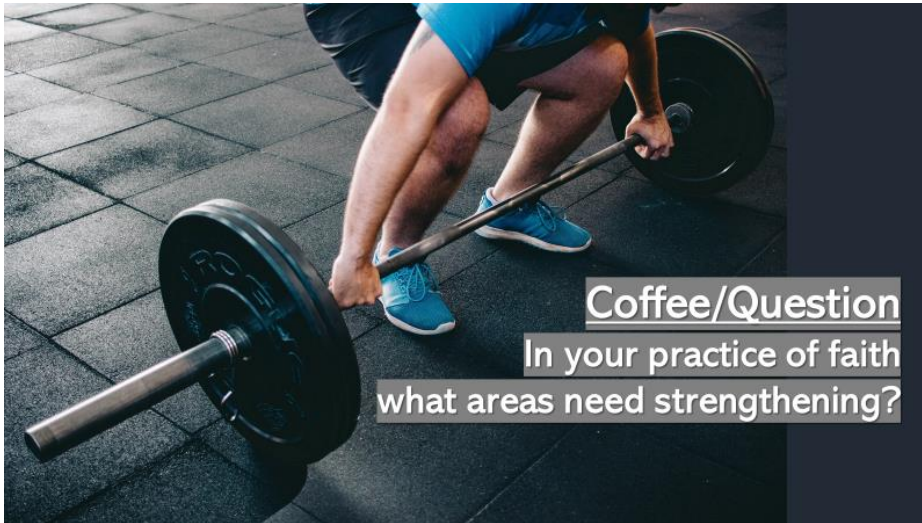


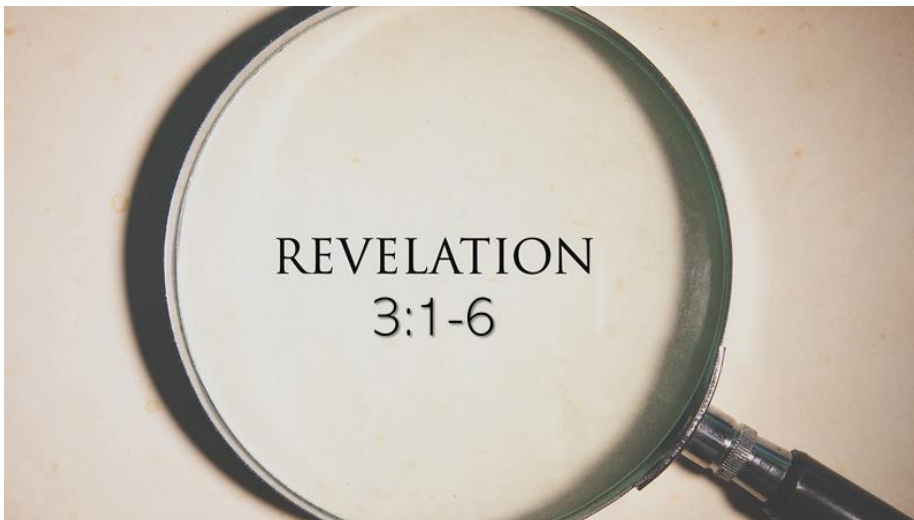
Sooke Baptist Church
Sunday, November 8, 2020, 9am and 11am
7110 West Coast Road
also on Facebook Live Stream and YouTube



Revelation 3:1-6
A Church on Life Support



Coffee/Question
In your practice of faith
what areas need strengthening?



3:1 - "To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars."

This introduction has some similarity to the introduction in the message to the church at Ephesus...but there is one significant difference.

In the message to the church at Sardis Jesus said that he **"...holds the seven spirits of God..."** as well as the seven stars (angels).

The "seven spirits of God" describes the Holy Spirit in all of his fullness as the third member of the triune God.

What does it mean for Jesus to hold the Holy Spirit in his hands?

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the triune God.

What Jesus said to his followers the last night of his life helps us understand...



The Spirit comes from the Father, but he is given to the believer through Jesus.

In John 16:7, Jesus again said...



Jesus reminded his church that he is the One who holds the Spirit...meaning he is the One who gives the Spirit.

Through Jesus the rescue which the church of Sardis was in desperate need of... would come through the presence and ministry of God the Spirit.

3:1b - I know your deeds...

This was an emphasis made by Jesus to each of the seven churches.

