Bob: Welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us on the Monday edition. We are separated today as we have a special program for you. Dave and Ann Wilson are away from our studios in Little Rock, but we’re connected. This is how we’re doing life these days, right?

Dave: We’re looking at each other on a screen. I’ve been in, it feels like, hundreds of screen meetings in the last couple weeks.

Bob: It’s not the same as being side by side, but I’m grateful that we have this technology available to us; right, Ann?

Ann: It’s so good to see you, Bob!

Bob: We are delighted today to be able to have Dr. John Piper joining us. I think most of our listeners know about John from his writing/from his years of pastoral ministry at Bethlehem Baptist Church. He is the head of a ministry called Desiring God. Most of his sermons/his books are available at the DesiringGod.org website.

John’s been on FamilyLife Today with us before. John, we’re thrilled to have you back again with us today. This moment we’re living in today is a moment unlike anything I can remember in my lifetime. In your years of pastoral ministry, has there been anything like this that you’ve walked through before?

John: No; but as soon as I say, “No,”—I mean, I said to somebody the other day, “This is not unique just to us, I think it’s unique in the history of the world.” Even though there have been pandemics, there’s never been a time when the globe is connected like it is. Everybody knows what’s happening everywhere, and it passes instantaneously through travel; that’s never happened. I mean, when we talk about pandemics in the first two centuries, or the black plague, we don’t know whether that touched the American Indians; we don’t know. But we know this—and this has never happened before—with this kind of connectedness and this kind of awareness.

But here’s the thing that I think is so crucial. When you ask, “Has it ever happened before?” namely, it’s happened every time somebody suffocates. I mean, I’ve stood beside many beds, where people are on ventilators. The unique thing about it is just
how many. I think that's really important to say, because every one of us is going to go through a coronavirus; we're going to die. The dying process will be scary; it won't be easy; so in a sense, death and suffering are very personal. The fact that I know people, who have this disease, or that 10,000 people are dying right now, that's just a statistic; but when my throat starts to close up, and I can't get my breath—and that happens to everybody before they go out of this world—so in a sense, it's not personally unique; it's just historically unique.

**Bob:** Yes; you felt led to write on this subject and have just released a book that's going to be out in a few weeks. The audio book is now available; the e-book is available. In fact, people can go to our website at FamilyLifeToday.com; you guys are graciously making that resource available, at no cost, for anyone who would like to get it. You've written lots of books; why, in this moment, did you feel the need to write this subject as a book?

**John:** I remember, back in 2004, when the tsunami happened: 230,000 people swept away in one night; whole churches on the east coast of South India gone in a night. I was stunned by that. I was asked by a lot of people to talk about that, and I did. This feels even more stunning to me. I don't know why it is; but one of the reasons Desiring God exists, it seems, is to talk about suffering; that's just been part of our DNA from the beginning. “Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing,” is 2 Corinthians 6:10. We've always struggled—always. What does it mean to be sorrowful and always rejoicing? Anytime something comes along that is a mega threat to joy, I feel that's my calling—is to talk about joy; that's my calling—is to believe that there are pleasures at God’s right hand forevermore, starting now.

“What about this, Piper? Come on, Mr. Joy/Mr. Sovereignty…” This feels about as big as it can get; and therefore, I looked at that little booklet I did several years ago on “Don't Waste Your Hospital Stay,” or something—I forget the name of it—a little tiny book on what I learned from being in the hospital a few years ago. Somebody said to me, “Just take that and turn it into something a little bigger, and it will be useful.” I took about four days and did nothing but write, and it came out to be about 100 pages. It just feels necessary—by the magnitude of the situation/necessary because I'm a lover of joy in Jesus—and I'm a believer in the sovereignty of God; and a lot of people can't put those together.

**Ann:** John, help us to put that together; because people are looking at this current situation and we're thinking, “Wait; I'm to believe that a good God, a merciful God, a God of love is overseeing the death of tens of thousands of people and a plague that is a pandemic. How in the world do I reconcile those things?”

**John:** Well, I suppose, just to make sure that they're asking the right question, they realize that God oversees the death of 50,000 people a day, every day, in the history of the world. If they have a problem with God and death, they might as well just jettison
God; because death is here, and it’s here to stay until Jesus comes. Every one of us is going to die. I think this is a good moment for getting rid of sentimental views of God—they don’t work; they just don’t work—I mean, we may as well stop being believers if we cannot reconcile God and death.

