# Journey Amidst Covid-19: A Theology to Direct the World's Path

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**Abstract**

The study investigates the world's directions in the midst of the Coronavirus situation, in which many travelers are wandering without a roadmap and fear of harm and evils is at every turn. The researcher has also investigated various tactics worldwide that are only available for a selected group of people. He goes on to argue that theologies developed worldwide in response to such a phenomenon are not deeply rooted in the Bible, and thus the biblical-historical approach has been used to provide practical theology in this context.

This study revealed that a common misinterpretation of this journey is based on 'how and where' questions to answer the Western world while neglecting the Asian and African worlds. As a result, the characteristic model has been provided to limit the understanding of God in this situation. Furthermore, in this paper, the researcher has argued that knowing God and experiencing the Lord are two different approaches.

It has also been investigated that solidarity with the poor is not the issue here, but rather the journey is beyond that measure. In addition, the medical approach has been viewed from this perspective. As a result, this analysis found that the entire world is terrified of this horrifying situation and has become more reliant on a vaccine that has yet to be developed.

Thus, in this case, this research has contended that the proposed models have not succeeded in bringing about the

necessary change to overcome this situation, and the need is to re-imagine the strategies proposed under the guidance of the Bible.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Fear, Vaccination, Journey, Solidarity, Characteristic model, Experiential model

## Introduction

We are all on a journey in which everyone plays a different role, but the destination is the same. The world is experiencing unprecedented change in the twenty-first century. This virus affects everyone, whether in the West or Asia, and it has taken thousands of lives. Despite the fact that this virus has severe consequences all over the world, this world has a tendency to focus on its economic situation rather than its lives during COVID-19. This is primarily due to the fact that the majority of them have faced numerous challenges such as job loss, market slumps, or business failures. Moreover, political challenges are at the stake all around. As a result, the entire world is undergoing drastic changes as a result of the pandemic. Until now, India has been the most affected zone in all of this chaos, according to a note from one of my friends in Kerala, India, who told me:

> "This time the entire nation is affected. I mean all the states. Not even a single state spare. Recently we had state elections and some religious celebrations. That's how it escalated. To an extent, the entire situation is politicized causing so many casualties. People are dying everywhere. No oxygen, no medical support, no proper burial, no place for burial, and everything is in a mess. Only God can save the nation. That bad it is. Very much disturbed by the news I get every day. Many of our ecumenical leaders, priests, friends, friends' family members all got succumbed to

> Covid. I pray that God will help humanity to tackle this pandemic."[188]

In light of the foregoing, it is not the intention of this paper to delve into the reasons for the pandemic, where it originated, or how many people have died as a result of it, as much has already been written about it; newspapers and television channels are constantly updating these figures. Thus, on the one hand, the goal of writing this piece as a Christian in this multireligious arena is to influence positivity in other communities by approaching things from the below rather than from the top down. The tactic of this piece is biblical-historical; however, it is a constant reminder for me to offer practical theology during this whole study. Moreover, I am also writing (with great meekness and humbleness) to share my personal experience as I spent two weeks with my uncle in the hospital who went to be with the Lord this year because of this pandemic. In this regard, this unique experience of mine by His grace and mercy would be a little drop in the multitudes' experiences of the ocean.

On the other hand, I am not writing this piece to support any institution or organization I am associated with, but rather the whole approach of writing this is to demonstrate my particular experience in this framework to understand the various challenges in this field.

Apart from the aforementioned points, the goal of writing this paper is three-fold. The first goal is to look at the entire situation in a broader context, where death rates from this disease are increasing on a daily basis. Though it is difficult to see the entire context, the focus would be very precise due to the limited space. The second step is to evaluate approaches that are based on personal experiences as a focal point of developing a strategy to overcome.

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[188] Message received through Whatsapp.

Last but not least, this paper is more than just an analysis; it is a journey to develop a model that is core to overcome.

**Approaches Worldwide**

The concerned beings always help others by sharing their own experiences. This is something so exceptional in this pandemic especially for building various strategies to overcome especially this time of distress. Though on the first hand, in this condition writings, and sharing personal experiences are vital, however, on the other hand, it is noteworthy to consider that our 'caring models' could become a trap for others if they do not meet the biblical standard in this universal vulnerability.

Several people in this perspective have built various strategies to overcome the present situation. The first among them is the Irish School of Ecumenics at the School of Religion in Trinity College Dublin in collaboration with the Dublin City Interfaith Forum who shared a video as an ecumenical reflection in response to the COVID-19.[189] These presenters from different Christian denominations and religions have reflected the message of togetherness in hope, by keeping social distancing and at the same time showing solidarity with one another by creating a space for humanity to reflect in their isolated spirits. The agenda of all the speakers in this video is to demonstrate how they are one voice amid COVID-19. The message is simple, although phrased in poetry to show solidarity to your neighbor by showing unity in diversity.

