

## God and the Coronavirus

When a worldwide disaster strikes the nations, as in the case of the coronavirus COVID-19, many questions arise. At first the questions are about the physical danger and how we can protect ourselves, but soon we come to questions concerning what is behind the tragedy. Sooner or later we begin to ask questions about what part God has in all of this. Is this a judgment of God? Is God angry with us? How can something so terrible happen if God truly loves us? Thanks be to God, the answers to all these questions can be found in the Bible, the Word of God.

### God Can Heal Us

The first thing that we should recognize is that God is still in control of the world, and has the ability to protect us and to even heal the sick. While Jesus was on the earth he healed many people (Matthew 12:14; Luke 7:21-22), and even raised the dead (John 11:40-44). The only thing that limited Christ from healing someone was unbelief (Matthew 13:58). And even today God commands that we pray that the sick might be healed (James 5:14-15).

The promises of God for His people are abundant in the Bible, and perhaps there is no passage that gives us more comfort than Psalm 91. Look at the first verses:

*He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.*

*I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.*

*Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence.*

*He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.*

*Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day;*

*Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday.*

*A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. (Psalm 91:1-7)*

We need to understand to whom God is giving these promises. They are for those who are trusting in the Lord (vs. 9), who have set their love on Him, and who have known His name (vs. 14). To such God promises, “*He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him*” (vs. 15). When we pray to God, seeking His help for such a difficult time, we should “*ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed*” (James 1:6). Our God will never leave or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5), and we must trust in Him.

Those who do not have faith in God will be in a state of panic. This makes sense, because if they lose their lives, they lose everything. Even Satan said, “*Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face*” (Job 2:4-5). However – as the book of Job shows – it is possible for a believer to trust in God through the trials, even losing his health, and come out victorious in the end. “*The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion*” (Proverbs 28:1). May we not give in to fear of this invisible enemy, rather let us trust in God and His perfect will for our lives.

### Our Individual Responsibility.

While we rest in God’s care for His own, we must also recognize that we still live in a material world, a world under the curse of sin and all its consequences. Some people will go to the extreme of declaring that, since God is going to protect us, there is not need for “social distancing,” or doctors, or frequent hand washing. But to act this way is to tempt God; this is exactly what Satan did when he

quoted from Psalm 91:11 and suggested that Jesus throw Himself off the roof of the Temple, just to prove what God could do (Luke 4:9-12). Such actions try to make God our slave to satisfy our whims. Jesus clearly declared unto all who think this way: *“that shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.”*

God promised to protect His chosen people, Israel, even from the diseases of the Egyptians (Deuteronomy 7:15), but even so He commanded them to practice basic principles of hygiene (Deut. 23:13; Leviticus 13:4,45). God can protect His people from whatever falling or stumbling by a miraculous intervention, but He chose to give instructions to provide for the physical security of His people in a practical way (Deut. 22:8). God expects that while we are in a physical world, we feed ourselves with physical food, avoid that which is poisonous, and care for our bodies. Those who say that we should not take precautions because “God will protect us” or “we must allow the will of God to be done” are ignoring what Christ Himself said concerning the need to flee from danger (Matthew 10:23). The Bible teaches prudence in the presence of physical danger, to the point of repeating twice the proverb, “A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished” (Proverbs 22:3; 27:12). The idea that we should not guard ourselves from danger has no more support in the Bible than the idea that we should refrain from swimming if we accidentally fall into deep, but simply wait and “let the will of God be done.”

One story in the New Testament provides a good illustration of the balance needed between God’s care for us and our own responsibility. When Paul was trialing to Rome, a great storm came up and even the sailors lost hope of being saved. But God spoke to Paul, saying, “Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee”(Acts 27:24). However, the plan of God was to save these men by bringing all of them in the ship to a certain island. When the sailors tried to leave the ship in a small boat, Paul declared to the officer in charge: “Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved”(Acts 27:31). If we want God to protect us, we must fulfill the basic responsibilities that He asks of us.

### **The Sword of the Lord**

Yet we may ask, “if God has all power over sickness, why has He allowed this to come? Something the Bible is very clear about is that a plague upon the earth may be “the sword of the Lord” (1 Chronicles 21:12), sent to judge a nation in sin. In a time when men often think themselves to be so capable or even invincible, we have seen all of humanity trembling before this sickness. Strong nations with powerful armies that had no fear of foreign invasions have now been invaded by a virus that has paralyzed all of life. God speaks in the Scripture of another terrible invasion that occurred long ago in the time of the prophet Jeremiah, saying, “I will take from them the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones, and the light of the candle” (Jeremiah 25:10). We have seen that the first things closed have been entertainments and celebrations, even canceling weddings, and now industry is being affected.

