



Church Newsletter

First Baptist Church of
Niles

Volume 2/Issue 9

WHAT WE ARE DOING? AND WHAT WE SHOULD DO?

IN THIS ISSUE

WELCOME

Welcome to Volume 2 of the FBCN Newsletter or the “current new normal” editions.

This week’s reading will be Psalm 85 (ESV), Revive Us Again

TO THE CHOIRMASTER. A PSALM OF THE SONS OF KORAH.

85 LORD, you were favorable to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob.² You forgave the iniquity of your people; you covered all their sin. *Selah*

³ You withdrew all your wrath; you turned from your hot anger.

⁴ Restore us again, O God of our salvation, and put away your indignation toward us!⁵ Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger to all generations? ⁶ Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you? ⁷ Show us your steadfast love, O LORD, and grant us your salvation. ⁸ Let me hear what God the LORD will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints;

but let them not turn back to folly.

⁹ Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him, that glory may dwell in our land. ¹⁰ Steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other.

¹¹ Faithfulness springs up from the ground, and righteousness looks down from the sky.

¹² Yes, the LORD will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase.¹³ Righteousness will go before him and make his footsteps a way.

Our guest speaker this month is Rev. Ebi Perinbaraj. He will be bringing a series he entitled “Gospel Church.”

His first two messages were a blessing if you can’t join us Sunday mornings I encourage you to watch the sermons on either First Baptist of Niles Facebook Page or on the website.

Join us for a virtual prayer meeting on Wednesdays at 7:00pm.

Wednesday Bible Study ([Click Here](#))

Meeting ID: 899 2251 1230

Password: 409807

One tap mobile

+13126266799

Meeting ID: 899 2251 1230

Password: 409807

Make sure you view the updated prayer list. There are so many needs.

In a previous newsletter I explored the subject of living a radical Christian life. I was stirred to dig a little deeper after I read a piece by John McArthur entitled "A Biblical Case for the Churches Duty to Remain Open." I have been struck lately by the apparent conflict being voiced by Christians. By conflict I mean there are complaints that the government is overstepping its bounds by limiting the number of persons allowed in a closed space for worship and imposing social distancing standards during worship services. The argument that is widely cited involves the First Amendment of the Constitution. I am not a scholar on Constitutional Rights but in studying the "intent" of the First Amendment it was the prohibition of the repression of religious beliefs. I have to defer to scholars on the subject.

I wonder if we forget that as we walk through these troubling days that Christ is not a Savior who is unaware of our suffering. With Christ joining us together, we have the opportunity to shine as the Church, united as one people in these days, to honor our leaders, and experience more deeply that the Church is more than a building. The Church of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is not the church building, it is the sanctified people of God, the Christians. Why then do we place importance upon the church building?

Is this a prevalent belief that the assembly place is holy ground? The Bible does not teach it. The word that is translated as "church" in the King James and other English versions of the Bible is from the Greek, ekklesia, which means "called-out people", or "assembly", as in a gathered body of people. The English word church actually comes from a

later Greek word, kyriakon, by way of the English circe, or Scottish kirk, and means the Lord's, as in belonging to the Lord. Unfortunately, many try to equate the modern church building with the old temple under the Law of Moses, calling the church building "the house of the Lord." Why is it that we find ourselves getting so agitated over something that is non-existent in the Bible?

There is no record in the New Testament that the Christians ever built a church building. We Christians are the house of God. (emphasis added)

Citing a thought column by Jonathan Turley, the Shapiro Professor of Public Interest Law at George Washington University. "Jesus bore it so that you would not have to." If that recent declaration by the Awaken Church of Jonesboro at Arkansas is true, Jesus might also be viewed as the first coronavirus offender, because the Last Supper hosted three disciples too many under the social gathering limits in most states during this crisis. Some church leaders accuse American governors of infringing on constitutional liberties.

The issue is playing out in several states. In Kansas, Democratic Governor Laura Kelly has barred religious gatherings with more than 10 people. That action prompted the Republican controlled state legislature to then vote to rescind the order as an attack on free exercise of religion. Kelly asked her staff to explore all her legal options. Under the Constitution, she is on strong ground to issue such an order. While untested, the free exercise clause is not a license for religious institutions in a pandemic.

The interpretation not only puts the faithful at risk of infection but also

their communities. No constitutional rights are truly absolute. Rights such as free exercise of religion and free speech can be overcome with a sufficiently compelling purpose of state and the least restrictive means of achieving that purpose. There is nothing more compelling than battling a pandemic, and limiting gathering size is the only effective deterrent to the coronavirus spreading until a vaccine can be made available.

