**Truth Currents** **7-24-20**

 Welcome to Truth Currents. As excited as I am about baseball, I’ve kind of got mixed emotions because baseball is kicking the season off with no fans in the stands. When I was playing baseball and we played games on the field, and there was nobody in the stands to watch, we called that practice. It will be interesting to see if following the pandemic and the lockdowns that we’ve seen in America, if professional sports will be able to survive in the months ahead with only television and online presence. If real people aren’t sitting in the stands, we’ll see if they can survive that.

 It’s an interesting question for churches as well. So many churches have closed down and remained closed down. The question in the minds of a lot of pastors that I talk to is, “*Will my people return when we finally open the doors?*”

 That’s what I want to talk about today. One week ago on Truth Currents, I talked to you about the state government in California closing down churches and prohibiting it from opening up for worship services. We talked about the government’s right or lack of right to have that kind of power over churches. We talked about the possibility for civil disobedience as a response. That’s a real problem. And it’s going to have to be watched closely. We’re going to have to see the unsettling nature of what’s happening with the relationship between some governmental agencies and local churches.

 But there’s another problem I want to talk about today that actually precedes the pandemic. It’s been unfolding for a number of years. And that is, American Christians who by their lifestyle are de-prioritizing church attendance. It’s interesting the problem in the American church, going way back before the pandemic, is that we’ve changed our attitudes about what church attendance is for, why we do this thing that the Bible instructs us to do, which is to be together as the people of God.

 It started a couple of generations ago as we began to see “kids sports” replacing Sunday and Wednesday activities. Families that had been doing church regularly were now pulled in the direction of other family events and hobbies. We’ve seen in our culture that Sunday work is often accepted by Christians without any protest, without any exploration of the possibility of having time away so that attendance at church can be a priority.

 Culturally, we’ve seen Sundays in America become just a second Saturday in the weekend. People treat it as a day off, a workday, a catch-up day, a day for chores around the house. And I think at the core of all of these changes is the transition that we’ve made within American Evangelicalism to the idea that the Gospel is really just a “get out of hell free” card without realizing that the Gospel is about life. The Gospel has to do with every aspect of who we are.

 I was talking to somebody this week and I mentioned the verses in **Hebrews 10**. And his response was, “*Oh, you know every preacher quotes those verses. And I really don’t want to hear that*.” Well, it doesn’t really matter if you want to hear that or not. If we’re determined to evaluate our culture, the day in which we live, with a Biblical perspective, then it’s important what the Word of God has to say.

 Listen to these verses in **Hebrews 10:23-25**.

Let us hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering, since He who promised is faithful. And let us watch out for one another to provoke love and good works, not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching.

 The writer of Hebrews says that it’s important for us “*to hold on to the confession*” that we have. What he means is that it’s important for us to take this confession that “we follow Jesus” and to pursue a greater grasp of what that means. That means that we need training in the great doctrines of Scripture. It means we need to understand the heritage of faith that’s been handed down from generation to generation. It means our families need what they can only get in the midst of the people of God that we call the local church.

 He says we have a shared encouragement. He said keep an eye on each other and encourage one another. Provoke one another to do good works. In other words, we have a built-in accountability as the people of God to help each other be better. This doesn’t mean that we’re a “Karen,” that we’re a neighborhood nag. It doesn’t mean that we’re bossing everyone around all the time. It means that we’re walking shoulder to shoulder with each other spurring each other on to do greater things in the name of Christ. We do that together. It’s a shared encouragement.

 He says don’t quit meeting together because we have shared life. There are some things that we can only experience when we come together as the people of God. We have an obligation to each other and to the Lord to find ourselves regularly and often together for the purpose of learning from the Word of God for the purpose of presenting ourselves in worship before the Throne of Grace. Church is not what you do when you don’t have anything else on your schedule. One of the evidences of authentic relationship to Jesus Christ is a passion, a hunger, a desire to be together with God’s people.

 The problem with this pandemic is it’s given people an excuse to do things they don’t want to do, like go to church. It strikes me odd when I see somebody at the grocery store. I see them at Lowes or Home Depot. I run into them at a Mexican restaurant or a fast food place. And when I say, “*Hey, I’ve been missing you at church*.” They say, “*Well, we’re just nervous. We just think it’s safe to come to church*.”

 Well, first of all, at least in our church, this is the cleanest building in Tulsa. We have taken every kind of precaution. We have UV lights that we use to clean our equipment, our chairs, our seats. We disinfect. This building has a wonderful Lysol smell to it.

 My question is, “*If this place is safe, what’s the real reason you’re not here?*”

 Across the churches that are in this city at least, the pastors that I talk to, their concern is: What if people don’t come back? It’s a real thing.

 The real question is, “**Why would authentic followers of Jesus ever consider not coming back?**”

 You see **Psalm 16:1-3** really gives us a picture of what our lives as Christians should look like. It’s Old Testament but listen to these verses.

Protect me, God, for I take refuge in you. I said to the LORD, “You are my Lord; I have nothing good besides you.” As for the holy people who are in the land, they are the noble ones. All my delight is in them.

 The question for us, whether there’s a pandemic going on or whether this is just normal life. If we want to be truthful thinkers, if we want evaluate current events from a Biblical perspective, we have to start at a very baseline beginning and answer these questions.

**Do I find pleasure and refuge in the presence of the Lord?**

**Do I take delight being with the people of God?**

 The threat of government intrusion into the life of local churches is a real problem, an unsettling issue that we’re going to have to keep alert to in days ahead. But the real danger: government may not have to prohibit churches from meeting if American Christians voluntarily give up the influence of the Kingdom on our culture by not making their way back to the people of God in worship before the Throne of Grace.

 I hope to see you soon. This is Truth Currents.