Like the Irish School of Ecumenics at the School of Religion in Trinity College Dublin, Beverley Patwell proposes the CARE (Connect, Adapt, Routinize, Exercise) model by taking an approach from above to take care of people that are connected

[189] Myozan Kodo, *Together in Hope - An Interfaith Encounter in Response to COVID-19*, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jELB3HZZFZ8 (Accessed April, 2021).

with us.[190] Patwell emphasizes in this pandemic that the need is to be more patient and more emphatic with ourselves and others.[191] She also shows the roadmap to recovery by viewing two different models, William bridges, Endings and New beginnings layered with Kubler-Ross's model of death and dying by going through the process of grieving. [192] What she postulates from these models is that transition happens at the time of depression in the pandemic as on the first hand, it leads someone to crises and on the other hand, to New beginning after facing a difficult period.

Thus, her point of departure in this whole situation is based on her own CARE model that is feasible anywhere in our daily life; in which the first point comes in terms of connection. Being leaders in this situation, Patwell encourages to walk in the shoes of employees as this provides opportunities, resources, and tools to help each other. Furthermore, Patwell asserts that in terms of Adaptation being leaders we should be ever ready to change our perceptions by listening to our employees as they listen to customers for changes. She, moreover in the later point states that we need to set our priorities to build new plans to work together to solve problems for achieving our goals and celebrating success. In the last point, Patwell recommends that we need to eat healthy food, also need to take some time to work effectively for enjoying the whole task.[193] From the above-mentioned points, Patwell recommends strategies to overcome this pandemic by sharing or listening to the stories of others in this pandemic as our lines of viewing this situation are blurred as everyone has a unique experience.[194] In other words, she is creating a space for others as she is well aware of the fact that

[190] Beverley Patwell, *Reflecting On Leading Meaningful Change Through COVID*, Academia Letters, 2021,
https://doi.org/10.20935/AL480 (Accessed April, 2021).

[191] Ibid., 3.

[192] Ibid.,3.

[193] Ibid.,5.

[194] Ibid.,6.

everyone is going through this tough situation. She stresses, the CARE model is about:

> "[T]taking CARE of ourselves and others, being kind and compassionate, and living our life with purpose are keys that will propel us forward– one step at a time – toward the light at the end of the pandemic tunnel."[195]

Patwell also recommends that:

> "Connecting with nature, slowing down, appreciating and digesting what is happening inside of you, and around you are also important coping tactics. Indeed, they can make all the difference."[196]

Like, Patwell there is another important study to consider of well-known theologian John C. Lennox (*Where Is God in a Coronavirus World?*) that can be traced to know the drastic effects of this pandemic.[197] Lennox sketched his thesis from the historic and biblical point of view to respond to Atheists in this situation by focusing on the 'problem of natural evil', rather than the 'problem of moral evil.'[198] Lennox assumes this disease from two viewpoints, his first claim is from natural disasters such as tsunamis, cancers, earthquakes, and Coronavirus.[199] In a similar way, his second claim comes under the immoral act that is directly responsible due to men and women's immoral acts such as hate, abuse, and murder. So, from these above realities, Lennox declares that natural and moral evil are interconnected as one leads to another thus humans are

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[195] Ibid.,6.

[196] Ibid.,6.

[197] John C. Lennox, *Where is God in a Coronavirus World?*, (The Good Book Company, 2020), N.pag.

[198] Ibid.

[199] Ibid.

involved in this situation (moral evil), however not deliberately (natural disaster).[200]

In his concluding remarks, Lennox proposes practical advice in the first place to take the best medical advice. He further recommends Quarantine is the best way to love your neighbor to protect everyone.[201] In the second phase, he recommends to not fear, but rather to face this situation courageously as this pandemic may break our bodies but cannot rule over our minds.[202] In the last section, Lennox commends that to love your neighbor in crises leads to lay down our lives for others as Jesus did on the Cross by giving Himself for us all.[203]

In a similar way to Lennox, John Piper is another most profound theologian and his study is important here to mention (*Coronavirus and Christ*). Like Lennox, Piper also approached this pandemic historically and biblically. His study begins by asking a tremendous question, "*Do we have a Rock under our feet?*"[204] In this regard, Piper's response to this coronavirus is whether we live or die we will live with our Lord, God is totally involved in this situation, and "*this is my Rock for today, tomorrow and eternity.*"[205] Piper postulates the Coronavirus through God's holiness, righteousness, and goodness. In the framework of God's Word piper declares that God has sent this disease, God would end it, He holds life and death.[206] Thus, on the first hand, Piper clarifies that God's sovereignty reigns whether we live, die this does not limit His holiness, righteousness, and goodness for this world during this pandemic.[207] On the other hand, however, he argues that if God

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[200] Ibid.