- 2:2 – I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance.
- 2:8 – I know your afflictions and your poverty
- 2:13 – I know where you live
- 2:19 – I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance
- 3:1 – I know your deeds
- 3:8 – I know your deeds
- 3:15 – I know your deeds

This reality about Jesus is true of for every church in every location in every time – Jesus knows everything about us.

3:1b - ...you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.

For the first time... in these messages to the seven churches, Jesus had no words of commendation. Krodel, p.131.

Regarding this stern assessment, Darryl Johnson says...

“Followers of Jesus have entered a life they cannot live... apart from relationship with the triune God...

Once individual disciples and congregations no longer live in the power of Jesus’ Spirit, the forms may remain, but the inner reality will be gone.

Darryl Johnson

p.99.

The presence and the life of God was absent... in the church at Sardis.
The power of the Spirit expressed through the working of his gifts of grace...the manifestation of love and faith... was absent... in the church at Sardis.

The church was in desperate need of a visitation of God...where he would revive them.

But Jesus gave them a spiritual prescription...he identified five things that the people of his church needed to do... in order that they might draw near to God.

DJ, p.100

- **Wake up!**
- **Strengthen what remains and is about to die.**
- **Remember what you have received and heard.**
- **Hold it fast.**
- **Repent.**

3:2-3 - Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. ³ Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent.

The Holy Spirit had been...



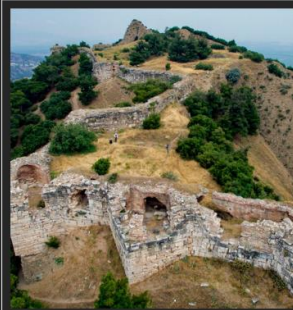
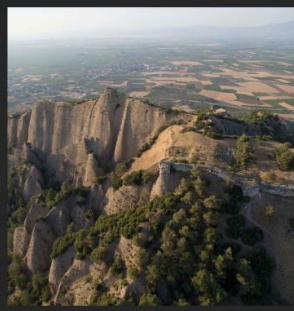
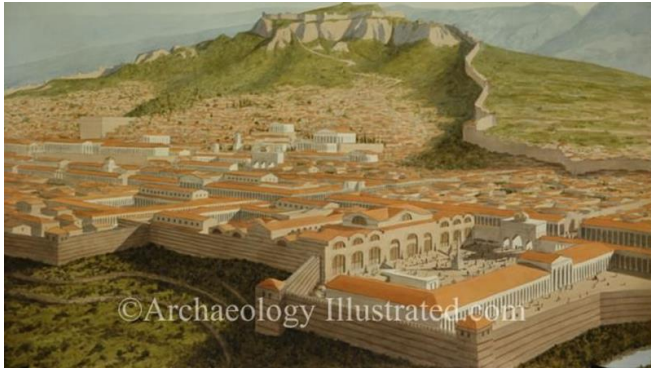
... he had been pushed aside...his fire had been put out.

•Wake up!

- Strengthen what remains and is about to die.
- Remember what you have received and heard.
- Hold it fast.
- Repent.

Two different times in the history of Sardis, the city had been captured due to a lack of vigilance.

Sardis was built on a mountain, and its Acropolis on the mountain's spur. DJ, p.100



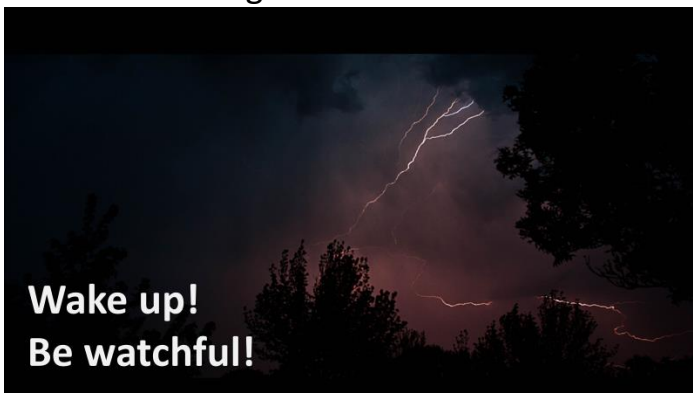


Because of Sardis' natural and constructed fortifications... its citizens had drifted into a dangerous complacency thinking their city to be invincible...impregnable.

In **549 BC**, Cyrus the Persian captured the Acropolis by sending a climber up a crevice in one of the perpendicular walls of the fortress.

