

I. Crisis and the Christian in Biblical Perspective  
“A Christian Response to the Corona Virus ”

Titus 2:11–14

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Some of what is going on with the Covid 19 virus is not new, like washing your hands. It's in the Bible in Exodus 30:21 which says [21] *They shall wash their hands and their feet, so that they may not die.* This is a statute forever from the Lord. This is nothing new for us. It's just reclaiming good ground. Now let's look in Titus 2:11–14 which says [11] *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, [12] training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, [13] waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, [14] who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.*

The grass withers, the flower fades but the Word of God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may it now be preached for you.

I received a call this past Thursday about the gathering of no more than 500 people would be acceptable due to what has been happening with the spread of the Covid 19 virus. With that being the cap we could do plenty of social distancing in this church by having people come at certain times. I have decided to set aside the theme of Lifestyle Stewardship until we get back to our regular schedule again and as I prayed about what to speak on I felt led to speak on what was happening today in our world with this virus spreading. I thought it would be appropriate to take a look at crisis and the Christian in Biblical perspective due to what we are dealing with right now. So in this study I want to give you three functional pastoral observations about the Christian in crisis, particularly the corona virus (Covid 19).

There are multiple passages in the Word of God where believers have been faced with crisis and those are wonderful case studies that we can learn from. I don't know how long this will continue but I have lined up a number of them of this topical expository preaching where the believer is in crisis, how they respond and what lessons we can learn from those particular case studies. However I want to do an overview first starting with this Titus 2 passage.

One guy told me recently ‘I don't have to worry about the Corona virus for I got saved and quite drinking them a long time ago.’ I said ‘That's not quite accurate so let me explain to you what the corona virus is.’ We get the word coronation from corona, where you place a crown on someone during a ceremony/coronation. We get this concept from Latin where corona is crown and that is the shape of the cell under a microscope of this virus. It's not new for it's even listed on the back of a Lysol can. We have known about the human corona virus since 1960 but this is a new strain and a more powerful strain. It's one that we don't have any vaccines for. The lethality of it is about 2 to 3 percent but there are groups of people that it is more lethal in like the older people, those that are health compromised and perhaps the very young.

This past weekend I went out of state to do a wedding for one the families in this church. This fellow came up to me and introduced himself in which I knew his father and grandfather and he said ‘I heard you were doing this wedding and thought for sure I wanted to come but then I told everyone that the wedding wouldn't take place if you were the one officiating the ceremony. Pastor Reeder just how old are you?’ I initially thought this fellow didn't have any

manners but I then said ‘I’m barely over 70.’ He said ‘I figured you wouldn’t be here because you’re vulnerable.’ I said ‘Vulnerable to what?’ He said ‘The corona virus!! For you ought not to be here.’ I said ‘Is that because of my age or my health being compromised, but perfect love cast out all fear so we’ll just go ahead with this, but don’t touch me the rest of this wedding.’ So I was able to survive it. We are aware that the focus of the lethality is there and we have tried to make those announcements as clear as possible to everyone in this modified schedule.

The question is, how should the Christian respond to this? We are getting a taste of how the world responds. In a secular world and life view which our culture increasingly has, is a materialist. They can only see things in terms of what they can only put their hands on. They react like ‘Oh my contagion is going to spike and it has a lethality to it??’ Then panic, then fear and because we don’t have a vaccine for it we have to go back to old methods of isolation and mitigation and that’s what’s happening.

So what should the Christians response be to this? How would Jesus have us respond to a situation like this? Does the Word of God frame this up for us? I believe the Lord has given us a directive as to how we should live. This should not take any of us by surprise. In 1918 we had the Spanish flu. I have lived through the Asian flu, the swine flu, SARS etc. Then there are wars and more people died in wars, the resulting famines, droughts and things accompanied with this in the last century than all the centuries combined of recorded history. This shouldn’t surprise us.

Before Jesus ascended to heaven He told us this all would happen. He told us there would be famines, wars, peril, earthquakes, rumors of wars, and crisis after crisis in Matthew 24 and Luke 21 and other passages. There will be personal crisis, geological crisis, national crisis, global crisis, economic crisis and Jesus says we’ll have this until He returns. So then how should we live? This Titus text will help us with this so we’ll take a look at it and then I’ll draw down three distillations for you.

