

Difference Between Hypothetical and Personal

I notice much has been said on social media by Christians and how to properly respond to the Coronavirus. Some congregations cancelled all their services for an indefinite time, others to one service per week, or some are meeting with a statement telling members who are sick or afraid to stay at home.

One statement that stuck with me is “I’ve never had to deal with this before.” Elders have to make decisions that will impact their congregations for the near and not so near future. It is one thing to say “we will never close our doors due to the government and another when the state governor says churches should not meet due to the spread of the virus. We can answer hypotheticals all we want but when it becomes personal then it takes on a different tone. I mean it was one thing to watch people in Italy on their balconies singing and pictures of people putting up Christmas lights to bring cheer but another to understand their loneliness.

I thought of this yesterday, March 19th, as we flew from Phoenix to Louisville. On the flight to Phoenix, I noticed the flight attendants not walking the aisles as much and basically keeping their distance. On the way back to Louisville they told us they were only going to give us a can of water and a snack. Otherwise, they literally stayed away from us. Then we video chatted with our youngest daughter Noah. Due to the health risk to younger people (about 40% of those admitted to hospital are under 59 years of age), she and our grandson, Tommy, were self-quarantining. Knowing the answer, I still asked if that meant Regena and I needed to stay away. To which she said, yes! At that point the idea of social distancing and quarantining went from hypothetical to person.

This made me think about the personal nature of the Gospel.

Our sins against God are not hypothetical but they are “real sins.” They are not committed by somebody else or society in general but by individuals. The Bible warns us of the danger of following others into sin. “You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert justice”. (Exodus 23:2) We as individuals are the ones committing the act of sin.

The Bible speaks of the judgement to come and we can talk about the “Judgement Day”. On that day, we will stand alone before the judgment seat of Christ. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” (2 Corinthians 5:10) You and I will not stand together or with our moms or dads, with our preacher, or the elders of our congregation: we will stand alone.

We can talk about spending eternity in heaven or hell in non-personal terms but the fact is individuals will either suffer for eternity or be with God. “But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness.” (Matthew 8:12) The weeping and gnashing of teeth will be our tears and our anguish if we go to hell. The bliss and comfort of heaven will also be ours if we hear the words “Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.” (Matthew 25:21)

We can study about Jesus leaving heaven to come to earth, the shameful treatment he received, and his painful death on the cross in purely hypothetical and clinical terms. “When they had twisted a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand. And they bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!” (Matthew 27:29) But when we can hear the words of scorn, see the blood dripping from Jesus’ head, and the nails being driven in into his hands it becomes personal. It is personal because he died for me! Yes,

he died for all of us, Jew, Gentile, Greek, Barbarian, rich, poor, etc. But he died for me!

Our hearing the Gospel must go from the hypothetical to the personal. I know many folks who can speak of the plan of salvation and how one is saved by the blood of Christ and yet never obey the Gospel. Why? There are many reasons but I have to think, one is it never becomes personal. The Philippian jailer understood this. "And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30) It is my soul, my eternal destiny, and my obedience that is necessary for me to go to heaven. The same goes for each of us. – Dennis Tucker