

Corona: The Church's Warning

By Robert McCurley

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Bible Text: Lamentations 3:39-42
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Greenville Presbyterian Church

400 East Main Street
Taylors, SC 29687

Website: www.greenvillepresbyterian.com
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/greenvillefcc

Our text this evening is found in the book of Lamentations, so if you'll take your copy of God's word and turn with me to Lamentations 3 and we'll be considering together with the Lord's help verses 39 to 42. Lamentations 3:39-42. We've gathered this evening under the throne of heaven to bring ourselves under the authority of God's own word so let us give careful heed to it. Lamentations 3:39,

39 Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? 40 Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD. 41 Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens. 42 We have transgressed and have rebelled: thou hast not pardoned.

Our whole country has been captivated and preoccupied with the unfolding events in our nation over the last few days. There's talk of the threat of the coronavirus. There is chaos in the markets and in our immoral economic policies, they're beginning to show some cracks. There are massive numbers of people that are being laid off from work and there is the threat of national disruption, and it is telling to watch the response to all of these things. You can bend your ear and you can strain to listen but you will listen in vain for much of anything about the living and true God in all of this, and you will listen in vain to hear any cry of repentance, rather we find people scurrying to cling to their idols. "Do not take our idols from us, our health, our wealth, our success, our leisure, our entertainment, our...", and on and on the list goes. We find people flaunting themselves and raising up, thinking that they will conquer whatever it is that comes their way. On the other hand, you have those with a complacent denial and indifference to what is happening. But what we don't hear is what we long to hear, this is true in both church and state, we long to hear of the Lord. Where is the Lord in these things?

And the wise will ask, the wise will ask the question, "What is going on and why? What is going on and why?" That is the question, and while we do not have an infallible interpretation of present providence, that does not mean that we do not have any interpretation of providence because he's given us his word through which to understand his dealings in the works of providence. We know, for example, that world history is the window dressing, that world history is the window dressing that serves the history of the church, that what God is about and what he is always about is the advance of his own cause, his own kingdom, and in dealing with his own people, with his own church. And

we see it all through, you see it in the pages of holy scripture. God raises up in Egypt as this powerful, you know, this world superpower and he does so, why? Well, he does it, first of all, to deliver his people, and then he does it, secondly, to enslave his people and to punish them for their sins. Egypt was a tool serving the interests of God's church and when it came time for them to be brought out of Exodus, what was the reason? Why was it that the Lord told Pharaoh to let his people go? He said, "Let my people go that they may worship me. Let them come to my mountain where they will serve me, will worship me." Later on in the Old Testament, we see the Lord raise up Assyria and off the 10 tribes in the north are taken into captivity, and then we see the Lord raise up Babylon and he punishes Assyria and conquers them, and then he uses Babylon to haul away his people into exile for 70 years, and these powers are serving the purpose of God dealing with his own church. And it's in that latter case that we find ourselves in our text here in Lamentations. These are the Lamentations of the prophet Jeremiah and they are penned within the context of God's hammer falling upon his own house, and it is Jeremiah prophesying and writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and pouring out his heart with a holy lament before the Lord for God punishing his own people. Jerusalem sacked. The temple dismantled. The best and brightest hauled off. Everything destroyed and so this lament goes up.

So we know from our reading of Scripture that what is unfolding in the present events chiefly has to do with God dealing with his church. We know that and we know other things, we know that the Bible says, "What you sow you will also reap for God will not be mocked." This is true of nations, it's true of church, it's true of families. The principle abides, time passes, scenery changes, but God's word stands true and that is what you sow you will reap, you will most certainly will reap, and if you sow the wind, you will reap the whirlwind because God will not tolerate being mocked. I say all of this because I want us to be very clear that the church and that Christians are not bystanders. We're not bystanders in all of the events that are happening. We are not just watching as one group on all of the events as they unfold and so on. No, not at all. We are dead center. We are in dead center of all that God is doing and we're going to note three things this evening from this passage in light of what I've said here by way of introduction.

