

Matthew 8:14-17

CHRIST OVER COVID

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A **plague hit Rome** from **249 to 262 AD**. This plague lasted **13 years**. Our pandemic has been a week and a half and we're **already going crazy**. Can you imagine what that was like? **Historians** have studied this plague and it was **bad**, real bad. I don't want to describe it to you but if you look up the **Plague of Cyprian** you can read all the details.¹ It killed about **5,000 people a day**. The city of **Alexandria Egypt** declined from **500,000 to 190,000**.² Church records say it was like Ebola.

There were **Christians** but this plague **didn't spare them**. The **leader** of the **church** at this time, **Dionysius**, wrote how Christians loved others at steep cost to themselves.

Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbors and cheerfully accepting their pains. Many, in nursing and curing others, transferred their death to themselves and died in their stead.³

They loved others so much they **died in their place**. **Why** did they do this? What could possibly **motivate** them to love others **self-sacrificially**? We have **doctors** and **nurses today**. We have **modern medical systems** with **sterile environments** and **face masks** and **aprons** and **toilet paper** (or at least we did). We have all sorts of **ways to stay safe**. They had **none of that**; but **they had Jesus** and **Jesus had them**. This is **the key** to why **they weren't afraid** and **we don't have to be afraid today**.

Jesus is over all plagues.

Jesus is **reigning** and **ruling** over every **pandemic**, every **disease**, every **virus**, and every **plague**. These early Christians knew that **nothing falls outside** of the **power** and **authority** of Christ Jesus. Whether they **lived** or **died** they were **secure** in him. I want to show you a **chapter** of the **Bible** that **highlight** Jesus' **power** over **illness**. I'm going to start at the **beginning of the chapter** in **verse one**.

Matthew 8:1-3 (NIV)

When Jesus came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. 2 A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."

3 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy.

A **leper** comes up to Jesus and wants to be healed. He says, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." In other words, "Jesus, if you want to **heal my horrible skin disease, it will happen**." You know what Jesus did? **Jesus willed it!** He reached out his hand, touched him, and said, "I am willing, be clean!" It says "**Immediately**" the man was **cleansed**. It **wasn't a day** or a **week** or a **month**. This **terrible disease** left him **immediately**. Jesus had **power** over this man's **leprosy**. There's a **lesson** for us in this.

Nothing is going to happen outside of Jesus' will so we don't need to be afraid.

In a fallen world it's **normal** to **feel afraid** or **anxious**; it's normal but it's **not required** if you **know Jesus**. If we **understand** that **nothing happens apart from Jesus' will**, even something we don't understand like **COVID-19**, then it gives us **hope** and **confidence** that everything is going to **be okay**. I **don't know why Jesus allows pandemics** to happen, but I do know that when **Christians have followed the way of Jesus** during plagues, and love others at **cost to themselves**, **Christianity has grown and flourished**.

Pandemics have been one of the **key ways** Christianity has spread. I don't think you're going to find this in any **church-growth book**. *5 Steps to Growing Your Church*. "#1. Pray for a pandemic." It's **confusing** but it's also **reassuring** that Jesus has **everything under control** and we can trust **he knows what he's doing**. *Nothing is going to happen outside of Jesus' will so we don't need to be afraid*.

I read one blog post from a **father** posted on Wednesday, March 11th from a **rural community** in **Austria**. He shared how the **local health department** called him to tell him one of his **fourteen-year-old son's classmates** had a confirmed case of **COVID-19** and that they had to quarantine him for **two weeks**. Can you **imagine** getting that **phone call**? When he and his wife told their **son** he said, "**Mom, Dad**, we're going to pray this one out, and everything is going to be okay."⁴ *When you know that nothing is going to happen outside of Jesus' will, it gives you peace*.

Jesus is Lord in sickness and in health.

Right after the leper a **centurion**, a **command** of **100 Roman soldiers**, comes to Jesus asking him to heal his servant (Luke 7:1-10). Jesus asks him if he wants him to **come** and heal him but the Centurion says:

Matthew 8:8b-10, 13 (NIV)

8...“Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. 9 For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”

10 When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, “Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. ...

