

Sabbath Worship & Pandemics

Gen 2:1-3, Hebrews 4:1-14, Romans 13:1-7
29 November 2020, 10:30 AM

Introduction:

Today we are breaking from our regular sermon series in Mark to consider a subject that should be of great importance to us at this time.

- We are a congregation that has been meeting in two places for two reasons.
 - The first reason is because we want to establish a church in the Truro region. We have been praying about this for years, and at the start of 2019, we began having services here in this beautiful building that God provided for us.
 - The second reason we have been meeting in two places is that, due to Covid-19 fears, the NS government has had in place a limitation of 50% capacity of our meeting places which is too small for our congregation in Halifax. That led us to have two live meetings here at Glenholme as well as two in Halifax since we already have members down here and since we needed to thin our numbers out in Halifax.
- However, recently, the Nova Scotia government has imposed new regulations to prevent us from gathering in Halifax county with groups larger than five for doing livestreaming.
 - As of Friday, this closure of Halifax churches is to be for three Sundays (at first it was just two), but it is rather unlikely that it will not be extended for much longer than this.
 - At this time, we are still able to meet here in Glenholme, but this could easily change and currently, those residing in Halifax county are discouraged from leaving.

All this being so, I thought it would be helpful to have a sermon on Sabbath worship and pandemics.

- I want to begin by looking at the worship that God has appointed for us in normal circumstances and then to consider what the Bible says about suspending worship because of a pandemic.
- We will be looking at many scripture passages today.
 - We have already read two of them and now I want to read the one that is foundational to this whole subject... Genesis 2:1-3.

Please give your careful attention to the reading of God's Word.

Genesis 2:1-3: Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. ² And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. ³ Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

May the Lord bless His word to our hearing.

As I mentioned a moment ago, I want to begin by looking at the worship the Lord has appointed for us in normal circumstances.

I. Our God has told us to present ourselves to Him in the assemblies He has appointed.

A. From the beginning, He gave us a holy day called the Sabbath.

1. The word Sabbath means rest or cessation.
 - You can see in the passage I just read to you (Gen 2:1-3) that God finished creating the world in six days and rested (*shaw-bath* is the Hebrew word) on the seventh day.
 - He was not tired. God does not tire. This simply means that He ended His labour. He had created all that He was going to create.
2. Verse 3 tells us that He blessed the seventh day and sanctified it because in it He rested (*shaw-bath* again) from all His work.
 - God does not bless and sanctify days for their own sake—the day would not know the difference.
 - When He blesses a day, it means that He makes it a blessing for us.
 - He makes it a day that helps us and encourages us.
 - When He sanctifies a day, it means it is set apart from the other days for us to use in our worship of Him.
 - Of course our creator is to be the centre of every day of the week, but God appointed every seventh day for us to set aside our regular work and activities to worship Him, both privately and publicly.
 - When a bowl was sanctified in Old Testament worship it meant that the bowl was used for worship and never to be used for your breakfast.
 - We should worship God every day, setting aside time for prayer and the word, but the entire focus of the seventh day is to be worship.

B. From early on, God called us to gather in assemblies on His Sabbaths.

1. We can see this emphasis in Leviticus 23 where we see that all of the Sabbaths were holy assemblies before God.
 - Listen to Leviticus 23:1-2: **And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts.’ ”**
 - A convocation is a calling together of people—vocation is a calling and con means with or together—
 - So a convocation is a calling together of people to present themselves before God.
 - While livestream is fine when you are unable to come together due to sickness or some other good reason, it is not an acceptable substitute for gathering with God’s people for worship.
2. Leviticus 23 goes on to speak of all of the holy sabbaths of God in detail, beginning with the weekly sabbath which is described first, in verse 3:
 - ³ **“Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work on it; it is the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings.”**
 - So on the weekly sabbath the people were to desist or rest from their regular work and activity and gather with each other in all their villages before God.

