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Have You Been Tested By Covid?  
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Introduction – I want to share a couple of verses with you to set the larger context of today’s sermon. What kind of sermon is this? And what do I hope to convey? In Acts 20 Paul is getting ready to depart for Jerusalem where he is sure to meet with persecution. He has a meeting with the elders, or pastors, of the Ephesian church that Paul planted. They understand this may be the last time they see Paul in this life. So they cling to every word. Among all the things Paul instructs them to do as pastors, we find these words in 20:28 – Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which He obtained with His own blood.

In 1 Tim 4:16 Paul gives similar instructions to Timothy, who is the main speaking pastor of the church at Ephesus. He writes, “Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.”

Being a pastor is simultaneously the best job in the world and the most fearful. It’s the best job because I get paid to study the Bible. I am able to provide for my family by studying the words of life. However, it is also the most fearful job in the world. Being a pastor means that I am accountable to God and will give an account to God for how I spiritually cared for the very same people His only Son died for. The previous two verses instruct all pastors to focus their ministry on three vital things; careful, close watch on yourself so that you are living what you are preaching, careful, close study of God’s Word so what you tell your congregation God has spoken in His Word is in fact what God has spoken, and finally careful, close watch over those God has entrusted to you to spiritually guide and nourish. If you do these things, Paul says, you will indeed arrive in glory and will bring your congregation with you.

This is what is at the heart of today’s message. I’m attempting to keep a careful, close watch on myself, on the Word, and on every soul in this church. We are 11 months into a pandemic. I’ve never lived through a pandemic before, and I’ve certainly never pastored others through a pandemic before. Our lives have been altered, we’ve had to make adjustments and try to navigate through uncertain

and uncharted territory. And through it, we know God remains sovereign. That means in addition to all we have experienced with Covid, God has utilized the presence of a terrible virus to the end that He would be glorified and He would cause it to be for the good of His people. Rom 8:28.

Over the past 11 months, many of us have been tested for Covid. Maybe we experienced symptoms, maybe we were around someone who tested positive, maybe a positive test result was required in order to return to work or school. Many of us have been tested for Covid, but I suggest to you this morning that all of us have been tested by Covid. Any time we face something new, something challenging, something life-altering, it is a test of our faith. We must all hit the pause button, honestly evaluate our spiritual lives, and ask the soul-searching question, "How are we fairing spiritually under the test of Covid?" What can we learn about where we are with the Lord? What are the spiritual symptoms Covid has surfaced in our hearts? And what would be the proper spiritual medicine to build the immune system of our heart so that Covid doesn't weaken us spiritually but rather has the reverse effect of strengthening our faith?

That brings me to our text this morning. 2 Cor 13:5-9. This morning is our test time. Let's see how we are doing. Has Covid revealed something missing or lacking in our spiritual lives? Let us find that Christ, the Great Physician, is here, and He can administer to our souls the proper spiritual medication to either awaken us to life or revive the life that is in us. The best way I know to examine ourselves this morning is by simply asking a few searching questions.

- I. Has the Presence of Covid Increased Fear or Faith in Our Life?
  - a. Now let's just be honest, Covid is a fearful virus, especially before any vaccines were being distributed. It has proven to be deadly to the elderly or to those who have pre-existing conditions or a compromised immune system. And it's so unpredictable. The effects of Covid can range from something like a bad cold to being hospitalized.
  - b. The point of today's sermon is not to deny or in any way dismiss the fact that Covid 19 is an actual, living, spreading, mutating virus. It is.
  - c. The point is as God's people, living as new creations in Christ with the guaranteed hope of eternal life, we are not to live in fear.

