



I'll make you a bet that I can summarize your last week in a mere fifteen seconds. [Watch this.](#) Let's jump right into this topic. You may have seen lots of Bible verses on Facebook or read some articles from a Christian perspective. There are lots of helpful resources available but this morning I want to address this topic as your pastor from the Bible. And I'm going to give you a lot of Bible this morning.

Here's the four FAQs so you can see where we are headed this morning.

1. Why is this happening?
2. What's going to happen in the next few weeks and months?
3. Would God send a sickness like Coronavirus?
4. Is this virus a judgment from God?

1. Why is this happening?

This is almost always our first question when strange or difficult circumstances arise. And this virus thing is both strange and difficult. When we ask the why question I think we are actually asking a deeper question—who is in control? Is this a random event or is God still on the throne today and every day? That's the natural question to ask but it's also the right question to be asking. It's a question about the sovereignty of God. Your level of panic, stress and anxiety will be in direct proportion to your belief in God's sovereignty over all people and over all circumstances.

One of my favorite statements on God's sovereignty in the entire Bible comes from a brand new convert. We love testimonies, don't we, and even better to hear from them right after they got saved. Let's listen to one man's testimony. You may have heard of him. His name is Nebuchadnezzar.

Something bad happened to this man. Before he tells us the bad stuff, you can already tell that he is a changed man. Prior to this, he was a narcissistic, bloodthirsty dictator.

King Nebuchadnezzar to all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you! ²It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for me.

³How great are his signs,

how mighty his wonders!

His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,

and his dominion endures from generation to generation.

Notice that he addressed this to “all people, nations and languages.” Why is that important? It’s important because it is missional language. Nebuchadnezzar wants the whole world to know the glory and power of the one true God.

Nebuchadnezzar’s description is exactly what heaven is going to look like.

⁹ After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

We have this marvelous promise that the whole world will be reached with the good news of Jesus Christ. Not every last person in the world but people from every tribe, nation, people and language. Nebuchadnezzar is worshipping in exactly the same way that you and I will do when we stand in the presence of Jesus. And Nebuchadnezzar’s worship grew out of incredible pain and suffering. When life was easy, he was filled with pride. It was only through suffering that he was able to humble himself and see God as he really is. Moreover, this highlights God’s ultimate purpose in all of human history, regardless whether we are suffering at the moment or not—that all nations, tribes, peoples and languages would worship him. Here we have a formerly pagan king testifying to God’s ultimate purpose.

Next Nebuchadnezzar filled in the details. Most of us know this story, but it’s good to be reminded of it.

²⁹ At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, ³⁰ and the king answered and said, “Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?” ³¹ While the words were still in the king’s mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, “O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, ³² and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.” ³³ Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles’ feathers, and his nails were like birds’ claws.

There’s the immense suffering. Seven periods of this. Was it seven years? I’m not sure but it probably did last that long, at least long enough for his hair grew like eagle’s feathers and his

nails like bird's claws. All throughout the Bible God continuously used pain and suffering for his good purposes. And he's doing that today, isn't he? Thankfully for most of us the suffering hasn't begun. And prayerfully it won't get that bad. But we just don't know yet, do we?

Here's the final part of his testimony.

³⁴ At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever,
for his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
and his kingdom endures from generation to generation;
³⁵ all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,
and he does according to his will among the host of heaven
and among the inhabitants of the earth;
and none can stay his hand
or say to him, "What have you done?"

This incredibly prideful man who had demanded that his entire kingdom bow down and worship him got radically saved. And the subject that captured his mind and heart the most was God's total, radical and complete sovereignty over everyone and over everything.

Do you believe that? Who is God to you? He either has control over toilet paper, viruses and the global economy or he doesn't. There is no middle ground. He is not wringing his hands wishing he could intervene and just do something...anything. The higher your level of anxiety and fear, the less your belief in God's sovereign power and purposes. Which brings us to the second question.

