

HARVEST ROCK CHURCH

AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE FOR THE HARVEST ROCK CHURCH FAMILY: Part 2

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May 24, 2020

Seven Reasons Harvest Rock Church Is Reopening On Pentecost

1. TO REJOIN OUR COMMUNITY

It is very sad that the church is considered non-essential service to the community. The church should have never been locked down. Houses of worship are absolutely essential to their communities. And we must be allowed to rejoin our community.

The spiritual, emotional, and mental well-being that houses of worship bring to people has had a 2,000 years' track record of transformed lives. This is not including specific ministries of local houses of worship that feed the poor, distribute groceries, provide counseling for drug addicts and people with suicidal tendencies, and the list goes on.

The decision by the government to deem houses of worship as non-essential does not lessen the importance of these activities; it only deprives the community of receiving them. We feel that this is wrong and unjust.

The good that has come out of this is that I, as the Sr. Pastor of Harvest Rock Church, have repented for my sins and the sins of the church during this season of COVID-19. I hope in the days ahead that we will demonstrate how essential we are to our city and community and bring forth the fruit of this repentance. Our goal has been to see transformation in our city, and this pandemic has been a wakeup call to us and to the church globally.

2. AS A MATTER OF ECONOMIC JUSTICE

As a church we must stand with and speak out on behalf of people who have lost their businesses and jobs because of the lockdown. We must be mindful that people employed by churches are also losing jobs, but our stance is not just about churches losing revenue.

My point is this. The current implementation of measures designed to keep us safe is creating circumstances, e.g., record unemployment, closure of businesses and schools, etc., that impact low-income and minority communities the most. This, too, is unjust. We must find a way to protect livelihoods even as we seek to protect lives.

The middle class has an opportunity to bounce back, but like the 2008 recession, the poor ended up on the streets homeless, and we feel that this is going to happen again.

This lockdown has impacted families with school-age kids. Once again, the poor is being impacted. With school not being open, what does a single mom do when she has to go back to work? Hire tutors? Hire childcare? Maybe for the rich, but the average person cannot do this. This really impacts the poor single mothers. We must end the lockdown now.

At the same time, Sue and I want to make a prophetic declaration that the lockdown is now dangerous and unjust to people in our society, especially to the poor and the young. By meeting on May 31, we are taking a prophetic stance for economic justice and against the unjust impact of this lockdown.

3. BECAUSE IT IS THE SUPREME LAW OF THE LAND

While many people have framed the reopening of houses of worship by asserting their constitutional rights, we must be careful not to communicate that our rights (whatever they may

be) are more important than the rights of others to be safe and secure. Unfortunately, some in the media are framing this issue in such “us” versus “them” terms.

Article VI of the U.S. Constitution states: “This Constitution... shall be the supreme law of the land.” All elected officials must govern according to the constitution. When they are sworn into office, they must swear to obey the U.S. Constitution. And the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution states: **“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech... or the right of the people peaceably to assemble.”**

Thus, reopening houses of worship is not about asserting one set of rights over another; it is about asserting that the “supreme law of the land” is just that, supreme. Of course, this does not mean that all other laws are to be ignored, only that they should not be elevated above the Constitution.

The lockdown is a violation of the civil rights of all people and not just the church.

And it does not mean ignoring the right we all enjoy to being safe and secure. As we freely exercise our religion and peaceably assemble, we need to do so with mitigation and social distancing.

4. BECAUSE WE’RE IN A PROPHETIC SEASON

Pentecost Sunday is the birthday of the Church. This particular Pentecost is a very special one for several reasons. One is because of the extraordinary season that we are in with a global quarantine. Second, the prophets from across the prophetic spectrum are all saying that this is going to be an extraordinary Pentecost.

We all have believed that we are on the verge of the greatest global revival; is it possible that it will come from the greatest global crisis that our planet has experienced, both through the First Amendment and the devastating repercussions on the global economy? I believe the answer is a resounding yes!

TEXT: Acts 5:27 When they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. The high priest questioned them, 28 saying, “We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.” 29 But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. 30 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. 31 He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. 32 And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him.”

INTRO:

I want to thank you, the Harvest Rock Church Family, for your efforts to honor the quarantine and practice social distancing for the past several months. I want to thank our pastors and staff for all their hard work during this quarantine. Every time I come to record the Sunday message, I see the whole production team wearing their masks and gloves and practicing social distancing.

So, thank you all for making this effort because I know that you are doing everything not only to provide safety for our society, but I know that you are doing everything for God’s glory. Know that Sue and I are very proud of you and we love you!

