

Fear, Prayer and the Coronavirus

Ecclesiastes 1:9-11

Introduction: We live in unprecedented times. Or so we are told (Eccl. 1:9). The Coronavirus has caused most of the world to cower in their homes. People are so fearful that they won't even venture to attend church services. A Brother in Christ wrote, "If we attempt to physically meet at this time, we are being reckless and show a lack of love for the brethren. In the congregation that I attend in Temple Terrace, Florida, we have multiple brethren that have been diagnosed with the Coronavirus and are very ill. We have many elderly folks here that it likely would kill if they were exposed."

Pause and think with me for a moment, didn't anyone in Temple Terrace pray for the Lord's protection? Why are the Lord's people being stricken with the Coronavirus? My bible says, "*Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them*" (Mk. 11:24). Assuming a lack of belief is not the problem with their unanswered prayers, why are Christians anywhere getting sick with the coronavirus? We have prayed asking the Lord to spare Christians everywhere that the world might see whom the Lord blesses. Yet, Christians still get sick.

I. It is an age old question concerning the operation of God.

A. Jesus' disciples thought people got sick because of their sins (Jn. 9:1-3).

1. Jesus says it had nothing to do with their sins.

2. This blind man was born this way so that God's working may be revealed in him by Jesus curing his blindness.

3. The Pharisees interrogated the blind man to find out how he gained sight. They were offended by the answer (Jn. 9:34). They thought the blind man was born in sin.

B. Galileans were massacred by Pilate while they were making sacrifices to God. The Jews supposed they must have been some evil people for that to happen to them (Lk. 13:1-3).

1. Jesus does not deny their sins, but He says that is not the reason they perished.

2. Anyone who fails to repent will likewise perish (i.e. in hell).

C. Jesus sites another incident where 18 people perished at the tower of Siloam (Lk. 13:4-5).

1. Do we conclude that they were the worst 18 people in Jerusalem?

2. Jesus says they were not the worst sinners but without repentance, they will likewise perish (i.e. in hell).

D. The idea that people get sick as punishment for their sins is not how God operates in this world.

II. Does God operate in the world?

A. The Lord is in control of the world (Col. 1:16-17).

1. "In Him all things consist." He allows all things to stand, to exist, to function.

2. Notice even thrones, dominions, principalities and powers were all created by Him and for Him!

3. Whether we can see it or not, Christ created everything and permits everything to consist.

B. God operates within the nations of the world. When Daniel rebuked King Nebuchadnezzar for his arrogance, the King thought he controlled the world. He thought no one wielded more power than himself. In Daniel's proclamation of the King's coming punishment, He reveals something remarkably interesting about the operation of God (Dan. 4:25-26).

1. Heaven rules in the kingdoms of men!

2. Not only does He allow nations to exist, He rules them as well.

C. Christ also serves as the head of His Church (Eph. 5:23-24). The Church is also a kingdom that Christ rules.

III. How might God operate in this world?

A. God has everything at His disposal to rule the world. "*When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or **send pestilence** among My people, if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land*" (2 Chron. 7:13-14).

B. This is a recognition that God can correct this world as it pleases Him. Could God send a virus to correct the wickedness of a disobedient world? If the people of that wicked world will not seek God despite the virus, is God obligated to heal the land?

C. Jeremiah spoke to a wicked nation in his time. "*Your own wickedness will correct you, and your backslidings will rebuke you. Know therefore and see that it is an evil and bitter thing that you have forsaken the LORD your God, and the fear of Me is **not** in you," says the Lord GOD of hosts*" (Jer. 2:19).

1. When we fail to fear (reverence or respect) God, we tend to backslide. Currently, the whole world fears a virus more than we do God.

2. Jeremiah says God will allow our own wickedness and backsliding to correct us. The whole world has forsaken God. Is God sending a message that we need to return to the bible, to His commands and to His message?

3. Jeremiah is implying that the very thing we fear more than God is the thing that will correct us. In this case, the world fears the virus more than the Lord so He will allow nature to take its course.

4. As Christians in a very wicked world, we are not exempt from God's anger. The righteous among the Israelites were taken captive by the Babylonians like Daniel. That is why it seems the Lord is not answering our prayers. Some Christians will get sick and some may die.

5. God could protect us from the virus, but He certainly will not answer our prayers if we show the same lack of fear for God as the world. There will be no protection from the virus we fear especially when we demonstrate the same lack of fear for God by missing services or using unauthorized means to meet over the internet as a substitution for assembling (Heb. 10:25; 1 Cor. 11: 18, 20).

D. God demands our acceptable service through reverence and godly fear (Heb. 12:28-29).

Conclusion: It is a tough lesson concerning the operation of God who has treated all men equally through the ages. Due to man's lack of fear for Him, He is just allowing nature to take its course to rebuke us. He can protect us, but we must put him first in our lives. *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength”* (Mk. 12:30). We need to repent so God can heal the land.