



The Coronavirus – Is it a Message from God?

A White Paper by:
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Doug often says that he “backed into” the prayer movement. For almost two decades, he offered Bible Conferences, Family and Leadership teaching and training to local churches. Prayer, he soon discovered, was the critically missing element in both the life of the church and the personal daily life of the typical believer. For that reason, Alive Ministries refocused much of its attention to prayer training, offering Schools of Prayer and coaching in the area of prayer ministries.

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No one rejoices in the face of a possible pandemic. And many say we may be facing a global pandemic with the coronavirus. The fortunately rare occurrence of the tragedy we now face induces a solemnity into whole cultures. Suddenly, what really matters is brought to the forefront. Death and eternity become more than philosophical, theological musings. Soul searching escalates. People become more important than appointments and business. We stay close to home. We reflect.

Technically, a plague is bacterial – not a virus. But the term *plague* is commonly applied to widespread and often mysterious deaths – pandemics. They denote the occurrence of some disease that mystifies the experts, exacting a higher toll of human life above the norm, and geographically beyond the average impact area. Its footprint is larger, and its kick more deadly.

The coronavirus certainly seems to be in that category.

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A History of Global Killers

Whether viral or bacterial, the globe has seen, from time to time, some brutal killers, taking the lives of as many as half-a-billion people. These include the HIV/AIDS pandemic (2005-2012) that claimed 36 million lives. The Hong Kong Flu (1968) claimed a million lives, half in Hong Kong. Two million died in the Asian Flu (1956-1958), originating in China. Almost 70,000 died in the USA.

In the same decade (1910-1911), a cholera pandemic claimed almost a million lives. It originated and was confined primarily in India. Only eleven died in the USA. A half-century earlier (1852-1860), another million died with this epidemic, spreading from India, racing through Asia, south to Africa, and then Europe and on to North America. The Russian Flu (1889-1890) claimed a million lives as well.

The Bubonic Plague of Justinian claimed 25 million (541-542). It crippled the Byzantine Empire and made the port cities of the Mediterranean grow still. Twenty-five percent of the population of the region were killed. In Constantinople, at its height, the Plague claimed an estimated 5,000 people per day and killed 40% of the city's population.

The Antonine Plague (165 AD) resulted in a death toll of 5 million. The population of the world was estimated to be 200 million, no more than 250. That's a 2.5 percent death rate. The cause is still unknown. It affected Asia Minor, Egypt, Greece, and Italy. Some suggest that the Plague was actually Smallpox or Measles. No one knows. Some suggest that it first spread through the Roman Army, carried by them from some unknown quarter, back into the Empire's population. The Roman Army was decimated.

Perhaps the most legendary 'Plague' was the Black Death (1346-1353).

It was also called the Pestilence or the Great Plague. Properly, it was a Bubonic Plague. It went down in history as one of the most devastating **pandemics** of all time. It was not viral, but bacterial, pneumonic in nature. It was Europe's first major plague and its second pandemic. It is thought to have come from Central or Eastern Asia, traveling the Silk Road, and boarding the Merchant Ships that traversed the Mediterranean. It entered Europe via the Italian peninsula. It raged for almost seven years, claiming 75 million lives. Some estimates place the death toll at a staggering 200 million. The Bubonic Plague devastated global populations – Asia, Europe, and then Africa. Fleas, living on rats, and carried by global merchant ships were believed to be the cause. The global population was 450 million – and when the Plague was over, that population stood between 350-375 million. So many died or were incapacitated. Normal human life and function were not possible. The land lay fallow. Shortages followed. It took two centuries for the population to recover to the previous level.

20th Century Death Rates – War and Pestilence

As a result of World War I, an estimated 10 million died in the military. An additional 7 million civilians died. Twenty-one million were wounded, and 7.7 million were missing or imprisoned. World population in the era of World War I was 1.8 billion. The death rate in World War I was about 0.84 percent of the global population.

In 1940, when World War II started, the global population was 2.3 billion. Sixty-million people had died, perhaps as many as 80 million. In addition, 38-55 million civilians lost their lives. Somewhere between 13-20 million died from war-related disease or famine. World War II claimed 2.87 percent of the population.

Between these two great episodes, in the era of World War I, in 1918, just over a hundred years ago, twenty million, and some estimate fifty million people, died over a two-year period of raging influenza. This is as many as were claimed by the World War. An estimated 27 percent of the population was infected with this virulent and highly contagious type of flu. The mortality rate was ten to twenty percent. Twenty-five million died over a 25 week period – a million a week. Previous strains of influenza had claimed the children and the elderly. The 1918 version struck down healthy and hardy young adults and seemed kinder to children and seniors.

The coronavirus virus has impacted the world. Outbound passenger airplanes have returned to their departure cities. And international flights inbound to the USA are being routed through 13 cities for enhanced screening, creating six-hour waiting lines. Global barriers are rising to attempt to contain the virus in places where no restrictions previously existed or had been erased. Trains, planes, and public areas are being relentlessly cleansed. Cruises have been canceled, as have some intercontinental flights. Quarantines are common.

Major sports events have been canceled along with major conferences. Switzerland has banned meetings of more than a hundred humans, as have some states here in the US – and such bans may proliferate. Churches have canceled services or are offering multiple services for small groups. Some are home-churching or holding video services. School districts have shut down due to teachers found to be infected. Colleges have extended their spring break and announced that classes will proceed on-line. Companies are allowing employees to work from their homes. States and cities are scrambling for testing kits. A great concern is the spread of the virus among a now substantial homeless population, one that cannot self-quarantine and has limited access to hand cleaning solutions.

Fear is common. But, that should not be so among believers!

Prayer and the Spread of the Disease

Yesterday, March 15, the President, Donald Trump, called a National Day of Prayer.

This was in the face of 154, 155 global cases. Half, 74,261, once infected, have now recovered. Sadly, 5,794 have died. Another approximately 6,000 of these are critical. Almost 80,000 of the cases have been in China, leading to the greatest number of deaths, 3,189. The USA stands 8th on the global list with almost 3000 cases. Sixty have died, and forty-nine have totally recovered – that number is changing daily. The USA is in the early stages of viral spread. The next 6-8 weeks are critical – with some speculation that hundreds of thousands could be infected and possibly die.

The good news is that new cases in China, as of yesterday, numbered only eleven, and in South Korea, only 107 – an indication that the epidemic may be leveling off in those nations. New cases in Italy numbered about 3500, and yesterday, 200 died. In Iran – if the figures can be believed – 1365 have died. In the USA, there were 252 new cases yesterday. Ten cases are deemed to be serious-critical. The greater concern is the potential impact on underdeveloped

and highly populated nations – India, Pakistan, and Southeast Asia, and of course, the continent of Africa.