In **218 BC**, Antiochus the Great captured the city by directing 15 of his warriors to stealthily climb up the wall and open the gates from within. DJ, p.100

With this message Jesus warned that his church was at great risk!



His strong words to them – **you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead** – was meant to jolt them out of their spiritual slumber.

- Wake up!
- **Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God.**
- Remember what you have received and heard.
- Hold it fast.
- Repent.

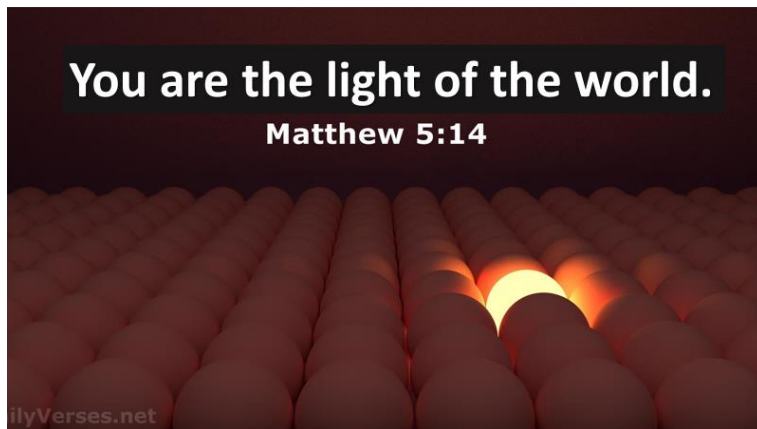
What had the church of Sardis not completed?
In chapter 1... John saw in a vision seven lampstands.
Jesus explained to him that the lampstands...were his churches.



What is the purpose of a lampstand?

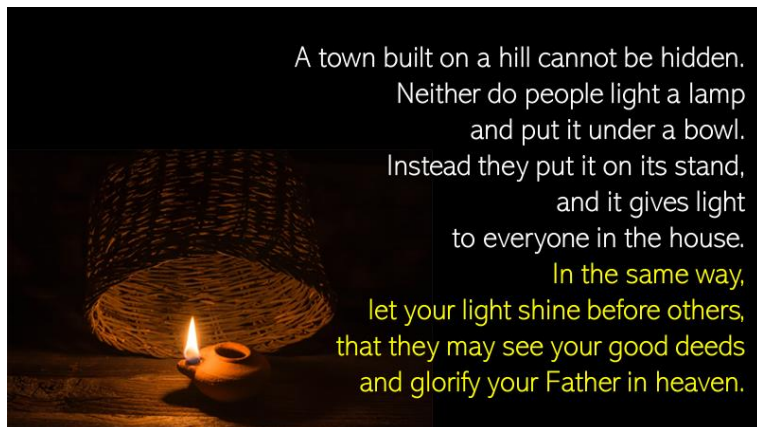
To give light.

Remember what Jesus said to his followers in Matthew 5:14?



What is true of an individual follower is true of a church.

Jesus had continued and said...Matthew 5:14b-16



Jesus expects his churches to shine his life out of them.
In the church of Sardis this was not happening.
The reality of the good Father who is in heaven was not being seen in how they lived.

Do we know what had happened to cause this?
The church in Sardis was the only one, to whom Jesus said nothing about persevering in the face of persecution.
Why was that?

We find the answer in what Jesus said to them in v.4 –



If only a few... had not, this meant that most... had.

What did Jesus mean by “soiled their clothes?”

GK Beale writes: This phrase refers to some kind of compromise with pagan or idolatrous practices. p.80

It would seem that the issue faced by the church in Pergamum and Thyatira had almost completely overrun the church in Sardis.

The majority had so accommodated themselves to the prevailing culture, that...

...their passion for Jesus was smothered, their distinctiveness lost, and with it their voice to speak the truth boldly.

You could say the church was on...



...life support.

- Wake up!
- Strengthen what remains and is about to die.
- **Remember what you have received and heard.**
- Hold it fast.
- Repent.

This word remember is used frequently in the Scriptures.

God says of himself... that he will remember.
Remember what?

Genesis 9:15

...I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind.

Exodus 2:24

God heard the groaning of the Israelites and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob.

Isaiah 49:15-16

Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, **I will not forget you!** See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands...

Psalm 105:8

He remembers his covenant forever, the promise he made, for a thousand generations.