This Titus text very likely became an early confession of the church and maybe even an early hymn. It was written by the Spirit of God through the Apostle Paul to Titus as Titus was sent to Crete in ministry of church revitalization of those churches that needed to be set back in order. If you think of this text as a hymn it falls into three stanzas. Stanza one is what I call past grace. Stanza number two I call present grace and stanza three I call future grace.

Titus 2:11 says *[11] For the grace of God **has appeared**, bringing salvation for all people.* This is talking of past grace. This ‘has appeared’ in the Greek is epiphainó and this is where we get the word epiphany from, which is the bright outshining that is spoken of in the rising of the sun as it comes up over the mountain and the rays just floods the valley. In this verse it is referring to something very specific in the history of redemption – the Incarnation. This is referring to Christ.

It is affirmed in John 1 – Christ the Light of the world has come and in John 1:14 which says *[14] And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.* God’s glory in the Incarnation has broken out and shines, now it’s veiled for it doesn’t shine without its veil. If it shined without the veil no one could live. Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, hail the Incarnate Deity. So Christ has come to save His people from their sins.

Notice that salvation has to be brought to us from God. We can’t do it. We can’t save ourselves. Where are His people? They are from all the nations and He is bringing salvation to all the peoples. Do you see the Abrahamic language here? The movement of the Gospel from the Jewish nation to all the nations isn’t plan B for it’s God’s plan all along. Abraham, in you all

the nations of the earth shall be blessed (Genesis 22:18). Now Christ has come, died an atoning death, He has risen and ascended. Now we're commissioned to make disciples of all the nations. Praise God for faith promise commitments, prayer and missionaries ready to go and then a church committed to doing it right where they send them from. This is what God has called us to.

I know you are a very motivated group but yet there may be some reading this that go to church but haven't come to Christ. Come to Him today for the church can't save you. Church attendance can't save you. Baptism can't save you. Ritual can't save you. You have heard the news – I'm sinner and I can't save myself but the Good News is that Jesus saves. I plead with you to come to this Savior. If you want to pray with someone please call us here at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200 for we'd love to pray with you about committing your life to Him. This glorious Grace has come to you and brings you to Christ so if you have come to Christ what happens with this grace next?

Titus 2:12 says this grace is *[12] training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age*. I really love the NAS translation of the word training here which is what Jerry Bridges calls upon in his book titled Disciplines of Grace where the grace of God is now disciplining us. When you take hold of the means of grace – the Word, prayer, sacraments, preaching, worship, fellowship, etc. – you deny ungodliness, you kill it, the very desire for it, for you want God's glory even in eating and drinking. So you renounce ungodliness, that's the vertical. You deny and renounce worldly desires – the ones that come outside in temptation, I want to flee and the worldly desires that are in me, the old man, I want to kill every day, whether its drunkenness, food, power, possessions, sexuality, promiscuity, perversion or any of that desire. I'm at war with it.

This present grace is training us, disciplining us and it leads us to three identifying marks of the Christian in this present age. We are to live sensibly, righteously and Godly in this present age with crisis doing it with present grace. In this present age we see periodic victories. We do not manifest our trust in grace when we live irrationally or presumptuously for the Christian life is sensible. Righteousness is obedience to God. We have a perfect righteousness that has been attributed to us through our salvation but we have a pursuit of righteousness. The sensible thing is obedience and trust and trust is manifested in obedience. As the timeless hymn says; *Trust and obey, for there's no other way, To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey*.

We started out denying ungodliness and we end up sensible, righteous and Godly. Coram Deo – living life under the eye of God. But God's grace isn't finished for there is future grace. Titus 2:13 says *[13] waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ*.

In what is happening currently and all the disappointments in life, the Master's Golf Tournament is not going to be played. I was convinced we must be near the end time for baseball's Spring training has been postponed and so has opening day. So when our hearts are fastened to those things and crisis comes we just are dismembered. We are dissipated and we begin to fall apart because there is where our hope is but not the believer's hope. The believer knows brokenness is a way of life until Christ comes and the believer waits for the blessed hope. Our hope is not in toilet paper or canned goods. Our hope is that Christ is coming and we're headed to a new heavens and a new earth and there will be no crisis for sin and all of its consequences are gone. When does that blessed Hope come? The One who came is coming again, our blessed Hope, our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.

In case you miss who He is, the next verse ties you all the way back to past grace. Titus 2:14 says *[14] (It is) who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works*. This is what He did in past grace for He's coming again, but this verse also ties back to present grace because when He comes for those people, He will find them zealous for good works. They are denying ungodliness and worldly desires to live sensibly and righteously in this present age. I love this passage so much.