And...

The question of religious freedom during a pandemic relies heavily on the gravity of the circumstances, said Ryan Tucker, Director for Christian Ministries at Alliance Defending Freedom, a group that specializes in religious liberty cases. State governments, he said, can ask churches to close or move their services online so long as they show "compelling interest" for doing so. "During this extraordinary time, it's conceivable the current situation involving this global pandemic may qualify as a compelling government interest," he wrote to church leaders facing restrictions of religious practice. But, Tucker added, governments still must respect churches by the "least restrictive means."

"In this case, temporary, evenly applied restrictions may satisfy that standard," he said. "But if these restrictions are unnecessarily prolonged or strengthened or if religion is targeted by some government body, then that analysis may change."

I have to ask myself, as Christians what are we using to defend our faith? Are we constantly citing "Man's" establishment clauses in defense of our faith and practice, or are we going to the Bible and

following the example of Christ and applying those principles to our lives? Essentially, the Bible discloses who God is and how we can accept him as Lord and Savior. As Americans where self reigns supreme we are inclined to manipulate the Bible to fit our needs, wants and desires. In the same way we take our understanding of man's law and try and make it mesh with God's. In the end we are missing the primary purpose of our lives by allowing ourselves to battle man's word versus our sole purpose of doing battle as commanded in the Word of the Lord.

In his book, "The Rise of Christianity," Rodney Stark surveys several factors that have influenced the rise in Christianity one these being the plagues that have been with us through millennia. He writes, The Plague of Cyprian (249–262 AD) was a lethal pandemic that, at its height, caused upwards of 5,000 deaths a day in Rome. While the plague severely weakened the Roman empire, the Christian response to it won admiration and a greater following.

May we—with our own pandemic—live out the wisdom and way of Jesus before a watching world.

Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria, reported: "Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbors and cheerfully accepting their pains. Many, in nursing and curing others,

transferred their death to themselves and died in their stead."

This evident Christlikeness—taking death in order to give life—stood in stark contrast to those outside the church. Dionysius continues: "But with the heathen everything was quite otherwise. They deserted those who began to be sick, and fled from their dearest friends. They shunned any participation or fellowship with death; which yet, with all their precautions, it was not easy for them to escape." (Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 7.22.7–10)

Plagues intensify the natural course of life. They intensify our own sense of mortality and frailty. They also intensify opportunities to display countercultural, counter-conditional love. The church rose to the challenge in the second century, winning both admirers and also converts.

Stark reckons the Christian population in AD 251 to have been just shy of 1.2 million—that's 1.9 percent of the empire. It's an incredible increase from the second century, though the Church still represented only a tiny minority within the empire. Counterintuitively, though, another plague contributed to the Church's onward march.

This plague was different (perhaps measles, though we're unsure), but the mortality rates were just as high as those a century earlier. Towns in Italy were abandoned, some of them forever. The military and Roman infrastructure were massively weakened. Once again, though, Christians shone in the midst of the trial.

Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, put it like this: "How suitable, how necessary it is that this plague and pestilence, which seems horrible and deadly, searches out the justice of each and every one and examines the mind of the human race; whether the [healthy] care for the sick, whether relatives dutifully love kinsmen as they should . . . whether physicians do not desert the afflicted."

The plagues "search" us. They discover in us either the way of the flesh (self-preservation) or the way of the Spirit (self-giving sacrifice). The third-century plague found in the Church a Spirit-filled people, willing to walk the way of their Master. Christian death rates were significantly lower than those of the general population (perhaps only 10 percent, though the word "only" is a fearful qualifier). The mutual love of brothers and sisters in Christ meant that, on the one hand, those who provided care were at a higher risk of infection, but on the other, those who were infected had better survival rates. As these Christians made themselves vulnerable to death, they actually found life. Once the plague had swept through, Christians were stronger. They were stronger as a proportion of society, since more of them survived. They had more resilience because they had a robust hope in the face of death. And they were stronger as communities, forging even closer bonds through the sufferings they'd faced. If you want to know how Christianity went from an obscure and marginal movement to representing around 6 million believers by AD 300, Rodney Stark will tell you: plagues were a huge factor.

“The early Christians had more resilience because they had a robust hope in the face of death. And they were stronger as communities, forging even closer bonds through the sufferings they’d faced.”

From the 14th century onward, the Black Death haunted Europe. In just five years it wiped out as much as half the population, with urban areas particularly affected. Outbreaks continued recurring in the following centuries, including the plague that struck Wittenberg in 1527. Many fled, yet Luther and his pregnant wife, Katharina, remained to care for the sick, citing Matthew 25:41–46 as their guide: “We must respect the word of Christ, ‘I was sick and you did not visit me.’” According to this passage we are bound to each other in such a way that no one may forsake the other in his distress but is obliged to assist and help him as he himself would like to be helped.

