

“God has not given us a spirit of Fear”

Philippians 3:20-21; Psalm 46; 2 Timothy 1:7

A Biblical Response to the First Confirmed Case of the Coronavirus in South Africa

Sunday 8 March 2020

Glenvista Baptist Church

Psalm 46:1-3 ^{“1} God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. ² Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, ³ though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling.”

Philippians 3:20-21 ^{“20} But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.”

2 Timothy 1:7 ^{“7} for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.”

Introduction

- a) A tenacious clinging to the Sovereignty of God and a solemn reminder that God has all things under control, never abdicating His throne or His rulership, never neglecting His people, and never once finding Himself in a position where calamity, sin or world affairs catch Him off guard – gives a wonderful sense of peace unto the believer, when circumstances arise that are possible cause for fear and panic. In the midst of calamity and catastrophe, the believer is called to trusting God irrespective of circumstances, to live by fear and not by faith; for fear is the absence of faith. To all of this the Gospel presents to us the only solution to our fear, for the fear of the Lord is the beginning of real wisdom (**Prov 9:10**). Suffering, calamity and disease are matters the Scriptures speak of abundantly and it is so crucial for the Church that we have a biblical theology of suffering, for if our theology as to this matter is correct, we will respond well in times of difficulty and calamity.
- b) Statistics show to date 3 386 deaths have taken place as a result of the recent Coronavirus and its outbreak in China in December last year. To date 98 424 cases have been confirmed worldwide of people having contracted the virus. It's been on everyone's lips. The country has been buzzing. The world is in a tizz and all seems to be spinning out of control and could soon so grip a nation of people that we lose track of

the bigger picture. And if the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ is not wise at this time, we may find ourselves soon responding just like wordlings. But our citizenship is not on this earth; we are citizens of a heavenly kingdom, a New Jerusalem still to come, and therefore even though the Coronavirus is like a dark looming shadow over the world our hope is in Christ, who is greater and in control of the Coronavirus.

- c) If ever a time has come in which believers need to be wise and prudent then it is now. Social media is designed to create a buzz and cause a panic amongst people. Within hours of it being made known that the first case of the Coronavirus has been confirmed in Hilton in KwaZulu Natal, in South Africa, after a 38 year old man had returned from an overseas trip to Italy, every platform on social media was going wild with alerts, facts, fear and even false reports. If ever a call to not root ourselves in the alarmism of the world is needed then it is now. Christians are not to give themselves to fear, and to run rampant with panic and alarm. Rather the believer is called to rest in Christ at this time, to be wise and alert, to not run ahead, to not make foolish decisions, and not to lose hope in a context where Christ is our Rock. Jesus Christ is our permanence and stability. At this time we need to hearken His words, **“Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid” (Matt 14:27)**.
- d) And that would be true in spite of the reality we see around us, in spite of calamity, in spite of economic crises, in spite of world alarm and panic. The fact that Christ is on His throne remains ever true. And beloved we need to be so careful that statistics are not exaggerated and are not allowed to paint a picture that ignores the reality of the overall and bigger picture. For instance statistics demonstrate that in spite of the fact that currently 3 386 people have already died worldwide from the Coronavirus, 9 282 will die worldwide of hunger today. Statistics also show that 1,4 million deaths were caused by cancer this year; 175 478 deaths as a result of malaria in the past year; 447 000 deaths caused by alcohol abuse; horrifically statistics show that 7,6 million abortions have been conducted this year and over this the media and even the church is alarmingly silent; 191 845 deaths caused by suicide; 241 501 deaths caused by traffic accidents; 2,3 million communicable disease deaths took place this year; 150 467 deaths were caused by water related diseases this year; 48 500 deaths will take place worldwide just today; 78 billion emails will be sent today; 4,4 billion users will be found on the internet today, whilst in a world population of 7,7 billion people, 841 million of those are undernourished across the world today. I think you can see where this is going. The media is blowing up the statistics of the Coronavirus in such a way that other even more important matters are simply never dealt with and are simply brushed under the carpet.
- e) Nonetheless the question before us is how the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ ought to respond to what we are currently seeing and what our own country is possibly facing at this stage. God's Word has the answers to this and to God we turn.