C. God commanded His covenant people to keep the Sabbath for two reasons.

- Because He created us and because He redeemed us.
 - Let's look at each.
1. First, because He created us.
 - The fourth commandment speaks of this. It says:
 - **Ex 20:8-11: Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. *In it* you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. ¹¹ For *in* six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.**
 - We praise Him and depend on Him as the one who gave us life and everything we have in this world.
 - Truly it calls for our highest praise and adoration of His power, wisdom, and goodness—how marvellous are His works.
 - The obligation to remember the Sabbath to keep it holy is an obligation that belongs to every single person without exception, for we are all created by God.
 - But we fell into sin and became desperately unable to keep the Sabbath and to worship God as He commands.
 - Instead we worship God idolatrously until eventually we are worshipping a god that we made up ourselves.
 - But God graciously called out a people to redeem them that they might be His true worshippers—and this is the second reason we should keep the Sabbath.
2. Because He has redeemed us—
 - He has graciously gathered us to be a people who are devoted to Him as our God, and has made every provision for us to worship Him.
 - When the Ten Commandments are repeated in Deuteronomy, the fourth commandment speaks of redemption as the reason we should keep the weekly sabbath holy:
 - **Deut 5:12-15: “Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. ¹³ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁴ but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. *In it* you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. ¹⁵ And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.”**

TRANS> Creation and redemption are both reasons to worship Him, and redemption is also the reason we can praise Him.

- Redemption is the greatest reason—to think that God should take sinners like us and provide for our salvation that we might be His people!

II. In the New Testament, Sabbath worship centres around Jesus Christ.

A. Our identity is those who are gathered in Jesus Christ to worship God!

1. Anyone who has read the New Testament knows that our very name is church... *ecclesia*—which means the assembly of those who are called out.
 - We are by definition a holy convocation.
 - An assembly called out from this sinful world to worship the living God.
2. But what church are we? We are not only the church of God, but the church of God in Jesus Christ.
 - We have been taught in God’s word that we can only come to the God in Jesus’ name.
 - He Himself is God, but He became flesh so that He could save us from our sins and bring us into the holy place.

B. The epistle to the Hebrews is full of beautiful talk about this glorious gathering to God that we do in our New Testament worship.

1. After telling us in chapter 1 that Jesus Christ is God the Son, chapter 2 tells us that He is the one who brings us to glory—that is, He brings us to the holy place where God dwells.
 - And it says that He does this by suffering for us—suffering, of course, for our sins.
 - Look at Hebrews 2:10-12: **For it was fitting for Him, for whom *are* all things and by whom *are* all things** [that speaks of God the Father], **in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation** [that’s Jesus] **perfect through sufferings.**
 - The word translated *perfect* means everything that we need Him to be—in this case, to bring us to glory—to our holy God. He was not all that we needed Him to be until He suffered on the cross for our sins.
 - And nobody can come to God apart from Him.
 - So verse 11 tells us that we are sanctified by Him.
 - Remember what I told you that sanctified means? Something is sanctified when it is set apart to God for His worship.
 - A holy day is a day that is set apart to God for us to worship Him.
 - The people that Christ has sanctified are holy people—also called saints.
 - Verse 11 says: **For both He who sanctifies** [that’s Jesus] **and those who are being sanctified** [that’s we who are redeemed by Jesus’ sufferings] ***are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,*** ¹² **saying: “I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You.”**
 - That is what He does in the assembly. He has appointed God’s glorious name to be declared to us by preaching of the word, and He sings praise with us in the midst of the assembly.

- Though we were once sinners, He is not ashamed to call us brethren because He has sanctified us by His blood.
 - And as it says, we are one with Him so that we come to God in the name of this Jesus who has saved us by His sufferings.
 - When we come to church to worship, we gather to God in Jesus' name, we are the holy assembly who has been sanctified by the blood of Jesus.
 - Without Him, we would be rejected and cast off because of our sins, but by Him, we come to God.
2. Hebrews 4 speaks about the Sabbath rest that Jesus entered into after His work of suffering for our sins was finished—
- a. Chapter 4:8-9 tells us that God had a rest that was greater than the rest that Joshua gave Israel when they were brought into the land.
 - It was a glorious thing, as we saw, that they were gathered to God in the land to be His people—they were gathered as God's worshippers.
 - As we saw in Deut 5, they were to observe the Sabbath not only by gathering to worship God as creator, but now much more to praise Him as their redeemer.
 - Hebrews 4:8 speaks of how God spoke of another rest that was even greater for His people than the rest of entering the promised land.
 - **8 For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. 9 There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.**
 - The word *rest* that is used here is *sabbatismos* in the original.
 - We are the assembly of God, gathered to worship Him through the work that Jesus completed by His sufferings.
 - Don't let anyone tell you that we don't have a Sabbath rest in the New Covenant.
 - We have an even greater rest in Jesus who brings us into the Holy Place itself as our leader.
 - b. Verse 10 explains that He entered this rest just as God entered His rest when He finished creating the world.
 - Verse 10 reads: **For he [Jesus] who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God *did* from His.**
 - Jesus entered into rest from His work of suffering because He finished that work and was raised from the dead on the first day.
 - That's the reason we gather now on the first day of the week.
 - We rest because Jesus rested.
 - We set aside our normal activities and we keep a holy convocation, an assembly each Sunday, where we present ourselves to God in Jesus' name, who was made perfect through His sufferings.