First of all, the sins of the church. First of all, the sins of the church and look with me at verse 39, "Wherefore doth a living man complain," or as the margin says, murmur, "a man for the punishment of his sins?" Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? How is there a just complaint, how is there a well-grounded complaint, how is there even a reasonable complaint, to complain or murmur over the punishment of our sins? Now as I said, the context here is the iron scepter of God. The Lord is bringing down his hammer upon his own people and they are being punished for their sins.

And what is the response among the people? Well, you can look with me as we'll look at various parts of this book, they want relief. That's what they want. The people are crying out for relief. They want relief from their anxieties and from their sorrows and from their deprivations, and so on and so forth. You look at chapter 1 and here are the people in verse 11, "All her people sigh, they seek bread; they have given their pleasant things for

meat to relieve," do you see it, "to relieve the soul." This is what the people are doing and it's not much different for the church leaders either. Look at verse 19, "I called for my lovers, but they deceived me: my priests and mine elders gave up the ghost in the city, while they sought their meat to relieve their souls." What is the picture here? He's saying that the people under the Lord's hammer, they're crying out for relief but what is it? They want their comfort. They want their ease, right? They want physical peace. They want to be able to have all of the pleasures that they were enjoying previously and to have those sustained, as it were, indefinitely.

The Lord's hammer is falling but, as you know from both this book and from the prophet Jeremiah, they have spent years saying peace, peace where there is no peace leading up to this. I mean, you think of our own nation, you think of how the book, the Reformed book catalogs have been littered for years now, they have been littered with books on happiness, books on success, books on how to make the best use of this world, books on how to preserve your own well-being and so on, and it has been this cry, right, of peace and of ease and so on that has been sought, and there are a few but too few books which have brought the prophetic voice of a call to repentance to God-centeredness and so on. We find even in the present hour that the church is largely sending out a message about practical tips which are largely related to self-preservation and not self-prostration.

Well, you can say, "Well, pastor, there's lots of sins. Think of our national sins." And I would say you've heard me from this pulpit preach countless times on the national sins of this country, of the toleration of false religion, and public blasphemy, and the legal protection for sabbath desecration, and on and on it goes, 60 million babies that have been tortured and brutally murdered, and the legal protection of all sorts of wicked immorality and perversity, and the lawless and immoral economic policies of legalized theft that have been implemented, and on and on we can go right through the commandments. All of that is true but what about the sins of the church because the Lord is dealing with the church in all of these things? What about the church giving itself over, what about the church bringing in, cultivating, propagating false worship, worship that has not been appointed by God and that has not been received under God's own authority? Do you think God is provoked by that? What about the sabbath desecration within the church? Do you think the Lord is blind to these things? What about the worldliness, right, the syncretism, the church looking, acting, speaking, pursuing, loving just like the world is and having, as it were, the Lord on the side? What about the lukewarmness of the American church, the dead stupor and sleepiness, the spiritual sleepiness, the promotion of spiritual minimalism on every front? What about those sins and heaps and heaps and heaps more of them?

Well, the fact is that in the case here in Lamentations, we are called to ask the question, "Wherefore doth a man complain for the punishment of his sins?" There's no cause for complaint, but what did the church do by and large in Jeremiah's day, not Jeremiah himself? You look in chapter 2, verse 14, where it says, "Thy prophets have seen vain and foolish things for thee: and they have not discovered thine iniquity, to turn away thy captivity; but have seen for thee false burdens and causes of banishment." What's happening? We have the church coming along and saying, "Well, we're going to bring

not the Lord's word, in the Lord's way, and in the Lord's time, but we're going to bring our own and we're going to have figments of our imagination that we're going to propagate in terms of doctrine and thinking and practice and so on." And they're distracting the people. The Lord's hammer is falling and what happens? These prophets are running around and they're saying, "Well, you're not being banished for this, that or the other thing." There's all of this distraction that is swirling around them and the Lord says, "You can't complain at punishment."

