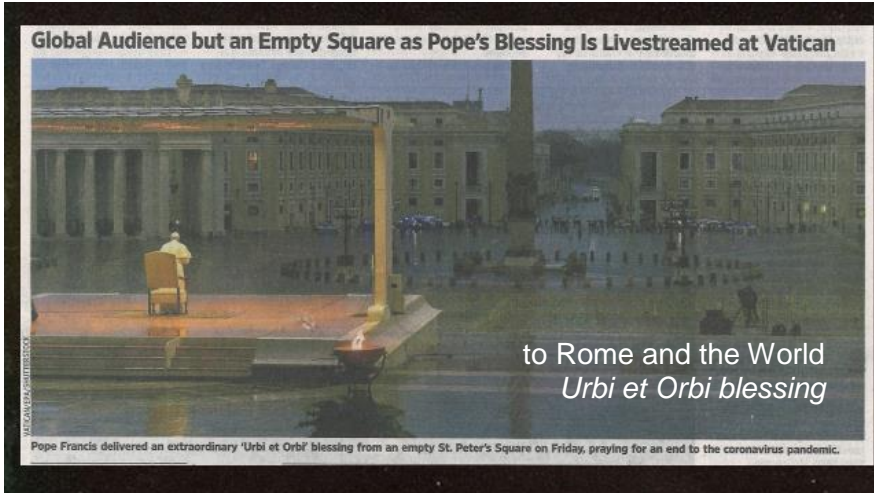


5 TRUTHS for CONFIDENT LIVING IN THREATENING TIMES

Romans 8, others

Of all the things I was taught in seminary when preparing to be a pastor, one very helpful insight was this: *Understand your times with a Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other.*

Well, I have my Bible in this hand (right), and here are the headlines from my Saturday newspaper.



Coronavirus Daily Update

As of 6:19 p.m. ET
March 27

101,657

U.S. cases

1,581

U.S. deaths

591,802

World-wide cases

26,996

World-wide deaths

130,915

World-wide recoveries

THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

U.S.'s Confirmed Cases Exceed 100,000

Infections continued to rise in New York and other hotspots across the country

The U.S. surpassed 100,000 confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus Friday, but by a continued jump in infections in New York and in new hotspots across the country.

By Tobi Assari, Lucy Crockett and Alex Coblenz

While testing for the deadly respiratory virus hasn't been uniform across America or globally, making accurate case counts hard to pin down, confirmed infections in the U.S. have doubled or tripled every three days for nearly a month.

Last Friday, the number of confirmed infections in the country exceeded 100,000, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University. By Tuesday, that figure was 83,000. Two days later, it had surpassed all other countries' reported totals, with just over 85,000.

The pandemic has swiftly reverberated across the U.S., shutting schools, businesses, arenas and parks and silencing once-busy thoroughfares. A record 4.8 million workers applied for unemployment benefits last week. Hospital



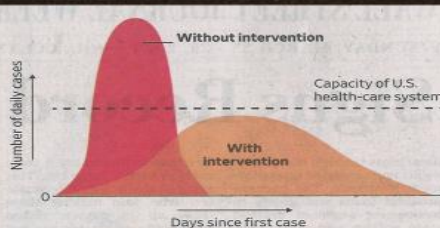
U.S. Army personnel sit apart at New York's Jacob K. Javits Convention Center, which will be partially converted into a hospital for coronavirus patients.

In the absence of interventions, that means 2.2 million Americans and 510,000 Britons could die, according to the projections, with hospitals' critical-care capacity exceeded as early as the second week of April.

"The world is facing the most serious public health crisis in generations," Neil Ferguson, director of Imperial College's MRC Centre for Global Infectious Disease Analysis, said in a statement. (He developed symptoms last week and self-isolated.)

THE NUMBERS | By Jo Craven McGinty

What Will It Take to Flatten the Curve?



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Researchers Probe Ways Infection Attacks Body

By SUMATHI REDDY

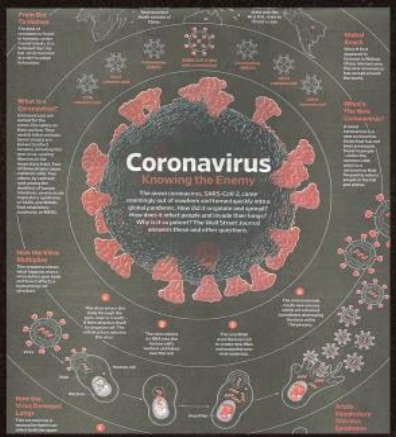
It starts, most often, with a cough or a sneeze.

Thousands of tiny, often invisible droplets of saliva or mucus disperse in the air. You walk by—within 6 feet of the offender—and inadvertently inhale the droplets.

The novel coronavirus that causes Covid-19 begins like most other respiratory viruses. But scientists are still studying how the virus in some patients progresses to the lungs, causing viral pneumonia, difficulty breathing, and even death.