Last week I gave four reasons why we, Harvest Rock Church, will be joining over 3,000 churches in CA to reopen our services beginning on Pentecost Sunday, May 31. I cannot go over all four points, but I want to encourage you to go to YouTube and listen to the message if you missed it last week. Once again, I want to announce that **Harvest Rock Church will be resuming in-person services at the Ambassador Auditorium starting on Pentecost Sunday, May 31.**

I want to thank many of you for your positive feedback. There were some who disagreed with our position to reopen on May 31. And we share your concerns for safety and not spreading the virus. I hope after you hear the second part of my message that you will see that we take safety seriously, but we also believe that businesses and services can open up and be safe at the same time.

I do want to share one critique that someone made. One person disagreed with me that the Governor was discriminating against the church in CA. I want to clarify what I said last week. I don't know Gov. Newsom's heart. I can't judge that he is targeting the church. However, after that email, I have to agree that even though his intentions are not to target the church, his policies have been.

In fact, the Department of Justice sent a letter to Gov. Newsom on May 19 stating the following:

“Even more pronounced unequal treatment of faith communities is evident in California’s Reopening Plan. Places of worship are not permitted to hold religious worship services until Stage 3. However, in Stage 2, schools, restaurants, factories, offices, shopping malls, swap meets, and others are permitted to operate with social distancing.

“The Department of Justice... [is] charged with upholding the Constitution and federal statutory protections for civil rights... the Constitution calls for California to do more to accommodate religious worship, including in Stage 2 of the Reopening Plan.”

5. BECAUSE WE BELIEVE THAT WE HAVE TO OBEY GOD IN REOPENING OUR CHURCH

Acts 5:27 When they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. The high priest questioned them, 28 saying, “We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.” 29 But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. 30 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. 31 He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. 32 And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him.”

I want to make some comments on our text for this message and then share how God led me prophetically to make this call of reopening on May 31.

BRIEF COMMENTS ON OUR TEXT

The context for Acts 5:27: The Sanhedrin had already arrested and whipped Peter and John for preaching the gospel in Chapter 4. The Great Sanhedrin was considered the equivalent of our Supreme Court. It was comprised of 70 members encompassing the high priest, the chief priests, and the elders. In Jewish towns in the Jewish Diaspora, you had “little” Sanhedrins made up of 23 elders. It was the governing body of the Jewish people.

But here as they are arrested again, the high priest (most likely the same Caiaphas who tried Jesus) says, **“We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching.”**

Peter gives three reasons why they are disobeying their “strict orders.”

- 1) **Acts 5:29 “We must obey God rather than men.”** This is the biblical basis for civil disobedience. When the governing authorities mandate anything that is contrary to God’s Word, we have to obey God rather than men.
- 2) **Acts 5:30 “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. 31 He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.”** Peter shares the Gospel, and he is saying we have a mandate to share the Gospel, no matter what.
- 3) **Acts 5:32 “...the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him.”** The Holy Spirit is given to those who obey Him, and we want more of the Holy Spirit! The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Truth (**John 14:17, 15:26**). **John 16:13 “But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. 14 He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you.”** That is why I love the Holy Spirit; He is God and will reveal God’s will to us through the prophetic activity of the Holy Spirit. Every major advancement of the Kingdom takes place through the prophetic.

MY PROPHETIC JOURNEY TO OPEN UP ON MAY 31

I want to share how the Lord has led me to obey God and make the leadership decision to reopen Harvest Rock Church on Pentecost.

First, I have an honest confession to make. When I first heard that churches were going to meet on May 31, and to be very honest with you, out of selfish reasons, I felt no desire to meet for several reasons: (1) It will take tremendous work to get our staff and auditorium ready to be CDC compliant. (2) I didn’t want to go through potential legal hassles, which could include a number of variables that may involve lawsuits we may have to initiate or other complications. (3) To be in an adversarial position with our city. I love our city and we have worked hard to serve our city by opening up our auditorium for concerts and other civic events. (4) Finally, things were going well with our church. Numbers were up, small groups were continuing to meet through Zoom, and because of your generosity, we were making it financially.

So, as pastors we gathered to pray for one hour on the National Day of Prayer, May 7, and I shared my feelings with the pastors. What I didn’t share with them was that I didn’t want to get in trouble legally with our civil disobedience.