The way I begin is, not with coronavirus, but with the world as it is. I go to Romans 8—I love Romans 8—I think Romans 8’s the greatest chapter in the Bible! It has this section in it, from verses 19 to 23, that talks about God subjected the creation to futility and to corruption; and the effect of that subjection is groaning. Even we, who have the first fruits of the Holy Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons/the redemption of our bodies.

If you ask, “Why do our bodies need to be redeemed?” the answer is they’re fallen; and they’re fallen because God subjected the world to futility. He did it because Adam and Eve sinned: “When sin came into the world, death through sin entered the world,” Romans 5:12. God is in charge of the condition of the world in that He subjected the entire world to this kind of misery, at the beginning, because of sin; and He’s going to lift it someday. I mean, that’s the big picture of the Bible: sin enters the world; suffering through sin.

I thought this through most deeply when it was 9/11, when the planes crashed in and the towers came down, and 2500 people evaporated in just a few minutes. I struggled with: “If God subjected the world to futility, and sin was the reason”—sin is an act of the soul; that is, I contemplate God with my mind and my soul—I regard Him as defective; His advice is not worth following—“I think Satan has some good ideas here. I can have more intelligence than God. I can decide what’s good for me. ‘Thank you, God, You may take a vacation. I will go with Satan and myself,’ and then what happens?—physical suffering happens—“and I ask, ‘Why physical suffering, God? It was a soul issue; it was a spiritual issue! Why are You taking it out on our bodies?’”

My answer, as I’ve reflected on Romans 8, is that sin is blinding; and blindness means nobody sees how outrageous is our treason against God. Nobody loses any sleep over the fact that they give God less attention than they do their hairstyle—nobody! So what’s going to get anybody’s attention to the outrage of sin? I think God’s answer is: “Touch their bodies; and they’ll come to terms with this, maybe.”

Right now, the touching of our bodies, the touching of our schedules, the touching of our churches, our families—all this touching—we feel; we get angry or we get irritated; and if we had any sense, we’d say: “That’s how serious sin is. That’s how serious our neglect and our despising of God is.” It’s a great wake-up call.

Dave: So you’re saying, John, one of the things that we can see, and you mention this in your book, as we look at the world and what’s happening in the coronavirus all around the world—I know many of us wake up and we read the news every day; and it’s depressing and scary, and we’re filled with anxiety and fear—you’re also saying that
reality shows us the moral horror of sin; like you said in your book, “It’s a picture of the state of our soul.”

**John:** It seems to me that the whole Bible is written for two messages, and all of providence happens for two messages: one is the *horror* of belittling God, and the other is the glory of grace. In order for grace to be glorious, you have to recognize the horror of what our souls are doing to God, virtually, every day. Hardly *anybody*—especially in the secular world—has any sense of the *horror* of their treason against God.

By treason, I simply mean this: Jesus Christ is the King of the universe. One day, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord of the universe. Right now, most people are in treason against their King: they don’t love Him; they don’t worship Him; they don’t obey Him; they don’t pay any attention to Him! He is marginal, at best, to their lives and hated, at worst. All of that is worthy of condemnation.

Short of condemnation, God gives this world thousands, and thousands, and thousands of days without coronavirus. What happens?—*nothing.* That grace is received: the sun comes up on the evil and the good every day; the rain comes down; the nation prospers—the result: self-centeredness, pride, arrogance, self-sufficiency—it’s outrageous that the whole world is indifferent to their Maker and their Savior. Along comes a coronavirus, and we’ll find out whether this will get the attention of the world.

**Ann:** John, I was just thinking, “Are we at the peak right now of sin?” We’ve been going thousands of years of God’s grace/of God’s blessing. There have been things in the past, but is this God’s wakeup call to our generation?

**John:** I can easily imagine more sin than there is now. [Laughter] But that’s not an answer to your question, because I don’t know. What the world will look like in the immediate years, leading up to the second coming of Jesus, is not crystal clear in the Bible. I think it’s left less than clear precisely to keep us off-balance; I don’t think God wants us to have this nailed down.

