

No Turning Back

It was on March 31, 2019 that we began our study of the Gospel of Luke. As we have worked verse by verse through this portion of Scripture, we have been confronted with and convicted by some of Jesus' most poignant and profound words. They are worth meditating upon and applying all the days of our lives. Lord willing, we will conclude our study of *Luke* on September 5 and then embark on Galatians. As we race towards the finish line of Luke's first volume, I want us to keep in mind a couple of passages that I believe are especially relevant to what we may face in the months ahead (I am not claiming to be a prophet in any measure!).

It is hard to believe that a year ago most of the world, including churches, were in "lockdown" due to the fear of COVID-19. A majority of the population avoided mass gatherings and limited their personal interactions with a hand-full of friends and family. It was a period of political and social upheaval as people looked to "experts" and "leaders" for some sense of direction and assurance. Unfortunately, as most churches got swept away by the tide of public fear and an "abundance of caution," she was impotent to provide the world and God's people the very thing that all sinners need, namely corporate worship, or as the new term became to be known "in-person" worship in contrast to "virtual" worship. The one divine grace that was necessary to sustain and strengthen sinners against the uncertainties of this life was sadly abandoned by God's people. In the aftermath of this tragedy, the world and the church in many respects are still reeling from having turned away from the Lord.

In hindsight of what has happened in the past 16 or so months, I pray that the Church will now be focused more than ever on the essential nature and the ultimate priority of public corporate worship. That she will proclaim in word and in deed that there is no substitute for the soul-nourishing, God-honoring, Christ-exalting weekly worship of the gathered saints on the Lord's Day. That as we worship the Lord as He has commanded on the appointed Day in corporate assembly, we will delight in the foretaste of heaven and the everlasting kingdom. If God's people have learned anything through this severe providence, I trust that it is how our souls were created and designed to worship God, not only for His worth but also for our souls' thirst. Augustine, one of the Church's preeminent theologians, has rightly captured this truth in his *Confessions*, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You." This heart-restlessness was felt by many during the lock-down as Christians abandoned corporate worship. They starved themselves of the life giving and soul-sustaining grace that was most needed in such a time. Would that God's people not resort to such a misguided, self-inflicted fast in the coming days but feast on the bountiful riches of Christ!

We are already "hearing" from the "experts" of the highly infectious nature of the Delta variant of the coronavirus. What will this mean for the near future? Will we repeat the same mistakes by allowing the fear of the unknown to eclipse the light of God's Word? Let's apply Jesus' words in *Luke* to this situation. In 9:62 Jesus said, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." These words were addressed to a would-be disciple who wanted to first say farewell to his family, but the principle is just as relevant to us. If you profess to be a believer, a disciple, then following Christ means moving forward with Him and not turning back. If you have made any genuine progress in your faith and walk with Christ, it is all of grace, and that same grace is more than able to carry you into His kingdom. When you allow your eyes (faith in Christ) to be drawn away by worldly fears to anything other than Christ, you are starting to look back to a life of self-rule and self-preservation. Jesus also had something to say about this in 17:32-33, "Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it." What are you willing to exchange for your soul? Remember Lot's wife! She not only lost her life but her soul as well because she took her eyes off the Lord. Don't be tempted by the fear of death in this life to throw away your soul for eternity.

It has been an encouragement to see most of the congregation return to corporate worship in the past few months. I trust your souls have been nourished in worshipping God corporately. As we move forward, take every thought (and emotion) captive to obey Christ (2 Cor 10:5) so that you may no longer be tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes (Eph 4:14). Then and only then will you have the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, having your hearts and your minds guarded in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:7). Let us advance regardless of the cost to the glory of God!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'S. Y.' or similar, written in a cursive style.

July 28, 2021