The next day, I got an email from one of our apostles, Charles Stock from Harrisburg, PA. He told me that he was so encouraged that the churches in CA were to be going to meet on May 31 and that CA had so impacted the churches in PA that the churches in PA were also going to join by gathering on May 31. I called Charles to tell him that we were not part of the Reopening Our Churches Coalition. But the more I talked with Charles, I was praying under my breath, “Lord, what are You saying to me?” After I got off the phone, I told the Lord I was willing to do anything He wanted me to do, but He had to give me big confirmation. God is so gracious. He did. The next morning, I was doing my normal studies and I was reading the *American Gospel* by Jon Meacham. I was reading when Churchill and Roosevelt met for the first

time on a naval ship off of Canada in August of 1941. They signed the Atlantic Treaty, and Roosevelt agreed to enter the war against Hitler and the totalitarian fascist state. That Sunday they had a church service on the ship, and the pastor read from **Joshua 1:9**, “**Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.**”

God spoke to me that just as Roosevelt and Churchill were fighting the injustice issue of their time, I too must fight this injustice of what I believe to be unconstitutional government overreach in our state and take a stand against the lockdown.

The next day I got a word of encouragement from Cindy Jacobs, and with much prayer, Sue and I agree that we must stand with now over 3,000 churches in this Reopen Our Church movement.

FINANCIAL MIRACLE TO CONFIRM OUR DECISIONS

One of the fruits of repentance is that I felt that as a church, we need to sow \$50,000 to help small businesses in Pasadena and in LA. I did this as Sr. Pastor of Abundant Life in 1991 when we as a church sowed \$20,000 to 20 churches in our city. But now is the time to sow into our city as our community has been devastated by this lockdown caused by the coronavirus.

As I shared this vision of sowing finances with our pastors, we all had a sense that this was God’s will for us to prophetically bless our city this coming week. What is amazing is that two days later, one of our church members emailed me that her husband’s boss, who had gotten saved and his wife healed of cancer at Harvest Rock last year, wanted to give a financial gift to our church. Crystal Kim came over with a \$50,000 check—the exact amount that we had determined to give only two days before! What a confirmation!

6. BECAUSE WE BELIEVE THAT WE CAN OPEN UP SAFELY

We can open and still keep people safe and secure. By God’s grace, this is how we are going to do it:

- 1. We are asking only members of Harvest Rock Church to attend the May 31 Pentecost Service.** We have to have a manageable crowd.
- 2. We are going to ask you to RSVP if you are coming so we can have the right number to have the right spacing in our auditorium. You must register online at the link below.** Please don’t RSVP if you are not seriously going to come, because if we are over the number, we are going to ask some of our leaders to forgo their seats. We don’t want to do that unless we have to.
- 3. We are encouraging all with underlying conditions to stay at home to watch online, no matter how old you are.**
- 4. We are encouraging all seniors over 60 to stay at home.**
- 5. We are encouraging people living with their parents who are seniors to stay at home.** We don’t want you to be a carrier of the virus.
- 6. We are encouraging parents with children to stay at home.** This is because we will not be having children’s ministry. However, since a very small percentage of children have been infected with COVID-19, we have no problems if the children attend with their parents. You just have to give us the exact number of your family members when you RSVP.

7. **You are required to wear a mask if you want to attend. If you don't have one, we will provide you with one.** Your temperature will also be taken by a non-invasive thermometer at the entrance. All the ushers will have masks and gloves on.
8. **There will be no gathering upfront during the worship time or during ministry time at this point.**
9. **No handshakes or hugs, but a big yes to “chicken wing” greetings.**
10. **Please abide with the CDC's recommendations based on our auditorium configuration. We will have three to four seats of space between you and the next person.** Our society has been amazing as people have honored social distancing in stores and other places of essential businesses. We trust you to do the same.
*Don't forget! We have full online LIVE services for those of you who cannot attend.

7. BECAUSE WE WANT TO STAND IN UNITY WITH OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS THIS MAY 31

There are over 3,000 churches representing hundreds of thousands of believers that will also be opening up on May 31. I believe that the unity of the Church is one of Jesus' highest priorities. I have stood with the church in LA with every major initiative from Love LA, Billy Graham coming in 2004, etc. I want to stand with the churches that are also taking a risk to open up this Pentecost. When there is unity, it sets the stage for God's blessing and for a powerful move of God.

Finally, thank you for all of your prayers and support of our decision to open up on May 31. Thank you also for taking this regathering seriously and prayerfully. We want you to personally hear from God and obey Him. If you don't sense to come, there is no shame and no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Honestly, we want the numbers to be low so we can honor the social distancing.

You are the best church that I know anywhere! See you, Lord willing, on Pentecost Sunday!