Luther spoke of circumstances where fleeing was permitted and, ever conscious of their propensity toward self-righteousness, he warned Christians not to judge one another for different decisions. But in writing of his own commitment, he remarked: “We are here alone with the deacons, but Christ is present too, that we may not be alone, and he will triumph in us over that old serpent, murderer, and author of sin, however much he may bruise Christ’s heel. Pray for us, and farewell.” (Letter dated August 19, 1527)

Notice how both Satan and Christ loom large in Luther’s thinking. Satan is a murderer from the beginning (Luther has in mind Genesis 3:15), and he stands behind the plague.

Yet Christ is far stronger, and far more involved. He is in those providing care, he is (Matt. 25) in the sick, and he is in the victory the church *will* experience over Satan—a victory that includes even the smaller “deliverance” of recovery from the plague. Luther and Katharina survived, and the way of Jesus was vindicated in this intense trial.

“Use medicine; take potions which can help you; fumigate house, yard, and street; shun persons and places wherever your neighbor does not need your presence or has recovered, and act like a man who wants to help put out the burning city. What else is the epidemic but a fire which instead of consuming wood and straw devours life and body? You ought to think this way: Very well, by God’s decree the enemy has sent us poison and deadly offal. Therefore I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine, and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance infect and pollute others, and so cause their death as a result of my negligence.”

Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 43: Devotional Writings II, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 43 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 119–38. Whether One May Flee From A Deadly Plague

By the 1850s, London was the most powerful and wealthiest city in the world, with a population of more than 2 million. A Cholera outbreak in 1854 struck fear into the hearts of Londoners. Charles Spurgeon, only 20 years old at the time, came to the capital to pastor New Park Street Chapel. He would look back to this

plague as a key time of learning both for himself and also for the city.

“If there ever be a time when the mind is sensitive, it is when death is abroad. I recollect, when first I came to London, how anxiously people listened to the gospel, for the cholera was raging terribly. There was little scoffing then.”

He tells the story of visiting a dying man who had previously opposed him: “That man, in his lifetime, had been wont to jeer at me. In strong language, he had often denounced me as a hypocrite. Yet he was no sooner smitten by the darts of death than he sought my presence and counsel, no doubt feeling in his heart that I was a servant of God, though he did not care to own it with his lips.”

The sinking sand of this world is a constant reality—but it often takes the storms of this life to reveal it. Spurgeon saw the plagues of his day as a storm that led many to seek refuge in Christ the Rock.

During this time, Spurgeon altered how he conducted business, but he continued to minister. Importantly, he continued to care for those around him and preach the Gospel. He said this during a cholera outbreak: “And now, again, is the minister’s time; and now is the time for all of you who love souls. You may see men more alarmed than they are already; and if they should be, mind that you avail yourselves of the opportunity of doing them good. You have the Balm of Gilead; when their wounds smart, pour it in. You know of Him who died to save; tell them of Him. Lift high the cross before their eyes. Tell them that God became man that man might be lifted to God. Tell

them of Calvary, and its groans, and cries, and sweat of blood. Tell them of Jesus hanging on the cross to save sinners. Tell them that."

Bringing it a little closer to home, how did Billy Sunday handle the 1918 Influenza Epidemic?

Some 6,000 residents of Providence would be sickened that year, and by the end of the outbreak in 1920 more than 800 would die. The Providence Aldermen shut down public gatherings in October, effectively halting Sunday's evangelism. For his part, Sunday bowed to civil authority and the constraints of an unprecedented moment: "It is up to us to hope and pray. We are always willing to help anything that is for the public good and do it cheerfully. There is nothing drastic in the order, and it is issued in an attempt to stamp out this epidemic." The Methodist newspaper Christian Advocate mocked Sunday. "We are not sure but that influenza is preaching to more people than Billy Sunday ever did":

Influenza stops Billy Sunday.
Rev. W. A. Sunday, in the third week of a campaign in Providence, R. I., has closed his tabernacle, on account of influenza, in compliance with the order of the Board of Aldermen. We are not sure but that influenza is preaching to more people than Billy Sunday ever did, despite the fact that he has reached such numbers as no other man ever did.