See also Hebrews 8:10-12; Isaiah 65:16-17;

The point being made by God is not that he is forgetful, but rather than he is faithful – God is a covenant-keeping God.

His commitment to those who walk with him is not casual, nor fickle.

God binds himself to his people like a husband and wife bind themselves to one another when they make a marriage covenant.

“For better or worse, in sickness and in health, for richer or poorer”...God remembers his covenant and will never forsake his own.

What does the scripture tell the believer to remember?

Psalm 42:5-6

Why, my soul are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. My soul is downcast within me; therefore, **I will remember you...**

Jonah 2:7

When my life was ebbing away, **I remembered you, LORD, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple.**

2 Peter 3:1-2

Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them **as reminders** to stimulate you to wholesome thinking.

I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles.

Jesus told his church in Sardis to remember what they had received and heard. He told them to remember because... they had forgotten.

They had forgotten the news of the gospel they had heard. They had forgotten the One whom they had welcomed into their lives. They were living as they were... with indistinguishable lives.... because they had forgotten... whose they were.

- Wake up!
- Strengthen what remains and is about to die.
- Remember what you have received and heard.
- **Hold it fast.**
- Repent.

What they remembered they were to hold fast.

This command was not general – hold fast.

The command was specific... hold **it** fast.

Hold on to the gospel.

Hold on to your Savior.

Hold on to the Spirit who lives in you.

Hold tightly to them... in the sense ...do not drift away from them.

There is not anything better than the gospel...
...nothing more precious than Jesus...
no one who can take the place of the Holy Spirit.
Hold fast to them!!

- Wake up!
- Strengthen what remains and is about to die.
- Remember what you have received and heard.
- Hold it fast.
- **Repent.**

To wake up, to strengthen what remains, to remember, to hold it fast, demanded a dramatic and radical change of direction – the church in Sardis needed to turn towards the Lord and away from their sinful accommodation and compromise.

v.3b - But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

Look at these three different passages that speak a similar warning.

Matthew 24:43: But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night **the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into.**

1 Thessalonians 5:2: ...you know very well that the day of the Lord will come **like a thief in the night.**

2 Peter 3:10: ...the day of the Lord will come **like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.**

Each time that it is said that Jesus will come like a thief... his followers are then told to be watchful, to be vigilant that the day not catch them off guard.

Let's come back now the warning given to the church in Sardis.

If they rejected Jesus' message to them, if they chose to continue with the status quo, on life support, living in what Gerhard Krodel calls "an acculturated stupor," (p.133) then Jesus assured them that they would spiritually experience what their city had experienced in the past.

He would visit them like a thief; and they would be unaware of the discipline that would suddenly come upon them.

But what was this coming which Jesus spoke of?
Was it... the day of his return to the earth?

Tom Wright says, "Probably not, though that too is in view as the ultimate backdrop. In the Scripture there are glimpses of other comings, which may consist of times of persecution for the purpose of cleansing and purification...or of moments of comfort and restoration...." Revelation, p.30

Remember what Jesus had told the church at Ephesus if they did not repent, "I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place." 2:5



Tom Wright added this, "The coming which Jesus spoke of may well be have been a time of persecution... or of internal collapse, which would result... in the church drowning... in its own inoffensiveness." Revelation, p.31

v.4-5a - Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. ⁵The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white.



purity

GK Beale writes, “The repetition of the promise, ‘dressed in white,’ underlines its significance, since here, as elsewhere in Revelation, white robes stand for a purity, which, through the work of Jesus, results in an eternal reward in God’s kingdom... The reward begins in this life because Jesus acknowledges that the few who are faithful are already ‘dressed in white.’” p.80

For the few in Sardis who remained faithful to Jesus, they were assured of Jesus’ on-going fellowship – he would walk with them.

And....there is nothing sweeter than the fellowship of Jesus.

For those who would finish the race of their faith, they were assured of a fuller righteousness to be given to them.... that would eradicate any vestige of sin in their body, soul and spirit, thus completing the salvation which the Lord had begun in them when they first trusted in Jesus.