13 Then Jesus said to the centurion, “Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would.” And his servant was healed at that moment.

The centurion doesn't address Jesus by his name, but calls him, “**Lord**”—“**kyrios**.” That's how you would address your **master**, a **sovereign king**, or even **deity, God himself**. But are masters or kings the Lord of sickness and death? No, only God is. He's saying, “*Jesus is Lord of sickness and health—Jesus is God.*”

Do you believe **Jesus is Lord and God**? If you don't, maybe you're **wandering** through this pandemic **fearful** of what's going to happen. But what if you could **trust** that Jesus is God and is going to **work everything out for your good**? The Bible actually tells us that if you **love God**, God is going to **use everything for your good** (Rom 8:28), even being **stuck at home, loss of income, sickness, even death**.

In **1854** there was a “**major cholera outbreak**” in **London** where the **famous preacher Charles Spurgeon** served as **pastor**.⁵ He was **visiting** the sick and doing **funerals** every day. He wrote of one **young woman** who was dying; but did so **trusting Jesus**.

I went home, and was soon called away again; that time, to see a young woman. She also was in the last extremity, but it was a fair, fair sight. She was singing—though she knew she was dying—and talking to those round about her, telling her brothers and sisters to follow her to heaven, bidding goodbye to her father, and all the while smiling as if it had been her marriage day. She was happy and blessed.

That **does not make sense unless you know *Jesus is Lord in sickness and in health and nothing is going to happen outside of his will.*** The only way to have ***peace under plague*** is to know ***Jesus is over plague.***

I want to put an **idea** in your **head**. Maybe Jesus is **allowing this pandemic** to **mess up your life** to **get your attention**, to **slow us all down**. When else would you **stop** and **listen** and **think of spiritual things**?

Maybe Jesus is using this pandemic to touch your heart.

The story of the **leper** and the **Centurion's servant** lead up to **today's story**. Jesus comes into one of his **disciple's home**, **Peter's**, and he touches his **mother-in-law** who is **sick** and **heals** her. I don't want to miss that he has touched something **much deeper**. He hasn't just made her **body well**. He's made her **soul well**.

Matthew 8:14-15 (NIV)

14 When Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever.

15 He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him.

Even though she's **feverish**, and there was **some belief** that the fever itself was a **disease** and so people **didn't touch** feverish people, **Jesus touches her**.⁶ Can you imagine if you got **sick with COVID-19** and Jesus comes to visit you and he reaches out to **touch you without gloves**? If you had enough strength, you'd probably **jerk away**. Before this woman can do that he **touches her hand**. As he touches her hand he somehow touches her **heart**. She **gets up** and begins to **do what she does best—love Jesus by serving him**, making him a **meal**, getting him something to **drink**. Can we be **open to the possibility** that Jesus wants to use this pandemic to **open up our hearts**—to tell us that we can trust in him no matter what happens?

During the **Cholera outbreak** a man who had previously **mocked Spurgeon** for his **faith in Christ** called upon him at **3:00am** in the morning to come and visit him because he was dying. Something about sickness made this man realize **he needed something more, something beyond this life, someone "over" this life**. I wish I could tell you that that man **made it**, but **he didn't**. By the time **Spurgeon got to him** his **mind was gone**. **His story** doesn't have to be ours. We can find **eternal safety with Jesus today**.

Jesus is Lord of the physical and the spiritual.

Look at the **absolute power** Jesus displays as he **heals people** and **casts out demons**.

Matthew 8:16 (NIV)

When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick.

Maybe you're thinking, "I'm a **spiritual person** but I'm **not interested in religion**." I'm not interested in religion either! I'm interested in **knowing the God** who can **cast out demons**. I'm interested in **Christ Jesus** who is **Lord of all things physical** and **all things spiritual**. I'm interested in the **person** who if he **wants**, **can heal me** of my **sickness** or can **work through** my sickness to do something **even greater**. I'm **interested in Jesus** who has the power to **speak a word** and **demons flee**.

