Romans 12:15; 1 Corinthians 10:24; Proverbs 27:12 *Sharing the Burden*

***Bobby Pins and Victory Gardens***This is a hairpin. You probably can’t see it. But in my hand I am holding a very small pin that a lady might use to pin her hair into place. It’s a pretty small, insignificant piece of metal.

And yet, in the early 1940s, hairpins—**known as bobby pins**—were put on strict rationing. Women who made appointments to have their hair done at a beauty salon were asked to bring back the hairpins that had been used at their last appointment, and to keep track of them for re-use at each subsequent appointment.

Why? Because America was at war. And steel was so crucial to the war effort that even bobby pins were carefully saved and re-used. It was a way for even ladies in their 50s and 60s with big updo’s to do their part in the war effort.

After the December 7, 1941 attack of the Japanese on the American naval fleet at Pearl Harbor, life in America changed in drastic ways. Rationing was implemented. Americans were issued books of stamps for key items such as gasoline, sugar, meat, butter, canned foods, rubber and more. Victory speed limits were posted to encourage people to drive at more economical speeds.

Rotating blackouts in America conserved fuel for the military. Groups such as the Boy Scouts led scrap metal drives. Consumer goods like automobiles and refrigerators simply were not produced. Women drew lines down the backs of their legs to simulate nylon stockings when actual stockings became scarce.

Americans all over the country planted backyard gardens to grow their own produce. By 1945 some 20 million of these so-called “victory gardens” were in use and had accounted for about 40 percent of all the vegetables consumed in the U.S.

By most accounts, Americans accepted these lifestyle changes readily and gladly. It was recognized that World War II represented a significant threat; and while not everyone could enlist in the army or go to work in a munitions factory, citizens all over the country looked for ways to contribute and many were eager to do even more.

Now, think about it? Does it really seem like one lady re-using her hairpins at her monthly beauty salon appointment really made that much of a difference in defeating the Axis powers? Probably not. Yet, it was important for everyone to do their part in the war effort and collectively all those efforts to conserve and save surely added up to help tip the scales. At a time of crisis, Americans stepped up to carry the burden of the fight together.

I’ve been thinking about these stories of rationing and sacrifice a lot in the last week; because in a lot of ways it feels like we are at a similar moment of crisis. The coronavirus is really, really bad. It is very contagious. Hundreds of thousands, if not millions are going to get it worldwide. Of those who get it, 1 to 2 people out of every 100 will die. If a localized outbreak occurs, the potential to overwhelm our healthcare resources is very, very real—as we are seeing in the stories from Europe. It’s bad.

And to fight it, we’re not necessarily talking about rationing or planting gardens, but we are being asked to practice “social distancing.” Don’t shake hands. Use hand sanitizer. Don’t touch your face. Avoid groups of 10 or more people. Stay home. Cancel church.

Some of it may seem sort of small—like do we really need to keep our car windows up if we are sitting in the church parking lot? Does it really matter if a few people get together for coffee way out here in small-town northwest Iowa? And yet, we are in a genuine crisis and it is important for everyone to do their part.

I want that to be the big idea of my sermon today: **we need to bear the burden of this fight together.** As Christians, as American citizens, we need to approach this situation with a wartime mentality, one where we are all looking for ways to sacrifice and share in the fight to protect one another from illness and death.

And I think this is especially true for us who follow Jesus. Jesus calls us to love one another. To think of others more highly than we think of ourselves. As Christians, we need to lead the way in our cautious care for one another.

Some of these rules about social distancing may seem as trivial as re-using hairpins. And yet, it is in these small acts of prevention that the public health is going to be protected and this war is going to be won.

With that said, I’d like to share three biblical principles that I believe are relevant to the current situation. Here are three biblical principles that can help us bear this burden together.

***Love in Action***First, I’d like to take you to Romans 12. **Romans 12:9-18.** If you have a Bible with you, you can turn to Romans 12:9-18. This is a section of the Bible where Paul is listing a bunch of one-liners about Christian love. Those things that I’ve already said, about thinking of others more highly than yourself and looking out for the good of everybody, they can all be found in this passage. Allow me to read it:

**9**Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. **10**Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. **11**Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. **12**Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. **13**Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

**14**Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. **15**Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. **16**Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.  Do not be conceited.

