

Once Upon a Pandemic

Bailout

April 12, 2020

Thank you all for tuning in today ... and a special thanks to those who are joining us for the very first time.

And if you *are* watching for the very first time because someone invited you to do so ... a big “way to go” to that person for inviting you.

Before I begin, I want to let you know about the series we’re going to begin next Sunday.

It’s called *Bloom Where You’re Planted Quarantined.*

And the reason we’re doing it is because ...

- We didn’t ask for this virus.

- We didn't ask for this recession.
- We didn't ask for schools and restaurants and gyms and churches to close.
- Or for "social distancing" policies
- Or stay-at-home orders.

But that's where we are.

The question is ... *how do we make the best of it?*
How can we "bloom where we're quarantined"
(so to speak).

That's what we're going to be talking for three Sundays beginning next Sunday. I hope you'll join us, and I hope you'll invite someone else tune in with you.

As for today (as Shannon said), we're closing out

our series, *Once Upon a Pandemic*, and if you missed any of these messages, you can go back and listen to, watch or read them in the media section of our app and our website.

And the reason we're doing *this* series is that things are going to be different *after* this coronavirus thing. Culturally, socially, economically, it's going to be different. More personally, *you're* going to be different. *I'm* going to be different.

The question is *how* are we going to be different?

My contention is that we're going to be different and changed – and, maybe, at the *very core* of our being – *based on how we interact with God*.

And by that, I mean more than just praying during this time ... which is good. You should do that. Don't hear what I'm not saying.

I mean things like ...

- What do you think about God?
- What do you feel about God?
- What do you believe about *where God is* in all of this?

... because if you don't have clarity on those things – if you don't understand and trust the love of God for you even in these trying times, you will disconnect from Him. And that will change your life for the worse.

On the other hand, if you can understand and trust God right now in the middle of all of this, you will draw near to Him. And your life will be better, and you will be better at life.

And my goal in this series has been to try and help you with that.

So, let's get into it.

“Making Whole”

I'm sure you've heard by now of all the ways that our government agencies are addressing the economic stress that has been caused by so many people losing their jobs and so many businesses having to shut down.

And I know that a lot of you watching right now are in those situations. You're out of work or your business is on life-support. If there is anything we can do to help, please let us know. Fill out the contact form on our website and we'll get back to you.

Anyway ... here's a list of just some of what the Federal Government is attempting to do:

- Making direct “stimulus payments” to

individuals

- Extending and expanding unemployment benefits
- Suspending student loan payments and interest
- Extending the 2020 tax deadline

- The Paycheck Protection Program
- The Economic Injury Disaster Loan Program
- A payroll tax delay for COVID-19 impacted businesses

All with a promise of “more to come” if needed.

Not to be outdone, the Federal Reserve is also taking action, including:ⁱ

- Cutting interest rates to near zero
- Open-ended purchases of Treasury

securities along with government-guaranteed and commercial mortgage-backed securities

- Lending directly to securities firms
- Lending directly to major corporate employers
- Temporarily relaxing regulatory requirements on banks
- Supporting loans to small- and mid-sized businesses through the newly created Main Street New Loan Facility and the Main Street Expanded Loan Facility

I don't even know what half of that means but the list could go on.

Point being: whether it works or not (and I know we all hope that it does), there is no question that our government and the Federal Reserve are attempting the greatest financial bailout in the history of our nation.

But what I find *most* fascinating about this effort is a specific phrase they repeatedly use in describing *the goal* of that bailout.

Let me read you a few statements and see if you can recognize it.

Two days ago, Fed Chairman Jay Powell said,

“People are making these sacrifices for the common good. We need to make them whole to the extent we have the ability. They didn’t cause this.

“Their businesses didn’t close because of anything they did wrong. They didn’t lose their job because of anything they did wrong.”ⁱⁱ

A couple weeks ago, Bernie Sanders, in his final debate with Joe Biden, said that Congress must

work quickly to pass a new stimulus bill ...

... ensuring that ...

“Every working family in this country is made whole, that we end the terrible anxiety that so many people are now experiencing ...

“... in terms of wondering how they’re going to pay their rent, how they’re going to buy the food that they need, how they’re going to keep their telephone bills paid, and all that stuff.”ⁱⁱⁱ

When Vice President Mike Pence was recently asked how uninsured patients with the coronavirus would be handled under the bailout ...

He said ...

“They’re going to get first-dollar coverage, they’re going to get care in the United States,

and the provider is going to be made whole from this program.”^{iv}

Are you seeing it yet?

Here’s one more ...