For the takeaways I want to give you three present grace observations. God's people who are founded on past grace, being molded by present grace, anticipating future grace and while we're here in a broken world we live sensibly, righteously and Godly in this crisis filled age. What does that look like? Here are the three takeaways.

The first takeaway is this gives us an opportunity (including the corona virus going on now) for God's redeemed to intentionally grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ personally and corporately as a church. Why hasn't God taken all the brokenness away now? He has won the victory and defeated our enemies so why hasn't He destroyed them and given us the new heavens and new earth? It is for the same reason He took Israel through the wilderness and that is He is getting you ready for the new heavens and the new earth, for that's what the world's crisis becomes for us. They become a test. God's grace is greater.

The grace of God has appeared. From this text we have just learned about God's grace from a sovereign God. God's grace didn't appear because we asked for it but because God sovereignly sent it. From the doctrine of the sovereignty of God's grace we get a number of other doctrines but one in particular that's important for what we are addressing right now is the Providence of God. The providence of God is a recognition that not all things are good but a promise that all things work together for good. We know because of God and who He is, not because of us and He causes all things to work together for good which is including corona viruses. Now this virus is not a good thing but God is sovereignly working causing all things to work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose.

Tied to that is that the same God who is sovereignly doing this work of past grace, present grace and future grace is the very same God who enables us to live sensibly, righteously and Godly. We don't just move around like robots. God's grace enlivens us and enables us in the midst of a broken world to live sensibly which is making decisions – righteously and Godly in the present age. In other words, when these moments come get a firm grip and grasp on God's grace in Christ. Then surrender and make sure God's grace has a firm grip and grasp on you and not the world – not its panic and fears. You make sure you know your God. His grace and mercy have a grasp and grip on you as you have taken the time to get a grip and grasp on His grace revealed in His Word then you can profit from this.

What do these moments do? Moments like this create a wonderful platform for us whereby our response to it becomes a witness. The epicenter of where the corona virus began was Wuhan China and it has now started to subside there. This past February and March an journalist observer, not a believer, said; "The Wuhan Christians in their response to the corona virus have put their government to shame – their selflessness, their strength, their thoughtfulness (sensible), their courage and when asked they tell everyone, 'it's because of our faith in Christ.'" Do you see the platform? That is the platform they saw was given to them to witness for Christ.

Such a moment also becomes an instrument in the hands of God whereby He begins to work on us. What do crisis and tests do? They show us what we know, what we don't know and what we need to know. That is what moments like this produce for us. They show us what we

know about our God and our relationship with Him in the body of Christ. They show us what we yet need to know from that work.

It's not only personally but corporately for how will churches respond? Will we be drawn together in the unity of truth, love, mercy and grace with our diverse gifts, responding to the glory of God with confidence in the grace of God? You want to trust God but not tempt God. You believe in God's providence, but panic no – faithfulness yes, fear no. There are so many verses I could show you on this but I'm just going to show you one in Proverbs 22:3 which says *[3] The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it.* To trust in God does not mean to act with simplicity and stupidity and that's why God Word points out sensibility. Trust Him. Be bold and courageous, but also be sensible in the Lord. Remember this verse in Proverbs.

We see in this verse the man hides himself. Let's say we go to some safari park and a lion comes up. What will you do? I would hide myself to the best of my ability. One might say to me 'don't you trust the Lord?' and I say 'I do, but I'm not going to tempt the Lord by standing there and becoming that lion's breakfast.' I'm going to hide myself for in that case that is what the Lord teaches me to do. I'm to be prudent, with God given wisdom.

Let's put this verse up against the corona virus that is going around right now. The prudent washes their hands. The prudent doesn't seek to be infected. The prudent understands hygiene and proper medical care. At this point I'd probably take as much vitamin C as I could put in my body within prudence. We take the right steps. The simple just go on and end up suffering because of their lack of prudence. We ask God to give us prudence and no panic but also let us address concerns. We trust Him with confidence but we're not going to tempt God in the name of trust.

We see this with our Lord who has a promise who would not let His feet or yours to stumble yet would not throw Himself down from the temple as He brought the prudent understand of God's Word to bear when tempted by Satan in the wilderness. This leads me to a second takeaway.