Have we lost the ability to act prudently or are we being caught up in the current wave of protest stating that our rights are being taken away? Christians have a history of taking up causes and the one that mobilizes the most individuals is the Pro-Life Movement. Pro-life means **valuing life outside of the womb** just as much as, if not more than, life inside of the womb. It is protecting everyone's right to live and thrive, not just the unborn. As we debate the issue of whether or not to open our churches and not pay heed to government restrictions are we

forgetting about the Right to Life issue? Are we valuing the lives around us by not taking precautions? Are you infringing upon my rights by not following the established guidelines?

Paul tells the Romans, "*So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore, let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way . . . So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin*" (Romans 14:12-13, 22-23). Paul is telling us to enjoy our freedom in Christ, but along with that freedom comes the responsibility to protect those around us who have doubts about that freedom. Our churches are not being closed to abolish our rights to worship. We are being asked to curtail worship for the overall benefit of our congregations and communities. We somehow have come to believe that we know what is best. The only one who knows what is best for society as a whole is God. We forget and so we feel he needs our help.

The concept of not causing others to stumble is found in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8. In these chapters, Paul talks about **personal convictions and our responsibility** to our fellow believers in Christ. He highlights several topics over which believers have disagreements—food, drink, and sacred days. In Paul's time, the disagreements were mostly concerning Jewish law versus the new freedom found in Christ. We experience much the same type of

disagreements today about the Pandemic. The Bible does not provide specific instruction and yet these are areas in which many feel convicted.

Taking this one step further, I wonder if some churches will begin to fly the Gadsden Flag along-side the Christian and American Flags. It makes sense after all, since the idea promoted by the Gadsden Flag and the "Don't Tread on Me" phrase is simple. "Leave me alone to live in peace, to do what I do best, and as long as my actions do not cause physical harm to others, (I'm afraid these churches will need to leave this last part out as it pertains to the Pandemic), there is no need for your intervention. After all its about "free will," personal choice and freedom without rulers or government burdens. It has everything to do with maximum freedom and limited government.

I leave you with three take-aways by **Glen Scrivener** that I feel we need to adopt during these times. Instead of wasting our energy fighting Government bureaucracy work through this trial to glorify God by our lives and extend His Kingdom.

- Point to the sinking sand of the world—the weakness of our flesh, the uncertainty of the markets, the mortality of us all.
- Preach and prize Christ the Rock—knowing that he alone can, and he alone will, weather the storms.
- Love our neighbors—moving, in Christ, toward those in need.

Amid the Pandemic let us be marked with wisdom, calm and peace.



PRAYER LIST

- ✓ ✓ Continuing Prayers for loss: All the families that have lost loved ones this past year. Remember those who have recently lost loved ones due to COVID 19.
- ✓ ✓ Continuing Prayers for physical needs: Rita McManus, Maria Hatfield, Erwin and Elizabeth Lickman, Gloria-Lynn Fernandez, Betty Matson, Ronaldo Claveria
- ✓ ✓ Continuing Prayers for our Ministry Needs: The Pastoral Search Committee, Pulpit Supply, Our Deacons, Financial support
- ✓ ✓ Continuing Prayers for our Sister Ministries: BIEM Ministries, Orchard Church, Pastors Davis, Billow, Eddy, Vitel
- ✓ ✓ Continuing Prayers for Spiritual Needs: Leonard Hatfield, Carol Pelfrey's family, Daniel Ruehlman, George Bizadellis
- ✓ ✓ Continuing Prayers for: The spread of the Gospel, Our Government, Our Nation, Our Community, Our Neighbors, Our Families, Pray for our members that have lost employment and for those who still have jobs and need to interact with others on a daily basis. Pray for those still working that God will protect. Lift up all our health professionals and their families who are on the front line of this pandemic especially Mylin and Errol Lardizabal and Liza Mitchell.
- ✓ URGENT Erwin Lickmann is requesting prayer for decisions to be made regarding the future living arrangements for himself and Elizabeth. A decision needs to be made soon as Elizabeth's health and mental faculties are failing.
- ✓ Alex Figueroa, (relative of Al Nuzikowski) Had surgery on August 13. Pray for a full recovery.
- ✓ Several requests from Carol Riemer
 - Her granddaughter's husband died of a massive heart attack at age 41.
 - Her daughter's ex-husband recently attempted suicide.
 - Through all of this her son, Rudy, just moved to Colorado with his family.

If you have prayer requests or updates on your family, we encourage to submit them to the Newsletter email address at the end of this newsletter.

First Baptist Church of Niles
"The Country Church"
7339 Waukegan Rd.
Niles, IL 60714

<http://firstbaptistchurchniles.org> or
<https://www.facebook.com/firstbaptistchurchofniles>
or

firstbaptistchurchniles@gmail.com

Newsletter email: nilesbaptistnews@outlook.com