Nor the Christian is taught to pray for God's glory and we know that man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. We know that God's glory is to be placed above and beyond everything else, everything is to be subjected to the Lord's glory and the question is do you desire it? Do you desire the Lord's glory? And you say, "Minister, we do. We do. We want the Lord's glory." Well, what if the Lord's glory requires vindicating himself? What if the Lord's glory requires him coming to show his power to those who are wayward? What if it comes at a personal cost to you? What if God gathering glory to himself is going to cost you personally? Do you still welcome his glory? Are you still glad for him to be glorified in the face of these things?

The question is where is God in the thinking of all of those that are around us. When you look at this book and you find him quickly, you look at chapter 2, "How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in his anger." He says at the end of that verse, he speaks of "the day of his anger." Verse 2, "God hath swallowed up all the inhabitants of Jacob, and hath not pitied: he hath thrown down in his wrath the strong holds of the daughter of Judah." He's speaking to his church. "He hath polluted the kingdom and the princes thereof. He hath cut off in his fierce anger all the horn of Israel: he hath drawn back his right hand from before the enemy, and he burned against Jacob like a flaming fire." Verse 4, "He hath bent his bow like an enemy: he stood with his right hand as an adversary." The end of the verse, "he poured out his fury like fire. The Lord was as an enemy: he hath swallowed up Israel, he hath destroyed his strong holds." Verse 6 speaks of the indignation of his anger. This is the Lord and he is revealing himself but, you know, Jeremiah finds himself in a pretty lonely place because he is faithfully seeking to speak the word of truth, he is faithfully seeking to bring the word of God to the people, and he is seeking to steer them in the path of truth, but the fact is he is despised for it and he is mocked for it. He is belittled for it. In chapter 1, verse 18, he says, "Hear, I pray you all people, and behold my sorrow. My virgins, my young men are gone into captivity." He's pleading, he's saying, "Don't you see what the Lord is doing to us, what the Lord is doing to his people?" Verse 22, "Let all their wickedness come before thee; and do unto them, as thou hast done unto me for all my transgressions: for my sighs are many and my heart is faint." Verse 21, "They have heard that I sigh: there is none to comfort me: all mine enemies have heard of my trouble; they are glad that thou hast done it." His soul is wracked. He is afflicted. He is laid low. He is broken. He is weeping. He is repenting. He is beside himself as we'll see more shortly. And the people mock at him for it.

We have to begin with the sins of the church. We are not ignoring the sins of the nation but judgment must begin at the house of the Lord and there is a great deal of accounting to be had from the hand of God's own house and his own people. Secondly, that brings us

to the turning of the church. The turning of the church, verse 40 and 41, "Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD. Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens." I would put to you, my friends, that what we are experiencing in the present hour, the current circumstances, the circumstances as we find them today, are a mere tremor, they're not the hammer. They are a whisper. The Lord is whispering at us. He has not yet blown the trumpet. The Lord has sent a breeze, this is not the tsunami. Let's keep perspective on what is taking place and yet the question is how has the house of God responded to a breeze, to a mere breeze that he has sent? Well, it seems as if it threatens to blow them over and there are great cries and great movements that I believe are a call to turn from the Lord rather than to turn to the Lord. There's pressure to turn from the Lord rather than as this text says, to turn to the Lord, to turn again to the Lord.

You look around, what happens? The Lord sends a gentle breeze across the face of the earth and immediately what happens? The churches close down, shut their doors and dispose of public worship. Churches close. Public worship is set aside. Now the children know, the children watch, the children see. They're watching all of these things. They see the Lord's gentle breeze blow across and immediately what takes place? They're learning very well the priorities that the church has and the place that God has within his own house. Well, if the church is going to cave now, where in the world will she be when the hammer falls? Where will she be? This is a call, a preliminary call to turn to the Lord. I mean, you look at chapter 1, "The ways of Zion do mourn, because none come to the solemn feasts: all her gates are desolate." You look toward the end of that chapter, "that they should not enter into thy congregation."