However, God will neither send nor permit an affliction without declaring the solution. We must return to the root cause of all of this. The Word of God has warned us:

*“They said, Turn ye again now every one from his evil way, and from the evil of your doings, and dwell in the land that the LORD hath given unto you and to your fathers for ever and ever: And go not after other gods to serve them, and to worship them, and provoke me not to anger with the works of your hands; and I will do you no hurt.*

*Yet ye have not hearkened unto me, saith the LORD; that ye might provoke me to anger with the works of your hands to your own hurt.” (Jeremiah 25:5-7)*

The solution is simply to return to where we got out of the way. God says, *“If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land”* (2 Chronicles 7:14).

## To Teach Us

At the same time it is important to emphasize that not all sickness is a judgment from God. The Bible gives us abundant evidence for this. Many godly people have become sick, and God does not always heal them. For example, Paul had to leave one of his fellow workers sick in Miletus (2 Timothy 4:20), because God did not grant him healing. Paul himself suffered from a “thorn in the flesh” and when he asked God to take it away, he received the answer: *“My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness”* (2 Corinthians 12:9). Paul recognized the purpose of the sickness was to teach him an important lesson, and so responded, *“Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong”* (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

Sometimes God has to show us that we are not strong, that we cannot live without His help. We have a much greater tendency to seek God when we are in the midst of suffering or weakness than when everything is going well. God wants us to be happy and in good health (3 John 1:2), but His priority is our spiritual well-being. Therefore, if we do not learn from His Word alone, He teaches us with the discipline of affliction (Hebrews 12:1-11). It is not always because we have sinned; God simply loves us and wants to teach us.

## A Spiritual Battle

Another possibility for the cause of a spiritual affliction is that God may be fighting a spiritual battle, of which we will not be able to see all the details. Every kind of suffering affects not only the sufferer, but also those around him. How often have we heard of someone who got his life right with God after the death of a relative or friend! The classic example in the Bible is Job, of whom an entire book was written telling the story of how he suffered and what he learned from the experience.

At the beginning of the book God declares three times that Job is “perfect and upright, and one that feared God and eschewed [hated, rejected] evil” (Job 1:1,8;2:3). However, when Satan proposed that God test Job and prove that (according to Satan), that Job was” really motivated by selfishness, God permitted it, only saying “lay not thy hand upon him” and “save his life.” In the end, God was glorified and Satan humbled when Job – even amid his confusion about *why* everything was happening – continued faithful to God, through his suffering.

## The Time of the End

The Lord Jesus Christ prophesied many things about the last days before the end of the world, and declared that pestilence was an important sign that the end was drawing near:

*“For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows”* (Matthew 24:7-8).

*“But when ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified: for these things must first come to pass; but the end is not by and by. Then said he unto them, Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven”* (Luke 24:9-11).

Although it may seem we are in the time of Armageddon, in reality the final judgment of God upon the earth has not yet come. We are in the time of preparation for the end. But the time is short, and each one of us should examine his own heart and ask himself, “am I ready for the coming of the Son of God to the earth?”

We must not forget all the people who are suffering in the world at this time. The truth is that every moment of every day, people are dying. But often we are not conscious of it until death comes close to us. Because of this Solomon declared, *“It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart”* (Ecclesiastes 7:2).

But, which is worse: to suffer in our bodies the temporary effects of a physical virus, or suffer the torments of Hell for all eternity? There are many souls that are this moment lost in sin, and we must see what we can do to help them, not just in their physical needs but their spiritual necessity. Jesus said that time of the end would be a time *“for a testimony”* (Luke 21:13), and we should seek ways to comfort a terrified world with the good news of the gospel.

### **The Trumpet**

*Can two walk together, except they be agreed?*

*Will a lion roar in the forest, when he hath no prey? will a young lion cry out of his den, if he have taken nothing?*

*Can a bird fall in a snare upon the earth, where no gin is for him? shall one take up a snare from the earth, and have taken nothing at all?*

*Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it? (Amos 3:3-6)*

When a crisis comes to an entire nation, or to all the world, we know that God is trying to say something. This passage in Amos helps us to think about what we already know: if a person, or a nation, is not in agreement with God, they cannot walk together. God must separate Himself from people who have given their lives over to sin. In the world today we see a great abundance of evil, in all aspects of life. Now we hear the roar of the “lion” and we know that there must be a “prey”: humanity separated from God by sin. And while so many are falling before this sickness, we must recognize that the divine Hunter is behind it all. He will not take up his snare until He has finished His purpose in sending it upon the earth.