The second takeaway is this gives us an opportunity to display and deploy a Gospel witness for God's glory and a Gospel witness for God's grace. In these times I'm asked 'is this God's judgment or God giving us an opportunity?' My answer is 'yes.' This could very well be God's judgment upon the nation. This is a pandemic and it does not refer to lethality. It refers to the breadth of something. This goes across states, nations and countries. I have no special revelation to tell you this is God's judgment with certainty but it could be. Something I do know is that in moments that man faces his extremities it becomes our opportunity to tell them to put their trust in God, His Son Jesus.

In our current situation hundreds upon hundreds are coming to Christ, right now in these last months and weeks in Iran, Northern Italy and China – the very focus points at this moment of this crisis. It is glorious to see how God does this. If it's judgment I leave that in the hands of God but it may also be a blessing to open up opportunities for us to talk with people about Jesus who would never talk to us before about Him. You can tell them your hope is not on what is on the shelf at the department store or the grocery store, for our Hope is in Christ. That door becomes wide open for us. These moments of crisis many times make hard hearts ready for the Gospel seed. Cease those glorious moments.

I'd love to tell you what John Calvin told his presbytery, his company of pastors, of how to respond to the plagues of Geneva but here is what Martin Luther said when John Hus wrote him and asked him what to do as a Christian pastor in response to these plagues; 'Dr. Hus here is

what I shall do. I shall ask God for His mercy to protect us, then I will fumigate and I will open up the windows to purify air. I will secure and administer medicine and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not requested or needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance inflict and pollute someone else and cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God wishes to take me He'll find me but He will find me having done what is expected of me and so I'm not responsible for my death or the death of others. But if my neighbor needs me however I shall not avoid their place. I will go to their place and their person. I will freely go even in the manner I have stated above. See this is such a testimony of God fearing faith. It's neither brash nor fool hearty nor tempt God.'

I want you to know I'm not going to be fool hearted or unnecessarily expose myself but I am going to wash my hands. I love today at Briarwood. This church has been cleaned four times with Lysol. I feel like I'm 13 years old in my mother's house again so we will do what's right, sensible, righteous and Godly but I want you to know if you or any of your relatives becomes a consequence of this crisis you call and we'll be there.

The last takeaway is this gives us an opportunity to observe and participate in God's providence at work in the midst of this present crisis. Doors are opening up for us all over the place. I don't have time to give you all the examples so I'll just end this way. I have done my scientific and biological reading and I have found out that a virus attaches itself to an organ and then it invades that whole organ. After that it moves to another organ and then to another and if the immune system doesn't develop the proper response and there are no vaccines then it eventually can kill the body. Boy this sure sounds like sin to me – the virus of sin.

The virus of sin creeps in small. Then it goes to this area and that area and another area and the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). We don't have a vaccine for sin but we have a cure and it's Jesus. Jesus will deliver you from the penalty and power of sin and He will even increasingly deliver you from the practice of sin. Praise God for the blessed Hope for one day He will deliver us from the presence of sin.

In 1793 Philadelphia was undergoing the yellow fever plague. Do you remember the horrendous killings at the Mother Immanuel Church in Charleston? I want to take you back a couple of hundred years to the original Mother Immanuel Church. I remember admiring their Christian response but it didn't surprise me because I happened to have heard what happened in the DNA of that church back to its original and his name was Richard Allen. He was a slave who bought his own freedom. Then he studied theology and was ordained at the Trinity Episcopal Church. Then he established the African Free Society. When the yellow fever hit he had planted a church called Mother Immanuel Church of Philadelphia. The death rate was 10 percent and rising. As it rose everyone fled but Richard Allen and his African American members. For the next days and weeks they transported, treated and prayed for the afflicted. They shared the Gospel with the afflicted. These become opportunities to cease for the glory of God as we trust and obey sensibly, righteously and Godly in this present age. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Take a moment of silent prayer to our Lord. Sensible, righteous, Godly, trusting our God without tempting our God. Obedience, fearless, faithful with no panic but with prudence is how we need to live our lives so God help us Lord live in this way in these moments of crisis. Help us to cease the opportunities You bring our way to tell others of You our blessed Hope. We ask this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

Life Takeaway #1

An opportunity for God's Redeemed to intentionally grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ personally and corporately

Life Takeaway #2

An opportunity for to display and deploy a Gospel witness for God's glory and a Gospel witness for God's grace

Life Takeaway #3

An opportunity to observe and participate in God's Providence at work in the midst of this present crisis