

Title: Coronavirus (COVID-19) Response**Text:** Various**Main Idea:** It is possible to find certainty in Christ when faced with an uncertain season.**Date & Location:** March 14th & 15th, 2020 | Edgewood Baptist Church | Rock Island, IL**Family Introduction**

It is good to be with you this morning. If we've never met, I'm Jason Crosby and I'm a deacon here at Edgewood and my wife, Suzy, is the nursery coordinator. We've been married for what will be 13-years this September. We have three kids: Brynleigh will be 7 next month and she enjoys singing, dancing, and drama. She's our extrovert creative. Madison is 4 and she enjoys learning, being outdoors, taking care of animals, and has a quick wit but she's an introvert so she's gotta warm up to you before you get to see it. And Eli is 2 and he likes to wrestle, and climb, and jump, and loves to help.

Since 2013, my fulltime role is as the station manager of one of Edgewood's Go Team Partners, Moody Radio – WDLM. We are a Christian radio station that equips, encourages, and challenges listeners to think Biblically and take their next step in their journey with Jesus Christ and I'd be happy to connect with you down the road if you would like to learn more about us.

Introduction

December 31st, 2019 appears to be when it all started. It was on that date when a pneumonia of unknown cause was detected in Wuhan, China and first reported to the World Health Organization.¹ 30-days after that initial report, the WHO declared a public health emergency of international concern. On Saturday at 3:15pm, there were almost 145,000 confirmed cases of Novel Coronavirus (or COVID-19) worldwide resulting in almost 5,400 deaths. The virus has impacted 135 countries, areas, or territories ranging from as few as 22

¹ <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/events-as-they-happen>

countries with only 1 confirmed case to 1 country, China, with over 81,000 confirmed cases.² It has been over 2-months and we are still on the front end of this pandemic. As a result, we really don't know where the final numbers will land and how many people will be affected.

Pandemics are nothing new in human history. The website health.com lists some of the worst pandemics in the history of the world. In 1665, the Great Plague of London killed 20% of London's population before tapering off in 1666. Between 1918 and 1919, the Spanish Flu took the lives of 50-million people worldwide while infecting about 1/3 of the world's population. In 1957, about 1.1-million people worldwide died from Asian Flu. In 1968, another flu pandemic broke out, this one called the Hong Kong Flu, took the lives of 1-million people worldwide. From 2009-2010, Swine Flu infected almost 61-million people worldwide, taking the lives of a little over 575-thousand. And, finally, HIV/AIDS was first discovered in the early 1980's. Today, there are around 65-million infections and 25-million deaths from HIV/AIDS, worldwide.

The response to our particular pandemic, COVID-19, has been all across the board. My Facebook feed is littered with posts by some people who think we are taking this too seriously and by others who think we aren't taking this seriously enough. Emotions are high and opinions are strong. Fear, anger, sadness, worry, anxiety. As I process how I'm feeling about it, here's the illustration that came to mind: it feels like I've been told a weather forecast and this is all that was said, "There is a storm that is coming." I don't know when it's going to hit, where it's going to hit, or what the damage is going to be like—could be minimal, could be great, could be somewhere in-between. I don't know...I'm uncertain...and the only thing I'm certain about is that it's coming.

² <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/685d0ace521648f8a5beeeee1b9125cd>

Earlier this month at Moody, we had an all-employee meeting where our president, Dr. Mark Jobe, shared that when we are uncertain and we have to fill-in blanks, our tendency as human beings is to go negative. Have you ever noticed that to be true in your life? Let's find out. Think about the last time you went into a conversation where you knew you were going to disagree with the other person. Do you remember that conversation? Now, think about the days and moments leading up to that conversation. Were those moments filled with positive feelings toward the other person? Were they moments where you thought, "This person loves the organization just as much as I do and they want to see it succeed just like I do"? Or were they moments full of internal conversations that you never won, leaving you frustrated, exasperated, and angry? When we are uncertain and have to fill-in blanks, our tendency is to go negative.

You see, when we are in a place of uncertainty, what we need is certainty and what I hope God will do through this message is remind us of a handful of truths that are certain during our uncertain season because here's the reality: even though we are facing uncertainty, it is still possible for us to have certainty and it's found in Christ. From there, I hope He will give us a handful of practical ideas that we can do while we navigate this uncertain season.

