

Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic has completely disrupted our lives. None of us have ever lived in such a bizarre, crazy time.

Like you, I have read and listened to many voices give their opinions and perspectives of this historic crisis.

Some are saying this virus is not much worse than the flu. Others refute this, pointing to the death rates in Italy, Iran, and Spain.

Some are saying we are heading for a deep recession, even a depression. Others are saying the economy will rebound from this and we will have the greatest period of prosperity in history.

Some are saying this is God's judgment for homosexuality and abortion. Others are saying such talk is an Old Covenant mindset.

Some are saying that China and the globalists partnered together to release a manufactured virus to retaliate against Trump's trade deals, which cost China billions of dollars. Others label that as a conspiracy theory because this virus clearly originated at the Chinese wet markets, where bats, rats, snakes, and many other unsavory animals are butchered on the spot.

Some are saying that a New World Order is using this chaotic moment to steal the freedom and liberty of millions around the world, the end result being a global government. Others are saying those who say such a thing need to wear a tin-foil hat.

In the church, there are also many voices and opinions.

Some are claiming that this pandemic will end in April. Others are basically parroting what they hear from the mainstream media. Some are offering hope while others feverishly declare God's judgments.

My point: There is so much noise. So many opinions. So much static. It's hard to truly decipher what truly caused this pandemic, where this is going, when it will end, and what it will lead to.

Like I shared in my message *An Hour of Testing* on March 22, I believe this pandemic is a merciful and gracious opportunity from our loving heavenly Father that is revealing how unprepared we are for the much greater trials ahead. This is a test run for the church, revealing to us our true condition, so that we can make the necessary adjustments for the increasing pressures of the end times.

Like I shared on March 22, this is a time for us to make the Lord Himself our refuge, to prepare an ark of His presence that shelters us from the plagues, pestilence, wars, and turmoil that will become increasingly more frequent in the days ahead. This is also a time where hearing God's voice is truly becoming a life or death matter.

In this message, as the noise, confusion, clutter, and chaos swirls around us, I want to offer clarity of what I believe the Lord is saying and doing during this crisis. I will do this by revealing a pattern we see in John 6—a pattern that is very relevant to the church in this season.

To start, we see four scenes in John 6. These are:

1. The crowd seeking Jesus because of signs, wonders, miracles, and supernatural provision.
2. Jesus in transition in the midst of a storm.
3. The Lord inviting the masses into His ultimate intention.
4. The remnant accepting it while the majority rejecting it.

Scene 1: The Crowds Seeking Jesus Selfishly

In John 6, approximately 5,000 men came to hear the Lord speak, which probably means close to 10,000 people were there when factoring in women and children. Jesus was performing great signs, wonders, and miracles. He even supernaturally fed this massive crowd with a few loaves of bread and fish. It was such a powerful moment that the masses wanted to make Jesus their King.

But Christ knew there was a cross before a crown, so He withdrew from the throngs of people to a solitary place to pray.

This scene depicts what much of the church has become. We are seeking Jesus for His provision and for the thrill of signs, wonders, and miracles. We love how the Lord blesses us with prosperity, influence, success, a fulfilling destiny, and our best life now. We love the emotional thrill of seeing the Lord do miracles among us. We even sing about Jesus as our King and Lord.

Yet for many, there is a hidden agenda. As long as Jesus fits into our box, lifting Christ up as King helps build our kingdoms and churches. But when He demands our death so that His life can increase in us, that's where the rubber meets the road. We love to sing and preach about Jesus as King and Lord as long as we can fit Him into our life. But when He requires us to decrease so that He can increase—so that He can become our life—that's when Jesus starts to become offensive.

Such was the case in John 6.

A Sword of Division

In summary, the masses were trying to fit Jesus into their life but He wanted to become their life. This created a rift between Him and them. The same is true today. That's why I believe the Lord is using this crisis to divide and separate within His church. This crisis is winnowing, sifting, threshing, and pruning His people. When it's over, it will result in the rise and fall of many.