3. He is spoken of all through the book of Hebrews as the priest who was made perfect (all that we need) by His death for our sins.
 - Hebrews 7:28 calls Him the Son who has been perfected forever.
 - Hebrews 8:1 tell us that He is our High Priest who is seated with God in the heavenly place—the holy place, and 8:2 calls Him a minister of the sanctuary.
 - The word here for minister is liturgist.
 - He is the one who leads us in our worship.
 - In Hebrews 10, we are encouraged to keep presenting ourselves to God in the assembly by Jesus who shed His blood for us.
 - We come with assurance in His saving work each Sabbath Day—we come into God’s presence where we could not dare to go without Jesus:
 - Hebrews 10:19-25: **Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, ²¹ and *having* a High Priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold fast the confession of *our* hope without wavering, for He who promised *is* faithful.**
 - Let us keep resting in His finished work from which He has not rested, and let gather in the official assembly with Him to worship God on the Christian Sabbath:
 - ²⁴ **And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, ²⁵ not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.**

C. What has He appointed for us in these assemblies as our liturgist—our worship leader?

1. We gather in His name, trusting in Him who brings us to the Father by His sufferings,
 - to hear His word preached... by which He declares God’s name to us—God’s saving work by Him, His promises, and His instructions on how to live as God’s people.
 - And we gather to lift up prayers in His name—to ask the Father to remove mountains, to subdue our enemies, to have mercy on us, to help us serve Him and to live as His people, to show us His glory and grace.
 - And we gather with Jesus to sing praise to God—as our creator, but now much more as our redeemer who sent Jesus to save us from our sins. We praise Him ardently for His power, His wisdom, His mercy, His goodness, His glory.
 - He has called us to gather for baptism—where we bring our children and those whom He calls from outside the church to salvation by Jesus. We remember that cleansing comes only through Him, our anointed Saviour who

shed His blood and who gives us the Holy Spirit that might believe and come to Him in response to His call.

- He has also appointed in these assemblies that we received the bread and the wine at the holy table that represent His body given and His blood shed for us... we come looking to be nourished by Him that we may serve God better and trust Him more.
2. This is what He has appointed for us to do—but what has He appointed for us to receive?
- The same as we saw in Genesis 2:3, and in Exodus 20:11... blessing.
 - We truly do behold our God in the holy assembly.
 - He reveals His glory and His glorious ways to us.
 - He answers our prayers in Jesus' name.
 - He gives us not only instruction, but renewed faith and obedience when we come before Him with faith in Jesus' name.
3. And do not think that this assembly can take whatever shape you want it to take.
- Jesus our Lord sent His apostles to establish His church under the government that He Himself appointed...
 - Where qualified elders have been made overseers or bishops to rule for Him, not as those who make up the rules, but as those who lead the people to follow the rules that Jesus has given us in His word.
 - Worship is not regulated by our thoughts and imaginations, we simply do the things that Jesus has told us to do.
 - The elders are to examine those who are called to see if they believe the truth and will promise to follow the Lord's ways, and then to baptise them and their children and to receive them to the Holy Supper.
 - Then they become a part of those who are assembled to God in Jesus name to worship Him according to His directives that they might grow.
 - He has also given His church ministers, who are also elders.
 - These preach His word in the assembly and administer baptism and the Lord's Supper.
 - We don't do this ourselves, but only those that He has called and set apart to do this in His name do these things.
 - Again, it is the assembly—or the church—of Jesus Christ, a people who gather to worship God in Jesus' name and according to His ordinances.

