

What does Coronavirus mean?

Proverbs 3:5 ESV Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. **6** In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. **7** Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. **8** It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones. **9** Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; **10** then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine. **11** My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, **12** for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.

- I. What happened to our world? 7 days ago many of us met right here in a building that now has only 4 people in it. The hearts of people everywhere are ranging from apathy and indifference, to thoughtful caution and outright fear. Panic buying has led to a shortage of basic necessities, and we are glued to the news, watching as this brand new virus holds the entire world hostage.
 - A. It's not uncommon for non-believers to use times of great crisis like this to mock those who believe, as well as the God we believe in. "Why would God allow something like this?", they question, assuming they have stumbled upon the silver bullet that will finally terminate what they see as irrational belief.
 1. But it may surprise you to know that I think that asking "why God would allow something like this" is a legitimate and wise thing for us to do.
 2. God is not afraid of a questioning heart. Habakkuk begins his prophecy by asking God **Habakkuk 1:1a ESV** "O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Martha and Mary expose a questioning heart at the tomb of Lazarus. "Lord if you had only been here, he wouldn't have died."
 - B. So if someone were to ask you why God would allow us to be faced with a worldwide pandemic, what would you say? I've thought a lot about this and have some thoughts to share with you.
 1. I don't claim that my conclusions are perfect or complete. That would require me to know what God knows. I don't! But I think scripture gives us guidance in these things. Even if it only provides hints, an incomplete understanding.
 2. **Deuteronomy 29:29 ESV** "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law." While some aspects of this will remain a mystery, hidden in the mind of God, let's see what his Word reveals to us.
- II. First, we must consider that coronavirus (at least in part) represents judgement on the world, and correction for the church. Many have misunderstood grace, and forgotten God is holy, so the thought of his judgment is dismissed out of hand. But the Bible shows that He will always punish sin, and correct those who are in Christ.
 - A. In Exodus 33 when Moses was on the mountain receiving the law of God, the people built a golden calf to represent the one that had rescued them from Egypt. This was an insult to God, and a grave sin, beginning Israel's idolatry.
 1. In response, Moses brought swift justice; destroying their idol, and sending the Levites through the congregation on a mission of capital punishment.
 2. But God also personally responded. **Exodus 32:35 ESV** Then ***the Lord sent a plague on the people***, because they made the calf, the one that Aaron

- made. This isn't the only time that God did this in response to the people's idolatry. Go to any Bible app and do a word search for "plague". You will find multiple instances of God's judgement being revealed in this way.
- B. Idolatry, or some other form of ignoring or dishonoring God is usually the root cause. Can you see how Americans have idolized money, power, and all kinds of empty pursuits? God's judgement (and there's real reason to believe COVID-19 is just that), serves two purposes, neither of which is to destroy us:
1. To bring the world into the fear of the Lord (the beginning of wisdom). They must made to see the emptiness of all they trust in so they will turn to God.
 2. To bring the church to repentance for all the ways it has reflected an idolatrous world, instead of reflecting a holy God who said **Leviticus 19:2b ESV** 'You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.
 - a) What are you trusting in more than Christ? Stock Market? The supply chain? Your job or health? None of which are promised, or will last.
 - b) When God corrects us, the proper response is not self-sufficiency or a new strategy. The right response is broken and humble repentance.
- III. God also may be letting us endure this trial so that church can experience the joy of depending on Jesus alone. "The joy which answers to prayer gives, cannot be described; and the impetus which they afford to the spiritual life is exceedingly great." -George Müller. If we're honest, we never pray more than when we're in trouble, so times like these provide great opportunity to see God move, which results in abundant rejoicing and growth in our spiritual lives.
- A. Where our trust lies is not only an idolatry issue, but a discipleship issue. Peter had to get out of the boat in a storm (a logically insane thing to do!) to walk to Jesus on the water. The disciples had to face the prospect of feeding 5,000 people with 5 loaves and 2 fishes before they saw Jesus multiply what they had.
- B. You will never have more joy as when you get to see God move because you were out of all options and cried out to him with your whole heart!
1. Some of you have experienced this joy. Others have become so adept at survival that you have never come face to face with genuine need before.
 2. Can you see that it is God's mercy that has brought you coronavirus which you can't figure out? Where no strategy will do? There was a king in the Old Testament who was about to be attacked by three much stronger armies.
 - a) He and his men fasted and prayed, crying to God for answers and help. Listen to how God replied to their prayers:
 - b) **2 Chronicles 20:15b ESV** "Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed at this great horde, *for the battle is not yours but God's...* **17a You will not need to fight in this battle.** Stand firm, hold your position, and *see the salvation of the Lord on your behalf.*" God brought you to this scary place not to die, but to see the mighty power of a loving God revealed!
- IV. A third thing God might be up to is providing an opportunity for us to be light to the people around us who do not know Christ (and there are plenty of them!).
- A. You can do this in many ways. First, by guarding your heart, which will protect you from words and actions that will bring shame to Jesus and his gospel. What

