

The Vine



For Internal Circulation Only



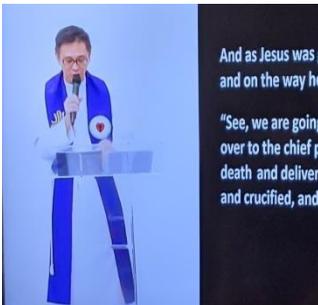
WHERE IS GOD?

by John Lee



IF I SAY THIS....

by Alicia Wong



DOING THE GREATER WORKS / THINGS

by Rev Anthony Loh



The Vine This Month

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Meeting



HOM Editorial

About a month ago, my colleague asked me what is the Lutheran stand on

End Times. Is it Premillennialism, Postmillennialism or Amillennialism. Perhaps she was wondering is the world coming to an end already with the pandemic and the failing economy. Amillennialism does not teach a literal thousand-year earthly reign of Christ. Christ's second coming will be one event at which time He will, in the words of Martin Luther, "raise up me and all the dead, and give unto me and all believers in Christ eternal life". The eschatology (*a part of theology concerned with the final destiny of humanity*) presented in The Lutheran Confessions is clearly Amillennialist.

She was keen to know if there was going to be a "Rapture" and all Christians can avoid the Tribulation. I told her that Lutherans believe that when Christ comes again, that is the end, and there is no "Left Behind" situation while the world goes on for another 1000 years. I also qualified that I am not an expert in End Times and there are so many people having strong beliefs in the other 2 views.

David Pawson (21/5/20) and Ravi Zacharias (19/5/20) both went home to the Lord recently. God is calling back two of His sons to glory in heaven. It is expected that faithful servants within the body of Christ will show collective endeavours in putting hands to the ploughs to continue the good works of Pawson and Zacharias. Rev Anthony's sermon on "Doing the greater things" clearly conveys the message about God's calling on every Christian to rise up as they are empowered to impact lives.

Speaking about the coronavirus situation, Ravi Zacharias said believers must "combine our faith and trust in God with wisdom" when responding to the crisis. Trust in God, he said, but heed the advice to keep yourself and others safe. Read John's article where he tackles a tough question like Ravi Zacharias used to do.

In the last issue of The Vine, I mentioned a taxi driver whom I gave a Bible to. Last week, he picked me up again and he mentioned he read about the creation story. He found it hard to believe. I suggested that he should start from John chapter 3. I pray that God's Word will come alive for him.

Martin Cheah

If I say this...

If I say this, what would people think of me?

If I do this, am I a bad person?

If I mind my own business, will things be easier?



The more serious we are in our walk with God, the more challenges we face. In my earlier article, [‘Distinguishing Ourselves’](#), I mentioned that some Christians are able to resist the flow of the world and move upstream to their

destinies, advancing in His kingdom while others will grow weary of the fight, no longer pressing on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called in Christ Jesus. I suppose some of you might feel dubious— that whatever I wrote sounds too poetic, too easy than actual practice in reality! Truth to be told, I struggle too. For the past few months, I grew increasingly weary. When the Circuit Breaker came, it was timely. Basically, I spent the entire month of April shying away from people and social media, wrapped in a cocoon of safety. It is only after a period did I emerge from my cocoon and started thinking of how I am to be ready for the world again when the Circuit breaker ends. There is always the possibility that whatever troubled me before the Circuit Breaker will happen again.

I even had a nightmare about similar situations recurring!



I began ploughing through the Bible, looking for something to speak to me. The answer came from an unexpected place – communication from a sister via social media. The honest conversation we had made me

realise that at times, we worry more about what the society thinks of us. We are in certain ministries, jobs or areas in our lives to be living testimonies, seeing possibilities found in life with Him and to fulfil His special calling. Despite being clothed in the full armour of God ([Ephesians 6:10-18](#)), we weaken ourselves with our mind, thoughts and imagination, allowing spiritual strongholds to take root in us. If we are sure God has called us to be in this certain situation, this job, this moment in this time, then continue to have faith. As long as we **walk in the Spirit** and not in our own abilities, **God will fight with us and for us**. We are not perfect, unable to see past every angle or possibility. We can only pray for wisdom, knowledge and understanding ([Proverbs 2:6-7](#)) to handle situations when they appear. Even in our weaknesses, our imperfection, we are made perfect in His strength.

