of their death approaches, most people’s priorities become crystal clear, including their relationship with God and their fellowman and their focus on leaving enduring legacies. If you knew you had only a few days to live, you would look at everything with a different perspective. You would have total clarity about what matters most; you wouldn’t wait until tomorrow to do what needs to be done today. If you knew you had just a short time to live, your life would be radically transformed. Why do so many of us wait until our deathbeds to get our priorities in order? Don’t we want all that life has to offer? Don’t we all desire to fulfill the purpose for which God created us? Wouldn’t life be more satisfying if we lived this way? We were created to be active and present in the lives we’ve been given. God calls us to a purposeful life of faith, living each moment all out for Him. He has promised us an abundant life, but only if we make our priorities in line with His. “No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matt. 6:24). In the race of life, let’s make sure we’re not chasing our hat out into the street!