7 strains infect humans

4 common colds, then SARS, MERS, COVID19



Italy's Slow Progress Is Warning to West

One of the most draconian lockdowns hasn't stamped out the virus entirely
By Eric Lipton
AND MARSHITA STANCET

Doctors in Brescia, a northern Italian town at the center of the country's new coronavirus pandemic, have seen glimmers of hope in their battle against the disease in recent days. The virus has killed more than 1,000 people there and the number of infected admitted to its large hospital is beginning to decline, down by half in 59 a day, suggesting the extreme lockdown imposed on the population could be working. But local officials believe the true number of those infected with the virus is perhaps six times the official figure of 7,905. And they are taking new steps: Those discharged from hospital but still positive for the virus are sent to temporary quarantine facilities.



Patients were treated in an emergency temporary overflow hospital building set up to ease the pressure on the health-care system in Brescia, Italy, on Monday.

In 1896, poet Rudyard Kipling penned arguably his most important poem. He simply entitled it *IF*.¹ In part...

*If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;*

*If you can meet with triumph and disaster
And treat those two imposters just the same;
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools;*

*If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And—which is more—you'll be a Man my son!*

Kipling understood how important it was to “keep your head” and “running well” especially when you facing disaster, criticism, threats. This week, as I pondered what the Holy Spirit would have me teach on this morning – in the middle of these difficult days – I sensed Him saying, “Talk with your sisters and brothers about *keeping your head when all about you are losing theirs*. Think with them – with My Help -- about living confidently, as Jesus’ disciples, in threatening times.” And then I was lead here, to Paul’s letter to the *Romans* Chapter 8, verse 18. Lean in as I read.

¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

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.

²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait

eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

²⁶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. ²⁷ And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. ²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose

We belong to the God and follow Jesus Christ, do not read our Bibles through the lens of the newspaper. Rather, we read our newspapers through the lens of the revealed Word of God...and it always gives us what we need -- like **5 key truths for living with discernment and confidence, even when living in threatening times.**

#1 We live today in a groaning, frustrated creation.

Romans 8:18-22

^{8:20} For the creation was subjected to futility (or *frustration*), 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.

There are 3 things to say about the world in which we live. **1st - We live in a creation that retains much of the beauty and resources** with which it was originally created – you still see everywhere that this privileged planet was designed by God and outfitted by God for LIFE. This is the place (in all the universe) where life could have and should have taken off!

But **2nd** - the Word of God has the only plausible explanation why LIFE here has not thrived.

Why even in the last 2000 years, humanity has been ravaged time and time again by either pandemic diseasesⁱⁱ

- Antonine Plague (AD 165) – 5 million dead in the Roman empire
- Plague of Cyprian (AD 250) – 5,000 a day died in the city of Rome alone
- Plague of Justinian (AD 541) 10% of world's population died
- Black Death (1346-1353) – perhaps ½ of Europe died within a 7 year span
- Spanish Flu (1918-1920) – killed an estimated 500 million
- AIDS (1981-today) has killed 35 million

...or the unending slaughter of wars between nations. According to Wikipedia, in the modern era alone (last 500 years) there have been 120 wars world-wide and regionally, and at least 342,600,000 people have died as a result of the conflict. In the last 100 year alone, 193,000,000. There is

something desperately wrong in God's creation. **It is crippled, it is enslaved to "futility"**ⁱⁱⁱ

(*frustration*)

- THE CAUSE: the result of Adam's moral choice to disobey God and invite the "you shall surely die" consequence into God's beautiful creation (Genesis 2:17)
- THE CONSEQUENCE: Paul describes this judgment, this "frustration" (vs. 20) as a "slavery to decay"^{iv} (vs. 21).

3rd – {and yet) **This creation that longs to give birth** (a woman in labor, the closer the delivery moment happens, the more frequent and intense are the labor pains) **to the "glorious freedom that the children of God will have."**

Romans 8:20 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.

#2 We too are *groaning*, yet hopeful *sojourners*.

Romans 8:23-25 (1 Peter 2:11 cf. Lev 25:23-24 Hebrews 11:13-16)

²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

We have been hearing the groaning of our neighbors, friends, our leaders, our countrymen these days: the frustration, tears and fears, even panic and the losses. We Christians also *groan*...but we do so differently. We who follow Christ are *sojourners*. Peter wrote

¹ Peter 2:11 Beloved, I urge you as **sojourners and exiles** to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable...

The writer to the early Hebrew Christians, speaking in chapter 11 of all the saints/believers who have gone before us and finished, reminded them (and us)

Hebrews 11:13 These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and **having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.** ¹⁴ For people who **speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland.** ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, **they desire a better country**, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared for them a city.

Hey gang! We are sojourners! A "sojourner" is a person who resides *temporarily* in a place. A sojourner lives in tents, in non-permanent dwellings. A sojourner *expects* to be where they are **only a short time**. A sojourner **doesn't figure** that his/her journey in a foreign place **will be particularly easy**. A sojourner, who resides temporarily in a place for only a short time, does **not believe nor**

imagine that where they are, **will deliver** for them now **what they know they will experience** when they get where they are going. Where they really belong.