We must be aware that **our words and thoughts are containers of power**. They can carry **power from the Kingdom of God or the kingdom of darkness**. It is our choice to use one of the most powerful weapons to pull down strongholds or to allow it to hold us back. For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. As a person thinks, so they are. Change your thoughts, change your words and God's power will change your life. Claim the inheritance that God prepared for you and the rich blessings He intended for your life. Ask Him to show what resources He has given us — love, joy, peace, strength, endurance, courage, His Word and His Spirit — and tap into them.

When we depend on God's power to work in us and through us, fear and worry lose their sting and obstacles are torn down. Since He has called us to an abundant life, He will provide the resources and wisdom to live it.

I pray that God grant each of us a spirit of wisdom and revelation, that we know Him more and more and fulfil His will for our lives. It is a beautiful calling, with a glorious inheritance, backed up by an amazing power!

Alicia Wong

The
Coronavirus is
everywhere,
but
WHERE IS GOD?

I suppose that most people – rich or poor, master or servant – are under stress of one type or another because of the coronavirus. (If you are not one of them, you must qualify as a rare breed.)

Different persons have different approaches to stress. It would not be surprising to hear the question being

screamed out: WHERE IS GOD who is known to be loving, caring, faithful, almighty ...?

In fact, this question has been heard for the umpteenth time through all the great disasters in human history, including many mentioned in the Bible, and through any number of incidents of great personal suffering. Scrutinizing the motivation for such a question, one cannot help but feel that at the root of it is man's fear of suffering and fear of death.

In suffering or death, does blame lie at the feet of God?

The Bible tells us: *"God did not choose us to suffer his anger, but to possess salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us in order that we might live together with him, whether we are alive or dead when he comes." (1 Thess. 5:9-10)*

God's Word focuses our attention on life and death not merely of this world but also of eternity together with Christ "whether we are alive or dead [in this world] when he comes."

"My thoughts," says the Lord, "are not like yours, and my ways are different from yours." (Isa 55:8)

Asking where God is in times of suffering is putting a question mark on faith. Being unable to think the way God thinks, we subconsciously set aside our faith and weigh ourselves down with our own rationalisation. If we truly walk in the realm of faith and not by appearance (2 Cor 5:7), our life would be filled with confidence as we say to God, *"For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O Lord, from my youth" (Ps 71:5)* – even if we cannot fully grasp God's purpose for the events according to His sovereign will.

As the scripture says, *"Who knows the mind of the Lord? Who is able to give him advice?" (Rom 11:34)*

Surely, we cannot be presumptuous to claim that we know the mind of the Lord and that we are qualified to tell Him what He should do about the coronavirus. Nevertheless, by what we know about sufferings and death as scripture reveals, we can lean on our faith and fill our minds with hope, even in hard times:

- **Inevitability of suffering** – *"We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit." (Rom. 5:3–5)*
- **About life eternal** – *"In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order*

that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.” (Eph 1:11)

Apart from fear of suffering and fear of death, is there anything called “helpful fear” or “helpful anxiety”?

Let’s say you have fear of getting into trouble with the law during the Circuit Breaker period and getting fined \$300. If this puts you on a cautious state of alert not to be forgetful about wearing a mask and not to be reckless against safe-distancing measures, it has the effect of keeping you and other people safe from the attacks of the coronavirus. Would you call this “helpful fear”?

Anxiety can exist at many levels. It needs not always be seen negatively. In fact, [a dose of eustress may be a much-needed prescription for some people](#) who are prone to exposing themselves to bad consequences because they simply are stress-free to “*bochap*” extreme – “couldn’t care less” come what may!