In the book, I have a section on the second coming; and my argument is that Jesus *repeatedly* gave the kinds of warnings: “I want you to wake up.” “Wake up! Wake up!” “Stay awake! You don’t know the day or the hour!” “Wake up!” I take all kinds of things to be wake-up calls. I don’t know if we’re at the peak, and I don’t know if we’re at the climax. I think it would be wrong to set dates; it would be wrong to state anything with any certainty about the timing of the Lord’s coming.

I just think we’re at a point, where God deems it wise to speak the way He’s speaking. I think we ought to be on our faces, fasting and praying, for the preservation and the purification of the faith of God’s elect and the *awakening* of the unbelief to belief of the folks who are not paying any attention.
Bob: That's how we can view this moment: as a good gift from God. He has done this to awaken us from something we were not seeing.

I mean, I've been thinking, John, about the verse, where Jesus said, “What father would give to his son a stone if he asked for bread?” I'm thinking, “None of us asked for this, and yet it feels a little bit like a stone.” What I hear you saying is, “This is God, in His grace, waking us from our slumber about our own sin.”

John: Definitely. Yes, I wrote a poem a couple years ago about that text of: “Which of you who has a son who asks for bread would give him a stone, or if he asks for a fish would give him a snake?” The poem takes a turn like this:

Suppose your boat is drifting out to sea, and you desperately need a stone for an anchor. You don't realize it, and you ask for bread while you're basking in the sun. If God's good, He's going to give you a stone instead of bread.

Or what if you have a snake bite and you need to get the venom out of the snake’s fangs in order to produce an antidote; not knowing that, you ask for a fish to put on these two little holes in your arm, which will do you no good whatsoever. Well, God hears your cry for a fish, and He gives you a snake so you can get the venom, so you can get the antidote.

In other words, I think the point of that text is, “If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father give good things to those who ask?”—good things to those who ask, which may or may not be precisely what you asked for, because you don’t know what you need lots of times.

My son, Benjamin, when he was about four, wanted a snack; he asked for a cracker. I got the crackers down. I pulled it open; they were all moldy. I held it up to him with fuzz on it; and I said, “Ben, I can't give you this. It's got...” He says, “I’ll eat the fuzz!” [Laughter] I said, “No, you won’t; not while I’m your dad!” He didn’t know; he just wanted the snack, and I knew better.

I think there are many times we may need a stone and a snake—that we don’t realize, “This is a snake, and it's good for us,”—if we will trust Him in it.

Bob: John, I think you saw the article that was in Time magazine recently, where a British theologian asks the question, “Should we be looking for answers in the midst of this?” The headline—and I don’t know that he wrote the headline—the headline was: “Christianity Offers No Answers about the Coronavirus. It’s Not Supposed To.”
As I look at your book, it seems to me that your book is providing us with some answers that maybe this British theologian says we shouldn’t even be expecting to find from the Bible.

**John:** Yes; I read that, and I was perplexed by that article. I don’t want to attribute that title to him, although things he said in the article warranted that title. [Laughter]

**Bob:** Right.

**John:** That was a provocative title, but so was the article. I didn’t like the article for numerous reasons. Christianity *does* offer answers; it *does*. When he said—and I have quotes here I put in a document in front of me—he said, “What if there are moments when the only advice is to wait without hope, because we’d be hoping in the wrong thing?”

I just cannot believe—I mean, I know this man—I cannot believe he means that! I just cannot. I mean, that’s just outrageous, I think, to say there are moments—I’d say the exact opposite. I would say there *never, never, never, never* is one moment, in the life of a Christian—for whom Christ has died, for whom there is no condemnation, who is sealed unto the day of redemption, who is elect before the foundation of the world, who is filled with the Holy Spirit, who has heaven promised to him—there’s never one moment in his life when the only advice is to wait without hope.

He *must* mean something I don’t get, but he *said* it in a way that set people up to really misunderstand. That statement I regard as simply bizarre; I’m not sure why in the world such a statement would be made. He says that: “Rationalists/rationalists want explanations. They want explanations for everything,” as if the only people—[Laughter]—as if the only people in the world, who long for some word from God for what He’s up to/why He does what He does—are people who are in the grip of some kind of enlightenment rationalism. I think that’s absurd! I think people from every era in church history have had a longing: “Help me, Father, by Your Word, in Your Spirit, to know what I need to know.”