[201] Ibid.

[202] Ibid.

[203] Ibid.

[204] John Piper, *Coronavirus and Christ*, (Wheaton, Illinois, Crossway, 2020), 8.

[205] Ibid.,18-19.

[206] Ibid.,42.

[207] Ibid.,49-50.

is sovereign over everything then it is important to know what are His purposes to achieve.[208] Consequently, in this regard, Piper gives six answers that are noteworthy to consider; his first answer is that Coronavirus is a wake-up call that is reminding every individual on earth that sin against God is far more dangerous than this disease.[209] Secondly, however, Piper carefully differentiates that the most loving and devout Christians may die of this disease.[210] So, from this point, Piper argues:

> "But it is fitting that every one of us search our own heart to discern if our suffering is God's judgment on the way we live."[211]

Piper's third answer to this Coronavirus is another wake-up call for Christians about Christ who is coming very soon, thus the bottom line is to be 'ready'.[212] His fourth answer is based on repentance that demands to rely on Christ rather than life. In the fifth category, Piper recommends another courageous act during this pandemic that leads towards love rather than safety. [213] He mentions the powerful act of early Christians the principle of love and charity that moves beyond the families of family and to those in need.[214] In the last section, Piper made another brilliant approach towards Mission that demonstrates the purpose of God to reach the unreached to complete the Great Commission.[215] In the concluding section, Piper offers a closing prayer that as His Son cried out in Gethsemane in perfect humanity "If possible, let this cup pass" we too cry out in our less-than-perfect humanity. Remember us and do not

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[208] Ibid.,55.
[209] Ibid.,67.
[210] Ibid.,72.
[211] Ibid.
[212] Ibid.,76.
[213] Ibid.,91.
[214] Ibid.
[215] Ibid.,98.

linger in your judgment and delay your compassion deliver us from this pandemic.[216] Therefore, Piper's whole study provides a framework for the whole situation.

**The World and the Coronavirus Pandemic**

Amidst crises wherein the whole world is suffering because of COVID-19 every community and every religion are on the same page and demonstrate they are together in the time of crises. As already discussed in the above pages that everyone has a unique experience, however, the intention of this paper is not to share experience alone, but rather to give a direction amidst this journey to develop a model that should provide a cure in this pandemic. Thus, before going to the road of recovery the need is to clear the road to make way.

The Irish School of Ecumenics is such a pleasant view to see that we are gathered together, praying and hoping without having any complaint; whether we are Hindu, Jews, Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, or Bhai community, and have the same motives and objectives. However, on the first hand, that aspect of togetherness must not be limited in the time of crises alone, but rather it must go beyond this crucial time. God willing, this terrible destruction would be gone, but what is next, would we be all on the same page after this? On the other hand, is not this a narrow view to be gathered and show unity in diversity to become one voice only in the midst of this grave situation? Although we look united, however, for our own agendas, and merely looking forward to seeing the end of this pandemic alone. Also, why are academics and religious leaders' voices only important? Why not the experiences of a suffering community that struggles with current crises every day and encounters divine love after every microsecond? How long will we be enslaved by our agendas? Like the Irish school of Ecumenics, Patwell's study provides many insights in terms of appreciating everyone's experience during this pandemic and especially for

[216] Ibid.,99-100.

providing her own CARE model; however, the weakness of this study lies in, she has only considered a limited group of people who might be part of her company. Patwell has just approached people from the above forgetting the needs of below who have lost their jobs in this pandemic. How about those who are dying without food and do not have the financial resources to feed their children? Why our compassions and discoveries are restricted to limited groups alone? In short, she has completely neglected the area that requires more attention.

In a similar way, Lennox strategy to look at this pandemic from the Western perspective to respond to Atheists is another important part of this discipline, however, the time is not to sit on the coffee table to invite people[217] to have Theo-talk to argue 'Where is God during this Pandemic', but rather the entire need is to leave our comfort zones for the sake of the depressed community that is dying without oxygen and suffering under the heavy expenses for this cure. Isn't this worse than a threat of this small virus to think for ourselves alone? How about those Asians and Africans who were living their lives before this tragic situation and longingly waiting for the deliverance from different monopolistic structures? For them, the two biggest threats, hunger, and dominant structures were the killers and now there is another dreadful tragedy. The biggest question in this pandemic should be, how can Christians in multireligious diversity become role models to serve the intra-marginalized community amid this contagious disease?