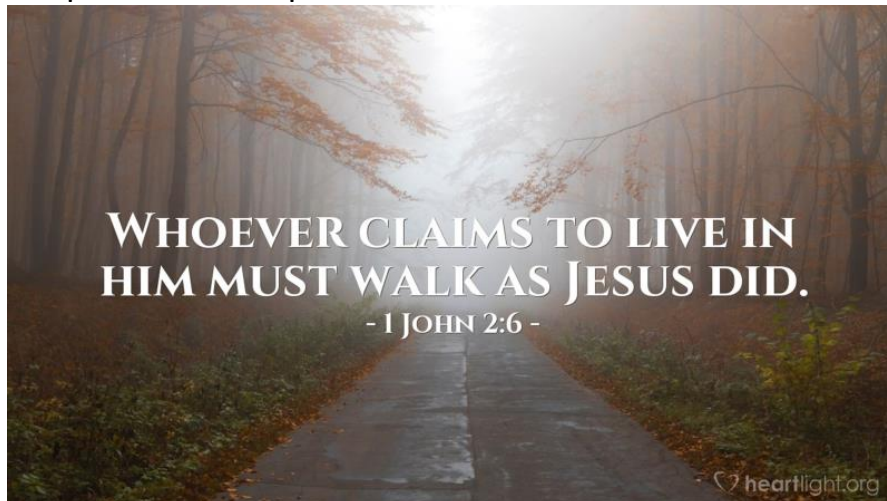
v.5b - I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels.

In the promise made to those whose lives give evidence of being born of the Spirit and of a character that is being transformed into his likeness, Jesus assured them that what God has begun in them will be completed.

But there is a subtle warning here against presumption...of thinking that irrespective of one's behavior, simply being part of a church is all that is required.

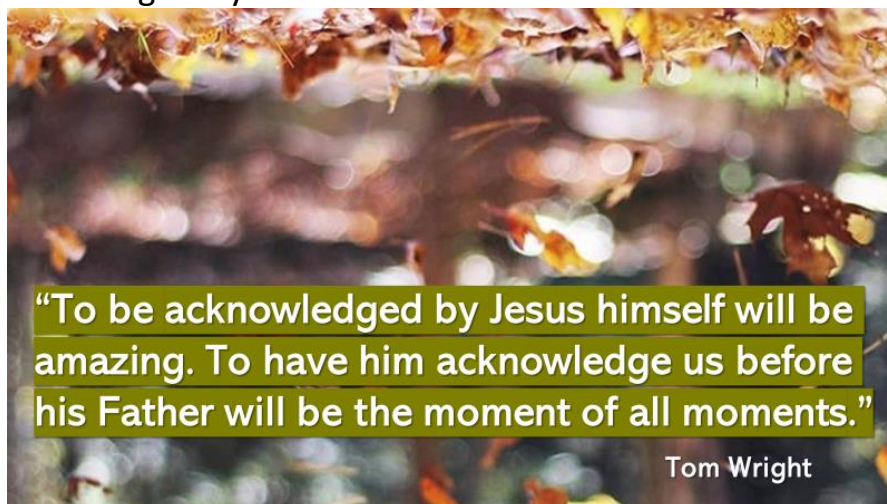
Revelation, p31

The believer's hope is not in a prayer they prayed, but in the life, they now live, in the power of the Spirit.



There is a third thing promised by Jesus to the one who overcomes. I will acknowledge them before my Father and his angels.

Tom Wright says...



Revelation, p.32.

⁶Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

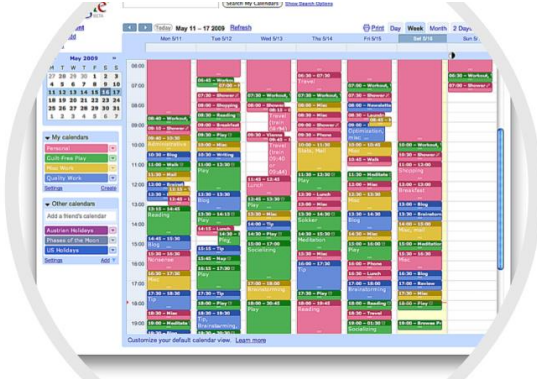
In Darryl Johnson's book, *Discipleship on the Edge*, he connects the command "strengthen what remains" ... to the church of Jesus today.

He says that it is healthy for a church, from time to time, to stop everything... in order to evaluate and question, with this clear purpose in mind - to strengthen what remains.

Just like a garage or storage locker can gather unnecessary stuff over the years...



...and just like our daily calendars can get filled up...



...so that we are left with little or no margin...



...the same thing can happen in the life of a church...lots of activity, but is it purposeful...is it life-giving?