TRANS> Brothers and sisters, this is who we are as the people of God.

- We are His church. The assembly.
 - We are to present ourselves to God with Jesus our Lord each Sunday, to worship our great God and to receive His blessing.
- And the brings us to the big question of our day to which I now wish to turn.

III. Is there any warrant for us to ever set aside our assemblies on account of a pandemic?

A. The answer is that yes there is.

1. But first we must remember something.
 - a. The Bible emphasises that our first order of business is repentance and prayer.
 - It shows that national and international calamities are sent by the hand of God and that the best medicine is true repentance.
 - Too often, we are like Asa, who did not seek God but only the physicians.
 - It is true that sickness has its natural cause, but God is sovereign over all, disposing all things as He will.
 - These plagues show us how fragile we are and ought to turn us to Him.
 - This is a very mild plague, but look at how much it has disturbed us.
 - Imagine a plague where a third of the people you know died.
 - We should be humbled before God and realise that we are at His mercy.
 - b. I have preached whole sermons to you about this from the start—from Amos 4 & 5 where God tells us that He sent all the calamities but His people did not return to Him; from Daniel 9, where we have Daniel’s humble prayer of repentance in the exile; and from Joel where God sent the locust plague.
 - I have preached sermons on each of these, so I will do no more than remind you about this today and quote that famous verse, 2 Chron 7:14: **If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.**
 - We are running around in vain trying to keep safe, but we do not turn to appeal to the one who sent it that we might return to Him.
2. There are principles in scripture that seem to give us warrant for suspending worship because of an epidemic.
 - a. Jesus taught us an important principle when He healed the sick on the Sabbath and was confronted by the leaders of the synagogue.
 - **Luke 6:9: Then Jesus said to them, “I will ask you one thing: Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy?”**
 - With these words He taught us that God does not want us to treat His Holy Day with the rigour that some of the Jews did—
 - Where they would not help an injured person because it was the Sabbath.
 - We may deduce from this that if someone is sick, they can stay at home to rest and to try to get well.
 - If the duty of assembling was absolute, they would be required to drag themselves there even if it literally killed them—it would then be a noble death in doing their duty to God—much as a doctor who dies caring for sick dies doing his God-given duty.

- Likewise, if they are likely to be contagious, they should not come and spread their sickness around to their brothers and sisters.
- b. We may see this principle that God does not impose a rigorous servitude from the way He dealt with women in the Old Testament regarding the feast days.
- He did not require them to go up with their husbands to Jerusalem.
 - He knew that often they would be caring for little children and it would be burden for them—perhaps they had recently given birth.
 - His Sabbaths were not meant to be a duty bearing down on His people, but a joy and a delight.
 - He delights in mercy, not sacrifice.
 - He made the Sabbath for man, not man for the Sabbath.
- c. We might likewise draw instruction from seeing how God did not rebuke His people when they fled from danger and missed worship at Jerusalem.
- We see how David fled when Saul was trying to kill him.
 - During that time, he could not go up the sanctuary—though he certainly did yearn to do so as we see in many of his psalms. We can be sure that he kept up more private and local worship, but he missed the sacrifices.
 - And we even see Jesus when He did not at first go up to Jerusalem because He knew that people were trying to kill Him... then He did go up, but in secret.
 - **John 7:7-10: “The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil. ⁸ You go up to this feast. I am not yet going up to this feast, for My time has not yet fully come.” ⁹ When He had said these things to them, He remained in Galilee. ¹⁰ But when His brothers had gone up, then He also went up to the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret.**
 - We know how Paul and his companions often left places when his enemies and persecutors were trying to kill him.
3. The history of the faithful in the church contains examples of godly ministers and godly magistrate (who bore persecution and loss for Christ) expressing that in times of extreme plague, it may be necessary to divide the church into smaller gatherings or even to suspend services for a week or two.
- Yet, at the same time,
 - there are many examples of them caring for the sick like Cyprian did at Carthage, when the families of the sick had cast out their own for fear of contagion and Cyprian called upon his congregation to take care of the sick, many of them who were their persecutors.
 - Martin Luther is an example of one who suspended services to protect the flock, but then bravely went among the dying to minister to them in their suffering. He did this in three major plagues over the course of his ministry.
 - Furthermore, it should be noted that we do not see the church suspending their worship until a plague becomes extremely perilous.

