



President Walton's May 2020 Message

Spring Training



St. Patrick's Day 2020 may be remembered as the day the world changed, or at least the United States. Prior to that most of us had heard rumors of a virus spreading, and concerns about it, but I don't think many of us had any great concern. Certainly, no one could have predicted the restrictions put in place, the shortage of toilet paper, the lines to get in stores like Walmart and the closing of restaurants. Who could have imagined the number of deaths worldwide, not to mention in our own nation. It has created great despair among many, wondering when it will all be over.

I think David, prior to ascending the throne as King of Israel, understood our plight. While being pursued by King Saul, who was determined to kill him, David wrote a beautiful psalm that maybe captures where you are. He writes, ***"How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? Consider and answer me, O LORD my God; light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death, lest my enemy say, 'I have prevailed over him,' lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken."***

Years ago, when I was in college, I was attending a celebration for the college and had the honor to sit with a beloved Dean, the late Thomas Green. After a lovely meal a speaker got up and pontificated for about 45 minutes, when Dean Green leaned over with his Bible and showed me this Psalm, underlined in his translation was, "The cry goes up, 'How long.'" As I tried to contain my laughter, he "affectionately" smacked the back of my head to quiet me down...you had to know Dean Green.

I don't know about you, but there have been days in the last six weeks when I've wondered how long will this go on. When will we get back to "normal"? As we wondered at that banquet in college, when will it be over? Like King David, we wonder, ***"How long, O Lord?"*** How long?

David continues in Psalm 13 with these words, ***"But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me."*** God had David's back, and we can be confident because God always has a plan, and while we may not fully comprehend the plan, we can trust it to be good! With David, we can place our trust in God. His love for us is so strong that He sacrificed His only Son, Jesus, to purchase us. Peter reminds us in 1 Peter 1:17-19, ***"And if you call on Him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot."*** It sort of feels like exile and yet we know that better days are

not far away! We know that in all things God works for the good of those He loves, and in Jesus He has proven how deeply He loves you!

These are interesting days we are living in! Who would have thought the baseball season would be postponed? I am kind of missing baseball in these pandemic days of sheltering in and social distancing. Let me share an analogy I've been thinking about while I can't watch baseball... Perhaps we need to think of these strange days like "Spring Training." God is preparing us for something even more. When a baseball team is in Spring Training they are getting ready for the "season." They are able to try different things, players may take on different roles, be placed in different positions, they are challenged to exceed. Could God have His Church in Spring Training? Is He preparing us for something bigger? There is no doubt He is! Perhaps He is focusing us on something different than our own "locker room." In other words, could this be the opportunity to become more outward focused for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus? We've talked about learning to reach our communities for decades. Now is the time! We can do it! Look how quickly churches adapted to technology when it became necessary! Look how God is using this to reach beyond those we have typically reached!

In an email conversation with my friend, John Denninger, he pointed out many at this time seem to be talking about having communion or not having communion, about having to learn video technology, about having to be exiled from their church facility. Each of these conversations, while valid, focus on "us" rather than looking out to the world that God loved so much He sent Jesus, who died and rose again to give us true hope. We, of all people, have an abundance of hope! This hope enables us to stand strong even in the midst of difficult days. It's a hope reminding us of better days ahead. It's a hope able to see beyond our own needs to the needs of those who do not yet know Jesus as Savior. What I've learned over the course of my life is the manager of the team isn't the one who wins the game. It takes the whole team working together. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12, ***"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ... Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it"*** 1 Cor. 12:12, 27.

Spring Training is a time to prepare individual players for the game. It also prepares the whole team for a winning season. Each teammate plays an important role in the game. In the same way, YOU have an important role to play in the body of Christ. God is at work, even in the midst of this "season," and He has a "position" for each of us to play. Look into the "stands" all around the stadium God has placed you in and see the opportunities right in front of you. I believe God is preparing us to reach many in 2020 for Jesus!



It is fascinating that God could have chosen July or August when the church is kind of on vacation anyway for this virus to hit, but instead the Lord chose to allow the pandemic to close down the world during Holy Week and Easter. God allowed every institution to shut down so that no one could interrupt the silence. God silenced science, the omnipotent power of today, which still has no definitive answer to COVID-19. God created an unprecedented hunger for good news around the globe with the bad news of invasive sickness and death that could touch anyone, and has literally killed over 2 million people worldwide. God allowed years of technology to advance to the point that the Gospel could be heard, seen, and celebrated by millions of people who would never have heard it in a church building. God, the Holy Spirit, used his people to proclaim the news of Jesus' death and resurrection in Pentecost-like proportions in brand new and innovative ways to opened ears!

On May 31st, the Church will celebrate the Feast of Pentecost. I cannot guarantee that you will be back in your church building, worshipping around a familiar altar, celebrating with your congregational family members, having access to communion or any of the things that three months ago were so familiar. However, there is no doubt that God has used this "exile" for His purposes! The same Jesus who told His disciples to stay in the city, promised, ***"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*** He was sending His Spirit filled people into the world with a message of hope,

healing, health and new life! God has poured out His Holy Spirit on people to empower their witness to the world. So now we are sent into the world, perhaps with new insights and experiences which can be used to reach many in what's left of 2020 for Jesus!

Spring Training is a time of preparation to go out and play ball! The cry still goes up, "how long?" I wish I had the answer. What I do know is, as God prepared David through his struggles, He is now preparing each of us, so when Spring Training is done, we will be ready for a winning season. In fact, I pray it will be a soul-winning season! Let us redeem the time and get ready! Get some 2020 vision and see the harvest all around us. The Living Lord of the Harvest, our Resurrected Jesus, sends us into a sin sick and pandemic laden world with a message of hope. It is, indeed, a different world. God is calling. Batter up!



In His peace,

Greg



The President's Equip Conference for all church workers AND laity, offering practical, strategic resources for congregations to learn and grow, will be held September 24-26, 2020 at the Hilton Buena Vista Palace in Orlando (across from Disney Springs). The theme is "One Body, Many Parts," from 1 Corinthians 12, and we desire to bring together the whole family of God in the Florida-Georgia District. In addition to useful workshops, we will have David Kinnaman, CEO of the Barna Research Group, Donna Snow, and for entertainment, The Skit Guys. More information will be available soon.

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Reaching Many in 2020
for Jesus!