

# LOCKDOWN: COUNT THE COST!

**A message from the Chairman of PTS Council, Dominic Stockford**

In one of his many examples, in which Jesus primarily explains how we should approach the cost of following Christ, Jesus also gives us a salutary tale as to how we should approach many other challenging situations:

What king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. (Luke 14:31-2)



In the words above we are asked to consider that a king going out against a foe would first make the sensible step of counting the cost of what he is about to do, before he engages in any fight. And, it is clear, he would do this because of the chances of such a battle being far more costly in lives than any peace that he might successfully sue for. The cost of engaging in a fight, we are shown, will frequently outweigh the rather more prosaic 'doing nothing'.

It is this simple teaching which seems to many of us not to have been absorbed by those who have gone about issuing instructions to lock down anything that moves – and specifically, from the Christian perspective, to close down Christian churches. There are many harms being done to this country, and therefore to the people within it, by the actions that have been taken. People have lost jobs – which they are unlikely to get back again, because many of the firms they work for are unlikely to survive. People will lose income, and in the long term will therefore lose their homes. People will and are losing their businesses, and therefore losing their ability to employ people in the future. And not only are they losing the ability to provide for themselves and their families, many will lose the will to do so again in the future. I read today of the fact that the car finance crisis is going to be fuelled even further by this lock down – yet another cause of even more trouble and distress.

There are, of course, many more harmful matters which are now occurring, and many more which will occur in the future. The GDP of the UK will drop significantly, which will affect society's ability to care for the ill, the underprivileged, and the vulnerable in the future. The NHS might be doing well at the moment (or rather, the front-line staff are doing well), but it will be significantly damaged by what is happening to our economy each and every day of the continued lockdown. And so on. Such real harms, occurring now and in the future, should be properly balanced against the apparent harm which this virus may do. And it does not appear that this is so. One number alone (I do not propose to delve further into statistics) should highlight what seems to be a gross over-reaction. Today's cumulative total of all who have tested positive for coronavirus in Richmond upon Thames is 235. The population of Richmond upon Thames is, according to current figures, 196,904. This gives us, as a percentage of the population who have had this virus badly enough to come to the authorities' attention, 0.12% of all those living in this area in London. A city which has, we are told, been extremely badly affected by it. And for that we have basically closed down the borough. Entirely.<sup>1</sup>

Amidst all this harm being done, practically and socially, another great harm is being done. Spiritual harm. The NHS has long employed chaplains in its hospitals because it knows well the healing and helping power of prayer, and of faith in Christ Jesus. This is why every time someone such as the National Secular Society suggests getting rid of them they are simply ignored. Spiritual comfort, prayer, and the coming into the presence of God, which can only be done 'where two or three are gathered together in My name',<sup>2</sup> are vital components in health, healing, and wholeness. I know this for a fact – in the past I was a hospital chaplain in a major hospital for three years.

Which brings us on to another great harm that is therefore being done in our society at this time. Our churches have been closed, by law. And it is worth noting here and now, that the President of Brazil has specifically *not* gone this way, standing out from the crowd by insisting that they remain open and accessible, and that people must be allowed to gather there 'to render thanks for the great benefits that we have received at [God's] hands, to set forth his most worthy praise, to hear his most holy Word, and to ask those things that are requisite and necessary, as well for the body as the soul.'<sup>3</sup>

The harm being done by the closure of places where people can place their trust in the Lord God, their Almighty Creator, provider, and sustainer, is not to be underestimated. And yet it is one further damage being done to our nation.

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<sup>1</sup> I accept that some people *may* have had the virus at home, and various other caveats – but untested as they are (and the tests themselves are not reliable) we cannot possibly know this to be a fact.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 18:20

<sup>3</sup> The Book of Common Prayer.

No one is suggesting that we encourage great heaving masses of humanity to gather together, packed and crowded into our churches – most free churches don't have that problem anyway. I know that my congregation, and many, many others could meet quite successfully, quite safely, taking all reasonable precautions necessary, and worship together each and every Sunday. We could also hold our churches open during the week, with similar precautions, so that people could come into them and join together in turning to God for prayer. But this government seems to have no time for God, no concept of what it *should mean in practice* to be a Christian country, and no time for any other way through what they tell us we are facing except 'their way'.

The Bible has clear words for these people, and for all who have lobbied to ensure that churches must remain closed for the duration, during the very time people should need them even more:

Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help.  
(Psalm 146:3)

And their faces and their minds are clearly completely and resolutely set against the encouraging injunction from God to His people found in the book of Deuteronomy:

When you go out to battle against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them; for the LORD your God is with you. (Deuteronomy 20:1)

They have chosen their way, and I say here and now, clearly, *it is the wrong way*. It is wrong because it demonstrates no fear of God – Peter tells us in his second letter to honour the Emperor, but to fear God. These men and women have taken us down a path where not only is there no fear of God (that being replaced by fear of a virus), but there is not even any respect for God; nor respect for the desire of many to turn to God, and to join together as we are mandated to do by God's Word, and place this current situation<sup>4</sup> into his hands through our sole mediator with God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

I call on them to think again.

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<sup>4</sup> As far as there is 'a situation' that is factually unusual compared to any other year.