

GRACE AND PEACE COMMUNITY CHURCH

Sundays 9am and 11:30am | 1701 Washington Avenue | Philadelphia, PA 19146
www.graceandpeacecommunitychurch.org

The following is a transcript of Pastor Jonathan's March 14th audio address to Grace and Peace:

Greetings Grace and Peace Community Church (and to whoever else might be listening to this):

This is Pastor Jonathan. Since we will not be gathering Sunday for corporate worship, I wanted to share a few thoughts with you, as we find ourselves in a highly unusual time that most of us have never found ourselves in: a global health pandemic.

I almost feel like laughing as I say that, when I think of 21st century medical advancements. But we are in times that are no laughing matters. With the rapid spread of the coronavirus globally, including in our region, and even in our city, we must take this as seriously as we can. And as believers in the God of heaven and earth and in His Son Jesus Christ and in His gospel of grace, we have the only way to look at this season for what it really is: *our God's mysterious will at work in the world to bring glory to Himself* – Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

How ought we as believers to be thinking? And what should we do? Well, I am unashamedly borrowing (with some alteration) from an email sent by a good friend of Grace and Peace, Pastor Dave Wiedis.

First, we should remember that the world we live in is broken. When God created all things, he made them good – exactly as they ought to be in order to give Him the honor that He deserves. But because our first parents Adam and Eve chose to neglect God's good and perfect will and chose to sin and rebel against him, corruption immediately impacted all things. All things, including humanity, began to deteriorate when sin entered into the world. Sickness and death are immediate consequences of the reality of sin. *The coronavirus only reminds us that this world and our bodies are victims to the power*

of sin. And therefore, to some degree, we should not be shocked by this further evidence of just how fallen and broken life under the sun sadly is.

But for believers in Jesus Christ, reminders of the brokenness of this world are also reminders that *we have the answer to the cause of the brokenness of this life*. We have that answer in the gospel of Jesus Christ, which says that anyone who trusts in Jesus is no longer a *victim* to the power of sin but is *victorious* in Jesus over the power of sin. Jesus left heaven and lived on earth perfectly conforming his life to the will of God in all things, in order to offer his sinless and spotless life up on a Roman cross where he would endure for a season the wrath of God until it put him to death, so that judgment would not fall on anyone who believes in him. And He died, and was buried, and then on the third day He was raised from death, and He was raised victorious over sin and death so that anyone who believes in him is no longer under the power of sin, but finds themselves in the victory of Jesus and his resurrection over sin. *This* is what we have to offer to the world in the midst of the brokenness the coronavirus is reminding us of in this season.

Secondly, we must also exercise *wisdom* in this season. James 1:5 – “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.”

As each day unfolds, we find ourselves needing to be wise. Yes, we need to wash our hands. Only give elbow bumps. Stay at home if you're sick. Try not to touch your face. Stay informed. And we also need to make judgement calls: Should I go out to eat? Should I have people over? Should I order hand sanitizer online? How much toilet paper should I get? We need God's guidance and Gods help. We need God's wisdom to know what to do in life in general, and also as we feel this even more so in this season. God promises to give wisdom generously to all who ask him for it in faith. Ask God for wisdom in matters big and small, believing that he will give it to you because of his love for you in Jesus Christ. He's already given you his greatest gift in his Son. And if you believe in him, then believe that God will guide you and provide you with the wisdom that you need to make the decisions you need to make, to honor him. Psalm 84:11 tells us,

*“For the Lord God is a sun and shield;
the Lord bestows favor and honor.
No good thing does he withhold
from those who walk uprightly.”*

Of course, we don't walk uprightly. But we walk in the upright One, Jesus Christ.

Third, part of exercising wisdom is to *resist fear*. For all who trust in the life and death and burial and resurrection of Jesus for the pardon of their sin and everlasting life with God, we have another promise from God:

“For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control” (2 Timothy 1:7).

And,

“For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” (Romans 8:15).

It’s an understandably fearful time for many. But believers in Jesus literally have nothing to fear because we have the Holy Ghost living inside of us, and we have His divine power, love, and self-control inside of us. And you are now, and forever will be, a child of the Most High God. He is your divine Daddy, and He is perfectly in control of all the events of this life, including *your* life, and including this coronavirus pandemic. We are not promised safety from the coronavirus. But we are promised safety, and security, and the love of God, in His son Jesus Christ. “For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation (including coronavirus) will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39).

Fourth, we are to live now in light of *then*. You see, as believers in Jesus, our lives here on earth are a mere pilgrimage. This is not our home, but our temporal dwelling place of glorifying God, until the day we enter the glory of God. Our lives now are to be informed and constrained and filled with the living hope of the life that is to come. In 1 Peter 1:3-7, we read:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

Our hope is not merely to avoid contracting coronavirus, or even being granted a long life here on earth (although we would love for those to be the will of God). But our hope is in the victory over sin and death in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because of his resurrection (and the resurrection he promises to all who trust in him) our living hope is entering our eternal rest and our eternal reward - the eternal inheritance of God *himself* in heaven, with all of the saints from every tribe and tongue and nation. *That* is the place where there will be no more sorrow, no more suffering, no more sickness, no more coronavirus, and no more death. They will all be done away with forever. *This* is the promise of God to all who trust in the gospel of his son Jesus. And *this* is what we are to hope in in this life, as we endure this global pandemic of coronavirus.

And so **fifth**, for now, we *pray*. Psalm 116:1-2 says,

I love the Lord, because he has heard
my voice and my pleas for mercy.
²Because he inclined his ear to me,
therefore I will call on him as long as I live.

God listens to the prayers of his children, not because those prayers are made in *our* names, but because they are made in the matchless name of *Jesus Christ*. Thus, we should boldly pray and call upon our God to protect us and our communities from coronavirus, and to give us and those in the medical community and leaders on all levels wisdom in the midst of all this. We also ought to pray what Jesus taught us to pray and Matthew 6:10:

Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

Let's pray for God to embolden His people in this season of fear, that we would lovingly offer the living hope of the gospel of Jesus to those who fear so greatly without Him. Let's pray that the truth of God's eternal Kingdom would minister to believers in this season. And let's pray that the will of God in heaven, which is perfect, would be done and would be seen as perfect here on earth. Even in Philadelphia. Even when it is hard to understand. Our God is sovereign, and He is good. And He is sovereign and good in *all* things. We see this most clearly in the cross and empty tomb of his son Jesus Christ. May this - the gospel Jesus - be our story and our song in this season. May God bless you in every way that you need it to the glory of Jesus Christ. Thank you for listening.

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The following are questions that can be used for personal reflection or group discussion on Pastor Jonathan's March 14th audio sermon:

1. Besides the coronavirus, what are other things in your life (perhaps something in your present or your past) that reflects the brokenness of this life, and needs the healing power of the gospel of Jesus Christ?
2. In this season, have you been praying to God for wisdom, or have you been trying to figure things out on your own? How have you been praying with others?
3. How fearful and worried have you been in this season? How confident are you that because of Jesus, you can cast your cares upon the Father? What are the anxious thoughts you need to entrust to God and pour out to Him?
4. What are you most tempted to hope in instead of heaven? Physical safety? Your own vigilance? What can you do to more firmly place your hope in Christ?
5. What are the 1 or 2 most impactful or relevant pieces of truth from this talk? Spend time now praying for them, make time this week to pray for them, and find others to pray them with you.