

Spiritual Contagion

Pastor James Foley – Shared Sunday, May 31, 2020

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for worshipping with us today! It is wonderful to have those of you who are joining us via the LIVESTREAM. It is also wonderful to have those of you who have gathered here IN-PERSON. Please have your Bible at the ready and be prepared to take some notes (as we segue into a time in the Word).

This AM I want to lay a FOUNDATION for a multi-segment series. Thus, today will serve as part 1 of 3.

FYI – Throughout this opening installment I want to introduce a series of overarching themes and questions—i.e., themes and questions that will NOT get immediate response or resolution in this one session. You will have to consider this teaching series as a whole, so please tune in regularly in the days ahead! That being said...

LET'S DELVE IN...

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 1

This season of pandemic has FAMILIARIZED society at large with the term PPE (i.e., Personal Protective Equipment) and with the wearing of MASKS. These days it seems you need a mask to enter a store, shop, or engage in any form of public activity. Even church attendance—in the short term—now requires a mask.

APP – Lord forbid you walk into your local Walmart without one!

Before things get divisive and folks begin to condone/condemn the role of masks during Covid-19, let me ask...

Q. Generally speaking – why do people wear masks or utilize PPE?

Q. Why do medical professionals habitually wear masks or don PPE?

A. Such gear EFFECTIVELY minimizes and/or deters the spread of CONTAGION.

NOTE – Of course, there is much debate regarding the efficacy of masks, etc. during this outbreak of COVID-19. It is interesting to watch scientists research this question in real time! However, I have NO desire to engage in that debate today (i.e., a MICRO-level question). Rather, I will note that—at the MACRO level—medical grade masks and PPE have proven highly effective at reducing the transmission of INFECTIOUS diseases.

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 2

This is highly significant. WHY?

KEY 1 – Because this world ABOUND with disease/malady and a great many of them are CONTAGIOUS (i.e., to varying degrees). If you work with the infirmed or in a research laboratory, you understand the BENEFITS of proper masks/PPE and the REALITY that there is sickness in this world.

NOTE 1 – I did some research as of late. I am NOT medically educated, so I was curious as to the following Q...

Q. How many diseases/medical afflictions exist in this world?

NOTE 2 – It turns out that this is an incredibly DIFFICULT question to answer. Thus said, I found the following excerpt insightful, as it comes from an expert in the medical field. Give your ear to the following response to the question, “How many diseases exist in this world?”...

QUOTE – “For the sake of clarity, it should be noted that the definition of disease is constantly changing, so no single number would be accurate beyond a few days. (For comparison, how much date is currently stored on the world wide web? As soon as we have a number it is no longer accurate). The best definitive answer would be based on what the insurance companies reimburse for compared to what diagnoses we have.”

FYI – As of October 1, 2015 there were some 68,000 different coding states for diseases.

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 3

FYI – So it appears I CANNOT tell you how many diseases there are in this world with any degree of precision! All I can say is, “A LOT”! However, what I CAN tell you is that the medical community recognizes four primary types of disease: **a)** deficiency diseases; **b)** hereditary diseases; **c)** physiological diseases; and **d)** INFECTIOUS diseases (which I want to emphasize this morning)! This raises the Q...

Q. How many infectious/contagious diseases exist?

A. Again—an exact # is beyond our capability. A LOT...

KEY 2 – What I do know is that there are many CONTAGIOUS diseases (and some of them SPREAD rapidly)...

NOTE – Without diving too deeply into the science behind this statement, how long does it take for the common COLD to run through an entire family or school? It’s amazing how quickly an entire population can take ill if/when exposed to a contagion! Mere months ago, most of us were unaware of COVID-19—and now some 6M have been infected with 360K deaths worldwide (i.e., assuming these numbers are reliable).

This leads me to one final point of introduction...

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 4

KEY 3 – UNCHECKED contagion/infectious diseases can be DEVASTATING (i.e., individually & collectively).

FYI – Some viruses, etc. are incredibly VIRULENT (i.e., lethal)...

- 1) **Ebola** – Mortality rate of app. 50% depending on the strain (11K+ deaths)
- 2) **Smallpox** – Mortality rate of app. 30% (300M fatalities in the 20th Century alone)
- 3) **Influenza** – e.g., The Spanish Flu of 1918 infected one-third of the world w/ 50M deaths
- 4) **Bubonic Plague** – Commonly believed to be the cause of the Black Death in Medieval Europe...