The World Health Organization places the mortality rate of those with the virus at 3.4 percent. The mortality rate for the common flu is .1 percent – one in a thousand of those with the flu typically die. With the coronavirus, the number is 34 in every thousand. The time-line for those who die is 14 days from the first symptoms to death. And from infection to symptoms, the incubation period ranges from 2 to 14 days. Still, the Wuhan Novel Coronavirus mortality rate is lower than SARS (9.6%), or MERS (34%). The Swine Flu (0.02%) mortality rate was twice that of the common flu. See:

<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/#repro>;

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/summary>;

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>.¹

Each year, about one billion people are infected with flu - 9.3 million to 45 million cases occur in the U.S. each year. ***And each year, depending on the strain and the intensity of the flu, 291,000 to 646,000 die globally***, 12,000 to 61,000 in the U.S. per year. At first glance, the flu appears to be much more deadly than we commonly believe. But we know the flu – we have come to live with the flu. We expect an annual vaccination and medical treatment plan.

In contrast, the transmission rate of Coronavirus may be twice that of the flu, and further, too little is known about it. The virus is new, strange, and mysterious. There is no immunity in our bodies. There is no approved vaccine. And some suggest that the virus may be changing under our noses.

This is a mystery. The world has laughed at Vice President Pence for praying with the Coronavirus Team. And at the idea of prayer itself. It seems that prayer suggests that we humans are out of resources, that we cannot handle certain things – and of course, by the standards of the world, such moments are indications of weakness. Their absence, the world should know, is an indication of pride – too often, blind pride. It is the arrogant notion that we can handle everything; that we know or should know everything. We ‘are’ gods! And we need no reliance on the God of the Bible, the God of our history.

In times past, when a national calamity came – nations, godly nations, prayed! ***And not only did they pray, but they also repented.***

It is not enough to merely ask God to make this or that go away. There are moments in history when God acts to wake up a nation.

In *Revelation*, God acts to wake up the globe in the face of what will be a cosmic mistake, that of the nations gathered to resist Him and Christ, and His rightful rule. The error of following the Anti-Christ, his false-prophet. This global shift of governments away from the guidance of godly principles and away from the priestly-prophetic ministry of Jesus, to another faith and value system, is already occurring. This is a slippery slope! Nations, once

¹ The statistics and numbers here are arguably dynamic. Check these important websites for more accurate information and changes.

deeply committed to Christianity, are now superficially Christian, only tolerant of Christians and churches. Is this virus a megaphone, a warning from God, that we need His protection?

Professor Gabriel Leung, who led the fight against SARS, confessed to his deep concern, estimating that, in his opinion, as many as 60 percent of the global population might be ultimately infected, claiming 40-50 million lives. His prognostications seem to be at the extreme edge. But he is a leading global expert on epidemiology. And he is not alone in offering such a bleak picture

Wuhan – A Desperate City

Wuhan is the largest city in central China, with 11-15 million citizens. To contain this virus, China has finally shut down this huge city, the largest in the center of the nation. The airport has been shut down, and people are restricted from leaving or driving into the city. Schools, non-essential government offices, and most businesses have been closed. Such restrictions are growing.

Christians in the city are reporting challenges with the lack of public services such as electricity, water, etc. There are problems buying food, supplies, baby formula, etc. The situation is desperate.

The church has sent out a letter to the world Christian body asking for prayer.

Pause – and pray for Wuhan!

What is God Saying? – Does He Send Judgment?

We seem to want a nice, toothless God. But, that is an American fantasy. It is not the God of the Bible. That God plays tough. He disciplines. He confronts.

Repentance is the only appropriate response to judgment or even to what may appear to be judgment. And it is always an appropriate response when one senses that something could be a sovereign wake-up call.

This is a sovereign wakeup call.

America does not merely need to pray – America needs to repent! And so does China, and Italy, with the rest of Europe, and Iran – and on and on!

Let's talk plainly!

The term *plague* occurs 101 times in the NKJV of the Bible. In the NASB, it occurs 73 times. In the NIV, it appears 109 times. It is no small matter. We often lay hold of certain passages, and 'claim' them, considering ourselves, as believers, as exempt, as somehow above and beyond, outside the reach of global calamity. *"No evil shall befall you, Nor shall any plague come near your dwelling"* (Psa. 91:10).

We exempt ourselves, or we dismiss the idea of judgment altogether. In the clear face of Biblical passages, we cannot so quickly dismiss the connection between God and plagues. Nor can we race to claim a personal exemption based on our personal faith. In almost a quarter of the mentions of plague, God or Lord appears in the context – God openly identifies with it, often claiming explicit credit for it.

Plague in the Bible – When God Slaps a Human or a Nation

Genesis 12 declares, “The LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram’s wife.”

The root of the word for plague is nega, which means to strike.

Provoking God. One could say that the Lord *slapped* Pharaoh; He *struck* Pharaoh. Such a blow is gracious. It is short of death. It is a wake-up call, an abrupt confrontation with reality. It is a “Whoa, slow down, stop! I am trying to get your attention. You are hurting yourself, and I am trying to prevent that!” moment.

In Exodus 11, God spoke to Moses and declared, after nine ‘blows’ against Pharaoh, “*I will bring one plague more upon Pharaoh... Afterward, he will let you go...*” Such discipline was critical. No blows were intended – not in a perfect world. Pharaoh could have; he should have responded to the request to release the Hebrew slaves. But he resisted, and in doing so, the “strikes” of God commenced, and they did not stop until he obeyed.

Pleasing God. Israel was told that to avoid a plague, “*every man [should give] a ransom for his soul unto the LORD... that there be no plague among them.*” That is, they should perpetually acknowledge God. He was not to be taken for granted or assumed.

Perpetuating Peace with God. In Pharaoh’s case, obedience would stop or prevent the plague. In Israel’s case, gratitude would keep the plague away. And idolatry would cause it to return, “*the LORD plagued the people because they made the calf which Aaron made.*” And later, when lust overcame them, and dissatisfaction with a longing for Egypt overtook them. In the absence of any gratitude, “*the wrath of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD smote the people with a very great plague*” (Numbers 11:3).