I mean, these are desperate times that are being described in the passage that is before us, but it is turning from rather than to the Lord. You know, if anything the churches ought to be multiplying their worship services, not diminishing them at this hour. My friends, we are watching a great sifting that is unfolding before our very eyes and if I had said to you two months ago, "You know, there's a day and soon, you know, the churches are going to close, they're going to be forced to close, people are going to close the churches, there won't be public worship." You would say, "Minister, you're crazy, not in America. That's not going to happen here." And yet it's come from a very unexpected source, has it not? But the result is the same. The result is the same.

You look at chapter 2 and verse 6, "he hath violently taken away his tabernacle: he hath destroyed his places of the assembly: solemn feasts and sabbaths to be forgotten in Zion." They are despised. He "hath cast off his altar, destroyed the wall, her gates are sunk into the ground and destroyed." He's broken her bars and the people keep silent. Something is woefully wrong and, you know, I'm concerned that what will yet come is enormous pressure will come undoubtedly, and powerful rhetoric from the church, mind you, powerful rhetoric and great heat will be applied as to why the house of God should be shut, why the public worship of God should be given a back seat, and many will roll over and many will acquiesce to it.

And it is turning from, it's not as this text says, let us search and try our ways and turn again to the Lord. Let us turn to him. Yeah, we are conscious, I mean, you received my

long letter earlier this week which set the tone for what I believe we ought to be thinking from God's word. It included practical things, those who think they may be sick should stay home and we should, you know, give special attention to care for one another when we're together and so on and so forth but we will not stop worshiping God, not for this and not for much more. We will not stop worshiping God. We will not stop giving him the first things. We will not stop giving him the first place. You say, "Well, pastor, even after all of the reasonable precautions are put into place and so on, you know, they say we could still die. I mean, even after all the precautions we could still die. You could die, you know, I could die." I don't say this lightly but I am compelled by conscience to say it, the answer to that is this: then you will have died well and I will have died well because you will have died in the best cause, the worship of God, and you will have died in the best place, at the footstool of the throne, giving him the worship that he is so due. And what a blessing when the angel comes to fetch your soul, "O Lord, hear comes one of your saints and we snatched them from before the throne." Do you think you will be bid welcome by the Redeemer? Oh, I can tell you I am not prepared to appear before the Lord with the testimony that when things got tough, I threw the Lord under the bus. That is worse than death to me. That is worse than death.

In the 1660s in England during the plague, all of the moderate ministers bolted. They shut the doors of the church and they sprinted as fast and furiously as they could to the north of England and out of London. They fled out of London. What did the ejected ministers do, the God-fearing ministers, Reformed ministers who had been ejected, booted from their pulpits in 1662? Well, they did the reverse, they ran into London. They ran into that and do you know what they found? They found that the pulpits were vacant where they had been barred to preach previously, and they discovered that they could make their way back into those now empty pulpits to churches that were slam full to the brim and overflowing, and they lifted up their voice in the name of the King, the Lord Jesus Christ, and they sent a message of repentance home into the bosom of those left surrounded by the plague to the glorious conversion of many at that time.

You say, "Well, pastor, you know, the magistrate may tell us that it's illegal, that you know, we're not allowed to assemble, that we can't worship. What are we going to do then?" We will tell the magistrate that there is another King, one named Jesus, and he is the only King and head of his church and our allegiance has always been to him and it will be to him still, and he will get his worship come what may. And if the police chase us out of our building, then we'll reassemble in an undisclosed location. And if we have to worship in the open air on someone's property, that will be fine too, but we will be found worshiping the great God of heaven and earth because he is worthy of it. He is worthy of it. We're going to maintain his priorities and worship we will.

The call of this passage is to run to the Lord, not from the Lord, and one of the reasons that Jeremiah was so in earnest about this is because when the Lord sends whether it's a breeze or a tsunami metaphorically, whether he sends the little or the great, running from the Lord heaps up provocations. It heaps up provocations. Rather than coming under the rod and bringing forth the fruits that are meet of repentance, right, these reasonable fruits,

if it calcifies as the conscience and hardens the heart, it increases the dishonor to the Lord.

