

S. J. Komanapalli

What is God saying to the Church through this pandemic time?

A pastoral approach

My dear brothers and sisters,

Grace and peace to you all. It is truly my privilege to present a few thoughts and observations regarding the topic.

As we journey through this Covid-19 crisis, my prayer is that it will be well with you, your family and congregation.

Recently, some Pastors asked for my viewpoint on the present pandemic. Some of the questions asked included how I view what is happening, implications for the Church, and some practical applications for the local Pastor.

Foundational framework

- 1) I do not believe that we are in a time of punishment from God. If so, it would have been the end of the world. However, nothing happens without Him allowing it. This has historically happened before with previous pandemics. The growing population, pollution, hygiene or lack of hygiene, poverty-all contribute to sickness and at some point, something mutates and causes an outbreak.
- 2) I believe God is using this time as a reset of many things especially in the church
- 3) God is stripping away some of the accumulated trappings of the church that have drawn the eyes to the event and place rather than true worship of the Creator.
 - a) Isaiah 17:7-8 *Man will have respect for the Holy One.* We love our Maker, but many times it is based on what we expect or fashion Him to be. Respect is when we see Him as He is and surrender ourselves to Him. The church has tried to fashion Christ in their image out of love but must learn to love Him as He is out of respect. We must come back to the place of worshipping in *Spirit and Truth* (John 4:24).
 - b) As the world comes to a standstill and without answers, God reminds us that He is our healer whether it is instant/miraculous or through medical science. (Jeremiah 33:6)
 - c) As sources of our income diminish or disappear, God reminds us that He is our provider and we should turn our trust to Him. (Genesis 22:14)
- 4) God is using this isolation to rebuild the personal altar and the family altar. We have focused so much on the Church/public altar that we have lost the foundational significance of the individual altar and family altar.

- 5) This reset will lay down a foundation that will lead to global revival.

The reality of the situation lies in the fact we have never been down this road before. Nevertheless, that also gives us the direction where to go first. The Lord spoke through Joshua in Joshua 3:4 to follow after the Ark *“that you may know the way by which you must go, for you have not passed this way before”*. We must seek His direction and guidance.

For Men and Women of God, this puts us in a particular quandary. For we must accept what we are knowledgeable about and what we are not. We must not be afraid to defer to science and not be quick to jump to conclusions or buy into conspiracies (Isaiah 8:11-12). We must be Men and Women who calm the fears of the people and point to a God who is still sovereign and in control. We must bring comfort, encouragement and hope. This is particularly important for those who would suffer from mental health issues. Science is a gift from God and we should not fear it but use it to benefit our people.

The Lord is calling His Church to be His voice once again (Isaiah 40:1) To be the voice of calm, healing, comfort, hope, encouragement, salvation and deliverance. Do not promote fear but declare the presence of God.

Practical applications

- 1) Show people that our hope is in Christ. Acknowledge that their worry or fear is legitimate and normal in times like these. However, show how we overcome when we put our trust in Christ

Preach Christ!
In despair--preach hope
In fear—preach courage
In sickness—preach healing
In mourning—preach comfort
In danger—preach protection
In panic and anxiety—preach calm and peace
Preach Jesus!

- 2) Do not be afraid to admit that we do not have all the answers, yet we trust in God who does have all the answers. (Psalm 95:6-7)
- 3) Acknowledge we are in a season of struggle but as we have overcome things before, God will bring us through again. Tell people to list out past victories in their lives.
- 4) Be practical and follow practical suggestions on daily living within framework of health protocols, governmental protocols, etc. Inform your people of these things.

- 5) Steer them away from conspiracies and stories that stoke fear and restlessness. Steer them to the Word of God.
- 6) Encourage our people to be part of the solution, whether encouraging one another, helping with resources, feeding, etc. The more people engage, the less they will feel helpless.
- 7) Try new technologies, strategies to bring the Gospel to all. This is a time to try new things that you can use in the church later when things come back to normal. Use technology to be in contact with and communicate with your church people.
- 8) Do not try to be everyone's Pastor or leader. Lead those you have been called to lead. Let others lead their flocks. Do not allow yourself to be caught up in controversies or criticisms over tradition of Worship ritual, Baptism or Holy Communion.
- 9) Use this time to build up your family. Enjoy the rebuilding of relationships and fostering them into the future.

“Stand strong, remain faithful, and be of good courage.”

“We will get through this together.”

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