QUOTE – “In Europe, it is thought that around 50 million people died as a result of the Black Death over the course of three or four years [i.e., AD 1347–1352]. The population was reduced from some 80 million to 30 million. It killed at least 60% of the population in rural and urban areas.”

SUMMATIONS & TRANSITIONS PT. 1

KEY – Ultimately, there are THREE primary takeaways that I need you to recognize/understand...

- 1) **This World Abounds with Disease and a Great Many of Them Are Contagious**
- 2) **It is the Nature of Some Infectious/Contagious Diseases to Spread Quite Rapidly**
- 3) **Unchecked Contagion Can Be Devastating Upon a Grouping of People/Population**

Thankfully, our scientific understanding continues to grow (allowing us to NAVIGATE such realities).

SUMMATIONS & TRANSITIONS PT. 2

Now you may be saying to yourself, “WHY is Pastor James suddenly acting like he’s a medical expert? Point?”

NOTE 1 – I make NO claims to be a medical expert in any way. I am—however—able to read and research!

NOTE 2 – I believe the pts. we have established are true—not just in the natural—but in the SPIRITUAL realm.

KEY – Hear me when I say the following...

- I believe that this **natural** world abounds with disease (many of which are infectious)
- I believe that it is the **nature** of some contagious maladies to spread (and that right quickly)
- I believe that **unchecked** contagion can be devastating upon a human population (ind. and coll.)

IN THE SAME WAY...

- I believe that **spiritual** maladies abound in this world and their influence is infectious
- I believe that it is the nature of some **spiritual** contagions to spread (and that right quickly)
- I believe that unchecked **spiritual** contagions can be devastating upon a population (ind. & coll.)

NOTE – And we do well to discern how to spiritually NAVIGATE such realities! Let me EXPLAIN/ILLUSTRATE...

SETTING THE TABLE

FYI – There are many texts we could examine to evidence these principles, but I have chosen one of my favorites from all of Scripture. Yes, it may be a common text—and it may even be one that we have studied in recent months—but it is TIMELESS and TIMELY in its application. Please turn with me to Numbers 13...

CONTEXT – The Jews had recently been DELIVERED from centuries of slavery in Egypt by God through Moses. Subsequent to this deliverance and their exit from Egypt (i.e., an event known as the EXODUS), the Lord led His people through the wilderness UNTO the Promised Land.

KEY – As they were on the very BORDER of their inheritance, we read the following account (lengthy)...

TO THE WORD PT. 1 (THE COMMISSION)

Numbers 13:1–25 (NIV)

1 The Lord said to Moses, 2 “Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites. From each ancestral tribe send one of its leaders.” 3 So at the Lord’s command Moses sent them out from the Desert of Paran. All of them were leaders of the Israelites. 4 These are their names:

from the tribe of Reuben, Shammua son of Zakkur;
 5 from the tribe of Simeon, Shaphat son of Hori;
 6 from the tribe of Judah, Caleb son of Jephunneh;
 7 from the tribe of Issachar, Igal son of Joseph;
 8 from the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea son of Nun;
 9 from the tribe of Benjamin, Palti son of Raphu;
 10 from the tribe of Zebulun, Gaddiel son of Sodi;
 11 from the tribe of Manasseh (a tribe of Joseph), Gaddi son of Susi;
 12 from the tribe of Dan, Ammiel son of Gemalli;
 13 from the tribe of Asher, Sethur son of Michael;
 14 from the tribe of Naphtali, Nahbi son of Vophsi;
 15 from the tribe of Gad, Geuel son of Maki.

16 These are the names of the men Moses sent to explore the land. (Moses gave Hoshea son of Nun the name Joshua.)

17 When Moses sent them to explore Canaan, he said, “Go up through the Negev and on into the hill country. 18 See what the land is like and whether the people who live there are strong or weak, few or many. 19 What kind of land do they live in? Is it good or bad? What kind of towns do they live in? Are they unwalled or fortified? 20 How is the soil? Is it fertile or poor? Are there trees in it or not? Do your best to bring back some of the fruit of the land.” (It was the season for the first ripe grapes.) 21 So they went up and explored the land from the Desert of Zin as far as Rehob, toward Lebo Hamath. 22 They went up through the Negev and came to Hebron, where Ahiman, Sheshai and Talmai, the descendants of Anak, lived. (Hebron had been built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.) 23 When they reached the Valley of Eshkol, they cut off a branch bearing a single cluster of grapes. Two of them carried it on a pole between them, along with some pomegranates and figs. 24 That place was called the Valley of Eshkol because of the cluster of grapes the Israelites cut off there. 25 At the end of forty days they returned from exploring the land.