Congressman Tim Ryan of Ohio recently said:

“[Congress is] sending economic support to make sure everybody is made whole to the best we can, and we’ll do it again, especially for some of these small businesses.”^v

The goal of this massive government bailout is to make everyone who suffers loss in this crisis “whole.”

Now, up until this crisis, I had never heard that phrase used in that context. I think it’s pretty obvious what it means (in that context), but I decided to look it up anyway.

Some of you who work in the financial world or the legal world, you already know this.

To “make one whole” means to pay or award damages sufficient to put the party who was damaged back into the position he/she would have been without the fault of another.^{vi}

Got that? Make sense?

The language is kind of stilted so, let’s put it like this:

To be “made whole” means having your world (financially and legally) restored to what it was before it got screwed up by someone or something else.

So ... as it concerns the current crisis, the goal is to put businesses and individuals back to where they were *financially* before everything was forced to shut down because of the coronavirus.

Again, whether or not that effort succeeds remains to be seen.

But that's the goal.

Making Us “Whole”

Now, at this point, I'm sure that some of you are thinking, “well, Rick, that's fascinating. Thank you for the education – I think. But what does any of this have to do with God?”

“And, by the way, it's *Easter Sunday*. What does any of *this* have to do with *that*?”

Well, as it turns out, it has *very much* to do with it.

Those who followed Jesus of Nazareth (and Jesus himself) often used financial language and metaphors to describe what Jesus was doing, what Jesus had done and what Jesus was going

to do.

For instance, in one of the letters the Apostle Paul wrote ...

And by the way, for those who may not know who Paul was, he was the number one antagonist of Christianity in its earliest days. He made a career out of finding Christians and dragging them before the Jewish and Roman courts, even participating in the stoning of one of the church's leaders.

But then, the Risen Jesus of Nazareth appeared to him and confronted him as he was on the way to persecute and destroy yet another church.

After that, Paul became the greatest *protagonist* of Christianity to ever live. He was singlehandedly responsible for the widespread and rapid development of churches all over the Roman Empire – even though it cost him dearly when he, himself, became the object of intense

persecution.

In addition, he became Christianity's pre-eminent theologian because, as a scholar trained in the Hebrew Law of Moses, Paul was able to understand and communicate how Jesus fulfilled that covenant in His life and established a new covenant in his death. He literally was a genius.

Anyway ... check out the financial language Paul uses to describe what happened on the cross on Friday afternoon in his letter to the Colossian believers and followers of Jesus.

This is just one of several ways he explains how Jesus death makes forgiveness of sin possible.

He starts by saying ...

Having forgiven ALL our transgressions ...

And that's really important to understand, by the way, that the forgiveness Jesus offers is a one-and-done thing.

You don't have to keep "getting saved" all over again every time you sin because all of our transgressions – all of our sins – past, present, future, known and unknown are taken care of.

And here's how:

*He [meaning God] has destroyed
what was against us: a
certificate of indebtedness ...*

...which is, obviously, financial terminology, that was specific to that culture.

And *in* that culture, scholars tell us, a "certificate of indebtedness" was basically a handwritten IOU obligating the signer to repay whatever debt was listed on the note.

So, if you lend me 50 shekels, I write a note that says I will pay you back according to whatever terms we agree on.

But, in this case – in what Paul is talking about, the debt to be repaid isn't financial (though the terminology is). The debt is *moral* and *spiritual*.

Furthermore, this apparently a debt that no human is able to pay because Paul says that this certificate is ...

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*... expressed in decrees opposed
to us. Colossians 2:13
(NET)*

... which sounds, at first like, “what the heck is he talking about?”

But it's not that difficult to understand.

Have you ever read through all the things you agree to when you sign up for a credit card? Probably not, even though they tell you to.

And they tell you to do that because if you don't pay what you owe, that list of agreements will become a set of "decrees opposed to you." They will become legal accusations against you; justifications for why you should be punished in some way.

And what Paul is saying here is that our moral and spiritual certificate of debt has become just that: legal accusations against us, justifications for why we should be punished^{vii} ... which is really bad news.

The good news, however, is that ...

He ...

... meaning God.

He has taken it ...

... meaning our spiritual and moral certificate of debt ...

*He has taken it away by nailing
it to the cross. Colossians 2:14
(NET)*

... which is such an amazing imagery!

When Jesus was nailed to the cross, our certificate of sin-debt was *also* nailed to the cross.

I'm not sure how it worked like that or why other than the way Paul described it in another of his letters (and we talked about this last week): "God made Him who knew no sin to *be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God."^{viii}

Somehow, Jesus – god in the flesh – was fused

together with all of our sin.

