

1/3/10

Getting Healthy

Several years ago a company started up to respond to the growing number of seniors now living in America. The company is called Life Alert. They have a necklace or wrist device you can push a button if in an emergency and it will call an operator. This device has added peace of mind for many elderly who still live at home and their adult children who worry about them.

It must be a frightening experience to fall and not be able to get up.

That happened to me one day about 25 years ago. I was working in my garden pulling weeds and as I was straining to pull a resistant weed my back went out. I immediately dropped to my knees and could not move my legs.

I yelled for Lynn who was in the house but she could not hear me. It seemed forever before I could get her attention. To be in pain, immobilized and unable to get help is a most frightful experience.

Today, thousands of people all around us are in that position. They have lost their jobs or else are working jobs at half their previous pay. Right here among us some are facing foreclosure.

When my small group went to Street Reach to serve a Christmas meal I was able to mingle and talk to some of the men. Several spoke of having great jobs and living on top of the world only to lose it all in the downturn. Some even lost their families. Some in their 50's have never been homeless before. Now they were trying to survive until things turn around.

So here we are in the middle of a recession and for those of us who are Christ followers there are two huge questions that beg an answer.

One is what is God up to? Or maybe even better, where is God in all of this? Since we believe that God is in control one question we would probably like to ask God if He revealed Himself to us this morning would be, what are you doing?

The other question that lingers in the back of many Christian's mind is this: What difference does it make to know and serve God?

Everyone is suffering right now; Christians and non-Christians alike.

The church has certainly not been immune to the recent global downturn.

We have had to lay off staff and the remaining staff has had to take pay cuts.

So what is up with that? Didn't God always protect His people from the evils of the world? No, and He never promised to insulate us from trouble.

But He always uses the evil of the world to advance His eternal purpose.

So here we are in 2010 and I'm ready for a better day. How about you?
So what are we to do? What is our attitude to be in this new reality? How are we to respond to the challenges we face right now?
We know that the Kingdom of God is always advancing; moving forward.
How can we move forward with it in this new reality?
So God is in charge but He is doing things very differently.

For one I think God is bringing about a global awakening among industrialized nations as to our responsibility to those in need. May I be blunt? God is judging us for consuming the wealth He has entrusted to us. This is especially true for America. It's the modern day version of the parable of the rich man who said, "I am increased with goods so I will build bigger barns." It never dawned on him that the increase was intended for others.

Luke 12:48 says "to whom much is given much shall be required." We have been given so much but instead of sharing we have consumed more.

In other words, as a nation we are being adjusted. I certainly am.

This adjustment is necessary for our future and for the advancement of God's kingdom. The god of materialism inside of me is being pulled down. The consumer mentality that has robbed me and has robbed those I could have helped is being destroyed.

We cannot fulfill God's agenda saddled down with an ever increasing desire for bigger and better.

This process of deliverance is good even though it is very painful.

Has this ever happened before so we can find wisdom and encouragement as to how God worked with His people?

It has happened many times but there is one time that God did a major adjustment among His people that actually involved a foreign take over of Israel. It was a direct result of God's people refusing to repent and turn away from false gods, such as materialism and sensuality.

(worship of money and sex.) Sound familiar?

NAS Jer. 26:13 "*Now therefore amend your ways and your deeds and obey the voice of the LORD your God; and the LORD will change His mind about the misfortune which He has pronounced against you.*"

God only uses calamity when every other attempt at communication fails.

The Lord has something to say to us today. But what you and I need right now is more than a few Scriptures on prosperity. What we need is a context

for where we are so we can have realistic expectations of what God is after. Where are we in the story of God's unfolding drama of our lives? What is God after?

I believe that God wants to speak to you this morning more than what I will be sharing. I believe this is a word for this church and maybe for THE church to wake up. I had my usual New Year's sermon ready to go. I was going to share the vision and give the marching orders as I usually do each January 1. The Lord stopped me and impressed on me that His people are not ready for direction and vision just yet. They need to get healthy. So what I am about to share is essential to your spiritual health which you will need to engage in the mission.

As I read these verses in Jeremiah I want you to ask God to show you where you are in this process and how it is to affect you and how you can respond.