Johnson's idea is great... ..but in 42 years of ministry... I've never seen it done, because...I think the "how" is really tricky.

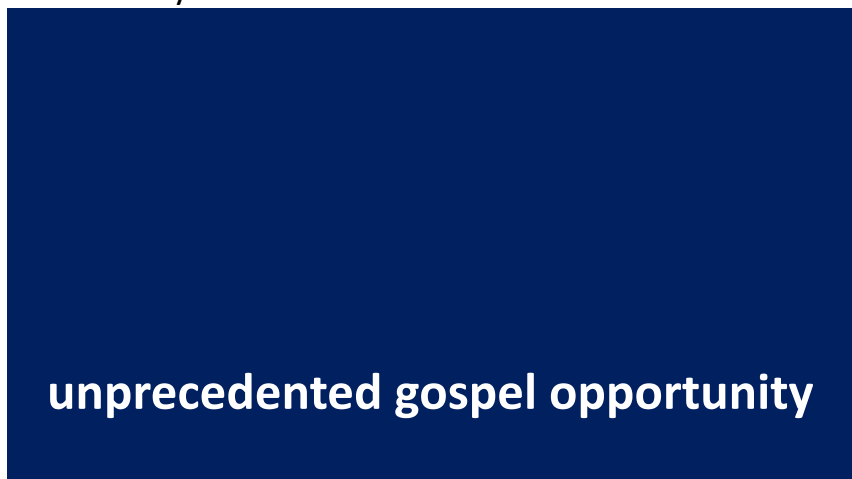
And then along came a pandemic.

I am increasingly becoming convinced that with the pandemic God is giving us time to....



Without question it has been a difficult and challenging time eight months. Having to pause our lives and plans is frustrating. Not being able to see family or friends has created great loneliness. Having to constantly adapt...has produced both anxiety and weariness.

That said, I firmly believe the circumstances in which we are now living are intended by our Lord Jesus to be an...



... for the church to proclaim the good news of Jesus.

For the people of our culture who've had their lives stripped down to the bare essentials, there has been an abundance of time to think.

The result has been that for many individuals they can no longer ignore the spiritual vacuum within them – their idols, the things they had turned to in order to fill the void within, have been proven to be catastrophically insufficient.

Many are asking..... why am I alive? what purpose do I serve? is this all there is? is there more to life? and if there is what is it?

Jesus' better story

More than ever people are receptive to hear the news of Jesus' better story –

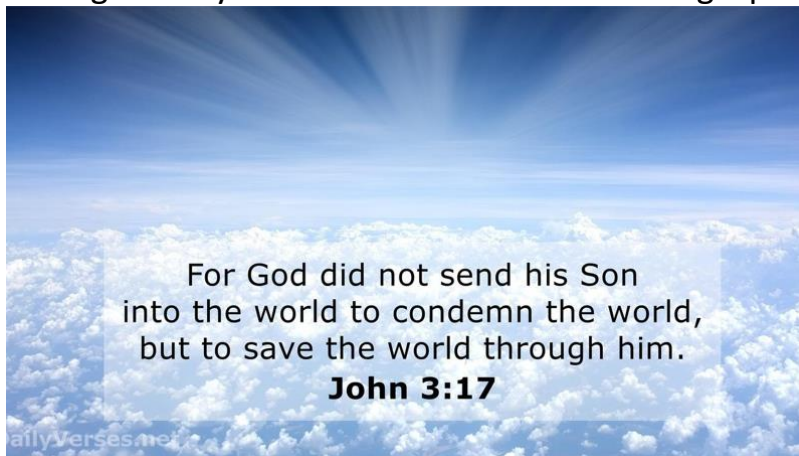
Jesus' better story

- The beginning
- The choice
- The decision
- The plan
- The good news

1. Of humanity's beginning – we were created by the triune God and entrusted by him to care for the world and its creatures.
2. Of the choice made by our first parents to act in defiance of the triune God and the door that their choice opened... for sin to corrupt human nature and... death to curse human experience and all life.
3. Of the decision made in eternity past by the triune God... that because of their love for humanity they would be our Rescuer.

