

What is God Saying Through Corona Virus?

Revelation 2:18-29

I. Introduction

- A. I earnestly prayed and asked for what I should say. I was led to Revelation 2, where we read the words of Jesus to the church at Thyatira.
- B. Keep your eyes on Jesus. Last week I sensed the Lord inviting us to keep our eyes on him and I sense the same theme today. Let us keep our eyes on Jesus by keeping our eyes fixed on his word.
- C. **Is God speaking to us through coronavirus?** Yes. God is daily speaking to us through many ways and one of them is through this world in which we live (Ps. 19:1 *The heavens declare the glory of God...*) Through the same event, he speaks different messages to those who are his children from those who are not.
 - 1. **God is in active control of the coronavirus.** He controls all things, as we saw last week, from Luke 8. Jesus demonstrates that he controls the climate, commands demons, cancels disease, conquers death. His sovereignty is unrivaled. God does not merely allow things to happen as if he powerless to prevent what he does not will to come to pass.

Many people, during times of difficulty, ask, "Where is God?" This is not a new question. It was asked of the psalmist, "*Why do the nations say, 'Where is their God?' Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases*" (Ps. 115:2-3). Where is God? He is in heaven on his throne, actively governing all things. He does everything that pleases him.

God is governing all events in this world, including calamity. He directs calamity and coronavirus to achieve his purposes. And "*all his works are right and his ways are just*" (Dan. 4:37; Dt. 32:4; Ps 33:4) including the rise of the coronavirus.

- a) God "*...works all things according to the counsel of his own will*" (Eph. 1:11). "*I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me... My counsel will stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose*" (Is. 46:9-10).

- b) Isaiah 45:6-7 *"I am the LORD, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity, I am LORD who does all these things."*
 - c) God did not merely passively allow the plagues in Egypt. He actively and intentionally caused them. He commanded them to achieve his purposes, which were several; 1) to deliver his people from slavery and suffering; 2) to judge¹ the brutality and idolatry of the Egyptians who were not his people; 3) to prefigure the messiah Son who was to come.
 - d) God is always doing thousands and millions of things through the events that we call calamity.
 - (1) In the days of Jacob and his sons, he actively commanded that there be a famine (*"He **summoned** a famine on the land and **broke** the supply of bread. Yet he **sent**² a man ahead of them, Joseph, who was sold as a slave."* Ps. 105:15-16). He actively commanded it, not merely passively allowed it.
 - (2) The famine became a means by which God raised Joseph to power and brought Jacob and his family to Egypt in order to save their lives. Through the calamity the family went through, he was humbling some and promoting others; he was teaching brothers how to love one another; he was teaching a father the danger of favoritism; he was giving birth to a new nation in the earth—the nation of Israel; he was teaching the value of forgiveness; and 10,000 other things that I can't even imagine or count.
 - (3) God is always doing and saying many things through the events of our lives.
2. **God is still God. He is still in control and he is still speaking to us who have ears to hear.** Therefore, what could he be saying to us through the coronavirus?
- a) To assume that God is not speaking to us through these painful days would be a grave error. C.S. Lewis, in his book *The Problem of Pain*, wrote, "Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."
 - b) Let us not be guilty of chronological snobbery. For us to assume that because we understand the means of suffering in our lives, that there is therefore no meaning in our suffering would be a grave error. Just because we discover the proximate source of our suffering, does not mean we have exhausted God's sovereign intentions in and through our suffering. We may be fatally arrogant if

¹ Ex. 6:6; 7:4; 12:12; Num. 33:4.

² See also Genesis 45:5 "...for God sent me before you to preserve life." ⁷ God sent me before you... ⁸ So it was not you who sent me here, but God."

we think that the ancients, who knew nothing of viruses, were therefore wrong in attaching divine meaning to plagues and pestilence. Neither God's sovereignty nor his desire or ability to communicate with us is voided simply because we understand better than the ancients the way the world works.

c) God is still speaking to us. What might he be saying?