I. You are Not in Control

Well, let's start with our first reminder, "You are not in control." Our issues with control go all the way back to the Garden of Eden. If we were to go all the way back to the beginning of your Bible and read Genesis 1, we would see that God spent 6-days creating the world. Every time He created something, He gave it two labels: The first label is its name, what it was that He actually created. Things like heaven and earth, man, living creatures, day and night, etc. The second label is a judgement meaning that He, as the Creator, is also the Judge over His creation. There are only two of these second labels used and they are, "good," and "very good."

During the time between He called all of His creation, “very good” and the creation of Eve, God took Adam and placed him in the Garden of Eden. It was here that God gave the following instruction, “¹⁵The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. ¹⁶And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die. (Gen. 2:15-17).” Adam clearly knew His responsibilities. He was to work the garden. He was to keep the garden. And He was not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

In the following verses, God creates Eve and it’s a thrilling moment for Adam to have a companion. Now, as the keeper of the garden, it would have been Adam’s job to communicate to Eve the rules God set for the garden and we know that He did because in chapter 3 of Genesis, we see an interaction between the serpent and Eve. Adam is there in a non-speaking role, which is to his detriment, though his actions speak quite loudly. Here’s the interaction,

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” ²And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’ ” ⁴But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. ⁵For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” ⁶So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. ⁷Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

Notice what Satan, the serpent, does in verse 2. He says, “Did God actually say...” Do you see what He did? He’s calling into question the goodness of God.” That’s the first part of the temptation. He’s tempting Eve with the idea that maybe, just maybe what God called good isn’t really good.

Eve responds, but in her response, she adds onto God's instruction, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden,³ but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" So, if you're wondering, this is the spot. This is the spot where Adam's silence is to his detriment. This is the spot where Adam should've stepped up, interrupted the conversation, and gently corrected his bride. But he didn't because he's complicit in what's happening.

Satan has an opening. Remember, the first part of his temptation was to cast doubt on God's goodness. Here comes the second part of the temptation. Satan says, "You will not surely die."⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Did you see it? It's right there in verse 5, "...and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Listen, Adam and Eve are already created in God's image, they are already like God. The next step up isn't to be like God, it is to be God. Satan tempts them with the opportunity to be God and to not just know good and evil but to determine it. Friends, that's a control issue. Bigger than control, that's a sin issue, and we all are faced with the same temptation. None of us are tempted to be like God. We are already created in His image. We are tempted to be God. We want the worship. We want the glory. We want the ability to determine right and wrong, good and evil. We face the same temptation Adam and Eve faced.

But you know what? Adam and Eve thought they were in control and when they succumbed to the serpent's temptation and willingly sinned against God by eating the fruit, they did have their eyes opened and they did know good and evil and they quickly realized they are not in control. Here's how I know: they received one more thing for their actions that they never saw coming and when we are tempted with a sin, very rarely do any of us see this—a consequence—they had no control over the consequence of their sin. You know why? Because

even though they were created in God's image, and even though they ate the fruit and their eyes were opened and even though they now had a new knowledge, they still weren't God. Only God gets to determine the consequence because He knows what is good and what is just and that's because He is good and He is just.

The consequence of Adam and Eve's disobedience was that sin entered the world and brought the death and destruction that come with sin and it infected everything. Everything around us is broken and in decay and by everything, I mean everything from our decision-making capabilities to the world we live in. Everything is broken and our daily sins confirm and contribute toward this reality.

You and I are not in control and we know this because as it relates to the world's brokenness, we can take steps to slow down the decay (we can make repairs to our homes and other infrastructure, we can visit a doctor when we are sick, we can eat right and exercise) yet, despite all of the education and information available to us—we have more information available to us today than at any other point in human history—yet despite all of this information, we haven't been able to stop the death, decay, and destruction. Not only have we not been able to stop it, we also haven't been able to reverse it. We don't have products that allow you to live for as long as you choose. We don't have a building material that gets stronger with time. We haven't been able to reverse the death, decay, and destruction. Our best efforts have only produced the opportunity to slow those things down. We are not in control.

