

When national emergencies arise, Christians are not exempt. When pandemics spread over the world, Christians get sick and die, too. When fear and panic are in the air, Christians are every bit as tempted to be afraid as others. We share in the suffering, sickness, and sin of the world, and so as the threat of the coronavirus hangs over us, we cannot and should not ignore it.

But while our circumstances are the same as the world around us, our response as Christians must be very different. Where the world panics, we pray. Where the world seeks to protect itself, we risk our lives to serve our neighbor. Where the world gives in to fear, we respond with faith. Where the world looks around and sees nothing but danger and disease, they cry out to the government and big business and toilet paper to save them. Christians look up to God, and when we are reminded of who He is, we are able to put what's happening around us into perspective, and so our response is not to trust in chariots or horses, but to trust in the name of the Lord our God.

And the way we show forth that truth is by worshiping and blessing the Lord, calling on our souls not to forget His benefits, reminding ourselves of His steadfast love by singing His praises. Our worship *fortifies* our faith as we recite again who God is, what He has done, and what He will do. Our first response to this national emergency, to this terrible virus, as followers of Jesus, is to bless the Lord our God.

Nothing looks more irrelevant to the world, but nothing is more important, because this is how God strengthens our faith, and that faith saves us. If you have faith in Jesus, then neither death nor life can separate you from the love of God in Christ. But if you do not put your faith in Jesus, then even if you avoid or survive this sickness, then you have gained the world, but at the cost of your soul.

To put it another way, if you wash your hands a thousand times a day, practice social distancing, quarantine yourself, and never get sick another day in your life, *without Jesus* you are still going to die. But if you put your trust in Jesus and die of coronavirus this afternoon, you will live forever! I hope you believe that, because there is something far worse than sickness and death. All children of Adam are infected with sin, and it is terminal. 100% fatality rate. And death does not bring an *end* to suffering; death opens the door to *eternal* suffering.

But when Jesus Christ saves you, when you remember to *bless the Lord who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, and who redeems your life from the pit*, you can respond to the coronavirus like Martin Luther responded to an outbreak of plague in his day. This is what he said:

“Therefore I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine, and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance infect and pollute others, and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me and I have done what he has expected of me and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. If my neighbor needs me, however, I shall not avoid place or person but will go freely...See, this is such a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash nor foolhardy and does not tempt God.”¹

Fear wants you to ignore your neighbor, to scowl at anyone who coughs or sneezes, and to hoard supplies like Smaug hoards gold. Faith reminds you that God gives life and takes life, God sometimes sends plagues and sometimes stops plagues. Listen to the Heidelberg Catechism on God’s Providence: Question 27 asks “What do you understand by the providence of God?” *Answer*: God’s providence is His almighty and ever present power, whereby, as with His hand, He still upholds heaven and earth and all creatures, and so governs them that lead and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, food and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, indeed, all things, come not by chance but by His fatherly hand.”

And then question 28 wants us to apply that truth to our lives: Q. “What does it benefit us to know that God has created all things and still upholds them by His providence?” *Answer*: We can be patient in adversity, thankful in prosperity, and with a view to the future we can have a firm confidence in our faithful God and Father that no creature shall separate us from His love; for all creatures are so completely in His hand that without His will they cannot so much as move.”²

¹ Martin Luther, “Whether One May Flee From a Deadly Plague” in *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy Lull, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 749.

² <https://students.wts.edu/resources/creeds/heidelberg.html>

Since He is in control, we can trust Him to watch over us, and look forward to the uncertain events of the future with certain confidence that God keeps us in His loving care.

And because we know that *we* are kept, that *we're* good, we can consider the needs of our neighbors as more important than our own. Counterintuitively, this may mean staying far away from your neighbor, canceling certain plans, and not gathering together in large groups. But there may be times when loving your neighbor means checking in on them or providing care to them, even when it means your risk might become higher. Wisdom and love will guide you as you put your trust in the Lord.

Faith isn't fearful, but it isn't foolish either. Faith knows that God controls everything, and that if He doesn't want you to get sick, you won't get sick. But faith also knows that God works through means: He calls us to be wise and prudent, to listen to doctors and take medicine, and to wash your hands.

And so as we prepare to endure this time of great sickness and national emergency, let us remind our hearts of who God is and why we can trust Him in troubled times: our God heals all our diseases (v. 3), and redeems our life from the pit. We serve a God with the power to heal, and hear how much He loves you: "As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear him." (Since that's how much He loves us, do we need to fear this disease?) "As far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us." (Sin is worse than coronavirus, and Jesus has already taken care of our sin. He'll handle this, too!)

V. 13 – "As a Father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more." God knows how easy it is for frail mankind to suffer and die, like the wind blowing away old grass. But He has not forgotten you; He promises to care for you, and His steadfast love is from everlasting to everlasting!

So bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not His benefits! People of God, wash your hands, and bless the Lord!

- *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*