False Prophets Impact. In Numbers 31:16, when the words of the false prophet Balaam led to trespass and national sin, “*there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD.*” Departing from God’s word, from His covenant, was coupled with a warning, “*Then the LORD will make your plagues wondrous, and the plagues of thy seed [children], even great plagues, and of long continuance, and sore sicknesses...*” (Dt. 28:59). The scripture then, surprisingly, anticipates new diseases and plagues, “*every sickness and every plague which is not written in the book of this law, them will the LORD bring upon you until you are destroyed*” (Dt. 28:61). Or until there is repentance and a return to God.

The Return

At some point, a once godly nation comes to its senses – hopefully. Notice,

*“the generation to come of your children who shall rise up after you, and the stranger [foreigner, immigrant] who shall come from a far land, shall say, when they see the **plagues** of that land and the sicknesses which the **LORD** hath laid upon it” (Dt. 29:22)... “all nations shall say, ‘Why hath the LORD done thus unto this land? What meaneth the heat of this great anger?’ Then men shall say, ‘Because they have forsaken the covenant of the LORD God of their fathers... for they went and served other gods and worshiped them, gods whom they knew not and whom He had not given unto them. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against this land, to bring upon it all the curses that are written in this book...”*

Again, the strike, the blow, the plague, or disaster – is the attempt of a father to awaken a son who is out of control and imploding. It is meant to be a redirecting shock. It is an act of grace. In the moment, any judgment looms so large, that the moon eclipses the Sun. We can't see eternity. We can't see the long game. We can't see immortal outcomes. God can, and does. And for our sake, he refuses, at times, to spare us pain, in order to save us the more significant and eternal torment of separation. He allows us a taste of judgment as a kind of vaccination, to spare us damnation. We lack the perspective that He has, and we fail to see that He is acting on our behalf.

The Call to Intercede

When the city of Jerusalem was about to be destroyed, David rushed to the eastern edge of the city, where he saw a destroyer angel with a sword drawn, ready to move into the city. He placed himself between the judgment and the city. This is the role of an intercessor.

Ornan, the owner of the threshing floor, itself a symbol of judgment, asked, *“Why has my lord the king come to his servant?”* And David said, *“To buy the threshing floor from you to build an altar unto the LORD, that the plague may be stayed from the people.”* And with prayer and repentance, the plague was stayed, and the city was spared.

Similarly, when a plague broke out in the camp of Israel, Moses said unto Aaron, the priest, the intercessor for the nation, *“Take a censer and put fire therein from the altar, and put on incense, and go quickly unto the congregation and make an atonement for them. For there has wrath gone out from the LORD; the plague has begun.”* (Numbers 16:46).

In both cases, intercessors – David and Aaron stood between the people and judgment. This is the role of the church. It is where Christ stands daily, in heaven, asking, as it were, for one more day, one more appeal to the lost, one more call to the cross, one more opportunity for the church to be obedient to the Great Commission. Staying of the judgment, however, does not stop it. It only extends the timeline. Judgment is inevitable. The cross both demands grace for those who come in repentance, and justice for the wrongful and innocent death of Jesus.

The purpose of Christ coming to the earth was to intercede. He is interceding now. He died interceding, praying for our forgiveness, reconciling sinners and a holy God. He continues to intercede, even now, in heaven. The role of Christians is to join him in his intercession.

He is praying now – for a global spiritual harvest. For his own church to rally and join him on mission. And he is calling us to pray for a broken, rebellious world. We are to bless, not pray for wrath, even if it is deserved. We are to join him, in prayer, in the face of impending judgment.

Such ideas only foster laughter among the unbelieving and even among many Christians. And yet, from the Scripture we learn,

“David built there an altar unto the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So the LORD was entreated . . .” that is, the terms of the treaty, the covenant, were again respected, *“and the plague was stayed from Israel.”* 2 Samuel 24:25.

Sorting Through Some Causal Issues

Beyond ‘plagues,’ there are in Biblical history, a number of disasters, calamities, military defeats. And the Bible is often clear about God’s role in these events. We race to extricate God, to declare Him innocent. We want to distance Him from the tragedy and offer an alibi for Him.

Instead, He often leaves His signature on calamity. Why?

Judgment On Sin and Sinners. We want to bifurcate – to allow judgment on sin and sinners, but create a Disneyland-like bubble for believers. Bad things happen to bad people, and good things happen to good people. This is more of an Old Testament idea than one rooted in the New Covenant. We struggle with why God continues to allow evil and suffering, particularly the suffering of the innocent. And we do so, not realizing that the clear separation of sin and righteousness, of vindication and judgment, is an eschatological issue. It demands the end of time as we know it, and the end of the earth as we know it. There are yet 2 billion who have not heard the gospel. The end will not come until all have heard, for God demands that every tongue and every tribe, and every nation, will be represented around His Throne. The greater tragedy is not temporal human suffering, but the potential for eternal separation from God.

The Unfinished Task. The great revival, the return of Jewish people to the Messiah, has not yet occurred. Out of 6.2 million Jews in Israel, there are only 30,000 Messianic believers in Israel. There are fewer yet, sons and daughters of Kedar, the descendants of Ishmael. Slowly, former Muslims and Jews are finding themselves together, worshipping Jesus, the Messiah. This, in its fullness, will be a wonder to the world.

The Wages of Sin. We live in a fallen world, where we are paid, in our various cultures, the wages of our sin. Sometimes that payment, to get our attention, seems to come all at once. Insurance companies have long used the language, “acts of God,” for lightning strikes and uncommon tragedies. Since God can be blamed, they reason, no human, including the insurance company, can be held liable. You can’t sue God. God does act judicially. The Bible conveys the idea of the ‘brim of iniquity,’ the concept that God keeps a running record of sin, and when the accumulation of sin has reached the point that it is at the ‘brim,’ it is poured out as consequences, as judgment. The only way to empty the cup of iniquity is repentance.

The Rejection of Mere Ritual. The ancients attempted to appease God, with rituals and sacrifices. In the end, the prophets eschewed sacrifice without an inner heart change. The sacrifices, without true repentance, without life change, meant nothing – and they were rejected. Similarly, today, empty, superficial worship in congregation after congregation, despite our happy music, does not move God or reconcile us with Him. Now, in the age of naturalism, God is not thought to be responsible for major hiccups to nations, or mishaps and misfortune in our lives, nor are we accountable to Him. Thanks to the deification of Modern Science, God, even the God of the Bible, is impotent! And we are, supposedly, gloriously liberated from religious superstition. That cynicism may seem overly ripe, but far too many believers act as if God is removed from daily life.

Earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, volcanic eruptions – happen. And there are scientific explanations for such things, as there are for viruses and pandemics. And man, medical science, is capable of finding a cure. We can save ourselves.