Well, there's turning to the Lord, thirdly, there is the repenting of the church. There's the turning of the church, thirdly, there is the repenting of the church. Verse 42, "We have transgressed and have rebelled: thou hast not pardoned." I hear calls to prayer. I hear it from government officials, I hear it from churches and it seems to be that, well, in the case of the government, it's a call for all faiths to pray. It's not a call to pray to the living and true God, the Triune God of the Bible, and it's not a call to pray for repentance and humiliation, mind you, either. No, it's calls to prayer. However good they look from a distance by themselves they are obnoxious in the nostrils of God. He is provoked by them.

But I hear calls to prayer from the church as well. In essence it is, "Save us. You know, let us cry out to God. God can save us. God will save us. God will deliver us. You know, he is a God who will deliver us and so on." My question is: save us from what? Save us from what? Deliver us from what? Save us so that we can go back to our idols and continue with business as usual? I fear and I'm grieved by it but I fear that that is, in essence, what is being said. "O Lord, protect us and deliver us and save us from all these harms, and let us keep all of our creaturely comforts, and let us devote ourselves to all the things that we always have, and let us maintain our spiritual minimalism and look like the world and trample your law," and so on. Is that what this cry is? Well, then my friends, it is not a cry or a prayer that will be received favorably by the Almighty if it is save us so that we can go back to our sin. No, I hope more and more that the cry will be, "Save us from our sins. O Lord, smite us if you must for your glory but deliver us from our sins for they are very great, and they are more than we can number, and they have heaped up way above our heads. Save us, O Lord, from yourself, from your just indignation and wrath. O Lord, turn us. Don't just take away the sting or the uncertainty or the anxiety or the fears or whatever else, but gracious God, turn our woefully weak and wicked hearts and turn them back and grant us true repentance." This is the kind of relief that Jeremiah sought.

I told you earlier the priests, the ministers and the people, they all wanted bread, right? They're seeking after the temporal conference of this world. You look at Jeremiah and you find a totally different picture, don't you? Chapter 1, verse 16, it's still relief but what does he say? "For these things I weep; mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water, because the comforter that should relieve my soul is far from me." Right, he is God-centered and God-conscious in what he is saying. In verse 18 he says, "The LORD, he is righteous. He is right in what he is doing, for I have rebelled against his commandment." This is Jeremiah, "hear, I pray you, all people, and behold my sorrow in these things." Verse 20, "Behold, O LORD; for I am in distress: my bowels are troubled; mine heart is turned within me; for I have grievously rebelled." Verse 21, "They have heard that I sigh."

Go to chapter 2, verse 18 him, "Their heart cried unto the Lord, O wall of the daughter of Zion, let tears run down like a river day and night: give thyself no rest; let not the apple

of thine eye cease. Arise, cry out in the night: in the beginning of the watches pour out thine heart like water before the face of the Lord: lift up thy hands toward him for the life of thy young children," and so on. What's happening here? This is not scurrying after the comforts of this world. This is forsaking comfort. This is afflicting the soul. I mean, this is coming and having the Lord plow deeply the souls of his church and of his people. Do you know the picture that's given here? His bowels and his tears and his strength and he's fainting and he's weak and he's beside himself in all of these things. It's the picture of a woman who has a son who is off at war and she looks out her window under the porch and sees two soldiers standing there, and she sees what's coming and she opens the door and they say, "Ma'am, we're sorry to tell you, your son has been killed in action." What is her response? Her response is to collapse on the ground and to wail and to pull her hair and to lose all of her strength. That's the picture of Jeremiah and that is not the picture that we see in the church of Jesus Christ in these United States of America. It's not. God have mercy on us.

Here's the evidence of a broken and humble heart. He is more concerned about the Lord, his glory, his righteousness, his kingdom, his house, than he is his own comfort. Tears poured down the face of Jeremiah. He is in high distress body, mind, soul, bowels, liver, heart. It's all a wreck. Why? Because God's worship has been defiled by his own people, because his day has been desecrated by his own people, because his people have taken the idols of the world like those that are around them, and the Lord told them through his prophets these sins in particular will cost you. Exile. He wanted God's name sanctified before the world.