This crisis is similar to what Simeon prophesied about Christ when He was a baby. He said about Him, "This Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed—and a sword will pierce even your own soul—to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed" (Luke 2:34-35).

Many leaders and churches that have been hidden for years in the wilderness will rise during this time. Other leaders, churches, and movements, who have become old wineskins, will be demoted. Some churches and ministries will even come to an end.

This crisis is also exposing the thoughts of many hearts. What we have thought in the deepest recesses of our hearts is being revealed. Our fears, anxieties, hopes, dreams, and ambitions have all risen up. If we don't like what we see, the Lord doesn't want us to hide from it or withdraw in shame. He wants us to repent and let Him transform us, until He becomes the life we live by.

Scene 2: The Transition

After the Lord's supernatural provision of fish and bread, Jesus sent the disciples ahead of Him. While Jesus delayed in coming, a fierce storm railed against their boat. About 3-4 miles from the land, the disciples were overtaken by fear as the winds and waves crashed against their helpless boat.

As the storm reached its peak, Jesus comes to them, walking on the water. Yet the most amazing thing happens. Overcome by fear, the disciples thought Jesus was a ghost (Matt. 14:26). *They didn't recognize Him in the storm.*

Here's how this applies to our current crisis. Jesus is right in the middle of this storm.

As I shared in my message from March 22, I don't believe the Lord released this pandemic, but I absolutely believe He is using this global crisis to do a great work within His people. To me, it's really hard to say that the Lord released this pandemic when it originated in Wuhan, China—a place where there's a biological lab and wet markets filled with diseases. If the crisis started in some remote place in Montana, then maybe we could attribute it to the Lord. But this is not true about this pandemic. Even so, we have to see how the Lord is using this crisis to do a pruning work in His church.

But here's the problem: Many believers can only see a "ghost" in this storm. They are mistaking Jesus' work in the storm for the work of demented people and evil governments. Don't miss what I'm saying. Certainly, there is much evil in this crisis. But if we believe all that is happening is the powers of darkness having their heyday then we could repeat the mistake of the disciples. We could attribute the sovereign work of Jesus for a ghost—a demon.

Think about it. In one moment, as the wise chess master, the Lord has sovereignly interrupted business-as-usual. He has temporarily put an end to our cherished idols of sports, entertainment, food, travel, vacations, financial prosperity, and even our beloved forms of doing church.

But some in the church are protesting the government for forcing the church to shut down. *They are taking away our rights. This is a violation of the constitution.*

But what if the Lord Himself has allowed the church to shut down for a season? Have you ever considered that?

What if the Lord is bringing the church back to its only true foundation—the person of Jesus Christ?

Jesus has come to us walking on the water as the Lord over the storm. Let's see Him at work in this storm and not attribute everything that is happening as the work of the devil or evil governments.

The Word of the Lord Fulfilled

For years, Terry Bennett has been sharing about his prophetic encounter, where he watched the Lord take a hammer and demolish the church, bringing it down to its very foundation.

Why would Jesus take such severe action?

It's actually pretty simple. The Lord wants to wean us away from the all the external things that have characterized the church for centuries—events, services, meetings, messages, music, gifts, signs and wonders, provision, and blessings. As the One who created us for fellowship with Himself, He wants to bring us into a deep, internal, experiential, holy-of-holies relationship with Himself by the indwelling Spirit.

For years, Terry has been saying that the church has become like Israel during Jesus's earthly ministry. The church has become *its own way, its own truth, and its own life*. For years, Terry has been warning that the Lord was going to end church as we have known it. And now it has been fulfilled.

Because of this crisis, we can't meet in our beautiful buildings. We can't have our stage lights, smoke machines, and skinny jeans. We can't have our entertaining forms of worship. And our best-life-now-motivational speeches just aren't appetizing during a pandemic.

Everything external we have come to love about the church has come to an abrupt end.