**17**Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. **18**If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

There’s a bunch of stuff in here. A lot instruction that bears careful consideration at this particular time. **Verse 10:**

Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.

Your actions are not just about you. **Verse 12:**

**12**Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

That could be the text for a lot of sermons right now, couldn’t it? Maybe I’ll come back to this verse in the weeks to come. And how about the end of **verse 17 and verse 18?**

Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. **18**If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

This is what we are called to, right now. As far as it depends on you, do what is right in the eyes of everyone. This passage bears a lot of careful study right now.

But the reason I’m drawn to it, and the part I want to especially call your attention to, is **verse 15:**

**15**Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

Mourn with those who mourn. One of the ways we bear the burden of this fight **is by mourning together.**

Here’s what I mean: we are all being inconvenienced by this situation to some degree or another. We are all being forced to give certain things up, or seeing things we enjoy taken away from us.

On Tuesday, during our church staff meeting, we just took a moment for everybody to share some things that we were going to miss out on or that we anticipate missing out on because of this quarantine. And everybody had things, and they ran the gamut from seemingly small to potentially life-changing. And as each of us shared, each item really felt like a gut punch. In our little staff of eight we talked about missing out on seeing our children compete in events they had worked hard for; to having to cancel visits from out of town with parents; to jobs being scaled back or even furloughed for our spouses.

Personally, my own list runs the gamut from the trivial—like this is the weekend when the NCAA basketball tournament should be held and usually I’d be neck deep in brackets right now; to the professional—I can’t get over the irony of doing a series of sermons on why weekly church attendance is a vital habit and then, not two months later, being in a situation where we have to say we cannot have in-person church; to the very personal—Beth’s mom is in remission from multiple myeloma, right now her health is good, but she is certainly among the most at-risk in the population, so we can’t visit her right now. My wife would love to go see her mom, but right now she simply can’t.

My point is not to get us to compare our lists to see whose hurt is the biggest.

My point is to say that it is O.K. to be disappointed in the loss of all those things. To acknowledge that the losses we feel are very real.

And then, to encourage us to mourn those losses together. To weep with those who weep. To feel the hurt of those who are suddenly jobless; to identify with the loneliness of those in the nursing homes who cannot leave their rooms or receive visitors; to recognize the strain being put on our nursing home staff and doctors and nurses.

There is a temptation to be very selfish right now. To look at our own inconveniences and irritations and just be super-angry at what we have had to give up. I get that temptation. But it is good to remember that we are all in a common fight, that we are all being called to make sacrifices—and some people are making bigger sacrifices than others—and to share that burden together.

“Mourn with those who mourn.” Let’s mourn this situation together.

***Christian Freedom***Second principal: **we share the fight by using our freedom to seek the good of others.**

One of the conversations I have had frequently in the last week is over whether or not the government has the right to tell churches not to meet. For that matter, can we even be told not to meet in groups of 10 or more? Isn’t this a free country? Don’t we have the right to assemble and freedom of religion? Can’t we decide for ourselves whether we will put our own health at risk?

I’ve been saying all week that I am not an expert on epidemics or statistics. I am also not a lawyer or a constitutional expert. I don’t care to debate whether these measures are necessary or right. And I really don’t want to get into a debate about whether the government can compel me to do this or that.

But I am a Bible teacher, and so I do want to think a little bit about what the Bible says about freedom. The relevant passages here are Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 10. If you want to turn in your Bibles, you can look up 1 Corinthians 10, starting at verse 23. The situation here is pretty specific to the times in which the Bible was written, but it leads to some principals that I think are very applicable right now.

So here’s the background: as the gospel of Jesus was spreading to new cities, people were coming to believe in Jesus out of some pagan religions. This was especially true in cities like Corinth and Rome, which did not have Jewish backgrounds. One feature of these pagan religions is that they would offer sacrifices to a whole bunch of false gods—the idols of Greek and Roman mythology. And the way it worked is that some of these pagan temples would then double as the local meat market.

So, let’s say you wanted to worship at the temple of Aphrodite. You would bring a lamb, and the priests there would sacrifice it. Then, rather than waste all that meat, the priests would take your slaughtered lamb and sell it at the market. Most of the meat consumed in the city of Corinth then, would have first been offered as a sacrifice to a pagan god.