II. God is in Control

Well, if you're not in control, and I'm not in control? who is? God is in control. How do I know He's in control? If we keep reading in Genesis 3, we see that Adam and Eve have sinned, know that they've sinned, and are trying to cover over their sin by hiding from God. God enters

the picture once again and begins a conversation with Adam and Eve where their sin is called out, “Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat (Gen. 3:11)?” and then shortly after He delivers the consequences, one of which is a hostile environment full of pain and enmity. Another consequence was the need for clothes. Adam and Eve were naked and unashamed before their sin. After their sin, they were still naked but full of shame. If the shame was to go away, their sin would need to be covered over so God provided them with clothes. Their clothes would be a permanent reminder of their sinful act against Him and His willingness to cover over that sin and care for them in their new, yet hostile, environment.

Romans tells us that this sin problem wasn’t confined to just Adam and Eve. It impacted the entire world. If the definition of pandemic is, “an outbreak of a disease that occurs over a wide geographic area and affects an exceptionally high proportion of the population” then we have identified the largest pandemic in human history. Yet, God demonstrating that He is in control and would not be phased by this pandemic, provided a solution for our sin through the sinless life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Speaking of Jesus, the author of Hebrews writes, “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.” And in Colossians 1:15-17, the Bible says of Jesus, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

In February of 2019, one of the most anticipated men’s college basketball games of the season took place. The number 8 North Carolina Tar Heels matched up against the number 1 Duke Blue Devils. What was supposed to be a fun, back and forth, highly-competitive contest

ended up being a blowout by the Tar Heels who won the game 88-72. One of the big reasons for the lopsided win was that 35-seconds into the game, Duke's star player, Zion Williamson was injured. Williamson was dribbling the ball at the top of the key when he tried to stop and plant with his left foot but the sole of his shoe, literally, split in half at the seam. The material that should have held the shoe together, failed to do its job, resulting in an injury to a star player and national embarrassment for Nike.

Well, when the material in a Nike shoe breaks, a star player is injured. Could you imagine what would happen if the One holding our world together quit doing so? Do you realize that if Jesus Christ were to stop holding all things together that everything but the Trinity would cease to exist? Everything continues because Jesus Christ is sustaining the entire universe. God is in control.

III. We Have Hope

So, if you and I are not in control and God is in control, what does that mean? It means that while the rest of the world can hear the news about coronavirus and fear, we don't have to fear. We have hope.

The University of Southern California just released preliminary results from a study looking at how the coronavirus is affecting the lives of Americans. 1 in 10 believe there is a 25% chance or more that they will lose their job. Not quite 1 in 5 believe there is a relatively high chance they will run out of money. 60% believe they will have difficulty working from home. 61% are practicing social distancing. 1 in 4 are avoiding restaurants. 22% are stockpiling food and water. 85% are washing their hands more frequently. Now, I like research so all of those numbers are interesting to me but here's the one that really stood out: 50% said they prayed.³

³ <https://news.usc.edu/166834/coronavirus-survey-usc-behavior-changes-health-economic-fallout/>

Prayer is certainly an appropriate response. In case you missed it, President Trump declared Sunday, March 15th, a National Day of Prayer and I can't think of a better use of our Sunday than for us to spend time in prayer, petitioning God regarding this disease and anything else we feel lead to pray for. What a great use of your Sunday.

Remember the words of 2 Timothy 1:7, "for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control." Jesus's words in Matthew 6:25-34 also come to mind,

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.

When Jesus says, "do not be anxious..." Jesus is correcting an ongoing behavior. He is not saying, "Someday down the road, something will happen and you'll become anxious. Don't do that." Jesus is saying, "You were worried yesterday. You are worried today. And you are worrying right now about your life. And you don't need to." "Why Jesus? Why don't I need to worry?" You don't need to worry because we have hope. God is in control.

Look specifically at verse 27, "²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?" There are two ideas that can be communicated here. The first one is the obvious one and that is that no medical professional will ever tell you that the best thing you can do for your health is worry. Worry only complicates your health, it does not improve it.

There's a second idea in here related to lengthen that also communicates the absurdity of worry. Think of the shortest person that you know. Are they in your mind? Now, imagine yourself walking into a room where they are hanging upside down, suspended from the ceiling. Now, if they were trying out for the circus you might see this as normal behavior, but if you asked them why they were upside down and they told you it was because they were trying to grow, trying to increase their height, you would think, "That's crazy." And you would think that, because you know people don't grow that way. Jesus is saying, "Who of you by worry can add length to your life? Who of you by worrying can add height to your stature? You don't need to worry." Why? Because God is in control and you have hope.

