



# FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (PCA)

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Greetings to those who are loved by God and called to be saints,

We are now approaching the third week of the suspension of corporate worship, social distancing, and the seemingly surreal world the response to COVID-19 has brought upon us.

Numerous theologians and pastors have offered commentary and counsel on this situation. Here are a couple of helpful links to consider:

**“The Crisis and the Deacons” by Daniel Schrock:** [LINK](#); *Schrock explores ways the church can continue to serve in this time through the deacons and also as members supporting the ministry of the diaconate. We should remember, while God did give deacons to ensure that the poor and vulnerable within the church were looked after, it is not their job to care for them alone. Schrock reminds us it is the deacons who **lead us** in service, not that they are the only ones doing the work!*

**“The Lion Roars” by Joseph Pipa:** [LINK](#); *Pipa looks biblically and theologically at this plague and reminds us not only is this pandemic under God’s sovereign control, but also encourages us to look at what God may be teaching us through this plague. He warns us not simply to look out into the world for causes and rest that God is judging ‘those people’s sins’ (e.g. abortion, deviant sexuality, etc.), but also consider how the American Church in particular has sinned against God. Pipa also offers sweet comforts and suggestions for ways to pray.*

I don’t want to duplicate the good advice that is readily available from a variety of faithful authors such as those listed above, but I do want to offer a few thoughts this week on our national (global!) situation.

Many of us - myself included - have expressed a desire for things to “get back to normal,” which in a sense is understandable. Many of us have faced cutbacks at work or furloughs entirely and are now wondering how we will meet expenses. Others of us are filled with anxiety and reasonable concern because of conditions that exacerbate our own (or that of loved ones) risk for complications. Some of us may even have (or will!) miss sharing important life milestones with loved ones. Most of us are concerned about how the Government’s attempts to handle the situation may in fact make things far worse in the long run.

But this situation also provides us an opportunity to take stock of where we were just prior to this global crisis and ask: is that a world, a “normal,” to which we should desire to return?

*Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit” – yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. (Jas. 4:13–16)*

Prior to the onset of the Corona pandemic, we lived in a society that - on the whole - boasted in its ability to shape most every event and handle those it could not shape.

The stock market was on a stratospheric rise that seemed unstoppable, and our Government implied that - under the right management - it would continue to do so beyond the time grandchildren were ready to retire; and many of us believed them.

Our healthcare industry offers cures, vaccines, and treatments beyond the wildest dreams of even our great-grandparents; and many of us began to trust the medical community completely.

Our education system promises to fix our social problems and give the tools for success so that, if we trust the professionals, everyone can follow and *achieve* his or her dreams; many of us believed them.

While there is nothing wrong with striving for good government, competent and ethical care for the sick, and promoting the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom, many in our society - even within the Christian community - fell into the trap about which the Apostle James warns us.

Did we, too, trust in the economy, healthcare, government, education, and countless other systems and technologies to secure our future and preserve our peace rather than founding our stability and hope in God alone? Even worse: had *we* become too comfortable in the society that brought us that stability?

One of the things with which this virus has confronted us is how fragile we are and how fragile our society is regardless of the progress we have made lately. Even those of us who are young and in 'low risk' categories are just as susceptible as anyone else to carry the virus and spread it on to others.

All of this serves as a reminder of at least two things.

First, *we are reminded to submit all of our plans to God*. This is not as simple as praying for God to bless our plans (though it is not less than that!), but also includes seeking the Lord's will in our plans. The rebuke James gives goes deeper than their boasting, but to the heart problem: they were not living in utter dependence on God to accomplish anything. They believed with enough skills and resources, they could accomplish anything. But James confronts them with the importance of looking to the Source of all things. As we submit our plans to God and as we consider our dependence on Him in all things, that will enable us to better identify ways to glorify Christ in our plans and in all that we do.

Second, *we are reminded the world is under a curse*. James morbidly(?), solemnly(?) reminds us we do not even know if we will be alive tomorrow. He's not attacking the discipline of planning (sorry, procrastinators!), but rather the sin of presuming on God's grace and patience by confronting us with the certainty of death (and everything that leads up to it). As he confronts us with the effects of the curse - thorns, thistles (cf. Gen. 3:18), and ultimately death - he is also driving us to take refuge in the One who delivers from the curse, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The virus may have shaken the sense of predictability and certainty that characterized our lives, but as we feel the loss of those things it reminds us they were never *really* there. Instead we must make our refuge and source of stability God's love in Christ for those who have turned to Him in faith and repentance.

When we come to faith, we confess that we have no "hope save in God's sovereign mercy." Sometimes we forget that statement is not just true for justification and salvation, but in every aspect of life. As you face financial difficulties, health stress, and/or other anxiety during this plague, remember three things:

First, *remember you are no less dependent on God's mercy now than you were earlier*. God was sufficient for you then and His kindness was not dependent on your gratitude to Him, but His love for you in Christ. So trust in Him to provide for you in this season and show you ways to serve Him now.

Second, *remember Christ is the only true source of stability*. No matter how certain, fireproof, or reliable, everything else will wear out and fail. But Christ watches over His people such that as we recognize our own weakness and frailty, we understand more of His goodness and greatness. The Scottish Presbyterian John "Rabbi" Duncan said this, "We are to grow in dependent insufficiency, and in the knowledge of Him who makes sufficient."

Third, remember if God's mercy is sufficient to save you from your sins, *His mercy is more than worthy of your trust through worldly afflictions that are not your own fault*. Our sins are our own fault, our own choosing. But none of us chooses to become sick. And if God's mercy extends to us in the depth of our sinful choices, we can be confident His mercy will sustain us through every affliction.

Your friend,

**Ryan Biese,**  
Pastor