

## Three Foundational Truths to Remember During COVID-19

These are interesting days. With the outbreak of COVID-19, known as the “Corona Virus,” our world has literally been turned upside down. It is considered to be a world pandemic. Though, to put it into perspective, it doesn’t yet appear this outbreak will come anywhere close to the Spanish Flu in 1918. It is estimated that about 500 million people or one-third of the world’s population became infected with this virus. The number of deaths was estimated to be at least 50 million worldwide with about 675,000 occurring in the United States. As of Friday, there are just over fifteen thousand COVID-19 cases in the U.S. with 201 deaths. (though these numbers are certainly increasing.) Our civil authorities are doing everything they can to limit the spread of this disease. So many things in our lives have changed. On the lighter side, someone sent me an app to determine how many days of toilet paper I have in my house. Another interesting tid-bit. Those of us with school kids have all of a sudden become homeschoolers. Let me read one very cute note from a boy named Ben. On their first day of class from home they had to write a journal entry. Here is what he said: *It is not going good. My moms getting stressed out. My mom is really getting confused. We took a break so my mom can figure this stuff out. And I’m telling you it is not going good.* This is funny. But on a more serious note, I would like to give us 3 foundational truths that will help us as Christians, as the Church of Jesus Christ, navigate these times. (God is sovereign. We are God’s special people. Our mission is still the same.)

1. God Is Sovereign. At any time in the history of the world, whether it be the Corona Virus outbreak or a great world war or hard times in your family, God is in control. And this is the most comforting truth. Knowledge of this truth anchors our minds, our hearts, our souls in times like these. When we think of God controlling all things, we often use the word “providence.” Listen to the Heidelberg Catechism on this subject.

Here is the question: *What do you understand by the providence of God?* Answer: *Providence is the almighty and ever present power of God by which he upholds, as with his hand, heaven and earth and all creatures, and so rules them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty—all things, in fact, come to us not by chance but from his fatherly hand* (Heidelberg Catechism Q/A 27).

God controls the nations. Ps. 33:10-11: **“The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations . . .”** He controls nature. Ps. 135:7: **“He it is who makes the clouds rise at the end of the earth, who makes lightnings for the rain and brings forth the wind from his storehouses . . .”** Ps. 147:7-8: **“Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and mist, stormy wind fulfilling his word!”** God is sovereign over Satan and evil spirits. This is most clearly displayed in Jesus’ earthly ministry. Mark 1:27: **“And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, “What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.”** God uses wicked people for his plans. Acts 4:27-28: **“for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.”** God hardens hearts. Exod. 14:17: **“And I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after**

them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen.” God sends trouble and calamity. Is. 45:6-7: **“that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the LORD, who does all these things.”** God does what he pleases and his plans cannot be stopped. Is. 46:9-10: **“remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose . . .’** In short, God guides our steps and works all things according to the counsel of his will.

So what do we do with this truth in a time like this?

Application: There is no such thing as an accident in the sovereign plan of God. There are no accidents in your life. *“What else can we wish for ourselves,”* Calvin wrote, *“if not even one hair can fall from our head without his will?”* As Christians we know God is sovereignly working all things according to his will.

2. We Are the Special People of God. In the OT this we see this with Israel. Is. 41:8-10: **“But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, ‘You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off’; fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”**

In the NT, this is the church. In Eph. 3:4-6 Paul says: **“When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”**

The applications of this truth are enormous for our situation right now. The reason we do not fear is not merely because God is in control, but because we are ***“partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus Christ through the gospel.”*** The reason we do not fear is because our sins are forgiven. We are seated in the heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 2:6). **“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us”** (Gal. 3:13). ***“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds we have been healed”*** (1 Pet. 2:24). Because of the death of Christ, the wrath of God is removed and our sins are covered. And through Christ as our substitute sacrifice we have free access to God. He is now our high priest. He is risen from the dead and has now ascended to heaven where He sits in glory. This is the gospel! All fear of a holy God is gone. All guilt has been taken away! We are his special people; the church, the body of Christ.

Application: God is for us. As his special people, as Christians, as those who, by faith, are united to Christ by the Holy Spirit of God, God is working all things for our good (Rom. 8:28). Whether it is life or death, feast or famine, sickness or health, our good will be the result in the end.

Application: “**Cast your cares upon him; for he cares for you**” (1 Pet. 5:7). There is nothing better than to go into your prayer closet and pray to the God who controls all things and cares for you.

Application: Do not Be fearful. This is what the world is doing. But, we are Christians! We do not fear the things of this world and those who can kill our bodies. The world fears death. But, Christ is risen! And our great enemy is defeated. Brothers and sisters, do not be anxious.

3. Our Mission Has Not Changed. What is our mission of God’s special people? Matt. 28:18-20: “And Jesus came and said to them, “**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.**” This command works in any culture with any people, under any circumstance, no matter how much things change. This means that during an outbreak such as this, we continue with our mission. We make disciples! We proclaim the gospel of Christ and teach those who believe all that He has commanded.

Looking inwardly, this happens as we gather together weekly as God’s special people and take part in the normal means of grace; the preaching of the word, the singing of Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, prayers, fellowship, etc. We take the Lord’s Supper. We baptize. But, in this time, which is something that hasn’t really happened on this scale since World War II, we cannot meet as the writer of Hebrews tell us: “**Do not forsake the gathering together of God’s people**” (Heb. 10:25). So what do we do for this time as we think about our own discipleship?

First, the elders will make sure we have a weekly sermon; for now it will be audio and can be uploaded as normal. I would ask that you make it a priority as families to gather together on Sundays and listen to the sermon. Talk about it for a few minutes afterwards, pray about the applications. Ask God to give great grace as you listen to the preaching and teaching of the Word. In the coming weeks, I will continue to preach; both topical sermons as God leads, and if things continue, I will probably return to the Book of James.

Next, our home group leaders will be asked to be in regular contact with their groups. If there are needs, we must do our best to meet them. As you pray, begin with prayers for your brothers and sisters in your group. Then, continue to pray for the rest of the congregation. We will keep everyone updated on urgent requests.

In your own homes, we would ask that every family spend some time daily together. Suggestions: Read through portions of Scripture. Pray about what you read. Apply what you are learning. Parents, work on your catechism. Memorize Scripture. Sing together. Read through a book/s. Families with kids, pick up a good series such as Narnia and read together. (I will put together more suggestions this week and send to everyone.) All of these things and more are ways we look inwardly as we make disciples. I believe one of the ways God is working this for the good of his people is to cause us to slow down for a time, to reflect, to think about those simple things in life that are really important. I have heard from a number of you this week. And

it is such a blessing to hear how families are spending time together in ways they haven't in years.

As we think about making disciples, we now turn to our outward witness to the world. Non-Christians around us are fearful. They are anxious. They are panicking. And as God's special people, who know God is in control, we must be a light to the glory of God in Christ Jesus. Already, I have had multiple occasions to share truth. What an opportunity to be a witness, to share good news through the worldview of Scripture. We are God's representatives. And the best way to love our neighbor is to share the Gospel. I realize we are not going out much. But, there will be opportunities. We all have neighbors who will also be at home. We can go around and ask those who are older if we can deliver their groceries. We can ask our neighbors how we can pray for them, how we can help them. For some of us, we can volunteer in our community to help with food deliveries, or other such things.

We are created for such times as this. Jesus will build his church. The gates of hell will not prevail . . ." (Matt. 16:18).

Let's pray!