The Deep End of the Pool. That's why, in Revelation, the earth spins madly out of control. There are no solutions. There are no reasonable causes. There is no empowered human response. It is interesting to watch the know-it-all media grilling national leaders, "Why? When? How? Who?" The absence of omniscience, on the part of human leaders, is not acceptable to them. They should have known. They should have had a plan for the unseen – a perfect plan. They should have anticipated this or that.

God, at times, presses us up against things we cannot anticipate or manage on our own – and He waits to see if we will turn to Him or turn away, or even turn against Him. ***Viruses aren't manufactured in heaven. There are no bacteria there. Such things are the stuff of a sinful, fallen world.*** God, by His grace, sets perimeters on the capacity of sin and death to destroy all of humanity. Yet, by His nature, that of holiness and truth, he cannot merely wipe away all the invisible, spiritual waste that humanity creates daily – a toxin called sin. And sin has consequences – the consequences, we are reminded, are deadly.

The Clueless Intellectuals. Science has no place for sin. No place for its consequences. It cannot draw a line from sin to death. It cannot explain divine punishment. It has no place for such things. And yet, when tragedy strikes, whether it is a tsunami, a volcanic eruption, a hurricane, an earthquake – or a virus, we look beyond science. We look heavenward. We question God, "Why?" We tend to make Him culpable. He should have acted. He should have taken better care of us.

Confused Christians. We want protection from being burned while playing with fire, and sometimes while playing in fire. We want protection from sexually transmitted diseases while continuing to be promiscuous. We want to live at the base of tame volcanoes and on fault-lines that don't move. We want heaven, here and now, while we continue in sin. The proposition demands that God conform to our standards. That sin be ignored. That rebellion be declassified as such. We want a world where there are no consequences to sin. We seek to charm the serpent – and if he bites, his venom, by heaven's decree, should not be deadly.

It is, of course, insane! And that's Paul's message in Roman's 1. Unchecked sin ultimately drives a culture, a people to spiritual blindness. It inverts their values. What is good is now bad. What is supposed to be understood as evil is now celebrated. Senses are dulled. Personal identity is confused. We consort with spirits – and while they present as friendly companions and guides, they are treacherous. They are demonic.

Christians Suffer When the Planet Suffers

On December 26, 2004, the Indian Ocean Tsunami, claimed 200,000 lives. On that Sunday, many Christians, in churches, died praying. Disasters don't discriminate between believers and unbelievers, between the innocent and the wicked. Too often, children, even infants, and the elderly are victims of disasters. We blindly insist that God cannot be responsible for such actions. If He were, He would have, due to His omniscience, differentiated the believers. He should have exempted the innocent, the true Christians.

Stuck on a Planet Under Judgment

We are, however, stuck on a planet that is under judgment. It has been under such judgment since the fall of man, since the rebellion of Adam, and since man was evicted from the garden. We are sons of

Adam, slaves to sin, born in the house that was once under his dominion but is now under the influence of the dark, invisible, lord, Lucifer. That same world, our world, became so evil, so quickly, that one global judgment has already occurred in the form of a flood – so the Bible says. Christ came to liberate the house of Adam by offering redemption and freedom from the penalty, and from the grip of sin; to all those who pray for such salvation.

Another universal judgment is coming – but God has been slow to send it, and long on mercy. In between, there have been moments in which humanity has tasted the judgment due to the growing and unsettled debt of sin. It is not God's will to release a tsunami of judgment. He Himself came to the earth, in Jesus, the Christ, but we rejected Him. We crucified Him – all of us. God offered mercy and demonstrated love. He offered a peace treaty, a truce for all mankind – for individuals and nations. Far too few have responded to this treaty. Now, He is holding the dam of another flood of judgment back, the final judgment, restraining it, holding out for mercy, for a global turning back to Him. But mankind seems to want no such truce. It only wants a puppet god, who caters to self-interested whims.

The Problem of Pride

We madly and blindly, in the face of disasters – perhaps, even when they are a discipline from God - declare that we can pull ourselves up by own bootstraps, without God. Like an angry adolescent, we roll up our sleeves and affirm our self-sufficiency. We can figure this or that out. We can control the climate. We can conquer all diseases. We can rework the genome, tampering with the genetic code, and live forever – or at least, a handful of the most powerful and privileged can live forever. The remainder, according to some global speculators, will have to be executed, terminated – humanely (cynicism intended), of course, in order for the population to be controlled, on behalf of the rich and powerful. Who is the most merciful, really? – humans or God? Who do you really trust – the globalists or Jesus? Can we really live without God?

The Problem of Defending God

In the face of the Coronavirus, believers feel a need to defend God as loving. Unbelievers justify their resistance to God, as being unloving. But love is not the only continuum on which we evaluate God. In fact, it is not a useful metric. Using the metric of love tends to be far too self-interested. It measures God's goodness and usefulness only based on how that benefits us and those we love, our world. God is the keeper of my world – and His duty is to make my world nice and safe, sweet, and full of delicacies. This is not Biblical Christianity. It is self-as-god, and God, as a servant.

The continuum on which we must evaluate is truth – God's truth. Is He faithful to His revealed truth, and are we committed to it? The blame we continue to project toward God blindly fails to see our own culpability – our sin. We find no fault in ourselves. Enlightenment, which was the period in modern history, where we blew out the candles, shifted this argument from the classical position that believed in the goodness of God and yet, consequences for the immorality of humanity. It, therefore, asserted the sovereign right of God, as Creator and Redeemer, to judge nations and people. It saw the value of remedial judgments in the face of the ultimate coming judgment.

Such micro-judgments, though they appear severe to us, are nothing compared to eternal judgment. However, in the Enlightenment, daring humans, with their fists clenched heavenward, wooed humanity to challenge God, and reject the idea that He was fundamentally good. Values were inverted.

Mankind was declared good and noble – God, at least the God of the Bible, was determined to be flawed. Humanity was no longer on trial; God was on trial. Mortals were not accountable to heaven; heaven was accountable to mortals. The sinners were in charge. Soon, they simply began to banish the very idea of sin.

Disasters and God

Not every disaster in scripture is attributed to God. There are famines, for example, in the biblical narratives of Abram, driving him to migrate to Egypt. Of Joseph, thrusting him into national leadership. Of Naomi and David, and during the ministry of Elijah. The early Christian church also dealt with food shortages.

In every case, though God does not claim direct credit for all disasters, for national or global calamities, He does assert His sovereignty in the midst of any crisis.