- d. We can't be paralyzed by our circumstances, no matter how threatening or fearful they may be. Our God is not only sovereign; He is our heavenly Father. By His grace, through faith in Him, and standing on the promises of His Word, we are to face our surroundings with confident assurance and faith in Him.
  - e. Yes, we are to be wise and cautious and use common sense. We don't invite danger, we don't act presumptuously, but we don't panic and fret either.
  - f. Not only is God sovereign and your heavenly Father, He holds you in the palm of His hand, He cares for you, and He is greater than Covid. Covid 19 does not move one inch beyond His will and control, and with one wink of His eye, it could vanish.
  - g. As the people of God, we are to be wise and cautious, but we live by faith not by fear. We face Covid with prayer, thanksgiving, and faith-filled, common sense living. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus – Phil 4:6-7
  - h. Faith not fear.
- II. Has the Presence of Covid Increased Our Absence or Attendance in Worship?
- a. Please hear me clearly and carefully. This question is not being posed to any of our older members or those with conditions or compromised immune systems. If you are in one of those categories, and you are staying at home with the exception of necessary medical trips and watching our service online, then that's what you need to do. Some have been quarantined. This question is not for you.
  - b. This question is for all of us not in one of those categories. This question is for all of us who have returned to some kind of normal living but have yet to return to worship.
    - i. Let's just honestly, for our own spiritual good, reflect on this and search our hearts.
    - ii. Why is it that we go to work, we go to school, we go on trips, we gather with family for special events, we attend functions like weddings and funerals, we participate in sports, we attend

social events and outings, we go to the gym, we go to restaurants, we go get groceries, we go shopping – but we're not going to church, or we're barely going to church because of Covid? Church, I'm not raising this question to judge or condemn – I'm raising this question because I'm burdened.

- iii. I'm burdened when we are attending every other event in our lives, necessary outings and entertaining outings while the pews are empty on Sunday morning, evening and Wednesday.
- iv. If we believed Covid was that dangerous and deadly, we wouldn't be going anywhere, but we're going everywhere but church.
- c. I'm just asking that we think a little more carefully about the reasons and justifications we give ourselves for staying away from church.
  - i. You may be thinking – I'm trying to be safe
    - 1. So it's worth the risk to go to work and school and out and about but it's not worth it to gather and worship?
  - ii. But I'm only doing the things that are necessary, things that I have to do.
    - 1. At what point did we decide that coming before our God and Creator and Provider and Savior was not necessary, was not essential?
  - iii. It's too dangerous to be in a crowd
    - 1. But you're in a crowd everywhere else you go
  - iv. I've just gotten out of the habit
    - 1. Since when did worshipping the One who has given us life and salvation become a habit?
    - 2. And how did we get out of the habit of going to church but not out of the habit of going everywhere else?
  - v. If I have to sit in the overflow and watch it on TV, I might as well stay home and watch it on my TV
    - 1. But you're not with the body, you've missed the fellowship of the saints and they have missed you
  - vi. I'm watching from home
    - 1. Are you really? III. statistics
  - vii. I have the service on at home while I'm doing something else
    - 1. So church, the weekly worship of the One and only true God and Savior is background noise?

- d. Listen, I know that going to church does not make one a Christian, but what does it say about our spiritual lives when we don't go to church, don't miss church, and can learn to live without it?
    - i. Parents, I plead with you today to rethink your devotion to the Lord. Some of you have not brought your children to church in 11 months. You may say its because of Covid or because we don't have children programs. But the fact of the matter remains – you take your children to school and to extra curricular events but you haven't brought them to church.
    - ii. They need to see God as the priority of our hearts during a pandemic.
  - e. Since I'm already in hot water, I'll just go ahead and say – this was a problem for our church before Covid – Covid has just made it more visible. Parents, you set an eternally dangerous trajectory in your home when you teach your children by example that God is first except during this season.
    - i. III. Husbands and wives
  - f. We have to ask these questions now – not later.
- III. Has the Presence of Covid Increased Our Craving for Things or for God?
- a. With all that has happened in the past 11 months – on top of living through a pandemic, our culture has rapidly declined morally and our politics are as chaotic and divisive as they have ever been. One would have imagined that as life grew increasingly uncertain and society grew increasingly dark that the church would be full and at capacity. But tragically it grew emptier at times.
  - b. Back in March when our economy basically shut down along with schools and churches, many of us pastors anticipated a great return to worship when things began to open up. The thought was that not being able to be at church would increase our longing as believers to gather together and worship the Lord. When we can open back up, we hoped to see a revival of worship.
  - c. But you see, everything else opened up about the same time. Maybe we missed those other things more? Because while we've made it to church a few times over these past 11 months, we've managed to make it to so many other things far more often.

Conclusion – A Pandemic is a great opportunity to spiritually examine ourselves. Could it be that somewhere along the way we lost our first love? Or could it be, we've never truly known the Lord as our first love?