Point 1 – “What is our Lord saying to the Church and the world at large at this time?” (2 Timothy 1:7)

2 Timothy 1:7 *“⁷ for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.”*

- a) **V7** It would be extremely presumptuous to answer that question in a prophetic manner as if God had whispered in our ear to the issue at hand. If anyone dares to say that God has said that He is orchestrating the Coronavirus as a result of x, y and z, such a person would be attributing to himself things God has not given to any man. That is why the Scriptures warn in **James 3:1**, *“¹ Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.”* We dare not spread lies or make assumptions from the pulpit and then say, “Thus sayeth the Lord!”.
- b) However we do know that our Lord is *“full of grace and truth” (John 1:14)*, and that it is truth that really matters. Before we fall into the hype of social media, or become guilty of speculating or even dare uttering lies, we can turn to the Scriptures and discover the objective plainly revealed truth which has already been made known to us by our God.
- c) **We know without a doubt that God governs good directly and that He governs evil by means of His sovereign permission.** Nothing happens unless the Lord either permits or ordains it. We see clearly for example how all the calamities which befall Job, are as a result of the direct permission and ordination, of a holy, wise and loving God. So also the Coronavirus is not without either the direct ordination or permission of our sovereign, wise and loving God. Therefore it would be wise to respond appropriate to the revelation of God's Word that, *“²⁹ The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.” (Deuteronomy 29:29).* We do not why it happens now or what God's intended worldwide purposes are through the Coronavirus, but there's a number of things we know very well as revealed through the scriptures.
- d) **We know that creation itself is subject to futility and frustration and that diseases, thorns, thistles, sufferings, heartache and pain, all come as a result of the Fall,** which we will be considering as of next Lord's Day, if God so permits. We live in a fallen world. Our forefather Adam subjected not only every living being to the curse of the fall, but the whole of creation as well. Paul writes, *“¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption*

and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. (Rom 8:19-22).

- e) **As much as creation is groaning under futility as a result of sin, we know also that death comes to all because all have sinned** (Rom 3:23). Death is the direct result of the curse that came as a result of Adam's disobedience. We've seen in the last two Lord's Days that the covenantal relationship God formed with Adam, came with covenant stipulations, and man was warned not to eat of a certain prohibited tree in the garden or else he would die (Gen 2:17). All die, because Adam introduced death by means of wilful and deliberate disobedience. All are subject to futility, hardships, death, disease and calamity as a result of original sin. Without original sin, we can conclude that there would be no diseases, no runny noses, no heartache, no death, no Coronavirus.
- f) **And we also know that God is supernaturally in control and that He has not given us a spirit of fear.** Paul writes to young Pastor Timothy that God did not give ⁷ us a spirit of fear but of power and love and self-control." (2 Timothy 1:7). That means we can remain fully confident that our God knows what He is doing, and that even though He may not necessarily disclose the reasons as to why certain things are sovereignly permitted and even ordained, that He remains good, wise and all knowing.

Point 2 – “The Need to have our Eyes firmly Fixed on an Eternal Home yet to come” (Phil 3:20-21)

Philippians 3:20-21 ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself."

- a) Some suggest that we can sometimes be so heavenly minded that we are of no earthly good. **Yet quite the contrary is true; we will never be of much use in this life, until we have developed a healthy obsession with the next.** Our only hope for satisfaction of soul and joy of heart in this life comes from looking intently at what we cannot see. We must take steps to cultivate and intensify in our souls an aching and a longing for the beauty of the age to come. Jonathan Edwards: "Labour to get a sense of the vanity of this world, and labour to be much acquainted with heaven."
- b) The consistent witness of Scripture is that we should make heaven and its beauty the object of our contemplative energy. When we do this it will equip us for the difficulties and the struggles of the life here and now. There is something about heaven that makes

the anticipation of it profoundly life changing, because the essence of heaven is the vision of God and His Glory and the eternal increase of joy in Him.

