

Moving from Fear to Faith Amidst COVID-19

March 15, 2020

It has been quite a week in the world and in our community. We have seen the spread of the coronavirus labelled COVID 19. As of yesterday, there were 162 654 confirmed cases worldwide. Over 76000 have already recovered. Over 5000 people have died. Since over 5000 have died, and this means tens of thousands are newly bereaved and in sorrow.

It came to our country. Then it came to our province; our city and now our community. Let me briefly review this week. On Monday, two schools in St Albert sent letters home to notify families of the potential exposure of one of their students to the virus.

The same day, the price of oil plummeted about 25 percent. Saudi Arabia signaled an increase production of Oil. Russia refused to back cuts. This occurred despite a depressed global demand for oil. So oil prices crashed to their worst one day plunge since 1991. This affected stock markets. The Standard and Poor 500 index dropped more than 7 percent on Monday and had its worst day since the 2008 financial crisis. Then on Thursday, the stock markets had their worst day since the 1987 crash. This happened despite the US Government's injection of 1.5 trillion dollars into the market. With all the cancellations, slow downs and no business, countless jobs are threatened.

The spread of the virus threatens the world's economy. People are scrambling to get home from overseas. The Alberta medical officer all gatherings over 250 people. All major sports leagues have cancelled games or suspended their season. Entire countries in Europe, over 60 million people are on a sort of lockdown or quarantine in an attempt to contain the virus. In our own community, many of you have seen empty grocery shelves. In our own church, we are taking the precautions we can to try to limit the virus' spread. We've pooled the hand sanitizer we had and spread it around the building to prevent the spread of infection. The Leadership meets on Tuesday to review other steps we may need to take to do our due diligence. No one knows the direction or outcome of this virus. We're all in this together for awhile.

So in light of all this, how have you responded to the news and events of this past week? Some of you may have little concern. You work in health facilities that deal with outbreaks regularly. Some of us might have medium concern. We've never experienced empty grocery shelves before and wonder what this might mean. Some might have a lot of concern because of age or compromised immune system. Many of us may be afraid.

So in light of all this, I felt led to pause the Isaiah series for a week to directly address this. I aim today to help us move from fear to faith in God amidst the COVID-19 outbreak. I want to give us some biblical principles for a healthy perspective

for however long we have to deal with it. Then we will look at some basic actions that we can take to help one another through this time.

4 Biblical Principles to help us keep perspective during COVID-19

One - The Lord is Sovereign over this virus and all other events in the world. God's sovereignty means He rules over everything – the universe; our world; all living creatures in the world and all events. Several Scriptures teach this principle. Remember Isaiah 40:21-23? "Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a curtain and spreads them like a tent to dwell in. He brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness." Remember He is Creator and Lord over the stars; vs. 25-26.

So the Lord God sovereignly rules over all things. He is not a detached observer who watches world events unfold and then decides when to get involved. Nor is He surprised by anything or reactive. He governs all and has sovereignty even over disasters and the spread of disease. He oversees, limits, guides and governs. This includes all the sinful and satanic dimensions of such disasters and diseases. This is good news for us because we gain assurance that the world is not beyond God's control.

One commentator puts it like this. "Jesus has all knowledge and all authority over the natural and supernatural forces of the world. He knows exactly where the virus started and where it's going next. He has complete power to restrain it or not. And that is what's happening. Neither sin, nor Satan, nor sickness nor sabotage is stronger than Jesus. He's never backed into a corner; he is never forced to tolerate what he does not will." As Psalm 33:11 says "The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations."¹ So God is in control. But that does not mean He's some universal ruler who sits in His palace, far removed from the people on earth.

Two – God is with us and a present help in trouble. Psalm 46:1-2a – God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear though the earth gives way." I preached on this passage back on September 1 entitled "An ever present help in trouble." We learned that God is always present in the midst of our trouble. He is present in the midst of His people. So we don't have to doubt or wonder if God knows what we face. We don't have to

¹ John Piper, <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/how-do-we-make-sense-of-the-coronavirus> Accessed March 10, 2020.

wonder if He cares. He is present and He does help. Over and over throughout the Bible, we see God command His people not to fear because He is with them. Joshua 1:9 – Do not be frightened and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. Isaiah 41:10 – Fear not for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” Hebrews 13:5-6 – God has said “Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.” So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid, what can man do to me?”

So God is sovereign and in control. God is with us – a very present help in trouble.