Ready? Let me give you the context of this before I begin to read. God had warned Israel repeatedly through His prophets that unless they repented He would destroy their nation. But there were other voices speaking as well. So the message was diluted by false prophets. **Chapter 28** tells of the prophet Hananiah who opposed Jeremiah and prophesied victory for Israel. He was wrong, Israel was defeated and many were executed and the survivors taken away to Babylon as exiles. It was the mother of all night mares. Now in exile the Jews are stunned and asking, Where is God? How could He let this happen? So Jeremiah writes this letter to those in exile.

Jer. 29:1,2

V4 "I carried into exile..."

V5,6 "...settle down...increase..."

V7 "...pray for your city..."

V10 "...in 70 years I will bring you back..."

I'm not insinuating this new reality will last 70 years. I think there are things we can do to shorten the season of judgment. All God has ever asked us to do is repent. Prayer and repentance is a powerful force.

God knows how long it will take for us to truly change. It is all about what will help us fulfill our destiny.

So what is our response in 2010?

How can we see the Kingdom of God come to Horry County?

1. Never forget that God has all the power and wisdom.

What we are experiencing has nothing to do with weakness or lack of resolve on God's part. He is still on the throne working towards His master plan. Please note:

God has an overall master plan for earth that will not be stopped or changed. It has been in place since man was first created and the hour for His return is already set. He also has a master plan (thelema- wish, desire) for each of us that syncs with the overall plan. That plan can be ignored and go unrealized.

Is. 55:8 *“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” declares the LORD. 9 “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts.”*

Way: road, distance, journey, manner:—actions

We have this gap or disconnect with God's plan based on our lack of understanding. The same exists between a parent and child. Like letting your child sit in your lap and steer the car. They think they can drive and may insist on doing it by themselves. They never knew that your finger was always touching the steering wheel. We are like that with God. It is always what we don't know that causes us to rebel.

No one would ever rebel against God's ways if they knew what He knew. So the *road* he puts us on may not be the road we would choose but it remains the road to purpose and fulfillment.

2. God's plan is always to help us and is always for our ultimate good.

God told Israel to increase and not decrease. Don't push back- Settle.

Now to the verse many of us know and have been encouraged by.

Verse 10 just told them it will be 70 years before anyone goes home.

Jer. 29:11 *“For I know the **plans** that I have for you,’ declares the LORD plans for **welfare** and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.”*

Plans: design, intentions, plot, purposes, scheme, ways

Welfare: shalom- peace, prosperity, completeness.

3. God's purpose must be sought after whole heartedly.

For many people it was an inability to believe that calamity was even a remote possibility. Yet it happened. They lost their homes and their country.

So what was the instruction of God? Where was God in all of this?

He was totally in charge. All He wanted was for Israel to repent.

Jer. 29:12 *‘Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you.*

*****13** *'You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.*

14 *'I will be found by you,' declares the LORD, 'and I will restore your fortunes and will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you,' declares the LORD, 'and I will bring you back to the place from where I sent you into exile.'*

What does “with all your heart” really mean? Until we discover that we will not see restoration.

I think there are things in our hearts that must be rooted out.

There is still materialism, consumerism, sensuality, greed, doubt, fear, cynicism, anger and unbelief. Desperate times demand desperate action.

Now is the time for us to fast and pray. (Alone and with each other.)

I would like for each of us to consider what we need to do without at least the rest of the month. One person called me and very solemnly told me the Lord had instructed them to fast criticism for the month.

Some of us need to confront our greatest weakness and declare a fast against it. It could be eating ice cream or fasting TV after 9 or until 9 pm when the kids go down. For some it could be eating out during the week. You don't have the money anyway. Who cares what your coworkers think?

Not only do we need to fast something. We need to add something.

If you are going to fast criticism then add gratitude. For the month of January add five minutes of Bible reading. Instead of just fasting ice cream add walking 15 minutes each day. If married, do this as a couple and commit for just one month. What has a hold on you? What distracts you? What is a potential threat to your future?

Some of you need to fast some relationships that are not God honoring.

You know they are pulling you down.

Give them a break until you reestablish who you are in Christ.

We can complain about our new reality or we can *increase* as we obey God and pursue His purpose.