

DON'T WASTE COVID-19!

How much has changed in 2020! As recently as February the main headlines were fixated on climate change (see our March issue). These few months on, Corona Virus Disease 2019 (hence COVID-19) is all the talk. The world has new jargon: lockdown, self-checking, social distancing, the making of masks and ventilators, clapping our carers, flattening the curve, opening the economy, and billing China. Language editions vary, but our chatter is the same.

We are in this with you, praying to God for an end to the virus, longing not only that the deaths would cease but that survivors would come, through it, to spiritual health.

THE WASTE OF THE INVINCIBLES

The invincibles tell themselves that COVID-19 is nothing to the Spanish flu of January 1918–December 1920. True, hot on the heels of the insane bloodshed of the Great War, it affected 500 million people (a third of the world's population) and killed a staggering 50 million.

The invincibles also tell themselves that in a world population of 7-plus billion why worry about 6 million cases of COVID-19 and nearly 400,000 deaths—the population of but one smallish city? True, but again, somewhat callous.



Off to the Florida beaches I go! (Photo: Tweet by Sarah J. Hollenbeck: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/coronavirus-florida-beaches-ignore-social-distancing/>, accessed April 20, 2020).

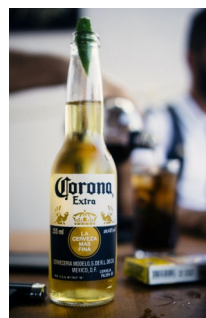
Think on the bright side, says the invincible. If only the media would report the numbers recovering rather than belaboring the refrigerated trucks outside of hospitals and

the mass graves of unclaimed corpses. True, but the invincible doesn't see—nor want to have to see—the dying in the last throes of life, and the abandoned funerals. Most do not feel loss. The health crisis is largely out of sight.

What the invincible doesn't realize is that his or her complacency is symptomatic of a greater sickness, that of the rich fool: *"I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample good laid up for many years, relax, drink, eat, be merry"* (Luke 12:19). If this is you, do think again.

THE WASTE OF THE IMPLODABLES

The implodables possess, by contrast, a compulsive self-contradictory panic. Feeling everything is out of control, they seek to control as much of life as is possible. This fretting is also egotistical. It trusts in self rather than in God, and leads, as with the invincible, to an obsession with personal welfare at the expense of that of the community.



This propensity to panic is part of our fallen human condition. Yet, those bent on rejecting God often know more of anxiety than others. In communist (atheist-run) China, for instance, the first two months of COVID-19 led to Anheuser-Busch losing U.S. \$170 million from sales of Corona beer! Now that's what you call panic!

Panic also exists in the West. Inevitably so, for we have tried burying God across the spectrum of academic disciplines for the last two centuries. Announce a lockdown, then, and watch the extraordinary self-centered hoarding of toilet paper and other essentials. A run on banks like the run on toilet paper and a great depression is inevitable! Panic, you see, is the price paid for getting above ourselves. It spreads when, though humbled, we yet resist God.

Our message, then, is this: As severe as the Coronavirus is to many, God has not stopped holding out his hand to us, offering us a far greater healing than is necessitated by COVID-19. It is one we each need, whether we be an invincible, an implodable, or somewhere in between.

GET SELF-CHECKING!

National Corona task forces are in full swing seeking humanity's restoration to health. The Christian church is the world's largest task force, caring for bodies *and* souls. She supports national governments and international agencies fighting the virus medically, also operating hospitals globally. Additionally, she views man from the perspective of God's medical handbook, the Bible, and deduces that the pandemic of sin (or sIn, since self is the cause of it) is far worse. Everyone is affected by it and everyone outside of receiving God's antidote is spiritually dead because of it.

DENIALS DON'T HEAL US SPIRITUALLY

Someone told Me
They don't Believe
In GOD because
They Can't See
HIM.

I replied,
You can't see
this Viruseither,
But you're
wearing a mask
and gloves.

Denial of sin comes in different forms. Some deny sin because of a more fundamental disbelief in God. If God does not exist there can be no such thing as sin, for sin is a breakage of God's law. Such a denial, though, flies in the face of the reality of conscience and of the chaos in the universe. (Image, Jim Feedahero Searles:

www.facebook.com/jimsearlessr/posts/3018103794914899.)

Other denials of sin may affirm God's existence but believe sin not to be that serious. Only criminals and the like, whose sin mars their fun and seriously affects others, need seek God. Most of us can get by just fine without him.

Others know sin is deathly, but, like the male who ignores the doctor because the medical appointment is too much bother, prefer to coexist with God rather than to go to him. All the while, though, the virus takes greater hold of them and the sands of time run through their fingers. God, the Great Physician, knows best sin's gravity and the fatal result of it. It is for this reason we ought to turn to him.

