

A Christian Response to Global Health Crisis

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Date: 14 June 2020

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[0 : 00] For them so long, I wondered that they might have left without me. I was distressed. After I thought I had looked everywhere, I sat down on the road near the driveway and cried.

Have you ever felt that feeling before? Sad, alone, abandoned, confused? Well, today, lots of people are feeling this way.

Today, in fact, millions of people are sad, frustrated, angry, anxious and lost.

Why? Because a terrible illness has brought our technologically advanced, enlightened world to a grinding halt.

Now, we all know that people die all the time. Sickness and disease is rife across the world, along with natural disaster, crime, injustice, divorce, abuse, suicide.

[1 : 18] But in light of the last few months, this new killer is unlike anything we've witnessed. Seven million cases worldwide.

Many, many more millions out of work. Nearly half a million dead. People are dying faster than we can bury them.

And with no end in sight, it seems. We have a reason, don't we, to sit down and cry. To cry out in anguish, frustration and anger.

We have reason to ask why. And to look for answers. But where? Who do we cry to?

Where are our answers? Governments? Conspiracy theorists? Mother nature? Maybe. But where will that lead?

[2 : 22] More confusion? More anger? Maybe more death? Maybe. No, this is not the place to cry out. Instead, we should cry out to God.

Why? Because, point one, the coronavirus is not a mistake. Now, immediately I hear someone say, hold on, Jeff.

Is God punishing us with COVID? And I say, not necessarily. But the coronavirus is God's doing. God's doing. God's doing. And some might find this hard to hear or believe and reply, but God is love. God is kind. God is saviour.

And yes, you're right. He is our loving, kind saviour. But to be our loving, kind saviour, he must be in complete control.

[3 : 29] Back at the beginning in Genesis, as God was explaining the hardship that was coming to the man and woman because of their rebellion.

God then spoke of his plan to crush our enemy, freeing us from the burden of pain, death and sin through the offspring of the woman.

His plan and promise was to bring about an even better life and relationship with God than they had in the garden. And to do this, God had to bring us into depravity and death.

So how do we reconcile this with our loving, kind saviour? Paul helps us in Romans 8 verse 18. He says, I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us.

The hardship that God has brought us through is completely outshined by what he is bringing us to.

[4 : 41] And not only us, but creation as well. He continues in verse 19. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it.

In hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. Do you understand what this is saying about our kind, loving saviour?

God brings hardship on us deliberately.

The God of the Bible is not what people tend to think gods are. He's not a statue.

He's not a thunderstorm. He's not a crutch. He's not a genie. He is your creator. He is your ruler. [6 : 07] Your life, my life, is his decision. And the lie that precipitated death, sin, and a groaning world has shrouded creation in a darkness so deep it has kept us from seeing him.

But why would God do that? Because from this dark, sinful place, are we able to see God as he truly is?

When God sent his son into this dark, broken world, a light shined into that darkness. And those who stand in that light and believe the truth about God are freed from it and become citizens of his eternal home.

When we stand in the light of Jesus and trust him as our only hope, we finally see the truth about our God. A righteous judge who punishes the guilty.

And a loving saviour who took that punishment on himself. So that those who live in this light and believe in him will be liberated from bondage to decay and brought into freedom and the glory of God.

[7 : 34] The coronavirus is tragic. And it fits well in the disordered, chaotic world that sin and evil produced.

But it is not a mistake. The God of the Bible does not make mistakes, even when we suffer. So how should we respond to this?

Well, I'm going to suggest one appropriate response to this reality in two parts. To mourn God-given tragedy, but not without hope.

Like many of you listening, I believe in this God, Jesus Christ, saviour and king. But you and I and everyone else, we still live in a broken world.

We still see and deal with the effects of sin every day. COVID-19 is still here. We are not immune. Christians and non-Christians alike are suffering.

[8 : 47] Losing jobs. Frustrated. Sad. Dying. And what I have needed to remember, and what you may too, is that it is good and right for a Christian to mourn such tragedy and cry out to God.

As the one who has done this to us. We are not to pretend that this is some random human made evil outside of God's decision.

Nor that our good God wouldn't do such things. Just listen again to a few of the highlights of Lamentations 3, which Helen read earlier.

I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of the Lord's wrath. Indeed, he has turned his hand against me again and again all day long.

He has made my skin and my flesh grow old and broken my bones. He has walled me in so I cannot escape. He has made my paths crooked.

[9 : 59] He has dragged me from the path and mangled me and left me without help. In tragedy and hardship, it is the response of the faithful to call out to God as the one who has brought this upon us.

The author in this lament is laying the source of his pain at God's feet. You have done this to me. You have brought this upon me.

You are the source of my suffering. Our favourite Bible sufferer, Job, says in chapter 16, 12, All was well with me, but he shattered me.

He seized me by the neck and crushed me. What these biblical authors make clear is that God is the one who brings suffering.

And so it is right to bring your suffering to him. It is right to pour out your pain and your agony on him.

[11 : 11] So let's do that. Let's put our pain and anger and sadness and frustration into words and lay them at his feet.

We don't need to be skillful authors like these guys. We just use our words. God, when will you end this pain? God, why are so many people dying?

Why must I be cut off from family and friends? You have stopped us from coming to church.

What other pain do you need to bring to him? God, why have you stopped me from being happy?