And, in that moment, His death was enough to pay what was owed – all of your sin, all of my sin, past, present, future, known and unknown – and put us “back in the black.”

... or, in the financial phrase of the day ...

The Cross was enough to “make us whole”; to restore us back to what we were originally intended to be (Paul calls it “the righteousness of God”) ...

... before the virus of sin and death *screwed up* everything, *marred* everything, *tainted* everything ... including you and including me.

This is why – when you become a Christian – “there is therefore now no condemnation”^{ix} when you fail and when you fall. Jesus has made you whole in God’s sight. You are a new creation.

So, that's one way this "coronavirus bailout thing" relates to God and to Easter.

But there's another way. And, in my opinion, it's even better.

Making God "Whole"

Here's a question to think about.

**When sin and death messed up the world,
who suffered the greatest loss?**

If you're watching with someone right now, tell them what you think. Who suffered the greatest loss?

Because you're so smart, I'm sure you all figured out that ...

God suffered the greatest loss.

After all, it was *His* world, not ours. He designed

it. He made it.

And whether He did it in six literal days like it says in Genesis or He began a process that continued for eons, eventually producing “everything that is,” the design in our world is so blatantly obvious as to not even be worth debating.

So, God designed the world and God made the world.

And the God’s world got messed up but not because of anything *He* did wrong. We humans did it. *We* screwed it up through our sin.

And so, in terms of the financial/legal phrase of the day, for justice to prevail ...

***God Himself* needs to be “made whole.”**

God needs to be put back into the position He would have had if the world hadn’t been messed

up ... which means that the world needs to be restored to what it was before we screwed it up.

And, friends, that's exactly what began to happen when Jesus rose from the dead on that first Easter Sunday morning.

Again, the Apostle Paul describes it like this in a letter to Christians who lived in the first-century city of Corinth.

He wrote ...

He [Jesus] is the first of a great harvest of all who have died. Just as death came into the world through a man, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man.

1 Corinthians 15:20 (NLT)

A few sentences later, he says it again but even more plainly.

There is an order to this resurrection: Christ was raised as the first of the harvest; then all who belong to Christ will be raised when he comes back.
1 Corinthians 15:23 (NLT)

What Paul is saying is that, in the resurrection of Jesus, the curse of sin and death is in the process of being undone.

In the resurrection of Jesus, the process of “setting the world right” – back to what it was when God made it before it was messed up – has begun.

And Paul says it will be finished when Jesus comes back and all who belong to him will be raised and *the whole creation* (as he writes elsewhere), will be set free from the destruction of sin’s curse on it.

Bottom line, the resurrection of Jesus is the

defining event in how God gets His world restored. It's how God Himself is "made whole."

Now the reason I'm telling you all of this is that, as we watch our government implement the greatest financial bailout known to man (and woman) – trillions and trillions of dollars – all to be spent in hopes of making "everyone whole"

...

... and as we each receive a stimulus payment, or an unemployment payment, or our business benefits from the Paycheck Protection Program or some other program, all in hopes that we *personally* can be "made whole" ...

The reason I'm telling you this is because I want you to understand that ...

What God has done through the death and resurrection of Jesus so that you, and me,

and the cosmos and even He Himself can be “made whole” physically, spiritually and eternally, *is a trillion times more impressive and impactful than our current “bailout”!*

President Trump has repeatedly said that “nothing like this has ever been done before” and from a human perspective, he’s completely right.

But from an eternal perspective – from God’s perspective – he’s nowhere close.

And I don’t say that to be critical. It’s just fact, because what God has done in Jesus will defeat sin and death and things like coronavirus forever and ever, amen.

On that day when He returns and raises those who belong to him in transformed bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.

*O death, where is your victory?
O death, where is your sting?"*

1 Corinthians 15:54-55 (NLT)

Together, the cross and the resurrection of Jesus make up the ultimate and eternal bailout.

Why Believe?

Of course, some would say, "OK, that's a pretty neat theological trick on God's part. And, from that perspective, I guess it kind of makes sense.

"But, seriously Rick, you're talking about a man being brutally executed who then miraculously had the dissolution of his cells reversed, the molecules of his flesh reknit, and the amino acids in his body chemistry rekindled. That kind of thing just doesn't happen."

"So, yeah, good story. I'm glad it inspires you and millions of other Christians. I'm glad it helps

you find meaning when times are hard. But, personally, I just can't buy it."

If that's what you're thinking, I have two things to say to you.

