

Is COVID-19 God's Punishment?
Sermon March 22, 2020

Dear beloved,

In the past few weeks and months, we have constantly heard, seen, and read about the Coronavirus, called COVID-19, that is disrupting life all over the globe. This situation has a direct impact on all of us, even if we have not yet gotten sick from it.

Now, we have learned and use a new political word: "social distancing." These days, when church gatherings are restricted, we try our very best to connect and to worship our God with the Calvin congregation, using the modern technology, from our homes where we feel safe and secure. You might find this way of worship very comfortable, sitting in your love seat or armchair. So, don't fall asleep, please. Hopefully, you won't feel so comfortable that you would ask me that, from now on, we should have all our services broadcasted.

Those, who read the Bible regularly, recall the book of Revelations chapter 16, where God is informing us about those things which would tell us about the end of this world. Scripture readers want to know if COVID-19 is one of the signs of the end of the world or not.

Let's keep in our left hand the newspapers today and, in our right hand, the Bible opened at Revelation chapter 16. At the end of my sermon, we will create our own thoughts and feelings about this situation, and we will hear how we should, as Christians, respond to all these challenges.

What Is This Coronavirus?

You probably heard that, in the last few months, some people don't buy CORONA BEER because they think that the Coronavirus comes from Corona beer!

Coronavirus is a type of virus that can cause the symptoms of a common cold or seasonal flu. The World Health Organization gave this Coronavirus a special name COVID – and the number 19 because the virus appeared in 2019.

It seems that this Coronavirus was related to the wildlife trade in China. This virus, comparing with previous flu viruses, is highly infectious and seems to have a mortality rate of around 5%., which is pretty scary. This means that 5 people or more out of 100 could die due to this virus. By today, this virus has spread through most of the world. Unfortunately, it seems that in the next few months, the number

of infected people will continue to increase. As a result, maybe millions of people will die around the world from it.

These days, I am often asked: Is COVID-19 one of the plagues of Revelation?

In Revelation 16, we read about seven plagues. God prepared these against humanity because people turned away from Him. Those seven plagues in the Bible are punishments and wake up calls. Let me share a few verses from Revelation 16.

The Seven Bowls of God's Wrath

1 Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go, pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth."

2 The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly, festering sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshipped its image.

3 The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead person, and every living thing in the sea died.

4 The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood.

5 Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: "You are just in these judgments, O Holy One, You who are and who were; for these people have shed the blood of Your holy people and Your prophets, and You are giving them as they deserve."

7 And I heard the altar respond: "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are Your judgments."

8 The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was allowed to scorch people with fire.

9 They were burned by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify Him.

10 The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and people were covered into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.

12 The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up.

15 “Look, says God: I come surprising you, like a thief!” Blessed is the one who stays awake.”

17 The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, “It is done!”

18 Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since mankind has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake.

20 Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found.

21 From the sky huge hailstones, each weighing about a hundred pounds, fell on people. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.

Now, let us go back to our previous question: Is COVID-19 one of the seven plagues mentioned in Revelation 16?

It might be tempting to say YES, but if we go deeper into these verses, I found quite a few reasons to say NO.

First of all, these seven plagues are God’s wrath towards those who do NOT belong to Him, the only Living and Loving God. It is not towards Christians but Christ's enemies, who cursed the God of heaven, and refused to repent and glorify Him. This virus COVID-19 is not discriminating Christians and non-Christians. Both Christians and non-Christians can be infected. No one is immune to it.

COVID-19 seems to be just another virus in our human history. It is even something that our infectious disease experts have been anticipating, and warning us about, for many years. On Friday night, with my family, we were watching a movie called CONTAGION, made in 2011, which predicts these days. If you have Netflix, I would recommend that you watch it, to see how we should protect ourselves by socially distancing.

However, God knows about this, and God has plans with it.

The second question I am getting these days: Is the Coronavirus a sign of the end of the world, and will our Lord Jesus Christ return these days? Are we in the last few days or months?

At this point, my answer is: Maybe YES, maybe NO.

First of all: We do not know when the end will come. In Matthew 24, Jesus Christ warns us that there will be many signs that will appear to point to the end, but nobody will know the day when He returns - not even the angels in heaven, only God alone.

Secondly: During world history, we already had similar very severe viruses and political unrest, which killed millions.

- In the 14th Century, the Black Plague killed approximately half of the population of Europe.
- In 1918 the Spanish flu, another coronavirus, killed 50 to 100 million people worldwide.
- Stalin, the Russian Communist dictator in the 20th Century, had 20 million or more people killed.
- Mao Zedong, the Communist leader of China, between 1950-1959, is estimated to be responsible for the deaths of up to 45 million people.
- In World War I, approximately 20 million died, and in World War II, 75 million.

Now, the death toll for COVID-19 could potentially approach that of the Spanish flu, 50 million or more, but there is no reason to suspect that it is a sign of the end. We do not know when the end will come, but this virus has to turn our focus towards our Lord Jesus Christ, and His return.

Jesus said to his disciples: *“You will hear of wars and rumours of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.”* (Matthew 24:4-8).

Jesus did not talk about viruses here; at that time the word VIRUS did not exist. But I think it is safe to include them since they are just as devastating as those events the Lord Jesus mentioned. History is replete with plagues, wars, and natural disasters that kill large numbers of people. Although none of these has been a sign of the end, we have to be prepared at every moment, because we never know when the Lord Jesus will return. We have to be prepared to go with Him.

What should be our spiritual response to this pandemic?

Although we agreed that COVID-19 might be not one of those seven last plagues of Revelation, and neither a very specific sign of the end of this world, it is still very real, and we have to take it very seriously. As Christians, we need to respond appropriately to it. As I sent to you on Tuesday, Martin Luther's thoughts that he wrote 500 years ago, we shall ask God mercifully to protect us. We shall avoid places and persons where our presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus, perchance, infect and pollute others, and so cause their death as a result of our negligence. But if our neighbours need us, however, we shall help them.

- Please keep your hands clean.
- Do not touch your face.
- Keep your distance from other people.
- Take advantage of the opportunity to strengthen relationships within your family by phone.
- Take the time to make your relationship deeper with God.
- Pray, read, and study the Bible.
- Be in peace.
- Reach out to your neighbours.
- Even while taking all of the appropriate precautions, you can still be in contact with your neighbours, and let them know you care and are available to help them.
- Be a quiet calming influence on those you connect with online.
- Rather than fuel the anxiety, share the love of Christ.
- Remember that this will be behind us someday.
- Live in such a way now that you glorify God.
- Be ready to go with Him if He may call you home.

May your hope in Christ remain firm as we walk through this dark valley. Remember that God is always with you. Focus on what is unchanging, and that

God can use you to minister to others even in this crisis. We already know in advance that this virus will not last. It is a valley that we will walk through, and we are going to walk through it together with Christ. Blessed be the name of the Lord.
Amen