[“Eustress” is defined by Merriam-Webster dictionary as “a positive form of stress having a beneficial effect on health, motivation, performance, and emotional well-being.”](#)

Looking into the Bible, we can glean instructions on what to fear and what not to fear:

- Fear the LORD, for it is the beginning of knowledge ... (Prov 1:7)
- Do not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day. (Ps 91:5)
- Fear as a deterrent, to avoid evil or wrongdoing (Jn 3:20-21; Rom 13:4)
- Fear of the future – Do not be afraid what is going to happen. (Ac 27:24)
- Etc.

Clearly, there are positive fears (commendable) and negative fears (to be banished).

The million-dollar question now as we face a global crisis is: Do we have to fear the terror of the coronavirus and doubt that God is in control of everything that happens according to His sovereign purpose?

Yes, it is ok to have positive fear – to be awakened to the dangers out there and hence motivated to take the necessary actions in the interest of ourselves and our neighbours.

No, it is not ok to have negative fear and doubt God's presence during the crisis.

Crisis time is an opportunity for us to put aside negative fear and let our faith stand out:

“Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me.” (Ps 23:4)

“Have no fear of sudden disaster or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked, for the Lord will be at your side and will keep your foot from being snared.” (Prov 3:25-26)

The MSG bible translation says, **“No need to panic over alarms or surprises, or predictions that doomsday's just around the corner, Because God will be right there with you; he'll keep you safe and sound.”**

It is certainly not right for people to make predictions. Let us not add to the innumerable failed predictions from doomsday “experts” in the past.

Some people may wax eloquent about the purpose of the pandemic, that it is an act of God to punish man for his sin plus some other reasons. If we agree about the inscrutability of God, then we are prepared to have no complete clear-cut answer about His will in the pandemic. Nevertheless, we do recognize that it takes darkness for man to be aware of light.

The darkness of the pandemic has brought about brighter skies with drastically reduced air pollution due to the lockdown of the world. The coronavirus has shone a light to bring into stark relief the darkness of human hubris in a thousand and one ways. Hopefully, intelligent people realise two things by their bright “fisheye” vision of hindsight:

- 1) The great foresight they often boasted was but a dark vision tunnel that threw askew their vanity schemes and projects of greed and arrogance.
- 2) *“Mortals make elaborate plans, but God has the last word. We plan the way we want to live, but only God makes us able to live it.” (Prov 16:1, 9 MSG)*

Is it only through suffering that wisdom rises above intellect?

Stress is not absent in me. Nevertheless, I know that:

God is neither silent nor absent in this pandemic.

Suffering births a compassion and flexibility we wouldn't otherwise have. Out of that shredding of our soul and reshaping of our view of God, He creates something new.

NGINA OTIENDE

"Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up." – Proverbs 12:25

"When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought me joy." – Psalm 94:19

John Lee



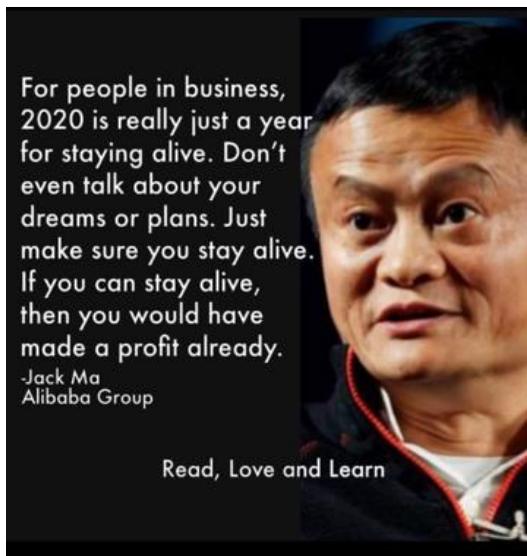
DOING THE GREATER WORKS/THINGS

Sermon delivered on 10th May 2020 (with adaptation)

Rev. Anthony Loh

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.” – John 14:12

We are in the midst of a pandemic with all of us stuck at home for more than a month. Can we do greater works/things in a time like this?



Jack Ma tells people in business, “Don’t even talk about your dreams or plans. Just make sure you stay alive.”

He continued, “If you can stay alive, then you would have made a profit already.”

Obviously, he is using “business language”, aware that many companies are having

problems and facing challenges to stay alive.

How about churches today?