- One minister I read mentioned that he was burying 40, 50, and even 60 people a day and had already buried 2000 in England.
- All public meetings had been shut down by the king except for worship services on Sunday. This minister spoke of how he and his minister companions had been marvellously spared from the contagion, even though they were among the sick and dying every day.

TRANS> All that to say that there are times when it is right to suspend worship, but our sabbath gatherings must be one of the last to go.

B. Who is responsible for making the decision about when to suspend worship?

1. This is a decision that belongs first to the civil magistrate.
 - God has raised the magistrate to protect the safety of the people who are under their jurisdiction.
 - He has not appointed the church to direct businesses and public agencies and households in this regard.
 - Even the church itself is to be directed in these matters by the civil government.
 - We certainly see this with men like David and Nehemiah leading the church in the fear of God as ministers of justice sent to punish the wicked and bless the good, subduing idolatry and upholding the Sabbath.
 - In the New Testament, Paul refers to the civil magistrate with these very terms (ministers of justice sent to punish evil and regard the good) and commands the members of the church to obey their ordinances not only for fear, but for conscience sake.
 - Indeed, in the Old Testament we see that even those rulers who were outside of the covenant people have responsibility to lead the people in the fear of God. The rulers of Nineveh are commended for calling their people to repentance with fasting before God.
 - It is their duty, despite whatever we may say with our modern notions of the separation of the government from religion.
2. But the elders of the church are also responsible to make decisions that pertain to the safety of those under their care as it pertains to the meetings of the church.
 - If there is danger, they may move meetings or divide the congregation to have multiple assemblies for a while, under the guidance of the civil rulers.
 - The civil rulers have a more general oversight, and the church elders and deacons have a more specific focus on the congregations they serve.
 - In cases of extreme sickness or dangerous weather, they may call off the services to protect the health and safety of the people.
 - God does not deal with us with rigour.
 - It is their responsibility to act in this way.
3. In the last place, it is up to individual households and persons to determine in their own case and in their own conscience before the Lord what is best for them.

- Many of you had to make such a judgement this week because so many are getting colds and things (as usually happens at this time of year).
 - Certainly, if someone is being excessively careless on the one hand or exhibiting inordinate fear on the other, the elders may advise them, but the elders are not to lord it over their conscience.
- In a snow storm, the elders may decide that it is reasonable to hold services, but they should not object to the widow who does not want to drive in the snow or risk falling on the ice.
 - If they do, they are raving Pharisees.
 - Yet, at the same time, if the guy that drove to his cottage with his Jeep through a blizzard doesn't show up to church two Sundays later because there is an inch of snow, the elders should have a word with him.
 - No elder should lord it over the conscience, but neither should they leave their people without admonition when they are just making excuses.

TRANS> You get the point. But now the big question.

C. Is this pandemic in Nova Scotia severe enough to call off worship?

1. Worship should be a top priority.

- We have seen how God has called us to present ourselves before Him in a holy convocation in Jesus' name.
 - We have seen how He blesses our assemblies so that we grow in grace and comfort.
 - We have seen how in them we honour God, blessing His glorious name and praising Him for His works of creation and redemption.
 - In public worship, we encourage each other and we bear witness to our neighbours that God is holy and is to be praised—
 - We seek to bring them in so they can hear the call of God and become God's worshippers in Christ too.
 - The church is where this is done most effectively and where our children are brought up in the faith.
 - I am not sure with some of you why you find better things to do than to attend both services on Sunday.
 - Whatever are you doing that negates God's call to gather with His people under the direction of the elders?
 - Christians today have worship as a very low priority and so does our whole society—of course.
 - A hockey tournament is thought to be more important than worship to us—a bit of tiredness will stop them from worship... or maybe a visitor comes by—whatever.
 - All this while brothers under persecution are risking their lives and livelihood to gather in the holy assembly.