2. What's going to happen in the next few weeks and months?

Here's another testimony from a former unbeliever. Wouldn't you think that Jesus' brothers would be the first to believe in him? We know that wasn't the case, but one of his brothers did come to believe that his brother was the Messiah and wrote these timely words.

¹³ Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"—¹⁴ yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. ¹⁵ Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." ¹⁶ As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. (James 4:13-16)

How would James answer this second question? What's going to happen in the next weeks or months? It's pretty obvious, isn't it? we don't even know what tomorrow will bring, let alone what will happen weeks or months from now. Nebuchadnezzar's testimony shows us how to believe in God's sovereignty and James teaches us how to submit to God's sovereignty. It's hard to imagine a more perfect answer to the Coronavirus situation. Things are changing on a daily basis. There are some hard facts but there are mostly a bunch of gigantic question marks. I mean, we all know that this is unprecedented in our lifetimes.

Ryan texted me on Thursday and wrote, “This will be a story I tell my kids one day.” He’s absolutely right. But at least by the time he tells his own kids, we will know how this craziness will all turn out. But for now, we literally do not know what tomorrow will bring. That is true all of the time but we are feeling it more intensely right now. Are you OK with this fact? Are you OK saying, “If the Lord wills we will do this or that?” about thirty years ago I began to train myself to regularly say, “Lord willing” when I am making plans. I know this can be something we just say but I really try to mean it every time I say it. God is sovereign and this is how we submit ourselves to his sovereign plan.

Do not mistake this for fatalism. We are still responsible for doing “this or that.” We are still responsible for washing our hands and obeying the government and teaching our children not to panic and learn how to trust God in this. We still make plans and decisions about tomorrow and next week and next month, but we actively submit all of it to the Lord’s will. Even the plan to hold church this morning fits here. The elders had to make a decision but the final decision is not up to us, is it? It never is. It’s like taking in breaths of trust. Teach yourself to say these words which will start to teach you to believe these words.

3. Would God send a sickness like Coronavirus?

Last Sunday I played the audio clip from Bill Johnson who said, “I refuse to create a theology that allows for sickness.” It is very common for people in the prosperity theology to say things like this. One of these guys tried to heal everyone with Coronavirus through their TV sets. Trust me when I say it was creepy looking. We know that God can use things like viral pandemics to accomplish his sovereign will, but would he actually cause this to happen? In other words, does he make use of the suffering or does he directly and purposely send the suffering to us?

You should know that all suffering in this life is a direct result of the Fall. In Romans Paul said that all creation is groaning under the weight of sin. Creation was corrupted by the sin of mankind which is why we have viruses that can kill us. They are not God’s fault, but he does make liberal use of such things. Here is a quick list of Scriptures.

Job 2:6

And the Lord said to Satan, “Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life.”

2 Chronicles 21

“Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father, ‘Because you...have walked in the way of the kings of Israel and have enticed Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem into whoredom... behold, the LORD will bring a great plague on your people, your children, your wives, and all your possessions.’”

Numbers 14:37

³⁷ the men who brought up a bad report of the land—died by plague before the LORD.

Numbers 16

⁴⁶ And Moses said to Aaron, “Take your censer, and put fire on it from off the altar and lay incense on it and carry it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them, for wrath has gone out from the LORD; the plague has begun.”

Numbers 25

⁹ Nevertheless, those who died by the plague were twenty-four thousand.

Deuteronomy 32

²¹ They have made me jealous with what is no god;
they have provoked me to anger with their idols.

²³ “And I will heap disasters upon them;

I will spend my arrows on them;

²⁴ they shall be wasted with hunger,

and devoured by plague

and poisonous pestilence;

I will send the teeth of beasts against them,

with the venom of things that crawl in the dust.

Zechariah 14

¹² And this shall be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the peoples that wage war against Jerusalem: their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths. ¹³ And on that day a great panic from the LORD shall fall on them, so that each will seize the hand of another.