We have big and small churches been “closed” for many weeks, including JCC. In fact, it is only the physical church premises that are closed while the church as a body of Christ is still open with members engaging with one another facilitated by technology. We still communicate with one another, pray for one another and encourage one another.

In the church context, do we believe that 2020 is a year for “just staying alive” and “don’t talk about dreams and plans”?

Knowing Christ makes us feel differently. We have God on our side, and we are confident that He will listen to our prayers when we turn to Him.

As we feel very much being “locked down” at home and “locked out of the outside world, doing nothing, a lot of things are in fact happening and changing. While we were “staying at home and doing nothing,” a Sunday Times opinion piece last week listed 100 ways the world has changed in the first 100 days of COVID-19. It made me think about how the church has also changed in many ways:

- a) The way we worship – As I appear in front of your computer now, you see me literally talking to only one person in the sanctuary in JCC from where this live worship service is broadcast. Between me and the video technician are many empty pews. Yet, I know that I am talking to many of you out there in your homes now.



- b) The way we conduct Sunday School – Little ones are learning to do zooming. 😊



- c) The way we do equipping – Cell leaders training with Rev. Huan with the aid of zooming.
- d) The way we do prayer meetings – some of us are still adjusting to talking with one another at “close distance” in front of computer screens.

While all of us are staying in our homes, a lot of happenings are taking place. We are still face-to-face in our meetings. Although we are not next to each other in the flesh, it feels like the person you are talking to is just in front of you.

With all the changes taking place while we are all staying at home, can we still do greater works/things as we are exhorted in John 10:12?

Or should we wait for 1st June when the Circuit Breaker is lifted; or wait till we get back to meet in the church after COVID-19? Will everything go back to the old pattern, same old habits and same old style of doing ministry:

- We sit on the familiar pews regularly as before COVID-19;

- we behave the same way with the same mindset as before COVID-19 and
- we do the same old things in our ministries, using the same methods as in the past years?

It is often said that change is the only constant in life. You do things the way you like, but change comes uninvited and beyond your control.

After a major change in the world, there will be a re-setting of life. Government policies are re-evaluated, people's careers, relationships and habits are transformed.

After a major change in the Church, it is also opportune to press the RESET button. The Church does not stand still – we renew ourselves, re-focus our ministries, restructure our methods and become refreshed to DO GREATER THINGS!

Bros and sisters, I believe we can DO GREATER THINGS now – not because we can by our own abilities; BUT in Christ, we are able to be used by Him to do God's things that can make a greater impact on the world, profiting communities and families in our lifetime.

The story in John 14 tells us that the disciples of Jesus were at a loss and directionless in their lives because they sensed uncertainties ahead. Massive fears were triggered in their hearts. From verses 1, 5 and 8, we can sense their frantic pulse. They were facing three major crises:

- The crisis of the “unknown destination” – “Where are you going?”
- The crisis of the “unknown direction” – How to go and which way to take?
- The crisis of doubt regarding the presence of God – “‘Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.’”

The disciples were paralysed totally by their worries, so how to even dare to dream about doing greater things of God? Today, are we like the disciples – afraid, losing original enthusiasm and feeling spiritually defeated? Does our pulse beat as furiously as the disciples’ because we are “locked down” and overcome by fears?

For three years, the disciples of Jesus were sheltered from life problems and challenges. Examples:

- Jesus calmed the storm when they could have drowned in the sea.
- Jesus defended them against criticisms from their enemies.
- Jesus provided them physical food (feeding of 5000).
- Jesus demonstrated power of healing the sick, lame, blind, deaf and “cancer of the day” leprosy.
- Jesus showed them spiritual authority by casting out demons.

Wow, three years of walking with Jesus, protected by a strong shelter! But now, they are overwhelmed by a spirit of fear and desperation because of three perceived crises.

Jesus says. “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.” – John 14:12

Do we have no dreams, not even small plans because we are “locked down now” and overcome by fears?

DOING GREATER WORKS/THINGS can only happen on sunshine days, or when we are on top in our spiritual life (like being at the mountain-top with Jesus)?