Jesus is over all plagues but there's **one plague** he's most interested in healing.

Jesus came to heal your plague.

Jesus **willingly bore our sin**, the ways we **disobey God** and **break his creation** and **act like a virus** in our **world**. The ways we **hurt each other** and **take advantage of each other**—Jesus came to **bear those sins**.

Matthew 8:17 (NIV)

17 This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

“He took up our infirmities
and bore our diseases.”

Jesus came to **heal disease** but that’s not all he came to do. The author of our gospel, **Matthew**, quotes a passage in the Old Testament that **speaks** of a **coming savior**. It calls this **coming savior** the **Suffering Servant**. It says he came to **bear our pain**, our **suffering**, and our **iniquities**, our **sins**:

Isaiah 53:4-5 (NIV)

4 Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.
5 But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.

The prophet Isaiah isn’t just talking about our **physical wounds**, but our **spiritual wounds**. Those **deep wounds** in our **hearts** that only **Jesus** can **touch** and **heal**. Jesus does physical acts of healing because he **cares about us** but also to **prove** that he can **forgive our sins** and **heal our hearts**. Jesus loves you enough to **bear your plague** on the **cross**. **My sin is so bad the only cure is death**. You don’t **play with COVID-19**. **You kill it**. That **act of death** on the cross is what **gives us life**, *eternal life in Jesus*.

Jesus is over all plagues because he came under our plague. This is why we who know Christ go and **sacrificially love our neighbor** at **risk to ourselves**. We are **secure in Christ** (John 10:28-29).

We come under because he is over.

Our **neighbors** need us right now. They’re **scared**. They’re **terrified**. They don’t know what they’re going to do **without Tom Brady**... But **isn’t it true** that **Jesus healed Peter’s mother-in-law** and it **changed her life** and now she wants to **serve others**?

In **1527** the black plague struck **Wittenberg Germany** where the **theologian Martin Luther** lived with his family. His wife **Katharine** was **pregnant** with their second child. **Instead of fleeing** he wrote a **why a believer should stay and help others**. Martin Luther says:

Yes, no one should dare leave his neighbor unless there are others who will take care of the sick in their stead and nurse them. In such cases we must respect the word of Christ, “I was sick and you did not visit me ...” [Matt. 25:41–46]. According to this passage we are bound to each other in such a way that no one may forsake the other in his distress but is obliged to assist and help him as he himself would like to be helped.⁷

But if you think I’m **suggesting** we **run around good health practices**, I’m not suggesting that at all. In that same letter **Luther** encourages his people to **protect each other**.

I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine, and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance infect and pollute others, and so cause their death as a

result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me and I have done what he has expected of me and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. If my neighbor needs me, however, I shall not avoid place or person but will go freely...

As **Christians**, we **show** we love our **coworkers, neighbors, classmates, and complete strangers** by practicing **good health practices, social distancing, washing our hands, and self-quarantine**. We also show the love of Christ by **being willing to risk ourselves** for those in need. Maybe that looks like a **coworker** who comes down with **COVID-19** and you drop a **meal off** at their **door**. Maybe that looks like a **neighbor** who get's so sick they **can't watch their kids so you take them in**. Maybe that looks like giving your **extra toilet paper** to a **complete stranger** on **Facebook**.

Maybe the Lord won't ask you to **risk that** but he's asking you to **risk something**. You can **risk your time** by **calling or texting friends, neighbors, and church members to check in on them**. You can risk your **paycheck** to help cover those in need. I know one **person** who is **giving her work hours** to coworkers because they need it more. How might you **wisely risk yourself** for others? Why not just **hole-up and shut out the world** until this **whole thing is over**? **Luther** has **one more word** for us:

If Christ shed his blood for me and died for me, why should I not expose myself to some small dangers for his sake and disregard this feeble plague? If you can terrorize, Christ can strengthen me. If you can kill, Christ can give life. If you have poison in your fangs, Christ has far greater medicine.

