

LESSONS TO LEARN WITH REGARDS TO THE CORONAVIRUS

I would like to welcome you all to this virtual church service. My name is Steve Hogan and I am pastor of Hope Bible church here in Tampa, Florida. As you know, our format is different today, that is, our congregation is not here at our church building this Sunday morning, for you are each at your own home. That's because the Coronavirus Pandemic has infected a small number of people in the world, and since it's very contagious, it is increasingly affecting the rest of the world. And so, this is a major, major problem.

Scientists show the nature and severity of this problem by using mathematical models and equations. If you recall, last week I told you that the line showing the number of deaths was inching up slowly in this country, but now it is rapidly going up. Last Sunday, there were about 50 people in the US who had died because of this coronavirus, and today, one week later, there are around 350 deaths. Who knows how fast and high this line will go and when it will peak? Who knows if the number of deaths in the country will increase 7x like the past week? Who knows when things will return to normal, whatever that means? Anyway, it's a huge problem, with closed schools, businesses and restaurants, quarantines, social distancing, lockdowns of cities, states and countries, financial markets plunging, a complete sports stoppage, people working at home, and people out of work. We are having a recession right now, and it could get worse. Saddest of all, increasing numbers of people, all over the world, are getting sick and dying. The result of all this is that people are scared, are panicking, are afraid of what may happen in the future.

I was listening to Governor Andrew Cuomo the other day, and I like what he said – *“We are fighting a war on two fronts - we are fighting the virus and we are fighting fear. And in many ways the fear is more danger than the virus.”* I completely agree. My role as a pastor in fighting this physical virus is minimal – just my wife and I taking the steps to avoid the virus and encouraging you in the church to do the same. But as to fear and panic, which is spiritual in nature, this relates to my job, and I want to do what I can to help you know what God's word says, so you can think rightly, and can spiritually process what is going on, and not give way to fear. Let me share some things I believe will encourage and strengthen your spirit and make you a more affective Christian in the days, months and years ahead.

Do not fear. The human tendency with this pandemic is to panic, to be afraid, to be anxious. But we are commanded to be anxious for nothing (Phil. 4:6). Verse after verse in the Bible explains how God is with us, and that we are to seek Him and trust Him, and that He will then deliver us from all our fears. *“I sought the Lord, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fear”* (Ps. 34:4). Remember, God is our heavenly Father, and we are His children, and He will take care of us, take away our fears, fill us with peace and joy, and make us strong and courageous in the midst of this pandemic. Jesus said, *“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, not let it be fearful.”* John 14:27, Isaiah 41:10

God is sovereign. God is completely in charge, which means this Coronavirus is not an

accident, but is part of His overall plan. God tells us, *"Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both good and evil go forth?"* (Lam. 3:36-37, Is. 45:6-7). Who are we to argue with God? He knows what He is doing! Might we be humble and know that God is sovereign, in total control, and does whatever He wants for His purposes and glory, and for our good. *"We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."* Rom. 8:28. In the days, months and years ahead, we will be able to look back and see more clearly why God wanted this to happen, and how He was using this for His purposes in your life, in the church, and in the entire world.

Be thankful you are saved, that you are God's child, that you know Him, that you have eternal life, a relationship with Him and with Jesus Christ. Be thankful for what He has given you on this earth – food, housing, family, friends, provisions, a church, a job, etc. Be thankful that no matter what happens on this earth, whatever trials may come your way, like this pandemic, your life will soon be over (your life is but a vapor) - and then you will be in heaven, with Jesus Christ and all your Christian friends. I cannot stress enough the importance of being thankful that you know God, and that He has blessed you so much, both spiritually and physically. *"In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."* 1 Thess. 5:18

Your relationship with God. This is the single most important thing in your life, having a solid relationship with God Himself. This means knowing He loves you and cares for you. It means knowing He is powerful, wise, good, faithful, and perfect, and that He perfectly deals with you. It means knowing, through the Holy Spirit, that God is with you. It means spending time with Him, reading His word and praying to Him about your life and the lives of others. It means, like Enoch, walking with Him every day, trusting Him, doing whatever He says. It means, like David, seeking Him and crying out to Him. It means, like Mary, loving Him, enjoying Him and learning from Him. *"She (Martha) had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word... 'Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.'"* Luke 10:39-42, Psalm 63:1-4, Psalm 73:23-26

Your relationships with others. You are to love God first, but you are to also love the saints, and have fellowship with them (Mark 12:30-31). God wants you to be in a good church and be close to other believers. He wants you to grow and learn from others, but also to do your part in helping them to grow and helping them to learn. In this present crisis, during this time when we are being instructed to stay away from people and not gather in large groups, we are so blessed that we can still communicate with others by phone, emails, texts, Facebook, etc. Therefore, we can, and we must keep in touch with others. We can and we must encourage others and be encouraged by others. We may be socially distant from others, but might we be all the more relationally and spiritually close to one another. *"Encourage one another day after day, as long as it is called 'Today,' so none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."* Heb. 3:12-13

