

Virus Attacks

This is a talk looking at how we can respond to coronavirus and choose faith not fear, hope not distress.

Towards the end of 2019 and into 2020, a major new worldwide virus called 'Coronavirus' or 'Covid-19' appeared on the world stage. The virus quickly spread outside of China and into the rest of the world bringing lockdowns of whole countries, affecting every area of life and challenging the whole world.

When we see these kinds of things happening, how should we respond as Christians and what does the Bible say?

Ask why has it happened

When Adam sinned, the entire world was affected. Sin entered human experience, and death was the result. And so death followed this sin, casting its shadow over all humanity, because all have sinned

Romans 5.12 (TPT)

When things happen, it's important to think about why something has happened. A preacher called Pastor Robert Morris (Gateway Church, Texas) said that when we see some of these things happening people ask, 'how could God have made such a messed up world' but that it is not God who messed up the world, it is man who messed up the world. These bad things happen because of evil, because we rejected a perfect God and decided that we should do things our way.

Here's the truth – the best way in life is God's way and when we don't go God's way, things don't go well. When we do, they do.

The good news is that God is only one shout, one prayer, one call away. And he will respond to our prayers and bring hope and help out of darkness and mess. If you don't know God, call out to him today.

When – people ask why this has happened, how can you react with God's love?

#Faith not fear

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

2 Timothy 1.7 (NKJV)

The first thing is that we can choose faith (to believe God and trust him) and reject fear. Through the whole Bible we see that God encourages us and helps us to choose faith and to resist fear, even when it means doing things anyway, even when we're afraid.

Trusting God is about believing that God is who he says he is (God of the universe!) and bigger than any event, disease, virus, war or anything else. It is about trusting that God is doing something and that we can rely on him. When things happen that are beyond us, it shows that we're not really in charge of the world – but that God really is!

One way we are different as Christians is that we have a hope – Jesus. One of the ways we can show God's truth is by showing this hope, love and help to others – especially in a time where they have no real hope. With God, we are never alone.

Think – how can you share faith not fear today?

Put God First and Pray

Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met.

Matthew 6.33 (Message)

The second thing is to put God first. Times of great crisis and trouble often mean people turn to God and cry out to him. Just think of a time when you or other people were in trouble and it made them pray and ask for God's help. This is a good time to do this!

In World War 2, one thing that history doesn't teach in schools (and isn't even mentioned in the movies 'The Darkest Hour' or 'Dunkirk, both released in 2017) is that the King called for a National Day of Prayer. That day of prayer was the reason that the war changed course. One thing that happened is that Hitler suddenly ordered his generals not to invade Britain. Other miracles also happened to enable Dunkirk and the rescue of around 350,000 troops.

During the Coronavirus pandemic, President Trump called for a National Day of Prayer on Sunday 15 March 2020. In the UK, all the main church leaders came together for a 7pm National Prayer time on Sunday 22 March 2020.

Prayer always changes things. Always. Even when we don't know how.

Any crisis is a time to pray, to put God in first place and to ask him to intervene in a powerful way. But more than that, we should put God first and pray every day – even when things are going well. That is a real lesson for each one of us.

God should always come – he deserves it and when we put him first, things work out better!

Speak out God's Promises

For the word of God is alive and active.

Hebrews 4.12 (NIV)

In the same way as we pray to God, we can speak out the promises God has given us in his Word. Unlike other religious books, the Bible is unique. It is alive and it is active!

In the song 'Waymaker' (Sinach), Leeland added a 'tag' at the end of the song that says, 'Even when I don't see it you're working, even when I don't feel it you're working, you never stop, you never stop working'.

That is true of the Word of God. It is always at work and God's word has tremendous power in ways we don't always see or understand. Many people turn to the Psalms in the Bible in times of crisis because the Psalms are about real life – struggles – but about God's answers.

If you want to start speaking out God's promises over your life and the life of others or even over nations, just find a Psalm (like Psalm 23, Psalm 46 and Psalm 91) and start personalising them and reading them out loud like prayers. Why not even learn some of these off by heart?

Think, when you meet others – can you share some of God's promises?