The Scriptures do not attribute every disaster to God.

God created the world and assessed it was “*very good*” (Genesis 1). Did it have the potential from the beginning for earthquakes and volcanoes? Was the earth vulnerable to comets and meteors? To sunspots and radical weather? We can’t know – but we do know that man was given “dominion,” an endowment of authority, which he lost due to his own sin and in the resulting fall. We have no idea how far we have fallen and how profound redemption has lifted us! Humanity has experienced a devolution, not an evolution. We can only surmise, that on the other side of the fall, what was created as harmonious, was radically whacked out of tune when man rebelled against God. Dissonance seemed to reign. Conflicts became normal.

From the beginning, forthrightness was displaced by secrets and concealment, by covering and retreating. Giving life was to be beautiful and painless. After the fall, life-giving danced with death. Everything now, including nature, is groaning (Romans 8:19–22). Occasionally, nature’s groans become incredibly violent. It, too, is a prisoner of sin and death. That is a fact lost on modern science, and on many Christians. Sin fractured everything – the relationship with God, with one another as humans, with animals, and with nature.

The brokenness of the world, due to sin, is fixable only with accountability to and reconciliation with God. And nature, at times, is prophesying to us about its victimization due to our sin. She is no dummy. She is not blind. She is shouting at us, to repent, to get right with God. We are reminded, multiple times, that the land “vomits” out those who commit sin on it (Leviticus 18:28; Leviticus 18:25; Leviticus 20:22; Jeremiah 9:19; Ezekiel 36:13; Ezekiel 36:17; Romans 8:22). The land is alive; nature is not a completely passive player. It appears to be more sensitive to holiness than does its custodial creature, humanity.

We believe that sin is a private matter – and that it has no consequences. That is patently untrue. Sin is deadly, and in Genesis, it is nature, the earth, that seems to first feel the effects of sin. It still does. No sin is private or without consequences. Bad behavior, wicked attitudes, ungodly acts produce toxic waste – and that impacts the environment, and as a result, the earth, creation, groans.

We are not nearly as sensitive to the effects of our sin – and that is the real problem of pollution. It is not, as environmentalists suggest, air pollution, carbon emissions, global warming, natural resource

overuse, and similar things that threaten our planet most. These are genuine concerns, but the more significant problem, one we almost completely ignore, is the spiritual pollution of cultures and lands.

This is the unaddressed problem - our accumulating moral toxicity, our rebellion, and our resistance against God - all ignored. Like uncollected garbage, such sin grows in our streets, and it breeds disease. We are becoming increasingly diseased and at-risk, with lower levels of immunity.

Instead, while we ignore the spiritual and focus on the natural, we remain convinced that we can cure all physical diseases, build earthquake-proof houses, grow enough food for the planet, harness nature, and disease, and tame storms – we are gods.

All the while, we beam messages into outer space, at an extraordinary cost, hoping for an answer from some distant planet that will reveal that they planted life here eons ago, and we are the product of that life. This has, at its root, a fundamental rejection of God as Creator, as Father, as Redeemer. This is a form of prayer – from the otherwise skeptical scientific community, and it is sponsored by us. That, it seems to us, is better than believing that the God of the Bible created us, came to us, in Jesus, the Christ, and we crucified Him. And it releases us from the moral demands and parameters of the Bible. The Bible reveals the nature of its God – but we seem more willing to take a chance with an unknown species on another planet.

Such a far-fetched idea would be ludicrous, laughable if it were not true!

The Problem with God – Why Does He Allow the Coronavirus and the Like?

God, we believe, as both all-loving and all-powerful, should prevent bad things from happening – like this new virus. The conclusion is that, since He does not do that, He is not all-loving. The other option is that He is loving, but He is not powerful enough to stop human disasters.

God – Nice, but Powerless; Or, Sovereign, but Lacking Character. On the one hand, we have a nice, but impotent God. On the other, we have something worse, an all-powerful God that seems to lack character. But there is another line missing from the ideological diagram. It is the line of truth, leading from God's holiness. Love is not His dominant character – holiness is what defines Him. Every parent understands the tension between love and truth. We love our children, but at times, they need more than love – they need truth, difficult and uncomfortable truth. Love affirms us, as we are – but truth is not as kind, it trues us, at times bending us, mending us, piercing us, redirecting us. And that is more painful, but critical to our health. Our cultural demand for sweet-tasting medicine and painless dentistry also affects our faith perspectives. We want a pain-free life, roses without thorns, cherries without pits – and such a world does not and cannot exist.

God – His Protective Care. God cares and protects. However, if God acted every time we endangered ourselves, to prevent consequences, our world might be free of pain, but it would only be a Buddhist illusion. Our actions would be meaningless, and so would we. Miracles would become normative, and the miraculous exception would become the rule – until natural order was utterly disheveled. Rational expectations would be impossible. One could not measure the effects of his own behavior, making any behavior pointless. Motivation would evaporate. Personal responsibility would disappear without consequences.

Man – And Moral Consequences. Rather than raise the morality, it would plummet – with no consequences for bad behavior. The behavior, even if it was evil in its intent, would not inflict its intended pain. That seems like a good idea, but, in fact, it would only exacerbate the problem. The cause-effect dynamic would be muted. We would be trapped, with our own evil natures, helplessly and hopelessly in our own bodies. The absence of effects, of consequences, would not erase the sinister motives in our hearts. And thus, another illusion – that sinful actions have no consequences. The wages of every sin (Rom. 6:23), the Bible reminds us, is death – and in the case of Adam, it was to be death before the end of the day (Gen. 2:17). Sin is not only toxic, but it is also deadly – and it spreads, sadly, from one human to another. Whether the virus emerged from unhealthy animals in the Wuhan market or from biological warfare laboratories – we are seeing its consequences. And, as with Adam, the whole planet is threatened by one man or woman. We are humans, bound together. We are one family – a human family, with only one Savior.

A World With No Consequences for Behavior. A world where there are no predictable consequences would be a world without true morality or any cultivated moral responsibility. Even science would be impossible, as God would regularly interfere with nature – creating unpredictable patterns, all to prevent any suffering. Decisive thinking, analysis, discernment would disappear. We would be a shadow of ourselves. The world would not be recognizable with water in which one could not drown. This is an “over-realized eschatology.” There will be a world where there is no sickness and no death, but that is the world in which Christ reigns! That is after his return and enthronement.