MASKS DON'T HEAL US SPIRITUALLY

Masks have their place in thwarting the spread of COVID-19 for sure, but they have been futile to prevent the virus from escaping from a wet market, Chinese laboratory, or whatever, and have no ability to cure the person already infected. Likewise, our masks in life cannot prevent the sin we inherit through conception. We are already infected by sin (Psalm 51:5), and are dying even as we live.

"Hear and understand," said Jesus. Sin *"is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person"* (Matthew 15:11). In other words, sin originates in the heart. The heart is the epicenter of the virus and is a laboratory of evil concoctions. Out of it, said Jesus, come evil thoughts. Out of it

the mouth speaks, and out of it come actions like murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander (Matthew 12:34; 15:19). Masks, then, may limit sin, but they cannot cure it. While scandalous sinners don't care to wear them, respectable sinners need them to fit really well. No sinner, though, has ever been healed by a mask.

CLEAN HANDS DON'T HEAL US SPIRITUALLY

Clean hands and untouched faces are crucial in the fight against COVID-19, yet Jesus warned his hearers that no amount of hand sanitizing can cleanse the heart. Speaking of the ceremonial cleansing of his day, Jesus warned, *"to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone"* (Matthew 15:20). He was not opposing personal hygiene, but simply saying that clean hands cannot get to the source of our spiritual and ethical malfunctioning.

Likewise today, no amount of external religious ceremonies can change our hearts. Getting back to church of itself won't do it. Paying money to faith healers exposed as corrupt by their silence and impotence in the current crisis, won't do it. Nor, dare we say it, will any of the great gestures on offer during the current

pandemic. They are most worthy of our acclaim—who is not deeply touched by 99-year-old Captain Thomas Moore raising £33 million plus for the British National Health Service?—but they cannot make a single heart right before God. Even our best works, the Scriptures teach, are defiled by sin. (Photo: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom_Moore_\(fundraiser\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom_Moore_(fundraiser)).)



VENTILATORS DON'T HEAL US SPIRITUALLY

We rightly celebrate when COVID-19 sufferers make it off ventilators and get home, but with sin, ventilators have no role since, as mentioned, each of us is already spiritually dead. We need resurrection not ventilation. As the apostle Paul wrote to the Christians of Ephesus: *"you were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked, following the course of this world."* "Trespasses" speak of our crossing of the lines God sets for us. "Sins" speak of our falling short of his standards. Both evince the fact that we, being spiritually dead, cannot save ourselves.

As hopeless, then, as COVID-19 may feel, sin is more hopeless still. Yet, there *is* hope! *". . . BUT GOD, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses made us alive together with Christ"* (Ephesians 2:1-2, 4-5). If, then, you know you have the sin virus, read on. God's medical handbook teaches us how he has come to us in Christ, the Great Physician, with the vaccine we each need.

CLAP YOUR CARER!

Understandably, the Coronavirus calls us to reevaluate who and what is important. Entertainers have their place in culture, but they never warranted the status of divinity. Comparatively, poorly paid healthcare workers turn out to be the heroes. Some chose the profession, others volunteer to serve as needed.

This scenario is familiar to the Christian. Our cure from sin has come to us through the greatest hero of all: the Great Physician. We don't simply clap Christ as the British endearingly clap each Thursday evening the National Health Service. Rather, we live to extol Christ. Here's why.

THE GREAT PHYSICIAN CAME TO US



How laudable of Princess Sofia of Sweden to leave her lofty status to support nurses in this pandemic! How much greater though Christ's descent to earth! No one stooped lower than he to address a virus, nor could they. (Reuters: trib-

une.com.pk/story/2201187/4-princess-sofia-of-sweden-becomes-a-nurse-to-help-fight-covid-19/.)

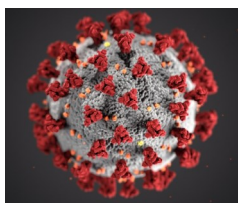
Christ humbly came in obedience to the will of his Father, yet, in the unity of God's plan, he volunteered to come (Psalm 40:7-8; Hebrews 10:7). He entered not a hospital infected by a bodily virus, but a world contaminated by a virus with deadly bodily *and* physical consequences.

In lauding those who go into harm's way, contemplate Christ. He put on no personal protective equipment (PPE), but he put on our humanity to reside in our sin-infected world yet remaining uncontaminated by our sin.

THE GREAT PHYSICIAN CALLS US

Christ came to us not as an untrained auxiliary, but as the solution to our sin. He functioned among us as both surgeon-general taking charge of the defeat of the virus, but also as the long-promised vaccine.

Given his credentials, we would think that all would rush to Jesus for restored health and rehabilitation from the ravages of sin. Not so. Sin's deadliness is its ability to blind us to its infestation. Those duped by their pride into thinking they had no sin, grumbled behind Jesus' back



about his acceptance of Levi's invitation to a feast with tax collectors (marginalized embezzlers) and sinners (prostitutes). Knowing their complaint, Jesus retorted, *"Those who are well have no need of*

a physician, but those who are sick. I have come not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:29-32).