I think there are answers in the Bible; now, I don’t mean answers for every question. I think I said in the book: “God right now is doing a *billion* things”—and that’s an understatement; okay?—because there are seven billion people in the world, and He’s doing more than ten things in everybody’s life—so that’s a lot of purposes God has. I don’t know 99.99999 percent of what God’s doing!

The question is: “Does the Bible show me a handful of glorious purposes that are true about all suffering over which God is sovereign?” The answer is, “Yes.” I tried to lay out about six of them; goodness gracious, there could be more than six. I don’t like that article, and I think it was very misleading/hurtful for people.
Dave: It’s not wrong for us, as followers of Christ, to be looking at this current situation and be asking God in prayer: “God, what are You doing?” and “What should I be learning in this moment?”

John: I think it would be crazy not to; and the reason is this: God is sovereign—He works all things according to the counsel of His will, Ephesians 1:11; no purpose of His can be thwarted; the Lord gives and the Lord takes away—so God is sovereign.

Even if He permits some things through secondary causes like Satan and evil men, He is sovereign over Satan/sovereign over evil men. We know that from [the Book of] Job; we know that from Acts 4:27-28. He is sovereign over the evil that people do, and over Satan. Therefore, even when He so-called “permits a thing,” He is purposeful in it. God never acts whimsically; He never does something and says, “I have no idea why I just did that.” He always has purposes.

Well, if God is sovereign and He always has purposes, you can't look at this event, which is one of the biggest events in the history of the world, and say, “Well, I guess there’s no purpose here.” That would be insane if you believe the Bible.

Then the last question would be, “Has He revealed any of those purposes?” I want to make clear here: “I don’t hear voices”; right? [Laughter] When I say, “What is God saying?” or “What is God doing?” I don’t expect to have a dream about that; I don’t expect to have a prophetic word about that. I expect to open my Bible and see what God says about things like this. Then I’m going to take what He says in the Bible and I’m going to put it next to what’s happening; I’m going to draw the connections, and offer it to people. I said I’m pointing/I’m pointing [to] paths, and I want people to walk down those paths with Scripture.

Bob: Well, and your new book, Coronavirus and Christ, keeps pointing us back to Jesus and back to Scripture and helps us think rightly about our current moment.

We’re grateful, by the way, John, that you are making the audiobook and the e-book edition of Coronavirus and Christ available to FamilyLife Today listeners for no cost. Our listeners can go right now to our website, FamilyLifeToday.com; and you can download either the audiobook or the e-book: John Piper’s brand new book, Coronavirus and Christ.

This is a book that will encourage you, help you think clearly and rightly about our present moment. It will equip you to be able to give an answer to people, who ask you about the hope you have, even as things in our world continue to worsen and people wonder why you have hope. This is a book that will point all of us in the right direction. Again, the e-book or the audiobook is available as a free download when you go to FamilyLifeToday.com; and we’re grateful to the folks at Desiring God for that. The print edition of the book is going to be out in another week or two; you can pre-order a copy.
of the book now. Again, all of that information is available on our website at FamilyLifeToday.com.

Our team is regularly putting together resources for couples/families; so that in the midst of being socially isolated, and staying at home, and feeling cooped up or trapped, you have some things to do with the kids: you have some new ideas, some fresh activities, some ways that you can make the most of this time and use it strategically and purposefully as you disciple your own children. Look for a link that says “Not Cancelled” because home is not cancelled/family is not cancelled. Our resources are available at that link on our website, FamilyLifeToday.com.

Now, tomorrow, we’re going to continue our conversation with Dr. John Piper, talking about this present moment and talking about anxiety, and worry, and how we counsel our own heart and soul in the midst of this current pandemic. I hope you can join us back tomorrow for that.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our hosts, Dave and Ann Wilson, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see you back next time for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

FamilyLife Today is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas; a Cru® Ministry. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

We are so happy to provide these transcripts to you. However, there is a cost to produce them for our website. If you’ve benefited from the broadcast transcripts, would you consider donating today to help defray the costs?

Copyright © 2020 FamilyLife. All rights reserved.

www.FamilyLife.com