And here's what we need to grasp: The Lord is in this.

In this present storm, let's not mistake Jesus for a ghost. Let us not label His work as the work of darkness and evil, even if it's different from what our cherished doctrines have taught us about the Lord. Even if it doesn't fit into our theological box.

Scene 3: Returning to the Person

Like the disciples and the massive crowd, who had to crossover the lake to hear the Lord's ultimate intention in His first coming, the church is also in a time of transition. The Lord is transitioning His church. What is His goal? As we see in John 6, it's this: That we would no longer try to fit Jesus into our lives but we would make Him our life.

Leonard Ravenhill said, "We've got people who've been 'saved' thirty years, and they're not a day older in the spiritual life. They're no more mature. They've no more spiritual strength or spiritual understanding or spiritual revelation. Why? Because they've lived on meetings instead of living on Christ!"

Though spoken decades ago, this aptly describes the present-day church. Never before in human history have we had access to so many meetings, so many messages, so many books. Through the internet, we have an unending buffet of sermons, teachings, podcasts, and articles.

If all we do is read and listen to these, and never get to the person of Jesus Christ and partake of Him for ourselves in the secret place, we will remain in a perpetual state of immaturity. And we will be shakable as the end-time pressures increase.

In this transitional time, the Lord is calling us back to Himself.

I went through Jesus' message in John 6 and noted these key phrases and themes:

- Believe
- Receive
- Rest
- Come to Him
- Eat and drink of Him
- Behold Him
- Abide in Him and Him in us
- Live by His life

When the people asked, "What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?", Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent" (John 6:28-29).

The eternal work of God, singular, is the person of Jesus Christ.

In short, Jesus was revealing to the masses why He came. His ultimate intention was to become the life we live by at all times. He was revealing the eternal purpose of God, which is Himself. The eternal Son of God is the work of God. God's ultimate intention is for us to believe in Him, receive from Him, rest in Him, come to Him, eat and drink of Him, behold Him, abide in Him and Him in us, and to live by His life.

We were created by Him to have His life in fullness, to become His eternal wife, to be conformed into His image, and to become sons of the Father.

John 6:57 summarizes His message succinctly: "As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of [by is a better translation] the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of [by] Me."

In the same way that Jesus lived by the indwelling life of the Father, we are to live by His indwelling life. How? By eating of Him, who is the bread of life. As we believe in Him, come to Him in the secret place, eat and drink of Him, receive from Him, behold Him, rest in Him, and abide in Him, we will live by His indwelling life all day every day.

The Lord is calling the church back to Himself in this crisis.

Scene 4: The Sifting

As in John 6, those who want to fit Jesus into their life rather than Him becoming their life could very well fall away in this season.

Notice that it was not just the conference hoppers that fell away, but even some of His disciples. John 6:60-61 says, "Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this said, 'This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?' But Jesus, conscious that His disciples grumbled at this, said to them, 'Does this cause you to stumble?'"

The Greek word for stumble means "to offend." This is a warning to us all: Be on your guard against offense toward the Lord as He allows our lives to be temporarily disrupted in order to get us back to Him.

Jesus said that in the end times many would be offended (Matt. 24:10). He also said, "Blessed is he who does not take offense at Me" (Matt. 11:6).

Will you allow offense to rise up in your heart toward the Lord for allowing your life to be temporarily interrupted so that you can get back to the person of Jesus Christ? So that you can return to Him, go deep in Him, and know Him like never before?

This crisis will separate and winnow the church. Those who want their church to return back to the way it was before the pandemic—rather than hearing what the Lord is saying in this crisis about returning to Him as the bread of life—could be offended at the Lord and fall away.

John 6:66 states, "As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore."

Notice the verse—666. Interesting. The ultimate antichrist agenda is to get us offended at Jesus Christ and then replace Christ with something or someone else.

Will this crisis cause you to withdraw from the Lord because what He is saying or doing is offensive? Or will you come to Him, eat of Him, and make Him the life you live by?