

## And Art Thou With Us

*Philip Doddridge (1702–1751)*

And art Thou with us, gracious Lord,  
To dissipate our fear?  
Dost Thou proclaim Thyself our God,  
Our God for ever near?

Doth Thy right hand, which formed the earth,  
And bears up all the skies,  
Stretch from on high its friendly aid,  
When dangers round us rise?

And wilt Thou lead our weary souls  
To that delightful scene,  
Where rivers of salvation flow  
Through pastures ever green?

On Thy support our souls shall lean,  
And banish every care;  
The gloomy vale of death shall smile,  
If God be with us there.

## ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

### *In the Nick of Time*

#### COVID-19 and the Christian

*Jeff Straub*

It came as no surprise last Friday when late in the day word came that the seminary's Friends and Family Banquet, scheduled for March 30, was cancelled. Fourth Baptist Church had already determined to suspend public congregational worship for two Sundays in response to Minnesota Governor Tim Walz's request that gatherings of more than 250 people not be held. Churches across the country advised parents with small children and their elderly congregants to stay home and listen to a livestream, where available. I spoke to an assembly on Sunday that fell well below the 250 maximum, but even there it appeared that many stayed home.

This year will be the "9/11" for the current generation. My generation remembers where we were when news of the airplanes crashing into the Twin Towers was reported. I was driving to a class early in my doctoral studies. My wife called my cell phone to ask if I was listening to the radio. I turned it on in time to hear Peter Jennings describe the collapse of the South Tower. When I reached campus, classes had been suspended and students were huddled around every television on campus. Shock and awe prevailed.

The events of 2020 will likely be designated "The Year We Lost." Universities have sent its resident students home, either ending their spring terms early or moving to online classes only. It is too soon to predict what may become of graduation ceremonies scheduled for early May. Apple has closed its stores around the world for two weeks, malls are closing, people are practicing social distancing, and the Stock Market is volatile, plunging and rising as the Federal Reserve tries to stabilize things. Governor Walz has now ordered restaurants in Minnesota to close their in-store dining rooms, permitting take-out and delivery only. Who knows where all this will end?

God does! He did not wake up one morning in mid-December to the outbreak of COVID-19 and mutter to Himself, "I didn't see that coming!" "I wish I had known so I could have warned humanity to get ready!" Open theists of a few years ago argued that some things are just beyond God's control. Living in an open universe is the price we pay for "free will." If God were to know ahead of time what would happen, then the things that do happen, happen necessarily. These would include the free responses of human beings. So, if God knows things ahead of time, including bad things,



*In the Nick of Time* is published by Central Baptist Theological Seminary.

Permission is granted to duplicate for personal and church use.

www.centraseminary.edu | info@centraseminary.edu  
900 Forestview Lane N, Plymouth, MN 55441 | 800.827.1043

and bad things happen, it is either because God doesn't care if bad things happen to us or that God cannot keep bad things from happening. He doesn't control the world. Things just happen.

Both of these prospects are both alarming and, thankfully, unbiblical. God knows, He cares, and He controls. I am glad that open theism is unbiblical. We live in a universe controlled by a God who works everything according to the counsel of His own will (Eph 1:19). So why the bad things? Why does God allow, permit, or even cause bad things to happen to us?

God is at work in his world drawing humans to Himself. Hardship and calamity will either draw humans to Christ or it will push them away from Him. Christians can bear witness to God and His works in His world at such a time as this. Who will tell of His power and might if we don't! What an opportunity for the believer.

It is such a blessing being a Christian at a time like this. While the world hoards toilet paper and hand sanitizer, the Christian stands poised to be a light in the darkness, a city set on a hill, shining the truth of God before benighted souls stumbling along in the darkness. Christian, take heart! All the coronavirus can do is kill us! To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Who among us doesn't long for Canaan's fair and happy land where our possessions lie? We face a certain future in uncertain times. We may not know what the future holds, but we know who holds the future!

The Scriptures are replete with admonitions to believers to "redeem the times" and to "number our days." We are mortal. Death is our expected lot unless the Lord returns to take us into the Father's presence. We look for the upper taker, not the undertaker! But in doing so, we walk circumspectly in this world with an eye to the sky waiting for the Blessed Hope and Glorious Return of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We have a duty to discharge to the Father to speak of His Son. Now more than ever we need to look for opportunities to speak on behalf of the Lord.

The coronavirus should not be a reign of terror in our hearts but a reminder that time is short and life is fleeting. Christians are to live in this world in a way that demonstrates our trust in God. What better time to do so than in the midst of a pandemic. Paranoia should not control us. We should be able to demonstrate supreme confidence on the God who neither slumbers nor sleeps. Neighbors, friends, family, co-workers all need to see Jesus in the way we conduct ourselves in the days of chaos. This is our opportunity to point people to Christ.

Will this be a long season of uncertainty? Perhaps. Will this be costly to us personally? Undoubtedly. However, in all this God, God sees, God plans, and God controls. Where can we go from His presence? How then should we respond in this time of uncertainty?

Let us pray! When all else fails, we turn to God in prayer. Maybe we should turn to prayer soon. Perhaps we cannot have public prayer meeting because of social distancing, but we can pray—for God's will to done, for us to embrace and welcome His will, for God's grace in the calamity, despite what may happen, and for the world that those without Christ will turn to God rather than away from Him in anger and despair.

Let's be ready to tell to all who ask the reason for the hope that lies within us (1 Pet 3:15). It has been said that "the bell that is struck the hardest sounds the clearest." Lord, teach us through this time of uncertainty "to number our days" (Ps 90:12) that we may seek Thy wisdom and bear witness to the certainty of Jesus Christ who to know is life everlasting! Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!



---

This essay is by Jeff Straub, Professor of Historical Theology and Missions at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

---