

# The Lion Roars: Thoughts on COVID-19

*Joseph A. Pipa, Jr. | March 2020*

I was asked by one of my students at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary to reflect on the current situation with COVID-19 (novel Coronavirus).

First, we assert with Scripture that all that is occurring with this virus around the world and in our own country is part of God's sovereign good purpose. God has foreordained all that comes to pass, and He executes his decrees by His providence (Daniel 4:34-35; Psalm 135:6). By asserting God's universal decree, we do not rule out second causes, but confess the first cause is God's good pleasure. This work of God embraces every illness and death; also, all the disruptions in society and in the economy. Moreover, Christ as mediatorial king is directing all things for the sake of his church (Eph. 1:22,23). The reality of God's sovereign control over the novel Coronavirus and its spread has direct bearing on our thought, speech, and behavior in response to it.

Second, because the pandemic is according to God's holy will, we must ask ourselves, "What is He doing?" Amos demonstrates the relation of cause and effect by series of rhetorical questions about cause and effect: "Do two men walk together unless they have made an appointment? Does a lion roar in the forest when he has no prey? Does a young lion growl from his den unless he has captured something? Does a bird fall into a trap on the ground when there is no bait in it? Does a trap spring up from the earth when it captures nothing at all? If a trumpet is blown in a city, will not the people tremble?" Then he applies the relationship to the works of God in 3:3-8: "If a calamity occurs in a city has not the LORD done it? Surely Adonai the LORD does nothing unless He reveals His secret counsel to his servants the prophets. A lion has roared! Who will not fear? Adonai the LORD has spoken! Who can but prophesy?"

God is roaring and He has revealed things in His word on which we should think and speak.

First, God is acting through this "natural calamity" with all its repercussions to proclaim his holy judgment. God, indeed, is longsuffering and slow to anger, but throughout history he acts periodically in temporal judgments. It is safe to say that nothing of such worldwide import has occurred since World War II. God is judging the

nations for their idolatry and corruption. But let's come closer to home. Is not God judging the United States? Approximately, 140,000 abortions have been performed in this calendar year alone (since January 1, 2020). We have perverted the holy relationship of marriage with sexual promiscuity, adultery, pornography, and sodomy. Amongst our many idols are sports and materialism.

Is the Lion roaring? Most assuredly He is.

Second, God is chastening and training His people. Christians are not exempt from the sufferings of this virus. Peter teaches that judgment begins with the household of God (1 Peter 4:17). For us, however, it is not a judgment of punishment, but of chastening, "My son, do not reject the discipline of the LORD or loathe His reproof, for whom the LORD loves HE reproves, even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights" (Prov. 3:11, 12). This chastening is both corporate and individual; it might be for specific sins or more generally correcting and refining. Individually, we are to examine our lives to ascertain if God is correcting us for particular sins. If we discern specific attitudes or actions that relate specifically the consequences of the virus, repent and seek God's grace. If we discover no specific relationships, seek God's sanctifying grace through the things we suffer.

Corporately, God is refining His church. As Christians, we have repeatedly and rebelliously profaned God's Holy Day with work and recreation (which God connects with idolatry, Ezek. 20:13-16); because of the virus, many are prohibited from working or playing every day of the week.

Increasingly, the church has substituted entertainment for holy Worship. God has closed the doors of our churches. God's people have grown satisfied with having one service on His day; God has removed all services. We have taken lightly the privileges of corporate worship; we are unable to worship corporately.

What then is to be our response? I offer six suggestions below.

First, do not look self-righteously on those who suffer. Begin with yourself; repent (Luke 13:1-5). Repent of your sins, the sins of the church, and the sins of our country.

Second, seek God's sanctifying grace in your life. Don't waste your affliction. Pray that God will work in your life through this trial.

Remember, He has promised that all of this is working for your good (Rom. 8:28).

Third, plead with God that in wrath He would remember mercy. Pray that He would withdraw the hand of judgment and show grace. Pray that many would come to saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ through this pandemic. Pray for opportunities to speak to your neighbors about the holiness and grace of God. Pray for the live streaming of services. Many people that would not go to church services are hearing the gospel.

Fourth, pray for those people throughout the world that are seriously ill. Pray that God would spare their lives. Pray for those who do not have basic necessities for daily life. Pray that there will not be a worldwide economic recession.

Fifth, do not be anxious. God will take care of you (Matt. 6:25-34; Phil. 4:4-7). Rest in the loving care of your sovereign savior. Thank God for all He is doing. As you pray, keep in mind the definition of prayer in Westminster Shorter Catechism 98: "What is prayer? Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies."

Sixth, through our time in self-isolation and quarantine, we can develop great empathy for our brothers and sisters around the world who have not been allowed to meet on the Lord's Day for corporate worship because of persecution. What we have taken for granted, they have not enjoyed. Remember them and pray for them.