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Stay Safe — Forever



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The email, wishing my family and me wellness amid the coronavirus crisis, ended in an altogether startling way: “Stay safe. Meaning, be always ready to die in Jesus.”

Search the get-well cards or the positive messages of this world, and you will not find anything like this pastor’s plea. None of the optimistic emails from credit-card companies nor the well-wishings of different politicians told me this. No celebrities, with their messages of being united and staying strong, meant what he did.

Safety in today’s world means what it has always meant during times of crisis: Stay alive. Stay healthy. Protect yourself from the present distress. Wash your hands. Distance yourself. Take necessary precautions. But this is not the safety the pastor wished for my family, and it is not the safety I wish for everyone who reads this. It’s not safe enough. His plea to me, and my plea to you, is simply this: *stay safe — forever*.

Are You Ready to Die?

The need of every day, for every soul, whether diseases spread, or bombs threaten, or old age beckons, is to be ready always to die. We can pass from this world in countless ways — some slower, some faster; some more painfully, others less. Calamities and pandemics present us with the opportunity to consider our end before it comes, and to put our soul affairs in order. So let me ask you, whether you're young or old, single or married, fearful or not — are you prepared to pass into eternity?

I'm not asking if you are prepared to leave all that you have ever known or loved in this world unfeeling. Nor if you are ready to cause deep pain to your most beloved on the earth. Nor if you are ready to enter that whimpering state that they call “dying” — a tumultuous and unpredictable realm.

No, are you ready to die — meaning, are you prepared to meet Jesus face to face? Are you ready to be seen and judged by him? Are you staying watchful and ready for his return? Three final realities approach: death, judgment, and eternity. Are you ready for them?

To stay safe in light of these bids us to do more than to keep our hands clean, avoid touching our faces, distance ourselves from others, and stay at home unless necessary. To stay safe ten thousand years from now, when we will have stood before God and given an account for our lives, calls us to flee to Christ — and remain safe in Christ — from that something far more dangerous than a deadly virus and even death itself: sin.

Danger Worse Than Death

Hear Christianity's scandalous claim for all who can bear it: Better coronavirus and death than unrepentant sin and life. Better to meet the virus and die trusting Christ than to be enslaved to lust, or greed, or any other sin, and live a few decades longer in unbelief.

I plead with you to consider this: Almighty God does not pause heaven's uproarious praise, summoning the angels to “be appalled, . . . be shocked, be utterly desolate,” because of sickness, financial ruin, or death — but because of sin ([Jeremiah 2:12–13](#)). Of sins — not diseases — is it most solemnly written, “On account of these the wrath of God is coming” ([Colossians 3:5–6](#)).

It is not ultimately because of coronavirus or cancer or car accidents that we actually die — the wages of *sin* is death ([Romans 6:23](#)). Jesus did not counsel us to worry about what could only kill the body; he warned against provoking a holy God to kill both body and soul in hell ([Matthew 10:28](#)) — as a judgment against our God-belittling lifestyles of sin.

Is not this pastor's admonition most needed today? I read recently that free VIP access to pornography is being offered to areas of the world under quarantine. Rates of consumption have gone up by double digits. As millions are quarantined, Satan enters those areas hit hardest and persuades many to guzzle spiritual cyanide, opening themselves to the coming fury of God, all as they seek to avoid the danger of the coronavirus. We shut ourselves off from the world, but our greatest problem is quarantined with us.

Plea to the Unprepared

What can I say to you to consider your soul? In times like these, most of us will not even leave for the grocery store unprepared — will we leave this world, cross the cold sea of death, and travel into eternity unprepared? Will we work tirelessly to secure proper provisions for our body in this life — clothing it, feeding it, bending to its needs — yet leave our souls starved for the next? Will we think of anything and everything but our souls, our God, and eternity?

While the grave is uncomfortably placed before you, consider it. Do not let this season of clarity pass. Many before you have heard the good news and decided to put it off until tomorrow. *Today* if you hear his voice, harden not your hearts in rebellion ([Hebrews 4:7](#)).

The sickness Jesus came to address was not physical. If a cure for the coronavirus were ready-made and available, and this upheaval passed, death would still be waiting, demons would still be laughing, sin would still be enslaving, and judgment would still be pending. But here is the antidote, the good news that makes men fearless to state plainly the bad:

He was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed. ([Isaiah 53:5](#))

Here, the prophet shows forth heaven's most precious and costly remedy to our rebellion against our God: the death of Jesus Christ on behalf of sinners. He is your only hope of safety from the judgment to come.

And he stands ready to forgive. His very name, *Jesus*, sings of redemption: “She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” ([Matthew 1:21](#)). Do you feel a great need for forgiveness? Is your sin horrible and your disease deep? He came for sinners. “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” ([Mark 2:17](#)). Look to Christ dying for the sins of world, believe, turn from sin, and be saved.

Plea to Christians

J.I. Packer once mentioned Christians of old who “prepared themselves for death, so as always to be found, as it were, packed up and ready to go” (*Quest for Godliness*, 14). Scares like the coronavirus show us how ready we truly are. Have we — the people of resurrection, the people of eternal life, the people whose citizenship is in heaven — stared death in the face, with sweaty palms perhaps, yet without flinching? We ought to live in this world to the fullest, yet always packed up and ready to leave.

Do we not long to go to Christ, who is our life ([Colossians 3:4](#))? He longs for us to be where he is; do we instead long to stay away? How deep do the words of Thomas Brooks cut? “It is no credit to your heavenly Father for you to be loath to go home” (*Works of Thomas Brooks*, 5:455).

Now is not time to lower the sails. We are nearer every day to our true country. Would we really curse the gust of wind called coronavirus if God should use it to bring us more quickly than we expected to himself? I hope we all would struggle (myself included) with something closer to what Mr. Whitefield wrestled with when he prayed, “Lord, keep me from a sinful and too eager desire after death. I desire not to be impatient. I wish quietly to wait till my blessed change comes” (*George Whitefield's Journals*, 318).

Stay Safe, Forever

None of this is meant to demean the real fear, real deaths, and real suffering caused by this pandemic. I lament the news of new cases and increased deaths. But when each update comes, I cannot help wondering, with the pastor's sentence seared in my mind, "How many stayed safe — meaning, how many died in Jesus?" That question, I assure you, tears at my heart far more than any other news could.

So please, stay safe from the virus. Be wise, and make the best use of the time. But as you take utmost pains to avoid the disease, heed the pastor's words, and *stay safe forever*, preparing yourself to die and see Jesus.