



ARTICLE

The threat of a virus can't undo Jesus' victory

BY DARYL CROUCH

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How is it possible that a virus could create so much disruption, travail, and death? We see many good news stories of heroes stepping up to serve people affected by this disease, but the dominant storyline here is devastation. Many people are fighting for their lives, and many are losing that battle. Others face financial catastrophe they never imagined possible. The nations are writhing, and our losses are both personal and corporate.

The sobering reality is that COVID-19 is just one variety from a family of coronaviruses that was discovered in Wuhan, China, last year, but no one knows for certain its origins. This microscopic virus that travels on other microscopic droplets of human secretions has wrecked us. Although coronaviruses are well known to the scientific and healthcare communities, this particular strain is not currently containable. We can treat the symptoms, but there appears to be no known cure for this disease.

One might ask, “Is God judging us? Has he forgotten us? Does he even exist at all, and if on the chance he does exist, how could he allow this?” The near apocalyptic nature of our current circumstances forces all kinds of people from all faith perspectives to at least consider what this means in light of our obvious human limitations and the resulting awareness of our mortality.

While few people in the world saw this particular pandemic coming, no one who has read the Bible, even small portions of it, can be completely surprised by our vulnerabilities now displayed.

The Savior’s sufferings

Consider the sufferings displayed in just the last week of Jesus’ life. The Gospels describe this in vivid detail. We see his heart break as he found the Jewish temple grounds converted from a house of prayer into a marketplace for the unscrupulous to profit on vulnerable pilgrims. The priests of God, who were God’s representatives on earth, no longer had any expectation for the people of God to experience the glory of God.

On the night Jesus was betrayed by the now infamous Judas Iscariot, he was also abandoned by everyone close to him. The religious leaders who should have recognized him, the disciples who believed in him, and his closest friends who sincerely loved him all left.

And then we read the account of Jesus' trials before both the Jewish and the Roman courts. These illegal and insincere tribunals were conducted under the cover of night and resulted in a sentence of death for Jesus, who deserved nothing of the sort.

Although the threat of a virus will restrict our public and congregational celebrations of Jesus' resurrection this year, it does nothing to blunt the power of Jesus' victory over sin and death or mute the sounds of our adoration of the One who has set us free.

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To put an exclamation point on the tragedy, this was no ordinary death. Crucifixion was brutal. Jesus' execution began with a bloody beating, continued with his hands and feet being nailed to two crossed timbers, which were then hoisted into the air and into a hole in the ground. From this suspended position, Jesus finally, after six hours, suffocated in his own blood.

If we could have sat on a hillside and simply watched this week of Jesus' life unfold, we would weep at the human suffering and loss of it all.

The apostle Paul wrote, "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, in this way death spread to all people, because all sinned" (Rom. 5:12).

“Sin entered the world and death spread to all people.” The groanings of creation are at a high pitch as we face this current global pandemic, but a fallen world is not a new phenomenon.

From Adam to Abraham, from Moses to the prophets, Jesus had seen the violent, life-smothering devastation of sin. So when he rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, He knew exactly what to expect. He understood how deadly sin could be.

By his wounds, we are healed

In one of the most important passages in the Old Testament, the prophet Isaiah described what the promised Messiah would actually do for us as he faced down the ravages of sin: “Yet he himself bore our sicknesses, and he carried our pains; but we in turn regarded him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace was on him, and we are healed by his wounds” (Isa. 53:4-5).

While every day of Passion Week came with a new version of bad news, and while every human being close to Jesus betrayed him, abandoned him, mocked him, or even executed him, Jesus never gave up his title of Messiah—the Promised One, the Second Adam who would deliver us from the curse of sin.

Again, the apostle Paul wrote, “But the gift is not like the trespass. For if by the one man’s trespass the many died, how much more have the grace of God and the gift which comes through the grace of the one man Jesus Christ overflowed to the many” (Rom. 5:15).

Every tragic moment of Jesus' final week, along with every sin-stained sorrow of our lives, was defeated early on Resurrection Sunday when Jesus was raised from the dead. The garden tomb still sits empty as a declaration that no bad news, no runaway disease, no loss, and not even the most microscopic residue of evil can survive under the pressure of Jesus' heel.

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So let us sing, even if through tears, the victor's song: "Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, death, is your victory? Where death, is your sting" (1 Cor. 15:54-55).



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