Martin Luther **really believed this** and it **cost him something**. **He lost people he knew and loved**.⁸ Jesus told us (c.f., 1 John 3:16):

John 15:13 (NIV) Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.

Christ is over COVID-19 and all **things, all pandemics, all sickness, all disease, all sin, all brokenness**. **Before** he was over he **brought himself under**. He **died** to give us **eternal life**. He **sacrificed himself** to **rescue us**. **Now we go and do likewise**. *We come under because he is over.*

Numbers 6:24-26 (ESV)

24 The Lord bless you and keep you;

25 the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;

26 the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this message on Facebook Live during the 2020 COVID-19 (Coronavirus) lockdown in Massachusetts. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes endnotes and references, or share it through Apple podcasts or Google Play Music. Read the story of our church here.

Discussion Questions

You and your family or friends can use these group discussion questions to talk through today's sermon and Bible passage. Please use whatever questions you find helpful.

1. What did you find surprising about the way Christians have responded to plagues throughout church history?
2. What does it mean that "Christ is over" all things, including plagues? How do you feel about that? Does it create mistrust or more trust in you?
3. Why doesn't Jesus heal everyone, all sicknesses and all diseases? What does the leper's request teach us about praying for healing? "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." (Matt 8:2)
4. Why do you think the church has experienced growth during times of plague and suffering? What about their actions gave their witness power?
5. Do you believe Jesus is God? How might his healing of the leper and the centurion's servant and Peter's mother-in-law give credibility to our beliefs?
6. Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (NIV) How can this verse encourage us in times of crisis?
7. How might Jesus be using the Coronavirus (COVID-19) to get ahold of your heart? What deep part of your heart do you need Jesus to touch and heal?
8. Matthew 8:16 tells us Jesus can cast out demons at the same time it tells us Jesus healed many who were sick. Is there a connection between the spiritual and physical? How much clarity can we have when making these types of connections?
9. Read Isaiah 52:13-53:12. This passage is about the Suffering Servant and was written around 700 years before the birth of Jesus. Why do you think the Gospel of Matthew quotes Isaiah 53:4? How does the broader passage connect to Jesus?
10. What does it mean for you to follow the way of Jesus during this COVID-19 pandemic? How can you love and care for your neighbor by not endangering them but also risk your time, energy, and maybe even yourself for the good of others? What does that tension look like?

End your discussion by praying for those effected by this pandemic. Pray that Jesus would use this time of crisis to further his kingdom in our communities, friends, and families.

¹ *Plague of Cyprian*. Accessed March 19, 2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plague_of_Cyprian

² Kyle Harper. *Solving the Mystery of an Ancient Roman Plague*. Published November 1, 2017. Accessed March 19, 2020. <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2017/11/solving-the-mystery-of-an-ancient-roman-plague/543528/>

³ Glen Scrivener. *Responding to Pandemics: 4 Lessons from Church History*. Published March 16, 2020. Accessed March 19, 2020. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/4-lessons-church-history/>

⁴ Andrew Zimmerman. Faith Under Quarantine: Coronavirus in my Son's Classroom. Published March 11, 2020. Accessed March 19, 2020. <https://www.bruderhof.com/en/voices-blog/world/faith-under-quarantine>

⁵ Geoff Chang. 5 Lessons from Spurgeon's Ministry in a Cholera Outbreak. Published March 17, 2020. Accessed March 19, 2020. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/spurgeon-ministry-cholera-outbreak/>

⁶ Zondervan. *Matthew, Mark, Luke: Volume One* (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary Book 1) . Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

⁷ Martin Luther. *Whether One May Flee From A Deadly Plague*. The Lutheran Witness. Accessed March 19, 2020. <https://blogs.lcms.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Plague-blogLW.pdf>

⁸ Wikipedia contributors, "Elisabeth Luther," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Elisabeth_Luther&oldid=943075575 (accessed March 19, 2020).