We are *sojourners*. And sometimes the sojourning is difficult. We groan. But like all the saints, who have finished before us, we are (like they did) **sojourning** (and running our race) **by FAITH**...a “not by sight but by faith” sojourn always looking for and desiring our real home!

#3 We hopefully sojourn with supernatural resources.

Romans 8:26-27

²⁶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. ²⁷ And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

By the way, have you noticed how much “groaning” is going on in these verses?

- Creation is *groaning* under the frustration and futility of sin’s crippling judgment
- Sojourners are *groaning* in our longing and desire to finally get to our wonderful, eternal home
- [Now] the Holy Spirit Himself (*vs.26*) is *groaning intensively* for us in prayer, before God the Father, that the will of God will always be accomplished in our lives no matter what is going on

What a supernatural resource you and I have in God’s Holy Spirit! He fully understands our weaknesses. He completely gets it when we are stymied and speechless in prayer but desperately need God’s help. What’s more, at the same time the Father is searching my heart, and knows what the Spirit is thinking. Bottom line – no matter what is going on around me and in my heart/life, God’s Spirit is connected with God the Father – and His resources are flowing my way. Which leads to truth

#4 We do not control our days. Our caring Father does.

Romans 8:28

Romans 8:28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose

The Lord Jesus himself put it this way:

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?”

²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the

Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

³⁴ “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble

A few years ago, *Reader’s Digest* published a number of short letters from children who lived in New York City. These kids had been at a parade featuring then President Jimmy Carter. Of course, thousands and thousands of New Yorkers had been on hand, lining the street, shouting, gesturing. It was a massive, fun crowd.

One little girl wrote her letter to the White House with this simple message:

Hi Mr. Pres!

Do you remember me? I was one of the people who waved at you when you came to New York. Remember? I was wearing the brown jacket.

Your citizen, Betsy R.

Unless Scripture is deceiving us, here is what we know to be true. No matter what you’re facing. No matter what your losses. No matter what your fears. No matter what your situation. You have an active, engaged heavenly Father who has your life and my life completely in His hands. He knows what color jacket you are wearing, sees your wave, and has His hands wrapped around your life.

- Yes...we live in a groaning, frustrated creation
- Yes...we too groan, yet as hopeful sojourners
- And yes...we hopefully sojourn with supernatural resources
- And yes...we do not control our days; our Father does.

#5 When we trust more, we fear less.

Romans 8:28a “And we know for those who love God...all things work together”

You remember, of course, what was included in Paul’s personal “all things” list, right?

² Corinthians 11:24 Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶ on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; ²⁷ in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, ²⁸ in cold and exposure. ²⁸ And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I am not weak?

And yet here he is, prompted by the Holy Spirit, saying to us. *Lean into what you know.* Peter says it, “Cast all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). Hebrews 13:5

Matthew 10: 28 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰ But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

“Keep your life free from the love of money; be content with what you have, for He has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you. So we confidently say, *The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?*”

CONCLUSION

This past week, our church staff team had one of the best staff meetings I can remember. We were huddled computers, some at home, some at church (6’ away), some in individual offices. But what drew us together was a remarkable devotional article by Julie Canlis, entitled “*Love in the Desert*” in which she spoke of how Jesus’ baptism, and hearing His Father say “This is My Son, whom I love” readied Him for his difficult, groaning time in the desert. She writes --

In Christ, we receive the words “You are my beloved child.” In Christ, we are led into wilderness areas—some of our own making, some imposed upon us—where we fight the Tempter with those same words of love. And in Christ, we ask ourselves, “What would it be like to hear *You are my beloved in the midst of this specific wilderness in my life?* Or, if we’re already vulnerable, we might wonder, *How can I not resent this pain, but choose it again and again?*”

As the years go by I have become more and more convinced that receiving God’s love from a place of weakness is absolutely essential to spiritual health. I want this experience for my kids as they grow (and sometimes flounder) in faith. We are loved by God and loved to the death. Only by staying grounded in this love does sin (*and fear* – my add) break its hold on us. Only by His affection do our temptations wither.^v

In these threatening times, use well the lens of God’s Word and His relentless love for you.

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ⁱ It was written (in part) to encourage a young British military officer (Leander Starr Jameson) who courageously dared a risky raid to win a battle, but ended with much loss. But Kipling had a larger view than simply the loss of one battle. His poem,

ⁱⁱ date from “20 of the Worst Epidemics and Pandemics in History,” <https://www.livescience.com/worst-epidemics-and-pandemics-in-history.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ i.e., μεταίωτης, *emptiness, futility, purposelessness, worthlessness*

^{iv} i.e., φθορά - *dissolution, deterioration, corruption, depravity, destruction*

^v Julie Canlis, “Love in the Desert,” *Christianity Today* April 2020, 44-45.