Know God's promises. I couldn't make it without God's promises. I feed on them daily, and during difficult times, like now, they are especially needed. And so too with you - you can't live without God's promises, you have to have promises. Nutritionally speaking, you need your fruits and vegetables, and spiritually speaking, you need God's promises. Here are some examples: Psalm 32:8, Psalm 46:10, Rom. 8:28, 1 Cor. 1:8-9, Phil. 4:13, Heb. 10:37. For a longer list of promises, go to post #146 (Christ's Kingdom.org). And here is one of my favorites – *“Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”* Psalm 23:6

Do God's work. During fearful times, we often retreat and focus on ourselves, on our own needs and concerns, and we forget God and His plans for our lives and the work He wants us to do. But you need to remember that God has gifted you in a special way so you can do the specific work He wants you to do (1 Pet. 4:10). It may be a small assignment or a big assignment, but either way, He has work for you to do every day of the week. This work relates to your family, loving them, and meeting their needs. It relates to the church, to building up the saints, to encouraging one another. It also relates to reaching out to the lost. In fact, it is during difficult times, during the darkest of nights, that our light to the lost often shines the brightest. During this trial, and always, make sure you put God first, and that you do the work He wants you to do. Remember to *“seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”* Matt. 6:33, Psalm 112

God is working. Sometimes we are so occupied by our work, by what we are doing that we forget that God is working. Here is how Jesus says it, *“My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I too am working”* (John 5:17). Do you get that, God is working all the time? God is working in us and through us (Phil. 2:12-13) in ways we cannot even fathom, and in every person's life, in every family, city and country in the whole wide world. And I believe God is using this present pandemic to restructure things economically and globally in ways we have never seen before, in ways that relate to His purpose and the work He is doing during these end-times, in ways that relate directly to Christ's return to rapture the church. *“We have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.”* Eph. 1:11-12

Jesus Christ is building the church. Since the day of Pentecost about 2000 years ago, Jesus Christ has been building His church, and He has continued to build the church through all the years. He never takes a break even though we take breaks, particularly with this pandemic-induced slowdown and shutdown, when we are not working as much. As a pastor, I am always thinking of what I should do to build the church, but now that I am at home more, I can wonder how our church is doing, thinking *“the church needs me.”* But I know God good enough to know that He, with Jesus Christ, has everything perfectly under control, and He is not slowing down or stopping His work in the church and with the church. In fact, what is happening now with this pandemic is an important part of God's plan to build the church, exactly how, I do not know. And so even though most every church in this country is not meeting together this Sunday morning, I know and I am

convinced that Jesus Christ is continuing to build the church, for as He says, *"I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it."* Matt. 16:18, Eph. 3:20-21

Prophecy and the pandemic. Luke 21:11 tells us that in the beginning stage of the end times, *"there will be great earthquakes, and in various places plagues and famines."* And there have been earthquakes, plagues and famines, along with wars in various places around the world for many years now. Therefore, I believe we are, at this time in history, in that beginning stage of the end-times. And so now there's this plague, this Coronavirus, that has plagued much of the world. But again, we are only at the beginning stage, which means there will be many more plagues before the end of this church age. I say this not to scare you, but so you can know the truth, and so you are prepared for what is yet to come. I hope you realize that this God-planned pandemic is one of His means to increase your faith, to spiritually strengthen you, for what He wants you to do now and in the future. Let's then keep working for God, knowing that times will get tougher the closer we are to Christ's return and the rapture of the church. *"Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might."* Ephesians 6:10

Share the gospel. Tell people that their biggest problem is not the Coronavirus, but their sin, and that what's most important is not surviving the pandemic, but being saved from their sin and from spiritual and eternal death. Tell them they need to realize that they've sinned against a holy God, but that He sent His Son to this earth to die on a cross, to be punished by His Father so as to make payment for their sin. Tell them that not to fear death, but to fear Him who has the power over death and hell, and that now is the time and today is the day to get saved. Tell them to repent of their sins and believe that Jesus Christ died for them, for then they will be forgiven of their sins and become children of God, and then someday go to heaven and be with Jesus. *"God made Him (Jesus) who knew no sin to be sin that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."* 2 Cor. 5:21, John 3:16, Rom. 5:8, Titus 3:5

Have hope. The Coronavirus is a trial, and a very big one at that. And one way to get through this trial is to know that life will get better, to know there's light at the end of the tunnel, to know that God has a magnificent future reserved in heaven for you. This is what we call hope, and you need this hope, this God-given guarantee of being in heaven, of being glorified, of being with Jesus and other believers forever. Might you see the big picture, that in God's eyes, your earthly problems are but momentary light afflictions resulting in an eternal weight of glory. Jesus Christ is coming soon, and then you'll be in heaven and on earth with Him and all the other believers, and you will forever worship and serve God, and forever reign with Jesus Christ.

Let's Pray.

One more thing: This message is found in either audio or video format at a link to Sermon Audio on the front page of HopeBibleChurch.US. Similar messages about what God wants us to learn during this Coronavirus Epidemic can be found at my blog site, located at ChristKingdom.org.