Good time to get right with God

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 I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

2 Chronicles 7.14 (NIV)

This Bible verse is in context of plagues, famine and trouble in the land. God reminded his people that trouble sometimes comes when God is forgotten about and pushed out. In these times there is an answer and it is when people turn back to God and away from doing what is evil. God always responds when we respond to him – just because he never moves away from us, it's us who walk away from him. When we turn back and walk towards him, we see his arms are open wide and he never stopped watching after us.

So in a time of trouble it often forces us to understand that God is our everything and that he should be and is first place in our lives. One person in Iraq who had experienced terrible persecution because of his faith said that at times like this you realise that God is all you need because God is all you have.

We Have A Present and Future Hope

He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever."

Revelation 21.4 (NLT)

"For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope."

Jeremiah 29.11 (NLT)

And remember that as Christians we have a hope and a future. God tells us this. Beyond even this life there is heaven and eternal life with Jesus – a place so perfect and beyond anything we can imagine! Maybe you can share this hope with other people too.

In the song 'Christ Be Magnified', Cory Asbury and Cody Carnes write that "death is just the doorway into resurrection life" and this is the truth that we carry with us at all times!

In places all around the world when trouble happens, people come together to pray and people find that the God they didn't believe in, is very real and present after all. During the Coronavirus outbreak, one Doctor in Italy spoke of how he and colleagues are coming together to pray, amazed they were previously atheists. They recognised that man can only do so much and that they needed God. One pastor who died had such peace as he read the Bible to others that the medical staff were changed. In one hospital in England, doctors and nursing staff came together to pray before the day. These stories have been repeated all over the world. God is the only hope.

Serving and Giving

...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many

Matthew 20.28 (NIV)

Jesus came to serve. He lived a life without any selfishness. He came on mission to help people find their way back to truth and life – God. As Christians, that's our purpose too – make the world a better place and point to Jesus as the reason.

When times are tough and things are bad, one thing we can do as Christians is to serve, give, help and invest in our own lives and the lives of other people.

Helping others is a God-thing to do and it also helps take our eyes off all the negativity to do something positive.

Giving our lives doesn't mean we have to die (!) it means that we spend our lives serving and helping other people, not just doing stuff for ourselves (that's good too – just don't make it life's main purpose!)

Here are some suggestions to do good. All of these should be done while keeping yourself and others safe – and obeying the law.

- Are there people you can help in your local community?
- Can you call or message people?
- Someone I know bought flowers and put them on doors around the neighbourhood.
- Our church gave leaflets out to people in the church to give to others in their neighbourhoods offering help.
- Keep buying things from local shops or their online service to support local businesses.
- Don't be greedy with shopping unless you want to give to others.
- Can you help your church with anything where you have skills?

- Can you support people at your church or in your community who have lost their jobs? Help them find something else or buy some shopping?
- Can you volunteer to help somewhere – especially if you're young and fit and healthy?
- Commit to pray protection, energy and health for people you know who are serving others (like NHS staff, doctors, police, delivery drivers, people working in grocery stores).
- Can you give a note to your local grocery store thanking them?
- How can you spread hope on social media?
- Can you learn some of the Bible? It's like feeding your soul !

Let's Pray Psalm 91 together

I dwell in the shelter of the Most High and rest in the shadow of Almighty God. I will say of the Lord 'He alone is my refuge and my place of safety. He is my God and I trust him.'

He will rescue me from every trap and protect me from deadly disease. He will cover me with his feathers and shelter me with his wings. His faithful promises are my armour and protection.

I will not be afraid of the disease that stalks in darkness nor the disaster that strikes at midday. Though a thousand may fall or ten thousand die around me, these evils will not touch me.

I make the Lord my refuge and my shelter. No evil will conquer me and no plague will come near my home. God will order his angels to protect me wherever I go. They will hold me up with their hands so I won't even hurt my foot on a stone. I will trample lions and cobras and crush fierce lions and serpents under my feet.

The Lord says he will rescue those who love him and will protect those who trust in his name. When I call on the Lord, he will answer. He will be with me in trouble and he will rescue and honour me. He will reward me with long life and give me his salvation.