Three – Sickness is part of living in a fallen world. Now I don’t think this is news to anyone here. We all see and live with various sicknesses. But when we see an outbreak of a virus, it can seem more threatening and invasive. Yet we need to step back and realize this is part of history and life in a fallen world. Romans 8:20-23 speaks to this. “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit groan inwardly, as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”

When sin entered the world it affected humanity and creation. Part of sin’s devastating impact hit the created order and our physical bodies. All would experience corruption and futility. All would die. That is the consequence of sin. “God didn’t create a world with disease, disaster and death in it. The chaotic forces of evil were released when the human race turned from God and the fabric of the world began to unravel.”² (Genesis 3:17-19). Though many of us are saved from spiritual death we still face physical death. But we live with hope because when Christ returns, sin will be banished once and for all. And death will go with it. We will live in a new creation that no longer groans for relief from futility. We will live in resurrection bodies that will imperishable – they won’t die; They will be glorious; powerful and somehow spiritual yet recognizable.

This point helps us realize that this virus is certainly unusual and serious in our time. But it is not unusual in a fallen world. It also points us to the one who can deal with the ultimate cause of this virus – sin and the fallen world.

² Tim Keller, *God’s Wisdom for Navigating Life*, (Viking, New York, 2017), 72.

There's only one person who can deal with that and who has dealt with that – Jesus Christ. So we can attempt to contain the virus and work towards a treatment. We must engage in those precautions. But only Christ can actually deal with it's root cause.

Four – Outbreaks and natural disasters test the true objects of our faith. Outbreaks reveal whom or for what we really trust for hope and comfort in life. **(Psalm 115:1-11)**

Listen to Psalm 115:1-11.

Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory,
for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!

²Why should the nations say,
“Where is their God?”

³Our God is in the heavens;
he does all that he pleases.

⁴Their idols are silver and gold,
the work of human hands.

⁵They have mouths, but do not speak;
eyes, but do not see.

⁶They have ears, but do not hear;
noses, but do not smell.

⁷They have hands, but do not feel;
feet, but do not walk;
and they do not make a sound in their throat.

⁸Those who make them become like them;
so do all who trust in them.

⁹O Israel,¹ trust in the LORD!
He is their help and their shield.

¹⁰O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD!
He is their help and their shield.

¹¹You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD!
He is their help and their shield.

Now I would say most of the people watching today say they trust the Lord for their lives. I don't doubt that claim. But actions speak louder than words. Or in the case of this past week, emotions may speak louder than words. So why on earth did people go and clear out the shelves of toilet paper? Could it be that such people put more faith in their own ability to stockpile something than in God's ability to provide?

Or maybe such behavior reveals that some put their faith in fully stocked grocery stores, or a smoothly functioning economic system. Our systems is a consumer-based economy. But for such an economy to work there have to be goods available to consume. So if the economy lacks such goods, then stockpiling somehow restores that faith at least for those who have the goods.

Or maybe our faith is in a healthy stock market or oil prices. Then the market has its worst day since 1987 on Thursday. Suddenly, our faith shakes because the market shakes. Or maybe our faith and purpose comes from following a professional sports team or the Olympics. So we get joy and purpose out of this. But all sports leagues have paused and may cancel their season. Suddenly what seemed so important is reduced to just one of many events subject to government cancellation.

Or maybe we place our faith in freedom to travel. But the government limits travel. So we lose our outlet.

When a natural disaster hits or worldwide plague spreads, it can expose our idols. So the question arises – who have we been trusting? If it's not the Lord, we need to repent of minimizing His worth and putting more faith in fully stocked grocery stores; healthy economies; stable prices and unrestrained freedom to pursue entertainment.

God is in control and reigns over all that's happening. God is with us and is a very present help in trouble. Sickness and this virus are part of living in a fallen world. Such times test who or what we truly put our faith in.

How will we respond?

- 1) **Do not fear. The Lord is in control.** Remind one another of this. Remind your kids of this. God is watching over us and is present with us through this.
- 2) **Take necessary precautions.** Sadly, we've heard of some Christian teachers saying things like "if you're a Christian, God will protect you from the virus because this is a judgment from God." I don't think we have biblical warrant to make such a conclusion. So take the precautions. God has put His truth and wisdom into a variety of people. Take the best wisdom and act on it.
- 3) **Evaluate who or what you put your trust in other than God.** If God reveals something to you, then repent of that. Then realign to Him.
- 4) **Together, let us be a beacon of hope and calm during this epidemic.** Because of our faith is in the Lord. Let Him be your rock and from His stability and give hope to others.