Jesus was not saying that some were without sin, but that they could receive no healing as long as they refused to self-check their hearts. He focused, then, on those conscious of their fatal sickness and inability to self-cure. (Image: www.unr.edu/nevada-today/news/2020/campus-receives-coronavirus-update.)

THE GREAT PHYSICIAN WAS CRUCIFIED FOR US

Time and again we have heard of doctors on the frontline fighting COVID-19, who have given their lives saving others. Think of Dr. Li Wenliang, a Chinese ophthalmologist who warned of its outbreak in December, but was ignored by the authorities and then died of COVID-19 on the 7th of February. (Photo: www.nytimes.com/2020/02/06/world/asia/chinese-doctor-Li-Wenliang-coronavirus.html.)



Coincidentally, Dr. Wenliang was 33 years of age—the same age as the Great Physician when bearing our sin unto the death of the cross. Unlike the brave doctors and nurses who would, understandably, have avoided the Coronavirus if they could, Christ went to Jerusalem precisely to pour out his life's blood for our healing. This was his mission.

You see, Christ's blood, our vaccine, has the power to inoculate us from sin. In the plan of God, it takes away the guilt of sin, for it turns away God's righteous anger against us for our sins and covers them from his view. Christ's blood takes away our pollution from sin, for it cleanses us in God's sight. Ultimately, Christ's blood brings us out from the presence of sin, for those resting in Christ for their forgiveness and healing are set on course for heaven. There every trace of the virus is gone, never to return.

THE GREAT PHYSICIAN CARES FOR US

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson will not forget the two nurses who watched over him in ICU, nor does the Christian forget that the Christ watched over us before we ever came out from under the sway of sin. It was *"while we were still weak . . . [that] Christ died for the ungodly."* The apostle Paul continues: *"For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:6-8). As hospital lobbies are lined with healthcare workers clapping the patients as they leave for home, so Christ, now raised from death and ascended to heaven, watches prayerfully over his people. He leads the celebration as one after another arrives home healed. We earnestly pray that you will be numbered among them.

Residential Address:

ENDING SOCIAL DISTANCING

God has given us a definitive cure for our sin. Less certain is whether we will receive it. The cure is sufficient for all without exception (for everybody), but it only takes effect in the lives of those trusting Christ for the solution.

When the reality of the virus weighs on us, it is not to entertainers we turn, nor to politicians, nor even to human doctors, it is to the Great Physician. The cure cost him his life, but, here's the great news, it is free to us.



Receive it with both hands! Your hands must be open and empty to receive the cure, but don't try sanitizing them before taking it. The cure of Christ does the sanitizing, not only of

our hands but of our whole. (Photo: pixabay.com/photos/receiving-hands-hands-receive-1920865/.)

Christ said as much before his crucifixion. Taking a towel he began to wash the feet of his disciples. Peter objected, to which Christ responded, ***"If I do not wash you, you have no share with me."*** Peter's answer is the hope of all who come to Christ conscious of their need: ***"Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!"*** Listen to Jesus' wonderfully definitive response: ***"You are clean"*** (John 13:8-11). Only one disciple was not. Judas, the most tragic figure in history, spent three years with the Great Physician but left this world unhealed. Oh that you would not do likewise.

With healing, social-distancing ends. No more estrangement from God or from those who in our sickness we hate. ***"In Christ Jesus,"*** wrote Paul, ***"you who once were afar off have been brought near by the blood of Christ"*** (Ephesians 2:13). Turn then to God through Christ. In him, healing is yours—in soul now, in body hereafter!

Next Issue Due Out: September 1

OPENING THE ECONOMY

To say that our healing is free is not to say that it is cheap. Those whose lives are spared ought never to be the same again. This is why, in the United Kingdom, for instance, the talk is of how, once the economy opens up, the nation is going to express its gratitude to healthcare workers. After all, the pay of public sector nurses has been capped for most of the last decade, with their pay increase voted down in 2017.

The same is true in the spiritual realm. Before experiencing healing for our sins through the cross of Christ, we think little of him. Yet, once we come to know God, his forgiveness, and a new life in Christ, our whole attitude to Christ changes. When walking close to God, we use our liberties not to sin, but to serve our Savior and his purposes to save others.

Our gratitude, then, is to go much deeper than clapping. While a day or two of lockdown affords a breather amid the current idolization of the busy, it has been a reminder that we are nevertheless called to work, and find our highest joy fellowshiping with God in his work. Paul stresses that although we are saved by God's grace (his unmerited favor) received through faith in Christ, we are yet ***"created in Christ Jesus FOR GOOD WORKS, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them"*** (Ephesians 2:8-10).

If, then, you have come to know healing for your sins, yours, as ours, is the great honor of serving God. The economy, so to speak, is open and ready for your labor!

"Christianity is one beggar telling another where he found bread."

Ceylonese pastor,
Daniel Thambyrajah Niles
(1908-1970)