Besides, Piper's approach of encouraging every reader to evaluate whether we are standing on the Rock is quite tremendous in this perspective. His wake-up call is to alert the entire world, which is very intriguing in this regard. However,

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[217] These are the introductory words of Lennox:

> "I would invite you, the reader, to view the book like this: I am sitting with you in a coffee shop (if only we could!), and you have asked me the question on the book cover. I put down my coffee cup and attempt to give you an honest answer. What follows is what I would try to say to convey some comfort, support and hope."

on the first hand, Piper has ignored the fact that the stage is more than his proposed strategies, Christ demands more than that; He has given us authority and power (this would be answered in the proposed model of this paper in the subsequent pages). Secondly, Piper's view of Jesus' prayer Jesus' prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, if it is possible, let this cup pass (Matthew 26:39) cannot describe our situation. On the one hand, Jesus Christ is a perfect human who drank the cup of God's wrath in order to offer Himself as the only sacrifice to God to pay the full price of our sin. On the other hand, by drinking this cup of God's wrath, Jesus Christ crushed the head of the serpent and fulfilled the prophecy (Genesis 3:15). Furthermore, it is important to note that, in response to James and John's mother's request, Jesus Christ told His two disciples that they would not be able to drink this cup, but they would drink from Jesus' cup later (Matthew 20:22; Mark 10:38).

It's crucial to distinguish between the cup of God's wrath that Jesus drank on the Cross and the cup of Jesus that every Christian must drink as partakers of Jesus' suffering. Additionally, for the further clarification of this passage, Brother Andrew, one of the most prolific scholars argues in that way, when Christ said, "Father, let this cup pass", does not mean by any mean that Christ is saying: I do not want to die on the Cross. He believes that Jesus cannot make this emphatic statement by saying to His Father to keep me from the Cross. Conversely, according to Andrew's statement, Jesus' prayer was that: He does not want to die in the garden, because of satanic pressure that caused Him to sweat His blood drops (Luke 22:44). So, Andrew linked Jesus' agony to the letter of Hebrews "…His prayer was heard because He trusted God" (Hebrews 5:7).[218]

Though the study's posed questions were based on, *where and what*, which is quite appealing in this subject, the thrust of this

[218] Brother Andrew, Susan DeVore Williams, *And God changed his mind*, (San Diego, CA, U.S.A: Chosen Books, 1990), 56-57.

should be, *how and when*. This is the most important need of this paper in order to arrive at our destination, which is based on the questions 'How to overcome this situation?' and 'When is the best time to fight against this?'

As a result of the foregoing examination, we will continue on our path to recovery. However, in the current situation and within the context of medical parameters, it is important to discuss people's fear of this virus.

**The Horror of the Virus and the Medical World's Solution Contrary to the Bible**

Though theologians have extensively debated God's characteristics/attributes, nothing has been said about God's will in the Coronavirus situation from a biblical perspective. Someone might argue that because the vaccine isn't yet ready, we can't get out of this mess. The most obvious response would be, 'aren't we more reliant on the vaccine than on God?' If vaccination is the solution to this problem, God is busy doing something right now, and if He can't do anything right now, He can't do anything at all; He has abandoned us. Thus, these medical approaches would limit our perceptions of God as an alien or sit somewhere overlooking this situation. Our findings, however, cannot be limited to examining, what God is doing in this pandemic or where God is in this pandemic, for if there was any time ever in this century to change the things all around and to experience God, it is now.

Although people are dealing with the pandemic in various ways, however, theology requires concrete responses to this situation. As a result of the preceding situation, on the other hand, the world appears to be so reliant on medical advances; the discoveries to simply interrogate plagues and viruses some 1500 years ago or so. Whereas, the need is to trace it back from the biblical-historical perspective wherein the story of Exodus, depicts the ten plagues that God had sent to deliver His people out of the hand of a powerful ruler. The Israelites' situation was

similar to that of the medical world today in the midst of this pandemic; they were dependent on Pharoah's army and did not want to get out of it. In this regard, Henry T. Blackaby and Richard Blackaby argue that Moses told the Israelites that God wants to free them from slavery, but they do not want to be free. The fact behind that was the Israelites being slaves of Egypt were content in their desperate circumstances that even after 400 years in Egypt they had lost the meaning of freedom, so despite knowing God's will through Moses, they were worried about Pharaoh's reaction. [219] In other words, the Israelites had embraced slavery by professing that it was the only solution for which they were created, and thus freedom was unacceptable for them. According to Blackaby, the Israelites had two fears: the first was that they did not want to irritate their taskmaster, and the second was that the Egyptian army would attack them, whom they had served their entire lives.[220] Blackaby insightfully declares that We can get so used to fear that we don't know how to live without it.[221]

Like the Israelites in history, the impact of this virus is identical in our situation, however, the story of Exodus does not end here, God showed Israelites to know God, rather than knowing Pharaoh and his army. God used signs and wonders to show He was more powerful than any human power. Unfortunately, our world knows COVID-19 and its reactions to human lives more than God. Often, our fears during the Coronavirus situation become so strong that we do not want to replace them by recognizing what God has done and could do through Jesus to remove these horrors. As a result, the world, like the Israelites, is reliant on vaccination rather than God, despite knowing God's will through Jesus.