That was basically how the economy worked. But as people in Corinth began to believe in Jesus, that raised a question: was it a good idea to be eating meat that had been sacrificed to a god you no longer believed in? It was an interesting theological question and a potentially significant lifestyle adjustment, and as I said, Paul talks about it both in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 10.

And Paul’s answer is basically: as Christians, we are free to eat anything we want. It all belongs to the Lord, so we can eat it to his glory (1 Cor. 10:25-26, 31). Paul is fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself (Romans 14:14). Since the pagan gods are not real gods anyway, it doesn’t really matter if the meat was first sacrificed to them (1 Cor. 10:19). As Christians, then, we have real freedom to make decisions about what we will eat or not eat for ourselves (Rom 14:22).

A big principal of Christian freedom is established here. There are any number of things that are not explicitly condemned in the Bible where Christians are free to choose for themselves.

This freedom, however, comes with a huge qualification. Because Paul recognizes that for a lot of other believers, this meat sacrificed to idols represents a problem. Moreover, for many unbelievers, for those who still believe in the idols, if they see a believer knowingly eating meat that has been used in this pagan system, it could signify that that believer approves of the pagan gods (1 Cor. 10:27-29). In that case, Paul says that exercising your freedom would actually be harmful to others and you should not do it.

Here’s the basic principal, in **1 Corinthians 10:23-24**:

**23**“I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but not everything is constructive. **24**No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.

Again, the historic situations are wildly different, but the principal still applies. You may feel like as an American, you should have the freedom to choose for yourself where you will go and who you will associate with during this pandemic. You may say “I have the right to do anything,” and philosophically and theologically you may, at some level, be correct.

But as a Christian, the last thing you should want is to use your freedom to hurt others. As a Christian, who loves God and follows His Word, the last thing you should want to be doing is joining in groups where there is potential for disease to spread, for our hospital to be overwhelmed and so on.

Please, please remember: the choices we make in the next few weeks are not just about us. They are about our whole community; they are about the whole world. It might seem to you like what you do doesn’t really matter; but remember the hairpins. We bear the burden of this fight when we restrain our freedom for the sake of others.

***This I Call to Mind***Third. This sermon is weird for me. I feel like I’m jumping all over the place. But I want to leave you with something hopeful. I’ll say it like this: **We share this fight by putting our hope in the faithfulness of God.**

The passage I want to turn to is in the Old Testament. Lamentations chapter 3. Again, the historic situation is wildly different, but there are some principals that are universally applicable. **Lamentations 3, starting at verse 19**:

**19**I remember my affliction and my wandering,
    the bitterness and the gall.
**20**I well remember them,
    and my soul is downcast within me.

The situation is this: Lamentations was written after the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians. We usually associate the book with the prophet Jeremiah, who had warned the people that this was coming. And now it has happened, and Jerusalem is a burned-out wreck. Many of the people have been carried into exile, the Temple has been destroyed, the walls torn down. The book of Lamentations is a depressing book: 5 long poems describing death and destruction.

So picture Jeremiah here, looking down over the city, and he is depressed. His soul is downcast within him. It is a total disaster.

We haven’t reached this point yet—a lot of the steps being taken are in the hopes that it won’t be total disaster—but already there are people sick, people who have died, financial hardships have begun. It isn’t too hard to identify with these verses. **Then, verse 21:**

**21**Yet this I call to mind
    and therefore I have hope:

Jeremiah weeps. He mourns. He feels the pain. But then, he reminds himself of something. He starts to preach to himself. He looks away from the circumstances and towards God. **Verse 22:**

**22**Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed,
    for his compassions never fail.
**23**They are new every morning;
    great is your faithfulness.
**24**I say to myself, “The Lord is my portion;
    therefore I will wait for him.”

When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, no one knew what the next weeks or months would bring. In the same way, we really don’t know what the next few weeks or months are going to bring for our world either.

But I believe that in God’s great love for us we will not be consumed. I believe His compassions will not fail. I believe that He is faithful, come what may.

There will be an end to this. Our world will come through it. And God is still going to be in control. As Christians, then, we set the example of faith by waiting for Him. We say: “The Lord is our portion.” He hasn’t abandoned us; no matter what happens, He is enough.

And then we share the burden of this fight together. We all need to do our part. We witness to the world by putting our hope in the Lord; and in our cautious care for others.