TO THE WORD PT. 2 (THE REPORT)

KEY – Here is where the plot begins to THICKEN...

Numbers 13:26–33

26 They came back to Moses and Aaron and the whole Israelite community at Kadesh in the Desert of Paran. There they reported to them and to the whole assembly and showed them the fruit of the land. 27 They gave Moses this account: “We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. 28 But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there. 29 The Amalekites live in the Negev; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan.”

30 Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, “We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.”

31 But the men who had gone up with him said, “We can’t attack those people; they are stronger than we are.” 32 And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, “The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. 33 We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.”

Q. What do we see herein?

A. We see the embodiment of my opening premise...

FYI – “Spiritual maladies ABOUND in this fallen world . . .”

KEY 1 – In the same way humanity can suffer PHYSICAL disease in our BODY, we can become subject to debilitating SPIRITUAL conditions of the HEART. These are DYSFUNCTIONS/DISORDERS of a higher—and more serious—order!

KEY 2 – God has called His people to walk in joy, hopefulness, confidence, faith and belief, fidelity, victory perseverance and truth. These are HEALTHFUL and life-giving things! But this is the OPPOSITE of what we see in the account of the sin-laden report of the TEN SPIES!

Q. Do you see any evidence of joy? I see despair.

Q. Do you see any evidence of hope? I see negativity.

Q. Do you see any evidence of confidence? I see pessimism.

Q. Do you see them walking in faith/belief? I see fear/doubt.

Q. Do you see a God-oriented fidelity in their report? I hear faithlessness.

Q. Do you see men given to a perseverant spirit? Their words suggest retreat.

Q. Do you see a God-inspired sense of victory? I see rampant spiritual defeat.

Q. Do you see men living according to the truth? I see those in deception.

ULTIMATELY these ten spies sent out by Moses were given over to sinfulness and infected with spiritual malady! Crippling spiritual disease had SET IN and would prove CONTAGIOUS to the community of faith/body of Israel. Let’s read on...

TO THE WORD PT. 3 (THE RESPONSE)

Numbers 14:1–10

1 That night all the members of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. 2 All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, “If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this wilderness! 3 Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn’t it be better for us to go back to Egypt?” 4 And they said to each other, “We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt.”

5 Then Moses and Aaron fell facedown in front of the whole Israelite assembly gathered there. 6 Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes 7 and said to the entire Israelite assembly, “The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. 8 If the LORD is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. 9 Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them.”

10 But the whole assembly talked about stoning them . . .

Q. What do we see herein?

A. We see the embodiment of my opening premises...

i.e., Spiritual conditions ABOUND in this world and their influence is INFECTIOUS

i.e., It is the nature of some spiritual contagions to SPREAD (and that right QUICKLY)

KEY – Simply stated the ten spies had (INDIVIDUALLY) come down with brutal cases of despair, negativity, pessimism, fear, doubt, faithlessness, a spirit of defeat, retreat and deception! Now look at how QUICKLY these spiritual contagions SPREAD amongst the community of Israel (i.e., COLLECTIVE impact)!

NOTE 1 – It has taken several MONTHS for the Coronavirus to go global and impact the lives of millions of people. It took only ONE NIGHT for these sinister spiritual contagions to infect the community of Israel (app. 600K–3M people)—in an age without social media, smart phones, ease-of-travel, etc.

Q. How in the world did the report of these spies infect SO many people SO quickly!

NOTE 2 – In seemingly moments, the healthful joy, hope, confidence, faith, belief, victory, etc., DISSIPATED and was OVERTAKEN with this negative report! The transmission rate of spiritual maladies is apparently FAR QUICKER than their earthly counterparts! Ebola, Smallpox and the Plague have nothing on fear, doubt, defeat, etc.!

NOTE 3 – It may be a bit anecdotal, but it APPEARS that negative reports spread more easily and quickly than good reports. Please note that the people of Israel did hear good reports (i.e., Caleb and Joshua). Yet the people GRAVITATED toward the negative report. This reveals something about FALLEN human nature...

i.e., We are MORE inclined to believe that which is false/fear-filled v. that which is true/of God. Tragic!

FYI – This leads us to the CONCLUSION of this account...

TO THE WORD PT. 4 (THE RESULT)

Numbers 14:10b–11, 21b–35

10 . . . Then the glory of the Lord appeared at the tent of meeting to all the Israelites. 11 The Lord said to Moses, “How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs I have performed among them?”