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[219] Henry T. Blackaby, Richard Blackaby, *Experiencing God Day by Day*, (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Books, 2016), 133.

[220] Ibid.

[221] Ibid.

Although the Bible tells us in the Old Testament that leprosy was a contagious disease, and if someone had this disease the infectious person detached from the community. The leper was considered unclean until the infection remained in the body (Leviticus 13: 1-3, 46). In this regard, Bret Thoman, OFS states that:

> "[L]leprosy is a disease of the peripheral nerves and mucosa of the upper respiratory tract caused by a particular bacterium. It is transformed via droplets from the nose and mouth during close and frequent contact with the infected person."[222]

In this case, Thoman further notes that in the medieval age people believed, this disease was a curse from God (Galatians 6:7) as the leper had done something terribly wrong that was not in favor of God, thus they treated them very badly. [223] However, with all such horrifying situations, Thoman tells the story of Francis of Assisi and his encounter with the leper. Francis had hatred for them, but embracing one another changed their feelings, and both felt God's compassion, Francis kissed and hug the leper and both felt God's love they never before. Thoman concludes that the man was not probably cured of this contagious disease and would not return to his family, however spiritually he had found a strong faith that one day he would be with His Father's kingdom in heaven.[224] Unfortunately, this disease is equated by many people worldwide with the number of beast 666 and many approached it like medieval people believed a curse from God. Amidst Corona's situation, it is not only an appeal to ask for any physical help, but rather it goes beyond; the genuine healing is linked to the care for all physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental necessities as demonstrated in this story of Francis. The

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[222] Bret Thoman, OFS, *Saint Francis of Assisi: Passion, Poverty & the Man Who Transformed the Church*, (Charlotte, NC: TAN Books), 2016, N.pag.

[223] Ibid.

[224] Ibid.

process of recovery, would not only limit to demonstrate solidarity with contagious people but would instead move ahead from every aspect.

Besides, in this pandemic, God is not silent. Therefore, the greatest need is to spend time in prayer silently to find answers. Andrew gives the best remedy arguing that when we don't understand what's going on it, it's perfectly normal.[225] Andrew further states that:

> "What would you do if you called your best friend and said, "I am sick in bed, I need you to bring me medicine," and she said, I'll be right there," but ten hours later she still hadn't arrived? I hope you wouldn't lie there in bed saying "This must be test. I'm not going to ask her why she didn't come, I am just going to grin and bear it. And anyway, she probably knows than I do whether or not I need medicine." Is that what you do? Or would you call her again and say, "Why haven't you come? You promised! What happened?" Friends don't think twice about asking each other such questions. So why shouldn't we ask God especially when the issues and needs are vastly more important?"

Andrew further clarifies that being a body of Christ and His friend whom He died we can't make excuse after excuse and falsely claim that everything is fine when it is not. The Lord wants us to ask, so that He may reveal unsearchable things to us. (Jeremiah 33:3).[226] So that we could approach with confidence the throne of God, so that in our time of need we may receive mercy and find grace through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Hebrews 4:16).

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[225] Andrew, 99.

[226] Ibid.,100.

In the earthly life of Jesus Christ if Jesus would have similarly approached the disease of leprosy (that was most horrible than the COVID-19), would He heal the people who were living in lockdowns for years without any doctor and medicine? The very first act of Jesus was to touch the leper to show that He is with the leper amidst such agony, sharing his pain (wherein the society had alienated such person by keeping social marginalization and distancing) and secondly to cleanse the leper out of the disease to show He has authority over every sickness and disease so that He may go to the priest to witness Jesus. (Luke 5:13-14). In this fashion, Graham Cray insightfully argues that when Jesus cleansed lepers, sick and demon-possessed; the healed community got a responsibility to actively participate in the community to show the reign of God on this earth.[227] In this perspective, it is noteworthy to understand that after healing the broken world, Christ's purpose was to reinstate the healed community for the godly purpose to reflect the life of Christ on others. Thus, here the meaning of *healing* is not sublimed to show solidarity to the poor alone, but rather it goes beyond. Today, it is misinterpreted in terms of physical healing, while in Jesus' time these transformed lives imitating Christ became the co-healers to present Christ from every aspect; intellectually, emotionally, physically, spiritually, and so on.