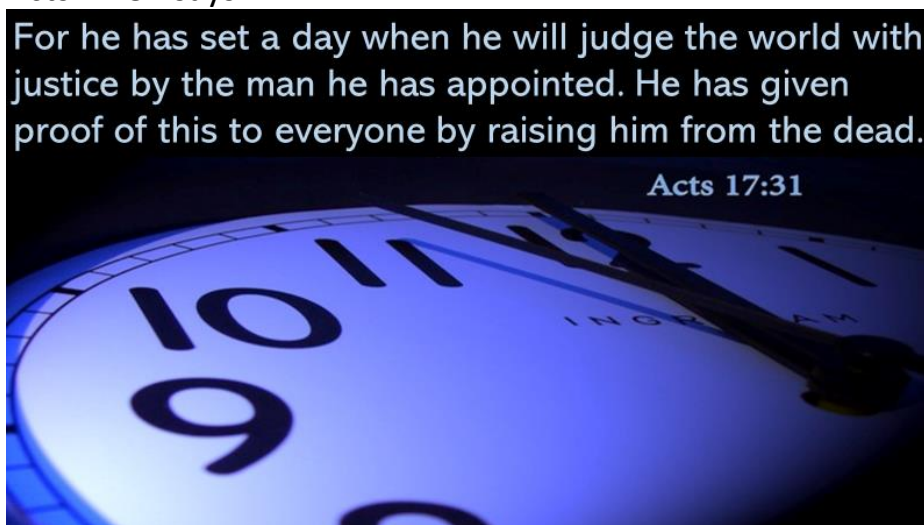
4. Of the plan for Jesus the Son of God to become a man and live a perfect life among us, of his sacrifice, made on our behalf, where he willingly died the death of a criminal – becoming sin for us... so that we might be given his righteousness; of his burial and resurrection from the dead, proving him to be the Savior of the world.
5. Of the good news of grace... that through faith in Jesus one can be saved from their sin, adopted by God the Father as his child, be transformed by God the Spirit, with the assurance of living with the triune God in the age to follow this one, when all things will be made new.

Follower of Jesus we need to see the world and the things happening right now... through the eyes of our triune God....and see gospel opportunity.



There is a future moment coming, a day when the world and its people will be judged.

Acts 17:31 says...



But that day has not yet come.

This still is a time of opportunity; a time when a person can repent and be saved. God is shaking the world in order to save.

But this season is also a gospel opportunity for the church to strengthen what remains.



It is fascinating to me... that when the leadership team talked together last fall, as we endeavored to discern what Jesus would have for us, how the thought came, which then has served as an informal guiding principle, "If we were a brand new church, what would we do?"

We had no idea that Jesus' plan for us would entail the drastic stopping that took place mid-March.

But here we are.

As a church we have been given the opportunity from God to strengthen what remains.

This is a time for us to re-center; to re-orient ourselves.

To what?

Dave Mathis says, "to the one thing."

Psalm 27:4

...**one thing** I seek

Luke 10:41-42

...**one thing** is needed

Philippian 3:13-14

...**one thing** I do



This is the reality which is ours by grace through faith.



This is what we so often think happens.



But this is what really is the case.



Strengthening what remains is a re-orienting...



...a re-centering



...of life around our Lord Jesus.

We've been cut back to the essentials.
And that is really is an ok thing.

We can worship together on Sunday mornings.
The youth can continue to meet on Friday nights.

And some life groups meet here during the week because we can't safely do so in our homes.

But there is a lot of things that we can't do.

And that is ok – because Jesus wants us to strengthen what remains.

When we think of our Sunday gatherings...is not Jesus desiring for us to strengthen these precious times of worship together???

We can't safely do Kids Zone – but parents you have been given a great gift – the opportunity to worship as a family...together... and then to use the songs, the prayers, the fellowship, the teaching of Sunday to disciple your children.

All of us coming together for an hour... as we now have to do...is training your family in the priority of worshiping God in the context of a community of faith.

You are teaching them that following Jesus is done in community.

And church, you are meant to encourage the children and youth who come.

You are there spiritual grandparents, aunts and uncles.

You are to talk to them; learn their names; come to know who they are.

When we couldn't physically gather...were we not reminded of how precious worship together is?

And are we not being taught by our Lord... in this season... that on Sundays this is the top priority?

I speak to all of us, myself included...if we are to thrive in the time in which we live, if we are to do more than simply exist, that is, just get by, then we absolutely need to be committed to and involved with a robust community of faith who is, in the words of JI Packer, both in awe of our awesome, holy God and utterly fascinated by his beauty, goodness, mercy and love.

There is nothing on this earth that comes even close to the church of Jesus gathered in his name.



Whoever has ears let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.