Now the “trumpet” is being blown in all of the world. The news reports and almost every conversation rotates around the latest that has been heard concerning the coronavirus. We see the result: the people are afraid, on a scale we have never seen before. A world separated from God cannot expect to receive His blessing, but only His judgment. If such a great “evil” has come to the world, we cannot say that God is not aware of it, or does not care, or is not in control. He has done it – with a purpose. How shall we respond?

### **Our Response**

The most important question in a worldwide crisis is not so much “what is God doing” but “what am I going to do?” God is working out His plan, and we have the promise that *“all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose”* (Romans 8:28). This promise is available to all people, because all of us can choose to love God and respond to His call. What is important is that we respond to what God is doing and learn what He wants to teach us. One man in the Bible who learned much through affliction was David (2 Samuel 24). When David, in his pride, disobeyed God and counted how big his army was, God sent a plague as judgment. But David responded well: *“And David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people. And David said unto the LORD, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech thee, O LORD, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly”* (2 Samuel 24:10). And although the Scriptures reveal that God originally wanted to send the sickness to punish the sin of all the people, David only thought of himself, saying, *“I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these*

*sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father's house"* (vs. 17). Afterwards, he built an altar and worshiped God.

We should follow David's example in the present crisis; not blaming others, but rather examining our own lives. In one of his psalms, David said that his physical affliction continued until he confessed his sin (Psalm 32:3-5) and in another said "*There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin*" (Psalm 38:3). When some of the believers in Corinth fell sick, Paul wrote that it was because of disobedience to God, adding, "*For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world*" (1 Corinthians 11:31-32).

At the same time we must not forget that the Bible also teaches that we often suffer due to the sins of others, when we are innocent. The people who were carried away into captivity in the invasion mentioned in Jeremiah 25 were not taken because of their own sin. The nation was judged for its sin in that many lost their liberty, their possessions, or their lives. But God said clearly to those who were taken away that it was for their own good:

*I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good. For I will set mine eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them again to this land: and I will build them, and not pull them down; and I will plant them, and not pluck them up. And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart. (Jeremiah 24:5-7)*

So then, how should we respond? Perhaps there is nothing we can do in the natural realm to stop the virus, but the Bible commands, "*Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much*" (James 5:16). God promises to hear the prayer of the one who recognizes "the plague of his own heart" (1 Kings 8:38). And we see the principle in the Bible that to oppose sin and seek the justice of God can stop a plague (Psalm 106:30). Sadly, when a person receives the consequences of his sin, he often turns around and blames God (Proverbs 19:3). In the time of the end, many of those suffering the judgment of God will curse Him instead of repenting (Revelation 16:9). While we cannot control the response of others, we can examine our own hearts and our own actions.

### **In the Hands of God**

The words of David in 2 Samuel 24:14 are very appropriate for us today: "*I am in a great strait: let us fall now into the hand of the LORD; for his mercies are great: and let me not fall into the hand of man.*" Thanks be to God that we are in His hands, not depending upon the mercies of some man. However, to be in the hands of God can mean being under His judgment (Exodus 9:3; 1 Samuel 5:6), or enjoying His blessing and protection (Ezra 7:6,28). It all depends on if we are in a good relationship with Him or not.

God is working in the world today, and in His wisdom He often sees that what is most needed for our spiritual good is physical suffering. Although God wants us to enjoy natural life, His priority is our soul, which is eternal. In times of worldwide suffering we cannot expect that only evil people suffer and that we who are right with God would be invincible. Sin always brings consequences, and usually innocent people around the sinner suffer as well. We must trust that God will bring about justice in the end, although we may not see it during our time on earth. The Bible says, "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished" (2 Peter 2:9), and gives the example of Lot. When God was going to judge the evil city of Sodom, He sent His angels to take out Lot and his family to a safe place. However, "*others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins;*

*being destitute, afflicted, tormented*” (Hebrews 11:36-37) and where taken by angels directly to Heaven.

We must believe that God is in control, and is caring for His people. The unbelievers of the world will no doubt declare that Christians are not any safer than them. It is as when the representative of the king of Assyria said, “*Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered at all his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria?*” (2 Kings 18:33). But God delivered His people from Assyria, showing that He is indeed more powerful than all the false gods of the world. And today God will deliver us, if not by escaping the sickness, in gaining the eternal victory when we go to be with Him.

Therefore, let us pray: “*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy name. Thy kingdom come, **Thy will be done**, on earth, as it is in heaven.*”