Thus, from the points above, it is noteworthy to distinguish that the approaches of the medical world are different from God. The next pages would bring the remedy to get out of this situation as we are not created to live in this grave situation, but rather God has created us for a purpose and this is the right time to fulfill it now.

**Re-Imagining Luke 13 Amidst COVID-19**

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[227] Graham Cray, *A Theology of Kingdom*, Vinay Kumar Samuel, Chris Sugden (Eds.), *Mission as Transformation: A Theology of the Whole Gospel,* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2000), 31.

So far, we have discovered that God has never called us to live in this dreadful situation for the sole purpose of physically assisting infectious people. Furthermore, we recognized that Jesus' act toward the marginalized was not limited to deliverance, but rather to transform so that the deliverer's face must be seen through the delivered life.

Thus, before moving ahead to the solution, it is important to have an extensive study on Luke 13. In previous studies, both Lennox and Piper approached Luke 13 by focusing solely on the element of repentance. Though at the beginning (Luke 13:1-5), Jesus' emphasis is indeed on repentance, however, Christ's answer to the suspected ones who were frightened of the two events: Pontius Pilate terrible act (political fear) on Galileans and Siloam's disaster (natural calamity), was not restricted to repentance, but rather the thrust of the chapter is focused on repentance plus believe in Christ. One might argue here that every chapter is a powerful depiction of believing in Christ, what is so significant in this chapter? The answer lies in the parable of Jesus Christ "I have been looking for fruit on this tree for three years, but I never find any. Cut it down. Why should it waste the ground?" (Luke 13:7). In this situation the second question might be asked; the element of repentance is quite enough, what is the significance of believing in Christ? The answer can be found in the book of Acts, where Paul stopped by a place on his way to Ephesus and asked what baptism they had received, to which they replied that they had received John the Baptist's baptism, whereas Paul emphasized that they should be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. To put it another way, Paul does not want them to live as repentant people but instead wants them to have faith in Jesus Christ. (Acts 19:1-5; 20:21). Now back to Luke 13 again, Jesus is moving towards Jerusalem, the city of Israel's ancestors and God's faithful people thus, Jesus told them the parable of a fig tree that represents Israelites, who were not repenting and believing in Christ's work amidst His three years incredible ministry. As the parable says, Son pleaded before God to give them one more chance so they could repent, believe in Christ,

and produce fruit, otherwise cut it down (Luke 13:9). It's worth noting here that, on the one hand, Jesus was giving Jews a chance to repent and believe in Him. Second, this demonstrates Christ's concern for all Israelites, whom He wanted to be the first ones to witness Christ (Romans 9:5).

Here the story goes further by healing the crippled woman who, for eighteen years, had an evil spirit (Luke 13:11). In this manner, Witness Lee argues that religious leader was cared about the rules and regulations of the synagogues not for the crippled woman the descendant of Abraham. He further notes that because Jesus Christ is entering into Jerusalem thereupon going to the synagogue, He intentionally broke the law of Sabbath to release the Jubilee blessings, fulfillment of His proclamation.[228]Thus, here Luke demonstrates a contrast between Jesus' ministry and religious leaders' ministry who were concerned with religious systems rather than humans. Lee then goes on to argue that the proclamation of Jubilee, whether directly or indirectly, is the central principle in Luke's writings of Jesus' ministry to the deliverance of captives and the restoration of divine inheritance in God's Kingdom.[229]

Although, it is true from Lee's perspective that these parables are connected to Jesus' proclamation in the synagogue (Luke 4:18-19), however, *in a broader context*. In other words, Lee's emphasis is on showing Christ's ministry in a broader context is of utmost importance, however, we cannot ignore the importance of any chapter with its immediate context (Luke 13:1-5) because each chapter has its own significance and implications in the Bible. Thus, it is necessary to examine the position of each chapter in the Bible before delving into the other chapters. So, it is rightful to say that the purpose of these

[228] Witness Lee, *Life-Study of Luke*, (Anaheim, California: Living Stream Ministry, 2001), 263-264.

[229] Ibid.,267-268.

parables here is associated with Jesus Christ's manifesto, however, 'generally' and 'particularly'. Generally, in terms of Christ's proclamation and particularly in the sense with repentance by believing in the powerful ministry of Christ, so that they have a faith of such sort that could move the mountains (Matthew 17:20); to overcome any political instability, natural calamity, or any religious threats. Consequently, because of repentance and have faith in Christ the Church would become a mustard seed, despite its small size, however, would grow a big tree and, like leaven, spread throughout the whole flour to demonstrate the reign of the Lord (Luke 13:18-21).