1. I get it. I understand why you would think that way because this "story" (and all of its implications) *is* crazy-sounding. And people who believe it, do look crazy because this kind of thing just doesn't happen.
2. However, in the real world of a global pandemic—with overwhelmed hospitals and morgues, a collapsing global economy, and the realization of just how fragile we are as humans – there is no place for any sentimentality about this story.

The Resurrection is either the hope of the world—the very center of reality—or Christianity is not worth our time.

Listen, I am not a Christian because Christianity

answers all my questions about God or about suffering in this world. It does not.

And I am not a Christian because my faith provides a nice, coherent moral order by which to live my life, though it does.

I am not a Christian because I have fond memories of summer youth camp and church potlucks, though I do.

And I am not a Christian because, as a pastor, it's my job to be a Christian. I could get a job doing something else and be very successful at it.

I am a Christian – I believe Jesus was God in the flesh; I try to follow His teachings – because *I believe that the physical bodily resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth really did happen.*^x

- It's not a fairytale. It's not "once upon a time, there was a really great man ..."

- And it's not the product of "the power of positive thinking after a really negative event (the crucifixion)"
- And it's not a metaphor, or a symbol of renewal and rebirth intended to inspire us to "keep on going" through the dark night of the soul or to give meaning to our lives.

I'm a Christian because I believe the physical bodily resurrection of Jesus really did happen.

And I believe that not because "the Bible tells me so." I believe it because of the overwhelming amount of historical evidence for it.

And if we had more time today, I could walk you through all of it.

In fact, on *many* Easter Sundays in previous years, I have done just that. I've devoted entire messages to the historical evidence. And if you

want to, you can check those out in the media section of our app and website.

But for today, in the interest of time, I'm going to give you one just example of the kind of evidence that I'm talking about.

Several years before Jesus was born, a man named Theudas went around claiming to be the Messiah of Israel (which most Jews believed would be a political and military savior from the line of King David who would overthrow the Romans and restore Israel to its rightful place in the world).^{xi}

And about four hundred men joined his revolt. They were all killed by the Romans. He himself was beheaded and his remains paraded around Jerusalem and his movement came to nothing.

Several years later, at almost the *exact same*

time when Jesus of Nazareth was born, another man known as “Judas the Galilean” claimed to be the Messiah and led another band of people to rebel. He, too, was killed by the Romans, and all his followers were scattered.

Move forward another three decades and this time, it’s Jesus himself – a descendant of David through His mother Mary – meeting the same fate: the fate of anyone who poses a threat to Roman authority.

He is executed on a Roman cross on a hill outside of Jerusalem for all to see.

Later that afternoon, His lifeless body is removed from the cross and placed in a tomb that had been hewn from solid rock (which was the custom in that day).

A circular stone is rolled in front of the entrance and, in the mind of Pilate and the religious leaders (who had colluded with Pilate to get rid

of Jesus and the threat He posed to *their* authority), “that would be the end of that.”

Jesus had finally been dealt with just like every other supposed Jewish Messiah. And now His followers, like all of theirs, would disperse and scatter.

Except, in this case, that doesn't happen. Jesus' followers – about 120 of them – *do not* disperse and scatter.

- Instead, even though they had seen Him crucified, they are absolutely convinced that He – not Caesar – is now reigning as the King of the World.
- And they are convinced that God's Kingdom, which Jesus constantly talked about, is now arriving “on Earth as in Heaven.”

- And in their minds, Jesus' execution isn't a defeat – it's a *victory*. By His death, they believe, Jesus has dealt a death-blow to death and the demonic powers which are holding the whole world captive.

It's pretty incredible – crazy even – what this ragtag group comes to believe.

But not only do they come to believe these things themselves, they go everywhere proclaiming these things and inviting others to join them in following in the “The Way of the King” – which is, again, incredibly subversive and therefore, incredibly dangerous.

And through their efforts, little communities of believers (called “churches”) began to spring up for the purpose of learning the Way, and living the Way and proclaiming the Way ...

- Beginning in Jerusalem

- And then spreading to the surrounding provinces of Judea, Samaria and Galilee
- And then throughout the various districts of the Roman Empire
- Then into the city of Rome itself
- And from there to “the ends of the earth” including, incredibly, the Kansas City Northland in 2020 A.D.

Of course, the million-dollar question is ... *why* did they believe and say and do such crazy and dangerous things?

After all, up to this point in Jewish history, there’s typically not been a lot of energy around self-proclaimed messiahs who are dead.

There’s only one answer that makes any sense whatsoever of those historical facts. Jesus’ followers ...