OK, maybe you can agree that God did this sort of thing in the Old Testament, but he doesn't operate that way anymore. Thankfully, Jesus miracles of healing were a sign that he was God in the flesh.

Luke 7

²¹ In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight. ²² And he answered them, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them.

God healed in the Old Testament. God healed in the New Testament and he heals today. It is simply who he is. But unfortunately, he is not done sending us pandemics. Look how bad this one will be.

Revelation 9:18

By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulfur coming out of their mouths.

In addition to the horrible suffering that will occur, notice the word ‘panic’. Where will it come from? It's a “great panic from the Lord.” Zechariah used the exact same phrase, which is not surprising because they are both describing the same future acts of judgment. Which leads to our final question.

4. Is this virus a judgment from God?

Every time there is some sort of disaster you will hear some preacher make the news because he said that God sent this disaster as a judgment upon us. Many said that AIDS was a judgment on gay men. Are any of them correct? Whenever this question arises, I go straight to Luke chapter 13.

There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ² And he answered them, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? ³ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. ⁴ Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? ⁵ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” (Luke 13:1-5)

Jesus’ answer here is elegant and powerful. Let’s summarize this into a few principles.

1. All disasters/tragedies/deaths are due to sin.

The Bible is clear that that earthquakes, hurricanes, viruses and cancer are all due to sin’s marring effect upon all of creation. The world does not have an answer for things like a coronavirus, let alone something much worse. Christians alone have the answer to suffering and death.

2. Most deaths are not a specific judgment on that individual.

Jesus is clear on this point. Unless God specifically tells you otherwise, we must not connect specific sin to a specific judgment. I have no idea if the coronavirus is a judgment or not. But let me remind you what I said in my series on Godly discipline. God constantly uses people and circumstances to reveal what’s in our heart so that we can be transformed by his truth. He is doing this this trillions of times every day to accomplish his purposes. Look what he did for Nebuchadnezzar. God knew that nothing short of this display of power would convince the king. Suffering was an act of mercy to him.

I know you know this truth because we all sang about it this morning.

When through fiery trials
thy pathway shall lie
My grace all-sufficient shall be thy supply
The flames shall not hurt thee I only design
Thy dross to consume and
thy gold to refine

3. For the unbeliever—disasters are a compassionate warning to repent.

As believers we want Jesus to return as soon as possible, but we must not forget that every day he delays his coming is one more opportunity to repent. The tribulation will be an unending series of what the world calls tragedies and what the Bible calls judgments. Even these will be compassionate warnings to repent. If they won’t listen during times of prosperity, maybe they will listen in times of tragedy and loss. As tragic as viruses and plagues are, there is something far worse—an eternal judgment. Don’t try to explain this in your own words, but rather use

Jesus' words. The next time this question comes up in a conversation, point people to Luke 13. Most people think Jesus was a good man and they respect his teaching. Let Jesus do the talking for you.

4. If we demand to be treated fairly, we will lose our only hope—the cross. Suffering always raises two questions—is God in control and does he care? If we complain and say this isn't fair, what we are demanding at that point is to be treated fairly, but by our own twisted idea of what fairness actually is. The single greatest act of injustice in human history happened when the sinless God-man died on the cross to take our sins upon him. How was that fair to him? It wasn't fair and when we demand fairness we lose the cross, our only hope in this life and the life to come.

5. For the believer—disasters are opportunities for compassion and truth-telling. Christians do not have a corner on the market in compassion. The world can also dole out enormous amounts of compassion. As believers we need to be at least as compassionate as the rest of the world. But do you know what can undo an enormous amount of compassion? When a Christian opens their mouth and claims that those who suffered and died from this virus deserved it. One or two comments like that can smear all the good that has been done in the name of Christ. Don't speak words of judgment, but do speak words of truth. Don't be afraid to point them to Jesus' warning in this chapter. Tell them it is not your warning, but rather Jesus' warning you want them to hear. Compassion is helping your neighbor, but compassion is also warning them of a final judgment. We need to do both of these as good as we can, to the glory of God.

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