

Jesus vs. Coronavirus

1. Warm-up Question: On Sunday, Jeff showed a scene from Disney's classic *Snow White* where she is surrounded by the wonder of nature and sings to the birds. Tell us about an idyllic moment in your life – one of those times when everything seemed perfect.
2. Unfortunately, life is not like a Disney movie. A headline in last week's *New York Times* proclaimed, "Sense of Crisis Deepens in U.S. As Worldwide Cases of Coronavirus Approach 100,000." For weeks now we've had the haunting sense that a superbug hatched in the middle of China was slowly making its way to us. Sure enough it arrived in Indianapolis on Friday. Across the globe, workplaces are being disrupted, schools closing, supply lines at risk, and the stock market plummeting. As all this has been unfolding, what have you been thinking or feeling?
3. As Jeff prayed about what Jesus wants to say to us in times like these, he was led to Jesus' words in Matthew 6 about the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. At first Jeff felt inner resistance to using Matthew 6 because, if read casually, it can sound like superficial "happy talk" akin to the scene from *Snow White*. In tough times, Christians often spout platitudes and offer false reassurance, saying things like: "Don't worry about a thing. Just pray and trust and God is going to give you everything you want, nothing's going to harm you, and you'll live happily ever after." In response to comments like that, Michael Heher offers this advice to preachers:

"Don't make promises God doesn't keep. Account for the shaky ground and patches of quicksand. Don't deny our disappointments or turn away from our broken hearts. Explain the beasts lying in wait, the damaged goods that can't be fixed, and the trouble in the streets. Show us God in the horrors hidden under cover of night and the prayers that don't get answered. Make your words equal to our predicament. Give us faith as wild as the world. Describe that, and we'll hang on every word."

How do you feel about what Heher says? Do you think there's too much superficial "happy talk" in modern Christianity? What's the danger in that?
4. If we look at nature around us (the birds of the air, the lilies of the field) with clear eyes, as Jesus urges us to do, we see that birds die and flowers get trampled. Life in nature is dangerous. With that in mind, let's now read Matthew 6:25-34.
 - a. Jeff noted several phrases in the foregoing passage that are critical to grasping the realism in what Jesus says. In Matthew 6:30, he says, "The grass of the field . . . is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven." What's the significance of that observation for what we should expect from life?
 - b. In Matthew 6:34, Jesus says, "Today's trouble is enough for today." What's the significance of that statement for what we should expect from life?

- c. In Matthew 6:27, Jesus says, “Which of you by worrying can add a single hour to your span of life?” What’s the significance of that statement for what we should expect from life?
 - d. When the totality of Jesus’ words in Matthew 6 is considered, Jeff suggested the promise Jesus offers can be summed up like this: God will be present with me and give me everything I need to triumph through life’s great tribulations. Does that feel like a fair reading? Why or why not?
 - e. In Matthew 10:29, Jesus says, “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. . . . So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.” What is – and isn’t – Jesus promising us in that verse?
 - f. In Romans 8:35, Paul says, “What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” What is – and isn’t – God promising us in that verse?
 - g. In Psalm 23:5, David says, “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” What is – and isn’t – God promising us in that verse?
5. In Matthew 6, Jesus highlights three key principles that can help us live into the promise that we can triumph through life’s troubling times. The first of those principles is found in Matthew 6:27, “Which of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?” **This is Principle No. 1 – Realize and accept that the future is uncertain and beyond your control.**
- a. We have a natural tendency to want to be in control. Why is that way of living so frustrating?
 - b. What’s something in your life right now that you just need to accept for what it is and make the most of it?
 - c. While we cannot eliminate the threat of coronavirus, we can take reasonable steps to reduce the risk. What are some steps you’re taking to reduce the risk?
6. **Principle No. 2 – Trust that whatever this crazy life brings you, God will be with you and provide what you need to triumph through it.**
- a. When in your life have you seen this principle at work?
 - b. What are some ways to make sure we experience the joy of life, and keep our perspective, even with the craziness of the coronavirus crisis?

7. **Principle No. 3 – When times get really hard, be faithful to your values.** This is what Jesus means when he says, Matthew 6:33, “Seek first the kingdom of God and God’s righteousness, and all these other things will be given to you as well.”
 - a. What are some ways coronavirus may test our values?
 - b. What are some ways we can be “salt and light” in the midst of the coronavirus scare?
8. Jeff said, “There are some tough times ahead.” What do you expect the next few months to be like? Do you feel ready?