Thus, the wake-up call to become a group of believers (Church) that could overcome any fear, the key is to enter through the narrow gate (amidst trials and tribulation to exercise such faith). The narrow gate leaves no choice; neither have many options, nor have many selections, but only rely on Christ. As a result of the Jews' refusal to repent and believe in Christ, Jesus declared that I would deny them on the Day of the Lord (Luke 13:27).

The last section is a response to the Pharisees who tried to afraid Jesus, "You had better get away from here! Herod wants to kill you" (Luke 13:31). Jesus Christ challenged Herod by declaring that, "Go tell that fox Herod, 'Today and tomorrow I am forcing demons out and healing people. Then, on the third day, I will reach my goal. Yet, I must be on my way today and tomorrow and the next day. Surely it cannot be right for a prophet to be killed anywhere except in Jerusalem" (Luke 13:32). In other words, Luke purposefully provides an authoritative framework to show Jesus' powerful ministry, in which He did not only teach how to overcome but also demonstrated through His own way by challenging any situation. Therefore, the whole chapter ends upon, Jesus mourned over the whole city who did not repent, neither believe in Jesus Christ (Luke 13:34-35).

**Theology Towards a Road of Recovery**

In the journey of this Coronavirus situation, we may become so comfortable in our fears however, the Bible is very clear to proclaim that "God's Spirit doesn't make cowards out of us. The Spirit gives us power, love, and self-control" (1 Timothy 1:7). It also clarifies that "God's Spirit is in you and is more powerful than the one that is in the world" (1 John 4:4). Thus, both principles are important, on the first hand, God's Spirit does not leave us alone, but rather gives us power, on the other hand, it also shows that who dwells in us is greater than [any coronavirus] the one who is in the world.

This is important to note here, Jesus Christ has not only given us His authority to overcome (Mark 16:16-18); He has given us the power; the gift of the Holy Spirit to resist any fear to boldly witnesses our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts1:8).

Thus, on the first hand, it is important to understand that every situation that comes in our life does not come by accident or chance, but rather it has a purpose.

Psalm 91 (NCV) is a perfect reflection of the Coronavirus situation; I don't want to go into too much detail on this, but it is important to consider the Psalmist's personal relationship with the *Lord* (emphasis added). Though the Psalmist's main focus is on God's sovereignty (1-2), then it shifts to his personal experience with the Lord, in which he shares his most unique experience with the Lord in order to overcome any harm. This Psalm can be divided into two parts. It is worth noting that this Psalm can be divided into two sections. The first is, God's 'characteristics/attributes', in which he explains what God can do and he refers to Him as 'God' every time. However, in the other section instead of calling 'God' the Psalmist deliberately switches his focus to call Him 'Lord', and this personal experience with the Lord shows that he has experienced the *faith-exercising authority* of the Lord over any harm. The term *authority* in this context does not refer to elevating himself

above the Lord, but rather to exercising his faith and personally experiencing the Lord's power amidst every tragedy.

Sadly, amidst the Coronavirus situation many believers are busy with questions 'what and why' that have limited their knowledge to know the characteristics/attributes of God rather than 'how' and 'when'; the vital need is to exercise faith amidst such disaster. This is the reason, some churches today are so contingent in the medical world, rather than the 'Authority and Power' to overcome any fear and disease.

Nonetheless, because of Psalmist intimacy with the Lord, The Lord says, "Whoever loves me, I will save. I will protect those who know me" (v14). Someone might argue here, how this verse responds to those who went to be with the Lord because of Coronavirus? This could be answered in two ways: On the first hand, (I am not going to judge here anyone's case) the simple response would be to leave this matter in between the Lord and any COVID-19 patient. This might seem a foolish answer at some point, however, I would like to mention here many devout people who passed away, thus, it is not right at all to predict anyone's case, it is not our responsibility to pass judgment on anyone's case, it is totally up to God if He takes anyone's life due to this disease it is up to Him. However, many patients who recovered from this disease found that their relationship with the Lord grew stronger during this time. In any case, leave it up to the Lord and the patient. On the second hand, it is also important to look at from another perspective, and this answer lies in the concluding section and that is not an unintended verse, but rather it is connected with the identification of the believer's faith "They will call to me, and I will answer them. I will be with them in trouble; I will rescue them and honor them. I will give them a long, full life, and they will see how I can save" (v15-16). Thus, the overall call is, characteristics/attributes of God are important, yet, we cannot leave the experiential model to personally testify to the Lord in our daily life.