Meanwhile, we live in between – the kingdom has come, but it has not fully come. We are healed – but not everyone is healed, and those who are not healed should not be maligned for less than stellar faith. We do see miracles – but they are miracles because they are exceptions. The order now is dominated by sin; the coming order is to be governed by holiness. A world with no skinned knees, no wounds, no bruises – is heaven! We can’t have heaven now, here, without reckoning with the God of heaven. Without repentance and turning away from sin.

Can We Trust God? Can we believe that God is trustworthy and loving in the face of disasters and the suffering they bring? What we call *faith* is often faith in faith – focused on some outcome. And usually, that is far too self-interested. Often, it is a request for exemption from something that causes us pain and mute our pleasure. It is natural to want a pain-free life and pleasure. But that is not God’s highest purpose for our lives. At times, faith is an attempt at manipulation, of God. That is the nature of religion. It is man attempting to be in charge – even of God. Yet faith in Scripture, as noble as such faith may be, can be less than faith in God! We need faith even when the scriptures do not seem to provide an answer; when a specific outcome, no matter how pure, is denied. This is faith at its deepest level – faith as trust. This does not preclude love – in fact, the Scripture is clear, “*Faith works by love!*” You cannot pray effectively to a God whose love for you is doubted. You will not trust if you do not sense, that such a God cares about you. When love is gone – faith and trust collapse.

God – And the Offer of Grace. God has already graciously restrained and limited the power of death. The cross holds back judgment. So when something like a pandemic threatens us, it seems so out of place in our Disneyland world. And we blame God, when we are the problem. We fail to see the accumulating toxic waste for which the planet has no disposal method but one. That place is found only at the cross – no longer a physical, but a virtual, spiritual place! Only through Christ can our sins be taken away. This was the purpose of hell – to serve as an incinerator of human sin. But, those who cling to their sin, in the face of a holy God, who is pleading, “Let go,” will eventually be swept away by their sin, into eternity. That’s when God stops us; He “slaps’ us! And he does that to slow us down and wake us up.

There is a difference between the righteous and the unrighteous. That difference is not the exemption from the human tragedy, but in our faith in the midst of such catastrophes. And, in where we go, once we cross the threshold of death.

Jesus and Disaster. Jesus was confronted with a disaster that had killed eighteen people. The question was about the relationship between their sin and the disaster. A structure, a tower, had accidentally collapsed on them. Were they wicked sinners? (Luke 13:1–5). His reply was emphatic, “No!” In that moment, rather than attempting to trace the tragedy to judgment, due to the sin of this group or perhaps, someone in the group. Rather than surmise, that those spared were more righteous, Jesus called on the group to examine themselves. Where did they stand with God?

When asked about a man born blind – was it due to his sin or that of his parents? Was it, in essence, a generational curse? (John 9:1–3). Jesus was again emphatic, rejecting the idea that the blindness was traceable to specific sin in either this man’s life or his genealogy. He cautioned, at that moment, about drawing a quick conclusion about human illness, and God’s judgment due to a particular sin or event.

Job is the ultimate example of how quickly we all draw conclusions about sin and personal tragedy (Job 1:8). One disaster follows another – until the once-wealthy man is broken and even his health fails. What God is after is the demonstration of Job’s faith, his resilience, before his friends, and, perhaps, shockingly, before Satan and his fallen angels, before the hosts of heaven. Would humanity, exemplified in this one man, turn on God when disaster came, unspeakable calamity, undeserved chaos? When friends and family accuse him of hiding sin – would he persevere? Would his faith endure? This man becomes a means by which God demonstrates to the dark Lord Lucifer the buoyancy of the faith of the righteous. What lesson is God desiring to display out of our lives, out of our faithfulness?

Of course, disasters can be divine discipline. God does judge sin, but usually, only after many calls for repentance and multiple warnings.

Living Out of Love and Not Out of the Law. In Christ, the basis of covenant shifted from law to love. Many Christians quote Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26 as promises from themselves. They live inside this categorical reward-punishment dynamic. They fail to read and interpret the Old Covenant/Testament through the lens of the New Covenant/Testament. This legal covenant that God confirmed with the nation, Israel, established covenantal grounds for the consequences of sin and disobedience, and the rewards for righteousness and obedience.

The general principle remains, but the context and substance are legal – and clearly related to the old covenant, not the new. These are crisp behavioral categories in which we control the outcomes. They are formula driven, do-this-for-that. Do-that-and-get-this! The New Covenant frees us, fortunately, from such consequences. We are now rewarded, not because we are good, but because God found goodness in a human called Jesus. And though there may be natural and even spiritual consequences for our behavior – we do continue to reap what we sow – nevertheless, God has nailed the ultimate consequences for our sin to the cross. And there is more.

We are not categorically exempted from the pain and consequences of living in a fallen world. This is Paul’s question, “*What shall we say to these [bad] things that are happening to us?*” (Rom. 8:31). We feel like “*sheep led to the slaughter*” (Romans 8:36). These Roman Christians seem to be shocked that they are not exempt from the consequences or enriched by the promises and exclusions of Leviticus 26 and

Deuteronomy 28. Paul points to the cross – Christ suffered and died. And we are his followers. What is promised us is not an exemption from life’s problems, but triumph in the face of them, “*tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword,*” will not separate us from the love of God. “*In all these things, we are more than conquerors through him that loved us... neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Romans 8:37-39). This is not an exempted but empowered people. They are not protected from the consequences of living in a fallen world but given “*a spirit of power and love and a sound mind*” (I Tim. 1:7), and not of fear. This is the call to live in victory, despite the challenges of the world.

The writer of Hebrews in the great faith chapter gives us example after example of those who, in faith, were delivered from one life circumstance or another. They experienced miracles. They defied death itself. And God still does such things. Then the writer mentions the “others” who were not delivered! Who lost their lives. And does not present them as inferior. Their faith was as worthy of emulation and admiration as the first group. God delivers some from, some through, and others to Himself. It is not merely our faith that determines the path we travel, God’s sovereignty is involved as well. We are called to faith – not in an outcome, but in God Himself.

The Road Ahead – A Cosmic Wasteland

It is going to get worse. As we move to the last days, we can expect disasters and even plagues to increase. And they are not, according to Scripture, mysterious in their origin. They come from God – from His throne, administered by judicial angels.

The Wrath of God. In Revelation 15, John, the Apostle, saw a sign in heaven, one he called “*great and marvelous.*” And then, he noticed “*seven angels having the seven last plagues*” that contained God’s wrath, and with them, “*the wrath of God*” was said to be “*complete.*”

John sees the “*sea of glass,*” which he had noticed earlier – it stood before the Throne. It was mingled with fire – this may have been a reflection of the fire on the altar. The redeemed in heaven, “*those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, [were] standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God.*” Harps! They are ready to play and sing.