21 . . . as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the Lord fills the whole earth, 22 not one of those who saw my glory and the signs I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times— 23 not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their ancestors. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it. 24 But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it. 25 Since the Amalekites and the Canaanites are living in the valleys, turn back tomorrow and set out toward the desert along the route to the Red Sea.”

26 The Lord said to Moses and Aaron: 27 “How long will this wicked community grumble against me? I have heard the complaints of these grumbling Israelites. 28 So tell them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the Lord, I will do to you the very thing I heard you say: 29 In this wilderness your bodies will fall—every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has grumbled against me. 30 Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun. 31 As for your children that you said would be taken as plunder, I will bring them in to enjoy the land you have rejected. 32 But as for you, your bodies will fall in this wilderness. 33 Your children will be shepherds here for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness, until the last of your bodies lies in the wilderness. 34 For forty years—one year for each of the forty days you explored the land—you will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have me against you.’ 35 I, the Lord, have spoken, and I will surely do these things to this whole wicked community, which has banded together against me. They will meet their end in this wilderness; here they will die.”

Q. What do we see herein?

A. The reality of my final premise...

i.e., Unchecked spiritual contagions can be DEVASTATING upon a population (ind. and coll.).

KEY – In the same way that unmitigated virulent agents can lead to CATASTROPHIC result (e.g., the Black Plague, Smallpox, etc.), unchecked spiritual maladies TOO lead to devastation and death. It turns out that the maxim is true: i.e., “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 3:23). If you leave spiritual affliction UNTREATED and allow it to SPREAD, the end-result is HORRIFIC...

Q. What took place in the community of Israel because they allowed this malady to remain untreated?

A. They would spend 40-years WANDERING in the desert until each person 20+ PERISHED (3M down to 2)!

APPLICATIONS PT. 1

Q. What do we learn from this account? Applications for 2020 and beyond?

1) There are Spiritual Maladies in this World and their Influence is Infectious...

The SAME spirit of despair, negativity, pessimism, fear, doubt, faithlessness, spirit of defeat, retreat and deception that infected the ancient Hebrews STILL persist today. Please don't believe that things have changed! We must remain VIGILANT against their influence, LEST they rob us of our joy, hope, confidence, faith, fidelity, victory, perseverance and knowledge of the truth!

KEY – Let us LEARN from their EXAMPLE and SMARTEN up! This is why their account was CHRONICLED...

Romans 15:4 (Emphasis Mine)

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

2) It is the Nature of Such Spiritual Maladies to Proliferate (i.e., Infectious and Spread Quickly)...

Q. How many of us have experienced the rapid spread of things like negativity, fear, defeat, etc.?

Q. How many have witnessed the impact that a few people can have upon a broader group/collective?

Q. How many homes, workplaces, churches, etc. have experienced the impact of virulent spiritual agents?

3) Unchecked Spiritual Contagion Can Produce Devastating Results (Ind. & Coll.)...

If we gown up and mask up to slow the spread of EARTHLY ailments, why do we NOT prepare ourselves for their more lethal, sinister and stealthy SPIRITUAL counterparts? I am forced to tell you that there are ailments FAR WORSE than COVID-19, Ebola, Smallpox, and the Bubonic Plague...

KEY – i.e., The conditions called despair, negativity, pessimism, fear, doubt, faithlessness, defeat, retreat and deception (to name a few)! EARTHLY ailments might cost you your HEALTH or your life, but left untreated, SIN will cost you your soul for time and ETERNITY!

APPLICATIONS PT. 2

This leads us to a VITAL series of Q's...

Q. How do we navigate such spiritual contagion and overcome the (-) influences of this fallen world?

Q. Is there spiritual PPE/Mask that proves effective in mitigating such crippling/deadly afflictions?

Q. How do we deal w. a world that bombards us w. negativity, pessimism, doubt, fear, fatalism, etc.?

Q. How do we rise above our fallen inclinations that cause us to gravitate toward such horrific things?

KEY 1 – These are great Q's and thankfully the Lord has provided effective/practical A's in His Holy Word.

KEY 2 – So while people argue over the efficacy of masks (waiting on scientists), let us consult THE Expert!

NOTE – Tune in NEXT Sunday morning as we provide A's to such Q's and continue in our new 3-part teaching...

CONCLUSIONS

KEY – Thank you for taking the time to join us today. Should those of you who have joined us online wish to give, please do so through the giving portal of our church WEBSITE (www.NewLifeBarre.org). For those who are present, you may feel free to give to the USHERS stationed at our two primary exits.

Numbers 6:24–26

24 The Lord bless you
and keep you;

25 the Lord make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;

26 the Lord turn his face toward you
and give you peace.