II. **The Words of Jesus to the church** (Revelation 2:18-29), whose eyes are like flaming fire, and his feet like bright bronze. I believe there are at least two things God is saying to his church: repent & endure.

A. To us he is saying, "**Repent!**"

1. Revelation 2:19-23 (ESV) ¹⁹ "I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. ²⁰ But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. ²¹ I gave her time to **repent**, but she refuses to **repent** of her sexual immorality. ²² Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they **repent** of her works, ²³ and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works."
2. **Repent of sexual immorality.** First, Jesus commends the church for what they are doing well, but then he points out some things that are not doing well and of which they need to repent. Specifically, he lists sexual immorality and idolatry.
 - a) The church had allowed a woman—a self-appointed 'prophetess'—to teach that sexual immorality was not sinful. She was teaching the church to "*practice sexual immorality*" and idolatry. She had a class in the church and was teaching them how *to do* these things. Jesus is not pleased with the church's tolerance of this woman or her sinful teaching.
 - b) "Sexual immorality" translates the Greek word *porneia*³, which means "an extra-marital sexual intercourse," and in the biblical context marriage always means the covenant union of a man and a woman. This woman was teaching that adultery (v.22) and pre-marital sex was not a sin.
3. **Refusal to repent, can mean loss of health, even death.** Jesus graciously gave her time to repent, but she keeps refusing (present tense). She keeps on refusing. Thus, Jesus says, "I will throw her onto a sickbed, her adulterous lovers into great

³ The Greek word is *porneia*, and refers to all "extra-marital [sexual] intercourse." Friedrich Hauck and Seigfried Schulz, "Πόρνη, Πόρνος, Πορνεία, Πορνεύω, Ἐκπορνεύω," ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 581.

tribulation, and her children I will kill." These are breathtaking words. In other words, he says, "Since you refuse to put away your sin, I will put away your health. Since you will not let go of your sin, I will let go of your life." There are instances in Scripture, when sickness and death results from sin.

- a) In the OT, Miriam rebelled against God by rejecting Moses' authority and God struck her with leprosy (Num. 12:10).
- b) In the NT, the abuse of the Lord's supper and fellow believers around the communion table resulted in both sickness and death. "...*this is why many of you are weak, and ill, and some have died*" (1 Cor. 11:30). There are instances when the sin of God's children is so grievous that he disciplines our bodies with sickness and death in order to save our souls.⁴
- c) Does this mean all who are suffering from coronavirus are suffering because of their own particular sin? No. The Bible is clear, not all suffering results from a particular sin.
 - (1) The man born blind - "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither, but that the works of God might be displayed in him" (Jn. 9:1-3).
 - (2) Job suffered greatly, but not because he had sinned.
 - (3) Jesus suffered even more, but it was not because he had sinned.
 - (4) Not all suffering results from individual sin.
- d) Christians are not under condemnation (Rom. 8:1), but there are time in our lives when it is God's will that we suffer so that he can accomplish his good and perfect purposes for our lives. "*Let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good*" (1 Peter 4:19). Christ is our model. He suffered according to God's will, and he accomplished God's purpose for his life through suffering. Suffering can have a purifying effect in the life of a believer. Physical suffering often clarifies spiritual vision.
 - (1) "There is therefore, now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).
 - (2) The apostle Paul suffered greatly, not because of sin, but rather so that he could more deeply experience the power of God's grace and to keep him from being arrogant and conceited, i.e. to keep him humble (2 Cor. 12:7, 9).

⁴ Discipline is the pain or suffering used and intended by God for the spiritual maturity and progress in sanctification of the believer.

(3) Through suffering God gets our attention calling us to repentance and to purity.

4. Of what do we need to repent?

a) Conceit, pride, arrogance?

b) A stubborn persistence in believing that our will is better than God's will?

c) Sexual immorality, adultery, pornography?

d) Self-reliance?

e) Do we need to repent of our idolatry?