These appear to be a throng of the righteous who had died as martyrs during the Last Days war against the God of Creation, and His Son, Jesus, the Redeemer, and His Church. These redeemed folks sing – their song cannot be extinguished. They sing the song of Moses – a reference to Jewish roots, to the Old Testament, and the song of the Lamb – a reference to Jesus.

“Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, For Your judgments have been manifested.”

His marvelous works are affirmed. He is the King recognized by the saints, as the heir of Adam’s fallen kingdom. Both reverence and worship are due him, and yet, both are withheld by the unrighteous. He alone is holy – there is no other God, no other faith, in the same category – None. He stands alone. It is His holiness that makes Him so superior.

It is not only His moral excellence that is in view but what Rudolph Otto calls the “numinous.” It is the unspeakable and glorious resplendence of God. It is the indescribable wholeness and beauty of God.

One is frozen before Him – both fearful and fascinated. Terrorized, one cannot react, running to or away. For a moment, we are immobilized, transfixed, mesmerized, spellbound, as if hypnotized. The fear is not phobic – irrational and reactive. It is not servile. It is, quite to the contrary, elevating, affirming, and yet it breeds caution and respect – reverence. And that is quality that even the church, not to speak of the world, has completely lost.

Suddenly, in heaven, there is disclosure. The *“temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened.”* This is the Most Holy Place, the place of God’s glory, the place where the Ark of the Covenant was stationed. From this place come *“seven angels having the seven plagues.”* They are clothed in pure bright linen with golden bands around their waists. One of the four living creatures that are known to be Cherubim gives these seven angels seven golden bowls that are full of the wrath of God. Suddenly, the heavenly Temple was filled with *“the glory of God.”* All of heaven is still as the earth receives its due judgment.

Judgment from Heaven. The first judgment affects those with *“the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image.”* The second affected the sea and its creatures. The third affected rivers and springs – they were polluted, turned as if to blood. This judgment is related explicitly to global persecution against Christians, *“You have judged these things. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. It is their just due.”* A voice from the altar, a voice of prayer, affirms the legitimacy of this difficult judgment, *“Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments.”*

The fourth angel judgment is one of global warning – an exceptional heatwave, so severe, that men are scorched with fire. Now, the earth begins to voice its true disposition, the depth of resistance against God, *“they blasphemed the name of God... and they did not repent,”* and, further, they did not *“give Him glory.”* Worship is withheld – perhaps, all global worship is now forbidden. There is no longer the position of atheism or agnosticism – that is swept away. The most unrighteous believe that there is a God, but they will not recognize Him as their God.

As if to show the cause, the fifth judgment is poured out *“on the throne of the beast.”* He is exposed as powerless. Consequently, his kingdom will be filled with darkness. Some dreadful and mysterious plague creates unimaginable physical pain. Men gnaw their tongues. Yet, their hearts only harden. Hatred of God intensifies, *“They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds.”*

The sixth angel poured out the judgment in his bowl. It affected the great river Euphrates, one of the great rivers associated with the Garden of Eden. It is one of the longest rivers in the world of over 1700 miles. The angel dried up the water of the great river *“that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared.”* Amazingly, this began to happen over a decade ago. The river started to dry up! It continues to dwindle. John suddenly *“saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet.”* These three primary leaders, the dark trinity of the tribulation era, begin to speak – as if proliferating deception. These spirits of demons performed signs, and they specifically targeted global leaders, the kings of the earth, to conspire together against God. These three human characters and their demonic energizers, now are moving the whole earth to Armageddon.

Now the seventh and final angel pours out his bowl. A loud voice rumbles from the temple in heaven, declaring, *“It is done!”* Suddenly, there was a cacophony of clamorous sounds – noises, thunderings, and lightnings. The earth trembled as a result of a great earthquake, unlike any before in history. A global quake or series of shocks? Every island disappeared, either displaced or covered by tsunamis. Mountains were leveled. Volcanic hail occurred, huge hailstones fell, apparently, all over the earth. These weighed

75-100 pounds. These are like bombs – and the destructive capability unthinkable. The sad result was, “Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail since that plague was exceedingly great.” They did not repent.

Personal Reflections

The bottom-line of any judgment, any plague – is a call for soul-searching and repentance. The other bottom line is trust – and maybe less spiritual speculation.

Have you ever attempted to connect the similar polarities of a magnet? Even with small magnets, it is virtually impossible to keep the same poles together. They repel. With larger and stronger magnets, you can’t even touch the opposite poles.

Theological Tension. In theology, there are contradictions. In fact, good theology is fraught with contradictions. Single dimensional theology will get you in trouble. Find the proof texts, mark them in your Bible, and ignore the opposite stream of thought, and you will quickly become an unbalanced believer. On that path, ultimately, you will be disillusioned. God’s love and truth live in tension, as do His mercy and justice. God’s unbelievable capacity for forgiveness must be conjoined to true reconciliation – and that is not merely a matter of love, but also of truth. His incredible, unconditional acceptance, demand, as do all healthy relationships, some means of accountability. And that is also a matter of truth, and being tried, and changed, and truly reconciled.

There is tension between God’s sovereignty and His foreknowledge. Does he plan all our steps? If yes, then, did he plan the fall down the stairway? Did He know it, and if so, could He have prevented it, and if He did not prevent it – what does that say about Him? And, so we circle back to the character issue.

Resolving the Mysteries. Some theologians have come to deny God’s foreknowledge as a consequence. He is all-powerful, they suggest, but not all-knowing. That pulls Him into our world, binding Him to the continuum of time and confining Him to space. In such a condition, He is less than the God of the Bible. Time, uncertainty, is then, in effect, God – even if it is unintelligent randomness and disorder. God’s sovereignty is muted. He is no longer the cause – but He is trapped in the impact. He reacts, rather than acts. Time holds the future, unwrapping it’s new events, day-by-day, while God deals with the daily news like all the rest of us! This is not a healthy resolution.

The other extreme is to grant God foreknowledge, but to deny Him sovereignty – and that we quickly know, diminishes God. That is not acceptable. It is not sound theology. Nor is the answer to deny God’s love – to assail His character.

Blind Spots – Demand Trust. Have you ever had a bad seat in a theater? Behind a pole or pillar, perhaps, you could not see the entire stage. You could lean left, and see a bit more, and then right, and see a bit more, but there was always a part of the stage you could not see. An actor, and then another, went out of view. You were left to imagine, to intuit from the larger story.