- I mean is that if you are just as fearful as everyone else around you, one of the greatest gospel opportunities in our lifetimes will be completely squandered.
1. Instead of hoarding food, toilet paper, and cleaning supplies, What if you found people in your neighborhood who could use some, and gave those things away, even at a loss to yourself, because you trust God to supply?
 2. What if when your friends and family talked about how crazy it was out there, you told them boldly why you were living without fear? What if instead of loudly and publicly criticizing leaders and their policies, you loudly and publicly prayed for them to have wisdom and be encouraged?
- B. Famine and war had devastated the city of Caesarea in the early 4th century; then the city was dealt another blow - a crippling plague that swept through the city. But as the panicked wealthy fled the city, the Christians stayed behind. Eusebius tells us why, "All day long some of them [the Christians] tended to the dying and to their burial, countless numbers with no one to care for them. Others gathered together from all parts of the city a multitude of those withered from famine and distributed bread to them all." He goes on to say that because of this, the Christians' "deeds were on everyone's lips, and they glorified the God of the Christians". What a great way for a revival to begin in our city!
1. Laying down our lives sacrificially for each other and for the community, lends credence to our gospel like nothing else can, as Jesus told us...
 2. **Matthew 5:16 ESV** In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Our good works are never for our publicity, but for Gods!
- V. Lastly, I believe God allows us to face a worldwide pandemic to remind us of our fragility and mortality. To highlight clearly for us just how fleeting life is.
- A. In 1854, Great Britain was hit with an outbreak of cholera. 23,000 people died in England, 10,000 of them in London alone. There were few households spared from mourning, and everyone knew someone affected by the epidemic.
1. Having begun his pastorate only a few months before at the ripe old age of 19, Charles Spurgeon found himself pastoring a church through this crisis. Never one to miss an opportunity to make a blunt point, Spurgeon said...
 2. "You cannot say, can you, that you have all your salvation? But a Christian can. He can walk through the cholera and the pestilence, and feel that should the arrow smite him, death would be to him the entrance of life; he can lie down and grieve but little at the approach of dissolution, for he has all his salvation; his jewels are in his breast, gems which shall shine in heaven."
 - a) He never tried to distract people (Christian or otherwise) from their death. On the contrary, he considered it great wisdom to consider it often. On another occasion, he said: "It is good for us then; it is greatly wise to talk with our last hours...It is great wisdom to make death our everyday companion...we ought often to lay our souls in death; to make death a familiar thing; to talk with it everyday."
 - b) His point was that since death is inevitable, and since it is at death that all our works (our profession, our charity, our devotion) will be tried by fire according to scripture, we should consider death gravely and often.

- B. For those who have not believed, or who have believed falsely, there can be nothing more terrifying than the day of death, when we will face certain judgement by a God who does not flinch in his holiness and justice. But for those who have put their trust in Christ, death is a gateway to never-ending joy!
1. **John 11:25b ESV** “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, **26a** and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”
 2. Corona virus gives a wonderful opportunity to consider these things, to examine our hearts and know whether they are right before him; and if they are not right before God, may we have a new urgency to seize the day; to lay aside all of our corrupting sin, and put all of our hope in Christ Jesus alone.
- VI. We are facing uncertain days, but let us be found trusting in the Lord, with all our hearts and giving little regard to our limited understanding. Let us acknowledge him in quarantine and social distance, in our anxiety and distress, knowing that he alone can make our paths straight. Let us not be wise in our own eyes. May we fear the Lord and turn from all idolatry and evil. Then we will find healing and refreshment in our innermost being. Let us honor the Lord with all of our wealth, our time, our strength, and our passion, confident that he will supply all we need. Let us rejoice in the Lord’s discipline, fully aware that is the action of a loving Father.
- VII. Benediction: **Philippians 4:7 ESV** (May) the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding...guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.