This is what's happening and, you know, it's the same picture that we have, isn't it? It's the same picture that we have with our Savior, with the Lord Jesus Christ, because he comes speaking the truth. He comes calling them to repentance. He comes preaching the kingdom. He comes opposing all of these things. And what is he? He's a man of sorrows and he's forsaking his comforts, and he's bearing all of these griefs, and he did not turn. He set his face like a flint and he did not seek the personal reliefs of his earthly distractions. He served his Lord in his will.

Look at Jeremiah's contemporaries, go read Ezra 9. Make that your prayer. Pray Ezra 9 from the very depths of your soul. Go to another younger colleague, Daniel, and open your Bible to Daniel 9 and pray that from the bottom of your soul. That is the example that we seek. Give us Jeremiah, give us Daniel, give us Ezra and Ezekiel. These are the ones that we esteem in the Lord. And they prostrated themselves, and they humbled themselves and they cried out, and they vindicated God's glory, and they said that he is right to punish his people and nations, and they honored him, and they stood for him, and they repented, they repented for their own sins, and they repented for the corporate sins of the church, and they repented for the sins of the nation as well.

All of those things are here in Lamentations. It's striking. I mean, you look at Jeremiah and there are times when he is saying "we" he's confessing the sins of the church. These people have no clue. They're gone. They're spiritually shipwrecked. But he's standing, as it were, in the place and he is praying and he is repenting over the sins of the people as a

whole and he says, for example, in chapter 3, "We have transgressed and rebelled. Thou hast not pardoned." Right, and then there's the language all throughout where he's confessing his own personal sins, where he's saying, "I called upon the name of the Lord. I called on thy name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon, thou hast heard my cry. Hide not thine ear at my breathing, at my cry." All the way through he's confessing his own sins. The church rather than closing its doors and saying no public worship for three weeks, should be saying we're having public worship every day and we're going to bow before God and we're going to cry out to him to repent. The true remnant may be mocked but the true remnant will humble themselves, not lift themselves up as if they'll conquer whatever comes, not distract themselves with all the cares of this world to the exclusion of what matters most.

My heart cries that God would put within us the sincere prayer that, "Lord, we will not stop seeking thee. We won't. We won't stop seeking thee and we could care less what anyone else does. Each has to appear and give an answer to his own Master, but we will not stop seeking thee. Do what thou wilt to us but we will bow under it, we will confess our sins and we will glorify thy name." This is not reducing prayer, it is increasing it and it is increasing prayer not for ourselves, not for our physical relief, but increasing prayer for the Lord and his glory and his cause and his kingdom and giving him the praise.

We can say all of these things, we can speak all of the right words, we can nod our heads and say, "Well, we can't argue with the Bible and these things are true," and not really lay it to heart. I'll never know, your elders will never know, your family won't even know where you are in the secret place but there is one who is watching and he knows. Where are we in the secret place humbling ourselves before the Lord, confessing our own vile sins and the corporate sins of the people of God. And it needs to come into our soul in a way that will reflect what we see in Jeremiah. He's traumatized. Not going crazy like we see the world all around us going crazy because of toilet paper and things, he is traumatized to the core because of his earnest earnest earnest concern for the glory of God.

You say, "Well, pastor, is it all gloom? Do you have any word for us this evening beyond what seems so heavy to us?" Well, the answer is there is tremendous hope. There's tremendous hope but it has to be God's hope sought in God's way. It's not this sickly, sweet, sentimental hope that all is going to be well, God takes care of us and we'll be fine. No. It is the Lord's way and the hope is rooted in God's covenant faithfulness.