There is a God, revealed in the Bible, that can be known – but never fully known. We can know ‘his ways,’ but we will never fully understand them. Like the positive or negative ends of the magnet, we keep attempting to close the center and secure their ends – but they each repel the other. Just as love and truth, at times, seem to conflict. And we struggle to bring the concepts of God’s love and sovereignty, His love and power, His power and love, and foreknowledge. The ideas seem incongruent. We’re in the theater – and some things, some portion of the cosmic stage, some view of the throne, we

fail to see – we cannot see. This is the mystery gap. We see in part, we know in part – through a glass, darkly. What we cannot see, theologians make up, adding to the scenes we have, to the narrative we have, and then erasing the mystery. They have created a static puzzle with the pictures glued to the table.

This is not wise! Once the ends are secured, dynamic theology becomes static, fixed – and God is hemmed in. But He cannot be so hemmed in – He is a mystery.

The God of Miracles. The Bible is full of miracles. And they happen today. In the Old Testament, miracles increase among God’s people at three points in history – during the time of their slavery in Egypt, to liberate them. And then in the ministries of Elijah and Elisha the prophets, to call them back to God. And finally, in the period after the Temple had been destroyed and they had been exiled to Babylon, to keep them safe, and preserve them, saving the nation. No season is more replete with miracles than the ministry of Jesus. He was God with us! In every case, the miracle was more than a personal benefit. It was a billboard announcing that God was alive, active. He hears His people when they pray. He still redeems and revives, and at times – He raises from the dead. But these exceptions to live in a broken, fallen world, are just that – exceptions.

Don’t Make Exceptions the Rule or Miracles the Norm. We can stand in the face of tragedy, and we can point to a believer who was miraculously spared. They become a symbol of grace and love. We love such stories – and we should. But then, someone points out another believer, a stellar Christian family, that perished in the same tornado, only a mile away! And we are confused.

We want to believe – with single-dimensional theology, based on some proof-text and not the whole counsel of God, that all believers should be spared. When they are not, we look for reasons that they were not delivered: Sin in their lives. They lacked perfect faith, etc. This attempt to reconcile the mystery, to color in the stage scenes obscured by the center-post is not wise. We can’t figure God out – not entirely. Speculative theology always leads to bad theology and faulty conclusions.

When Miracles don’t Come. On the other hand, when miracles don’t come, we conclude that God is blind, and we cynically declare that there is no personal benefit in serving Him. We want so much an exemption from the suffering, and we want to be the exception. When the exemption from some life disaster does not come, some reject their faith. But true faith is deeper. It is not so self-interested. It is not mechanical – “I was spared because I did thus and so...” That is religion, faith as a technique. It is self-interested and self-controlling. That’s not New Testament Christianity. The rain now falls on the just and the unjust. What sets us apart is not the absence of rain in our lives, it is how we handle the storm. It is whether or not the storm is outside of us or inside of us. It is that we sing in the rain.

The Answer is Not An Answer – It is God. We are quick to point out that healing is in the atonement – and it is. But it is not in the atonement in the same way that salvation is in the atonement. That is, saved people get sick, and die. Not all are physically healed. There is another dimension of healing! Soul and spirit healing. It is deeper, more profound. And yet, we see miraculous answers to prayer, and we are promised that when elders gather and pray over a sick believer, that the “prayer of faith” will raise him up. When that does not happen, we have tended to attempt to perfect our faith; to work on prayer as a technique, rather than trust more deeply in God, and leave some outcomes to mystery.

In the book of Job, God never answers his theological, philosophical questions. Instead, He gives him a tour of Creation and underscores His Sovereignty. He is revealed as Omnipotent and Omniscient, against the vastness of the universe and depth of the earth’s oceans. He shows His concern for a variety

of species, with their strengths and weaknesses. He spotlights distressed wild donkeys and the moments the mother deer gives birth to her vulnerable young with only Him in attendance.

It is a call to trust. We don't know how Job learned the backstory of how he became the focus of an exercise in cosmic spiritual warfare. He had no idea that all of heaven and hell was watching him. And we seem unaware that heaven and hell are watching us. The nightmare ends when Job is moved to stop pursuing an answer to his "why?" question from God, and commit to pray for his accuser friends.

Maybe that's our answer too.

I don't know if the Coronavirus is a global plague or not. I do know that God wastes nothing. Even if this has been authored in hell and is the work of the Evil One who attempts to steal, kill, and destroy – God has perimeters on such evil, and He chooses to work in the midst of it.

The question is, will we waste this moment with self-preoccupation? Or, will we pray for our friends. And of course, we should pray for ourselves, for God's direction and protection, for grace and healing – I would never suggest otherwise. "Father... deliver us from evil."

In Ecclesiastes, the Bible says, a wise but simple man saved the city by wisdom (9:14-18). John Welch married the daughter of John Knox. God transformed his life, and he served the little town of Ayr as pastor. He was known for his role as a reconciler. He united the once brawling village. In the midst of a plague, a quarantine was imposed, a travel ban. Traveling merchants attempting to enter the city with a wagon load of cloth and rags. They were stopped at the city gates. The merchandise seemed benign, harmless, and the merchants, healthy. Still, the city fathers wondered if them and their goods into the city. They called John Welch, the pastor. Welch silently circled the wagon, saying nothing, evidently praying. And then he announced that the merchants and their wagon load of rags should be turned away. The next city was not so discerning – the cloth was the carrier of the plague.

God chooses to place intercessors on the wall of cities – that is his will. And they are to enter a dialogue with the elders of the city, at its gates. This is the role of the church – to be an intercessory community for the city. In this crisis, He is calling the church to give itself to prayer, not for itself, but for the nation, for cities, for souls, for a national and global spiritual revival.

In Genesis 18, when Abraham was visited by angels, he asked nothing for himself. He hosted the divine party, cooked them dinner, and washed their feet. He welcomed them, as we should again, welcome God to our homes and cities, our schools and corporations. In the end, the one thing he prayed for, indeed, pleaded for, was that Sodom and Gomorrah be spared if a righteous group of ten could be found. This is the priestly posture of intercession. It is noble, missional prayer. On that bluff, with Abraham, in intercession, was the Angel of Yahweh, a pre-incarnate manifestation of Jesus. Abraham and Jesus (pressing the text a bit), interceding for wicked cities. Sadly, a righteous quorum was not found. But Lot was spared, and God gave Abraham his greatest desire, the long-withheld promised son.

Selfless intercession is the great call on us now. Let's pray for America.

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