- c) **A contemplative focus on the beauty of heaven frees us from the excessive temptation to focus on the things of this earth.** If there awaits you and me an eternal inheritance of immeasurable glory, it is senseless to spend so much time and energy, money and concern, sacrificing so much of what God has given us now, to obtain for so brief a time in a corruptible form of what we are going to experience eternally in its consummate perfection. We read in **Philippians 3:20-21** – our citizenship is in heaven and knowing this enables us to escape the grip of earthly things. Therefore we ought to be governed by its rules, principles and values. It must be stressed that we **ARE ALREADY** citizens of the New Heaven; we are already citizens of the new state. We are therefore resident aliens on this earth.
- d) **A contemplative focus on heaven enables us to respond appropriately to the injustices of this life.** I encourage you to read **Revelation 18 and 19** where John describes the celebration that takes place around the throne of the Lamb and the shouting of Hallelujah's that takes place there as saints and the myriads of angels reflect and meditate upon the manifestation of the righteous judgement and wrath of God. Contemplation on the glories of heaven produces the fruit of endurance this side of eternity. ***You see, the strength to endure present suffering is the fruit of meditating on our future satisfaction.*** That's what Paul meant in **Romans 8:18** when he says that the struggles and sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glories that will be revealed in us at the time of Christ Jesus. The reason we do not lose heart, Paul says, is because we contemplate the unseen things of the future.
- e) This is what Paul meant in **2 Corinthians 4:16-18**, it is only when juxtaposed with the endless ages of eternal bliss that the suffering of this life becomes tolerable. Paul tells us in **Colossians 3** that we are to fix our eyes upon heaven where our life with God is hidden in Christ. Contemplations of the heavenly glories sustain us in times of physical and emotional and spiritual trial.
- f) A good reminder for the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, even as we face the uncertainty of a virus that has taken numerous lives thus far. When calamity and disease sets in, it is a comfort to think of that heavenly state where there is fullness of joy. Jonathan Edwards: "There shall be nothing in heaven that offends the most delicate eye. In other

words nothing that is abrasive, irritating, agitating or hurtful. Nothing harmful, hateful, upsetting or unkind. Nothing sad, bad or mad, harsh, impatient, ungrateful or unworthy. Nothing weak, or sick or broken or foolish. Nothing deformed, degenerate, depraved or disgusting. Nothing polluted, pathetic, poor or putrid. Nothing dark, dismal, dismayed or degrading. Nothing blameworthy, blemished, blasphemous, or blighted. Nothing faulty, faithless, frail or fading. Nothing grotesque or grievous. Nothing hideous, or insidious. Nothing illicit, illegal or lascivious or lustful. Nothing marred or mutilated, misaligned, or misinformed. Nothing nasty or naughty, offensive or odious. Nothing rancid or rude, soiled or spoiled, tawdry or tainted, tasteless, or tempting. Nothing vile, or viscous, wasteful or wanted. None of it. And all of this for hell-deserving sinners like you and me. Well, what will we see there? Wherever you turn your eyes you will see nothing but glory and grandeur and beauty and brightness, purity and perfection, and splendour and sweetness, satisfaction, salvation and majesty. We will see only all that is adorable and affectionate and beautiful and bright, and brilliant and bountiful and delightful and delicious and delectable, and dazzling. And elegant and exciting, fascinating and fruitful, and glorious and grand and gracious and good, and happy and holy and healthy and whole. Joyful and jubilant and lovely and luscious, majestic and marvellous, opulent and overwhelming, radiant and resplendent, splendid and sublime, sweet and savouring, tender and tasteful, euphoric and unified. And why? Because we will be looking at the face of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.”

Point 3 – “The Reminder that God is Sovereignly in Control of all things, even, and especially those in nature” (Psalm 46:1-3)

Psalm 46:1-3 “¹ God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. ² Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, ³ though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling.”