2. Sadly, our civil magistrate who has suspended worship in Halifax county has skewed judgment about worship.

- To them, as to many so-called Christians, the holy convocation is about as important as a stamp collecting club, sports, or a rec centre.
 - It should be one of the last things to close—for Jesus said to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and things like food and clothing will be added to us.
 - The civil magistrate has a duty to defend the Sabbath—to shut down businesses and public meetings to keep the Sabbath holy...
 - but instead, they stepped over the will of the people and opened these—
 - Worst of all, when they did that they acted contrary to their God-given duty to promote worship among their people.
 - God appointed them to punish evil and reward good, but instead they often do the opposite.
 - This means that they cannot be expected to make wise judgments about closing churches because their priorities are so distorted.
 - Furthermore, we see in our magistrate an excessive desire to control.
 - They want to control death—on the one hand to prevent it and on the other to make it happen whenever we choose... to abort babies, to terminate the elderly, to take our own lives when we deem them not worth living.
 - There is also, related to the virus, an excessive fear and angst among the people that is constantly fanned.
 - You hear the line, if just one life is saved, it is worth it.
 - Worth what? Not worshipping God?
 - What? If the goal is to save life at all costs, we should stop all driving except for emergencies and necessities—we'd save lots of lives.
 - But we take the risk—we drive our cars to church and many other places even though we might crash and kill people doing so.
 - God has called us to carry out our duties and leave the outcome to Him. The duty is ours, the event is God's.
3. Nevertheless, our starting point with the magistrate is obedience and submission, but in the end we must obey God rather than man.
- If they command us to do what God forbids or forbid us to do what God requires, we have a duty to obey God rather than man.
 - This is what we are taught in Acts 4:19.
 - We must understand that the civil magistrate does not have absolute authority. They have no authority to forbid is to gather for worship unless there is very good reason for doing so.
 - But when it is a judgment call, as it is in a pandemic, we should not be hasty to disobey. God has commanded us to honour and obey them in all their lawful (just and reasonable) commands.
 - That means that if our session believes they have closed churches too quickly because of the priority that worship ought to have,
 - we have to carefully decide how to respond.
 - We should appeal to them—as we have done.

- We should plead with them—as we have done.
- Eventually, we must obey God rather than man.

D. In a matter like this, we are going to have differences.

1. We will have differences with other believers about what to do because it is a judgment call.
 - Some see the virus as more serious than others.
 - Misinformation is rampant in one way or another.
 - Some see the point at which we resist authority to be a different point than others.
 - Some do not believe the civil magistrate has any authority in matters related to the church at all—I hope I have shown you otherwise today, but still, some believers will have that view.
2. There are things of which we must beware when we have such differences.
 - a. We must beware of legalism.
 - When we are dealing with something that is a measured judgment call, we must not give in to excessive dogmatism and impose our views on others, calling them evil and foolish if they do not agree with us.
 - It is easy to feel smug because “I am so committed to God that I am not going to let the government tell me what to do.”
 - Or on the other side to say, “I obey the government like God says. I am glad that I am not like those rebellious fools who think they know better than our leaders.”
 - Our session has no intention, whatever we do, of trying to force everyone to agree with whatever we decide.
 - This matter is a judgment call and we refuse to lord that over you.
 - To your own Master you belong. To Him you must answer. We’d rather have a congregation that honestly weighs everything and that honestly follows their conscience before God than one that follows us in a matter like this.
 - We live in a society that tries to force everyone to think the same away about doubtful matters.
 - As Christians, we should resist adopting such attitudes.
 - b. We must beware of division.
 - The session has to make decisions for the church... we are responsible to determine if we meet or not and under what conditions
 - Other churches, even in our Presbytery, will not make the same decision that we do.
 - But we must not start excommunicating each other and denouncing each other.
 - We may disagree, but this is not something to form separate churches over.

- We can pray for each other and support each other, and we can debate and discuss and sharpen each other.
 - Of course errors can lead to greater errors, but we should deal with that when it comes, not before... it may be that we will help each other if we don't polarise.
- c. We must beware of dishonesty with our own consciences.
- It is easy to say that we are following our conscience when in fact it is not really our conscience but our fleshly desires.
 - The decision to disobey an authority should never be done lightly.
 - We need to be honest before God in all that we do and must never set aside our conscience.
 - Many times we will have to wrestle much before God, but remember that in doubtful things, you will not be far off if you are sincere in obeying God.

Conclusion: One thing for sure: We should all yearn to be in the holy courts of the Lord to praise and worship Him with joy in Christ Jesus our Saviour.