You look at chapter 3 and this comes to the fore. It's rooted in God's covenant faithfulness. This is what Jeremiah pled. He says in verse 21, "This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope." There it is. "It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness." He is pleading the covenant. He is pleading God's covenant faithfulness and you look at this, this isn't just pious talk, he's saying, "I've taken the Lord as my portion. I am seeking by gospel grace to say," in verse 24, "The LORD," Jehovah, "is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him." It may be that this will be taken away from me and that will be taken away from me, and other things will be taken away from me,

but this is what I have and therefore I hope, "The LORD is my portion." It is the exercise of sincere faith in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, as I said in the letter, this is the ark into which we run, it is Christ himself, and we do so by the exercise of faith in him. And it goes on, doesn't it? "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD." Verse 28, "He sitteth alone and keepeth silence." It's true. "He putteth his mouth in the dust," this is Jeremiah. It's true. But he can say in verse 31, "For the Lord will not cast off for ever: But though he cause grief," it is the Lord causing the grief, "though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies."

Hope is found in coming to the Lord and coming to him on his terms and coming to him in his way. That's where true hope is. It is turning to the Lord and it is begging that he would turn unto us, that he would as Jeremiah says elsewhere, turn our hearts that they might be turned, that we might be turned toward him and that he would graciously turn toward us in his favor, not to merely put Band-Aids on our silly, little, broken idols that are being ground to powder, but that he might put life in us, that he might renew us, that spiritually we might have vitality, that we would walk in the fear of God, that we would deny ourselves and follow him, that we would delight in him, that we would prize communion with him, that we would seek to uphold his glory and his honor. That's what we seek, that the Lord would put those things, renewing those things in our hearts. That's God's way of hope, not the cacophony of nonsense that is blaring in our ears. This is biblical and well-grounded hope. Let us not steer clear of it to the right or to the left.

The events of the present day are a whisper, they are a breeze that the Lord has sent through the halls of this land. How will the church respond to the breeze? It's telling, it's telling, we must by the grace of God set our faces to seek the Lord. And whether he sends us a breeze or whether he sends us a metaphorical tsunami, we will be found at his feet, that we will be found at his feet because then you are very well prepared. If everything else in your life were to vaporize, the Lord brings his hammer, you will be incredibly well prepared, you will be snugly tucked away in the ark when the floods come. As I said in the letter, you have that beautiful example from Ezekiel, same time period, chapter 9, when the Lord is bringing his hammer on his church and the Lord says, "I'm going to mark those. I'm going to mark them. Where are they? Where are the few who will sigh and cry over the abominations that abound?" And the Lord says, "I will show them mercy. I will mark them and I will show them mercy."

I entitled the sermon "Corona: The Church's Warning" because I believe it's that. I believe it's a warning. I believe it's a tremor and I want by the grace of God for our congregation to hear and heed the warning, to not be deaf to the Lord's voice, to not be blind to the Lord's hand, but rather to come under him with attentiveness, with spiritual exercise, with a God-centeredness to magnify the Son. He sits in the heavens and he wields an iron scepter. What for? To smash to smithereens those who rebel against him. It's not an idle tale. This is reality. This is the truth. Blessed are those who trust in him. Blessed are those who mingle their trembling with their mirth, who serve the Lord with fear, who kiss the Son. My friends, let us kiss him. Let us kiss him and if called upon, let

us kiss his rod and vindicate and glorify him in it, but whatever else, let us be found turning to him. By the grace of God, let us turn to him.

Stand together for prayer.

Almighty God in heaven, thou art a just and a righteous God, thou art the judge of all the earth and thou doest right. Lord, we confess that thy glory is to be esteemed. We pray that it will be esteemed in our hearts above all else. What are our comforts, O Lord, if thy glory is laid in the dust, if dishonor is brought to thy name? Our comforts are nothing. O Lord, grant us a heart that would bow down not in word but in sincerity to own our sins. The provocations of thy church, rebellion and disobedience, the transgressions, we confess them as we have already in this prayer meeting earlier. O Lord, we have sinned, we have done evil, and our sins are very great. Give us, O Lord, the mercy of repentance. We confess, O God, that we do not deserve to be given the gift of repentance, that you would be just to leave us hardened under our sins. But grant us this grace, O Lord, grant us that our hearts might be turned. Turn us that we might seek thee and lift up the light of thy countenance upon us. Hear our cries for Jesus' sake. Amen.