Listen to the words of Psalm 46, "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." Now jump down to verse 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."

IV. One Day, This Will All Go Away

You are not in control. God is in control. We have hope. Let's remember one more thing: one day, this will all go away. The follower of Christ has a future that does not include death, or destruction, or hurt. The hope for the believer given in Revelation 21:4 is this, "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." In Luke 21:25-28, Jesus talks about His return and He says, "And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves,

²⁶ people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷ And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸ Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

For the follower of Christ, that day is going to be a good day. But that day isn't here yet and so we are stuck with our present reality of a COVID-19 pandemic, and yet, even in the midst of it, Jesus still gives us hope when he says in Luke 21:10-13, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. ¹¹ There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. ¹² But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. ¹³ This will be your opportunity to bear witness.” Did you catch that last sentence? Yes, one day, all of this goes away but that day isn't here yet. So, until that day comes, this day—this day that you're living in—the way that you respond to a COVID-19 pandemic will be your opportunity to bear witness about Jesus. You are not in control. God is in control. You have hope. Others need that hope too. How does God want to use you to give the hope that you have in Jesus Christ, to those around you? Can I give you some ideas of what that might look like during a pandemic?

Application

First, be neighborly. Love your neighbors by checking in on them, especially older ones. If you do this by calling or texting, you don't even have to worry about jeopardizing their health. Maybe the next time you're headed to the store, you can shoot a neighbor a text and see if they need anything.

Second, you could offer to deliver food to people in quarantine. Maybe God would use you to coordinate meals and systems for the safe delivery of food to people in quarantine.

Perhaps, He'll lead you to purchase meals to have them donated to a food bank.

Third, you could donate blood through our local blood banks. As the number of people infected with coronavirus increases, the number of people eligible to donate blood, decreases. While blood is not necessary in the fight against the coronavirus, it is essential for women giving birth, cancer patients, and others.

Fourth, you could help a healthcare worker. As hospitals and area health facilities begin to see an increasing number of patients for coronavirus, demands might be placed on employees to work longer hours or additional shifts. That means they might struggle to provide meals or childcare for their families. Perhaps, God would use you to volunteer some time or food as you care for overworked health care employees.

Fifth, you could volunteer at a local food bank or pantry.

Sixth, you can support small businesses.

Remember, we can still live out our four G's in that we can still gather by meeting together online. We can still grow by utilizing tools like RightNow Media and our own study of the Bible. We can still live out our third "G" of giving in that we can mail our gifts to church or we can give digitally through the app or the website. And we can live out our fourth G of going with the gospel into our communities that need hope.

Conclusion

This week, Matt Smethurst, an editor at The Gospel Coalition, published an incredible find. 72-years-ago, C.S. Lewis wrote an essay titled, *On Living in an Atomic Age*. In the essay, Lewis wrote about the fear culture had of the atomic bomb and people should live in spite of that

fear. Smethurst correctly points out that the words of Lewis still apply to us today if we replace the words “atomic bomb” with “coronavirus”. Let me close with Lewis’s essay,

In one way we think a great deal too much of the atomic bomb. “How are we to live in an atomic age?” I am tempted to reply: “Why, as you would have lived in the sixteenth century when the plague visited London almost every year, or as you would have lived in a Viking age when raiders from Scandinavia might land and cut your throat any night; or indeed, as you are already living in an age of cancer, an age of syphilis, an age of paralysis, an age of air raids, an age of railway accidents, an age of motor accidents.”

In other words, do not let us begin by exaggerating the novelty of our situation. Believe me, dear sir or madam, you and all whom you love were already sentenced to death before the atomic bomb was invented: and quite a high percentage of us were going to die in unpleasant ways. We had, indeed, one very great advantage over our ancestors—anaesthetics; but we have that still. It is perfectly ridiculous to go about whimpering and drawing long faces because the scientists have added one more chance of painful and premature death to a world which already bristled with such chances and in which death itself was not a chance at all, but a certainty.

This is the first point to be made: and the first action to be taken is to pull ourselves together. If we are all going to be destroyed by an atomic bomb, let that bomb when it comes find us doing sensible and human things—praying, working, teaching, reading, listening to music, bathing the children, playing tennis, chatting to our friends over a pint and a game of darts—not huddled together like frightened sheep and thinking about bombs. They may break our bodies (a microbe can do that) but they need not dominate our minds.

Let’s pray.