Why must I suffer like this?

When will I get work? When will I get friends? When will I get love? Why must I endure this pain, God?

[12 : 26] I hate where you have brought me. Why do you want me to suffer? Why have you left me alone? I said a moment ago that it is the faithful who bring their pain to God.

It is the faithful who believe in the true God who deliberately subjected his creation to frustration in order to bring it to glory.

This is our God. This is the God of the Bible who saves through suffering. And so it is okay to ask why.

Why have you brought this upon me? Because doing anything else, trying to find out who to blame, trying to seek out revenge to what or whoever God uses, or even I think putting on a happy face and pretending it's not that bad when it really is.

It's just denial or ignorance about who God really is. Even our Lord Jesus demonstrated this response to God.

[13:52] Has he hung on the cross? According to God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge, as Peter said in Acts 2. Jesus knows better than anyone what it's like to say, Jesus knows better than anyone what it's like to be abandoned by God.

He cries out knowing that his father has put him there and says, my God, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? So join me in responding to this awful health crisis and all the other things in the way that a Christian should.

God, coronavirus totally sucks and we've had enough. Why are you doing this to us?

When will you end this pain and death? When will you end the violence? When will you protect the vulnerable? God, we're sick of it.

It sounds a bit weird to say or hear this, doesn't it? You might feel uncomfortable.

[15:04] I did a bit as I was writing this. But when we don't come to God with this, when we instead run from him and say what so many popular voices say every day, a good God couldn't do this, like them, we end up distant.

Distant from God, distant from God's people, distant from God's goodness. All it does is affirm the lie and perpetuate the darkness.

The Bible teaches us that when we bring our anger and frustration to God and in a sense, give it back to him who is responsible, what we're doing is we are acknowledging that he is the only one who can deal with it.

And like the lamenters in the Bible, including Jesus, we know he's bringing the justice and the life that he's promised. And so the second part of our appropriate response to such tragedy and suffering is bringing your pain to God, but not without hope.

My final point. Over the last few months, as COVID was spreading, every day the headline was worse than the day before.

[16:43] A million infected, a hundred thousand dead. Iran, the grave diggers can't keep up. New York, the deaths are piling up.

US, the worst hit country. And to add insult to injury, the death of George Floyd, protests, tear gas, riots.

With this backdrop, lament feels hopeless. What's the point? What good does it do? And you know, that's an okay question.

And that's the impression you get when God's people suffered and cried out to him. It must have felt hopeless. But what do we notice with those who pour out their sorrow on God?

Well, I notice two things. Firstly, the lament doesn't end their pain. And secondly, they remember God's love.

[17:48] When God's people suffer and cry out, it's not as though God looks down and says, okay, everything's better. Now your life is great.

It may be the faithful response, but God doesn't necessarily reward their faithfulness with sudden miraculous healing. But, they hope.

Listen to this lament with hope in Psalm 44. Awake, Lord. Why do you sleep? Rouse yourself.

Do not reject us forever. Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression? We are brought down to the dust. Our bodies cling to the ground.

Rise up and help us. Rescue us because of your unfailing love. These are the words of someone who is at the end of their tether.

[18:54] Someone who feels like God just isn't there, but who trusts in his unfailing love. Again, when God deliberately gives Paul a thorn in the flesh, three times he pleads for God to take it away.

He knew what God had given him and recognized that God had the power to take it away, but he didn't. Instead, he said, my grace is sufficient for you.

You don't need healing or protection or relief to do what I've prepared for you, God says. In fact, in your weakness, my power is made perfect. And so, Paul delights in the weakness God has given him, not because he loves pain, but he knows what God is doing through him, which is bringing his creation into glory.

What does this show us? These two people are not happy, are they? They're not enjoying what God has given them.

They're greatly suffering at God's hand, but not without hope. As a lost little boy all those years ago, I sat on that gutter, bawling my eyes out.

[20 : 30] I had zero capacity to realise that my parents hadn't left without me, and so I was lamenting in what I saw as a hopeless situation, deserted and alone.

I can do nothing to help myself. All I've got left is to sit and cry, which is what I did. This is the state of any person who grieves the terrible things in our world without hope.

They may look for an answer. They may claim to have found it. They may shout, cry, complain, blame, fight, but without the eyes to see and accept the light and life God has given in his son Jesus, it will be to no avail.

How will a Christian respond differently? Well, we may still sit and cry, feeling lost, abandoned, and alone.

But as we grieve the terrible position we're in, we have hope. We know that while we may not be able to change our situation, even though we can't see him, dad is just over that hill, ready to carry us home.

[22 : 04] Friends, this is the right response to a global health crisis. when God feels distant, when the world feels crazy, when you just can't understand why, our God is in control.

He hasn't stuffed up. And like with Jesus and many others, he may not immediately take the pain away, but he hears us and he loves us and he's coming to bring us home.

Will you join me as I pray? Most gracious heavenly father, you are our loving, kind, sovereign lord, and we thank you that you are at work in us and our world for our good, God even if we sometimes don't like the path you bring us on.

Father, we ask for your mercy and relief for the many who are suffering greatly due to the global health crisis. Father, will you end their hardship and ours?

We thank you that you have graciously rescued us out of sin and death through the death of Jesus. would you cause all people to trust in him and may you bring his day of glory very soon.

[23 : 39] Amen.