(1) Have we worshiped athletes and so the Lord shut the arenas?

(2) Have we worshiped education and so now the Lord has closed all schools?

(3) Have we worshiped celebrities and so now the Lord has turned off the bright lights in the theater?

(4) Have we worshiped doctors and so now the Lord has reminded us they can't always heal us?

(5) Have we put our faith in science and so now the Lord sent us something new that to reveal to us its limitations?

(6) Have we worshiped money and so now the Lord has caused wealth to evaporate?

(7) Have we worshiped our health and so now the Lord has reminded us how fragile we really are?

(8) In our past-paced lives, have we forgotten our Maker and so he has now slowed the whole world to complete stop so that we will look up to Him? Should we repent of our neglect of Him?

(9) What is Jesus saying to us? Repent, while you still have time. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

B. To us he is also saying: **Endure!**

1. **Revelation 2:24-29 (ESV)** ²⁴ But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. ²⁵ Only hold fast what you have until I come. ²⁶ The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will

give authority over the nations, ²⁷ and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. ²⁸ And I will give him the morning star. ²⁹ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

2. To the faithful believers, the church, in Thyratira, Jesus says, "Hold fast what you have until I come (again). In other words, endure faithfully until the end. Hold onto your faith until I return to get you." Keep your faith. Keep believing in him. Do not give up. Then onto what should we hold fast? I know nothing better than the words of Jesus, his promises to you:
3. **Hold onto his desire to have you with him.** John 14:1-3 (ESV) ¹ "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ² In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."
4. **Hold onto his provision of prayer for you.** John 14:13-14 (ESV) ¹³ "Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it."
5. **Hold onto his giving of himself to you.** John 14:16-17 (ESV) ¹⁶ "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells... in you."
6. **Hold onto his promise of eternal life.** John 14:19 (ESV) Because I live, you also will live.
7. **Hold onto the promise of experience of his love.** John 14:23-24 (ESV) Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. ²⁴ Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me."
8. **Hold onto the help of the Helper.** John 14:26 (ESV) "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."
9. **Hold onto his peace.** John 14:27 (ESV). "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."
10. **Hold on till the end because things will only get worse.** Luke 21:10-19 (ESV) ¹⁰ Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. ¹¹ There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and

pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. ¹² But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. ¹³ This will be your opportunity to bear witness. ¹⁴ Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, ¹⁵ for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. ¹⁶ You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. ¹⁷ You will be hated by all for my name's sake. ¹⁸ But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹ By your endurance you will gain your lives.

11. Jesus is calling us to endurance. Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.

III. What is Jesus saying to the churches today?

- A. I am king over coronavirus. Love me more than your life and your health. Do you love me more than your own flesh. Jesus is sovereign over suffering.
- B. Repent. Let go of your sin and with the arms of faith, hold fast to me! Turn from sin and turn to me.
- C. Do not live in fear. I am with you. My Spirit is with you. He is your helper and your comforter. These days of trouble are opportunities for you to bear witness about me. When it's time to speak, trust in me. I will give you what you need to say.
- D. Do not fear death. The world may hate you because you bear my name, but know that I love you. So bear my name faithfully to the end and I will give you eternal life.

IV. Conclusion

- A. Take time now, confess your sins. ask for and receive forgiveness through Jesus.
- B. Rest in His sovereign arms. Be blessed by knowing that Jesus is preparing a place for you and yearns to have you with him where he is.

Discussion Questions

1. How would the Bible answer the question, Does God sovereignly control all events, including both good and evil? What Scripture would you use to support your answer?
2. Do you believe that God is speaking to us through the circumstances of our daily lives? Why or why not?
3. Read Revelation 2:18-29. What does this teach you about the church?
4. What does this passage teach you about Jesus?
5. Read John 14:1-27. Which of the promises made by Jesus gives you the greatest comfort? Which give you the most strength to keep enduring?
6. Do you sense the Lord is saying anything to you this morning? If so, what?
7. What will you do to respond to what you have heard or read today?