During a crisis, such as when facing the unknowns of COVID-19, the challenges in the workplace or in family, it reflects our defeatist feeling similar to the feelings of the disciples like Thomas and Philip if we think like these:

- The Word of Jesus cannot be implemented in our lives;
- the Word of Jesus is not weatherproof and
- “I am helpless myself; you take care of yourself.”

When we are in the same despondent situation as the disciples, we can easily get the wrong idea that the anchor of our life assurance or life security is shaken and going to be withdrawn. Brothers and sisters, is Jesus departing and leaving us alone to fend for ourselves?

Is our peace in Christ affected or robbed by our enemies when all our earthly pursuits, earthly passions and earthly security are being tested? It may be about our jobs, health, wealth, relationships, life goals. It is a challenging time, but not a time for us to say we have no dreams. It is Kairos Time for you and me to reassess our dreams and align them with God’s purpose for us to DO GREATER WORKS/THINGS, knowing that Jesus is with us. We can at least start with SMALL PLANS rather than NO PLANS.

COVID-19 should not:

- determine how we should live our life in Christ today;
- cripple our life in Christ;
- paralyse our dreams and goals for God;
- push us to sleepless nights;
- stop us from serving one another and our community or
- stop us from praying and doing God’s work in our lives and in the lives of the people we are praying for.

We can do greater things not because we can by ourselves; but in Christ we can be powerful and useful vessels for Him. Today is the 5th Sunday of Easter, and I am looking ahead to

“DOING GREATER WORKS/THINGS”

- 1) Our **Eternal DESTINATION** is assured (HOPE) v2
- 2) Our **Eternal LIFE** is guaranteed (PEACE) v3b-4
- 3) **God’s PRESENCE** is promised (CONFIDENCE) v8-10
- 4) **Our PRAYERS ARE** heard. (BOLDNESS) v13-14

31st May, which is Pentecost Sunday, to be inspired by the potential that the Holy Spirit can empower us to do greater things.

Pentecost Sunday reminds us of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon every disciple of Jesus; whereby the disciples turned the world upside down, in their generations, when they were living in fears and uncertainties – close to 50 days, after Jesus’ ascension. They reached out to the poor, to the lost, those in bondages with boldness and in faith as they were empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Here is an SMS testimony from an elderly lady who experienced healing from Parkinson’s disease with JCC intercessors praying for her:

“I have also experienced healing for Parkinsons. I know some of your intercessors (JCC intercessors) have been praying for me. You saw me last year when I found it so hard to walk or sit or stand. See the healing that has

*taken place in the videos taken at home last week.
Hallelujah!!”*

(Note: video shown with permission during worship service)

A few days ago, a church called us up enquiring how we could help them set up the Project Befrienders (providing shelters to the needy). We ourselves struggled two weeks ago when we tried to put our plans together. We are new in this ministry; yet, God opens doors for us to help another church. Is this a type of greater works we can do?



We can trust God that He can use us to make greater impact in the lives of our neighbours when we take the first step in connecting with them:

- to bring healing to our friends;
- to bring comfort to the desperate or
- to bring peace and hope to the hopeless.

These are but a few examples of the “greater works” that we can do today in whatever scale as we are empowered.

Will you rise up today?

WE BRING 'SUNDAY SCHOOL' TO YOU

...ON SUNDAY MORNINGS...

...DURING THIS CB PERIOD...

JOIN US



ON E-PLATFORMS



WHY SUNDAY SCHOOL IS STILL IMPORTANT TO YOUR CHILD...

...DURING THIS CB PERIOD...



Apart from physical food, they need spiritual food for **NOURISHMENT** too

ANCHORING
their emotions,
stresses, pressures
upon God



Spiritual **CONNECTEDNESS**
with their sunday school
friends and teachers

PLAY YOUR PART TO ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO JOIN US...

- For Little Lamb Kids (age 3-6), pls contact either Jacqueline, Poh Kiat or Lydia
- For Ishine Kids (P1-P2), pls contact either Valerian or Mong
- For Ishine Kids (P3-P4), pls contact either Khan Lian or Gildabella
- For Ishine Kids (P5-P6), pls contact either Derrick or Evania