3.1 – “God’s Sovereignty Over Nature” (v1-3)

- a) This Psalm encourages hope and trust in God. It is a call for God's people to trust in Him, in His power and His providence in the worst of times. It is a reminder of God's gracious presence with His Church through all these times. God is not a distant God standing aloof to the problems of His people, but rather as **“God with us”**, our Emmanuel, God who **“is in the midst of her”** (v5), a God of grace and provision, standing with His people in the midst of the battle.
- b) **VI** And so the psalmist alludes to the fact that **“God is our refuge and strength”**. Therefore the struggling saint, the one not knowing, whether God truly is in control can be reassured that God is **MY** refuge and **YOURS**, and that we can be assured of His intimate, everlasting and personal care for His people. Not only that, but He also has proven Himself over time to be a **“very present help in time of trouble.”** God never withdraws Himself from His afflicted.

- c) **V2** In **verse 2** he uses the word **“therefore”**. You see it is precisely because of God's faithfulness and tested perseverance and closeness to His people in times of adversity and trial, that the Psalmist can write here that we have no need of fear. It is because of God's intimate presence with us in adversity and life's shaky and painful trials, that he can write, **“we will not fear”**.
- d) **V2-3** The situation being described here is one of natural disaster. He argues truly from the greater to the lesser. A picture is painted here of tumultuous seas, and crushing waves and tempest winds. We see the earth shaking, possibly in manner of unprecedented earthquakes. We see a situation being sketched of absolute panic and catastrophic disaster. Not your everyday type of experience, but an experience frightful indeed. I guess bringing something like the Coronavirus into this analogy would be quite appropriate.
- e) Now what the Psalmist does here is he points us to our hope in God, even, or especially in times of unimaginable natural disaster. Even if the sun were no longer to be in its orbit, and the moon would fall out of the skies, or the Coronavirus wipes out all of mankind, the Psalmist asserts utter confidence and trust in the omnipotence and unmatched Sovereignty of Almighty God.
- f) **V3** You see, precious friends, while earth dissolves, and mountains rock, and oceans roar, and the Coronavirus takes lives, God remains Sovereign. It is in Him we live and move and have our being and therefore we have no reason for fear or panic when even these types of things may come our way.

3.2 – “An Invitation to Rejoice Over God's Sovereignty” (v8-11)

Psalm 46:8-11 ⁸ Come, behold the works of the Lord, how he has brought desolations on the earth. ⁹ He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire. ¹⁰ “Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!” ¹¹ The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.”

- a) **V8** Having seen that God is sovereign over nature, the Psalmist now calls us to rejoice in God's Sovereignty. There is a call here for us to **“come and behold the works of the Lord”**. Here we have an invitation for the joyful citizens of Jerusalem to go ahead and view the remains of their enemies.
- b) **V9** Notice carefully the providential dealings of our covenantal God with His Church. **“He breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire”**, a picture of His voice quieting the tumult of war calling for the silence of peace, bringing all the attempts of the enemy to nil. It points to that final day when God will crush the head of the serpent

under his feet; that final day of victory in the Day of His Appearing, when every enemy shall lick the dust.

- c) **V10** In the midst of all this, the call comes for God's people to "be still and know that He is God", and that "He will ultimately be exalted among all the nations of this world".
- d) **V11** The Psalm then ends in assuring tone, a repetition of what has been seen before: "the Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress."

Conclusion:

- a) In conclusion then beloved friends, we see so clearly that we have no reason for fear. That which God in love has predestined for His people is far more glorious than anything we will ever endure this side of eternity. We are to comfort ourselves this Lord's Day with the wonderful words of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthian believers, "³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom 8:35-39)
- b) We are to remind ourselves that even though 200 South Africans will be brought back under quarantine this week to South Africa from China, and even though more than 3 000 have already died from this virus across the world, that nothing can happen to you and me, that would ever fall outside the permissible and decreed will of God. God will take care of us, no matter what the outcome, and in His providential dealings with His children we can trust.
- c) And as much as there may not be a cure for the Coronavirus, we can rest assured that our greatest need, which is that of being rescued from the eternal wrath of God at sin, has been fully taken care of in and through our Lord Jesus Christ, who has conquered sin, Satan and death. Look to Him therefore, for He indeed is our only hope.

Amen

Soli Deo Gloria

Sunday 8 March 2020

Glenvista Baptist Church