- Believed what they believed

- Said what they said
- And did what they did ...

... because they had witnessed not only his death and burial.

They had also witnessed His resurrection and then, six weeks later, His ascension to the dimension of reality where God the Father lives – which we call Heaven.

For me personally, that's the most convincing piece of evidence there is – a huge part of why I believe.

Responses

And I realize that just because *I* believe it, doesn't mean it's true.

But, if it *is* true – if Jesus did, in fact, come back from the dead on a quiet Sunday morning some

2,000 years ago, then that changes everything – our beliefs, our ethics, our time, our money, our relationships.

If it's true, then the resurrection of Jesus is the most decisive fact of the universe, the center point of history.^{xii}

And it means that you and I can benefit from the greatest bailout of all time; God's incredible, lifechanging, miraculous effort to "make whole" everything and everyone, including Himself.

So, how do we do that? How do we respond to what God has done?

I think there are three ways depending on where you are in your spiritual journey.

First, if you're not a Christian and you're thinking, "I'm not convinced of what you're saying, Rick, but I do need to look into this more" then your response would be to just

“come and see.”

One of the things that most people overlook in the story of Jesus is that no one believed in him when they first started following Him. And that was OK with Him. In fact, it was his number one invitation: “Follow me and see for yourself if I am who I say I am.”

And I think He would say the same thing to you today.

Practically speaking that means you’re welcome to hang out with us with no strings attached as we try to follow Jesus.

- Keep tuning in every Sunday.
- Listen to the messages I’ve done over the years.
- Read the story of Jesus for yourself.

- Send me an email and we'll arrange to chat sometime.

Just come and see. Hang out with Jesus and with us.

The second way to respond is for those who would say, "I'm not a Christian, but I *am* convinced that this Jesus-thing is real."

For you, the response is what I call the ABCs.

"A" ... Agree with God.

Agree with God that you are a sinner and you need a savior. That's the first thing.

"B" ... Believe that Jesus died for your sins and that He rose again.

Trust that what He did on your behalf is enough; that you don't need to try to make up for or

atone for your sins – which isn't even possible.

Then, finally, “C” ... Come and follow Him.

Come and be part of the movement and community he started 2,000 years ago called ‘the church.’”

Agree, Believe and Come – that’s how we accept God’s invitation. That’s how we accept his grace.

The third response is for those who are already Christians.

After Paul explains to those Corinthian followers of Jesus what Jesus’ resurrection accomplishes for them, for the cosmos and for God, he spells out a very practical implication for them.

He writes, “so, my dear brothers and sisters ...”

Be strong and immovable.

If God can raise Jesus from the dead, if that's what he has planned for you, then there is nothing in this world that shake you.

Always work enthusiastically for the Lord, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless. 1 Corinthians 15:58 (NLT)

All of history – good, bad and ugly – is going somewhere.

Therefore, everything you do to serve Jesus and others is, in some way, going to be part of that. It matters. It counts.

Now, we're going to close our time this morning with a new worship song that our programming team has really wanted to do.

And we decided to do it today because it really

fits what we're talking about – how God is able to change everything for us through what Jesus did and through our faith in Him.

So, after I pray, turn up the volume and sing along. And then stay tuned after that for a few things I need to make you aware of.

Let's pray.

1 – Come and See

2 – Agree, Believe, Come

3 – Be strong, immovable, enthusiastically work for the Lord

CLOSING COMMENTS

1. If you prayed to commit your life to Jesus, please fill out the contact form on our website to let us know.

2. Next week – Bloom Where You're

Quarantined.

3. Offering – app or website, click the button at the bottom of our screen.

Endnotes

ⁱ <https://www.brookings.edu/research/fed-response-to-covid19/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.axios.com/coronavirus-debt-bonds-economy-f8a3868c-77d9-440d-84ca-827cff2b0d97.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.commondreams.org/news/2020/03/31/no-more-spending-after-securing-45-trillion-corporate-bailout-trump-white-house-and>

^{iv} <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-vice-president-pence-members-coronavirus-task-force-press-briefing-18/>

^v <https://businessjournaldaily.com/ryan-calls-on-trump-to-declare-national-stay-at-home-order/>

^{vi} <https://definitions.uslegal.com/m/make-one-whole/>

^{vii} https://www.preceptaustin.org/colossians_214-151

^{viii} 2 Cor. 5:21

^{ix} Romans 8:1

^x The previous section is based on an excellent article

@<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/april-web-only/coronavirus-easter-only-symbol-then-hell-with-it.html>

^{xi} Acts 5:36,37

^{xii} *ibid*