It is a matter of long construing to go into every detail of this topic, thus I would limit this study with another reference to demonstrate, Thomas response towards the risen Christ, he said to Him, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28) and that personal encounter with the Christ goes beyond characteristics or attributes. Let me put it this way before my wedding: I was aware of my wife's character, but after marriage, I began a personal relationship with her. If I had focused solely on her character, I would not have fulfilled the purpose of marriage. Similarly, the Christian life goes beyond knowledge, as believer enters into a personal relationship with the Lord, (this kind of experience is only possible through the power of the Spirit) which enables us to know God's will (Matthew 7:23; Romans 8:27).

**Overcome by the Authority of Jesus Christ and the Power of the Holy Spirit**

Now, it is time to reach our destination we cannot stop being just personal with the Lord, there is much more to do after having this closest relationship to resolve *how and when* questions. This personal relationship would exceed to exercise the faith in the time of any trouble because you know the Lord and His power dwells in you and the power of death cannot defeat His Church (Matthew 16:18). This is all done by the power of the Cross, the risen Christ has already crushed the power of Satan and now it is believers’ turn to defeat the remaining power of Satan by the given authority of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit.

As I discussed earlier everyone’s experience matters in this journey, however in the journey if the world is going in the wrong direction, the whole mission is to stay awake to direct the path of the ‘Forgotten world.’

And here my story starts, I saw several patients in a single room during my visit with my uncle in the Corona ward (as I previously stated, it is not my responsibility to judge any

COVID-19 patient). The staff was well organized, but they allowed the attendants to remain with their patients. There were almost 10 to 12 patients, including my uncle. Despite the fact that the room was filled with the agony and pains of various patients and their attendants, when I called home to inform them of Uncle's condition, they asked me to come home right away. I refused them several times because something deep inside me compelled me to stay with my uncle; despite my uncle's request to leave, I was adamant about staying in the room. Though this experience was not new to me, every journey has its own adventure. The first thing that came to my mind was, 'fear not, and this promise appears 365 times in the Bible.' This promise gave me the courage to tell my uncle that nothing would happen to me and I would not leave you in this condition under any circumstances. He accepted this belief because his condition was so bad. Since my uncle and aunt lived alone and their son lived abroad, it fell to us to look after him.

The journey appeared to be straightforward at first, but it was far from straightforward. I always carried my Bible with me and made the sign of the Cross whenever fear tried to take over my thoughts. One can understand Jesus' victory over Satanic forces only going through a hard time to understand the power of the Cross as the Bible declares, "God stripped the spiritual rulers and powers of their authority. With the cross, he won the victory and showed the world that they were powerless" (Colossians 2:15) This tactic of 'making the sign of the Cross' was so effective that I always declared aloud that it is you, Lord, who has told me to serve my uncle. Thus, I always made this sign as an affirmation that Jesus already defeated the spiritual forces of evil on Calvary, and now being a follower of Christ I am defeating it by the Word of God that delivered out of my mouth (Ephesians 6:17b).

A week had passed, and uncle's condition had deteriorated despite doctors prescribing numerous medications and injections. Another uncle used to come back and forth to stay one night, but he became ill as well, so due to his sickness, he

left to visit the hospital. As a result, the situation deteriorated, with the fear that my second uncle had also contracted the disease. That night, I was afraid and thought I would become ill as well, and assumed this would bring an end to my journey; however, God's miraculous hand was upon me, and despite my fear, I opened my Bible to seek God's guidance in this dire situation. Reading the book of Psalms brought me relief. “Lord, I give myself to you; my God, I trust in you. Do not let me be disgraced; do not let my enemies laugh at me” (Psalm 25:1-2). I claimed this prayer by saying, God, because this is your Word, I will not be ashamed; I trust in you, and in a similar manner, I requested for my second uncle's safety as well thus, by God’s grace and mercy we both remained safe in God’s hand.

However, a few days later, my uncle was shifted to another hospital where I was not permitted to see him, and he eventually went to be with the Lord. This was an extraordinary journey to experience the Lord's way rather than His characteristics/attributes and I learned that God’s ways are only recognized through experience and knowing Him deeply.

**Equip Every Believer to Overcome in this Pandemic**

In this pandemic, on the first hand, it is important to keep your Bible with you because you never know when you will need it. The Bible declares that “And our brothers and sisters defeated him by the blood of the Lamb’s death and by the message they preached” (Revelation 12:11). Derek Prince one of the most influential theologians of this century argues in this regard, that the keywords in this scriptural passage are blood, Word, and Testimony. Prince declares that when you personally testify that becomes your testimony through the Word of God that is scripture and the blood of Christ that shed for you on the Cross. [230] Thus, in this battle, the way to overcome any fear is to have a firm belief in what Jesus has accomplished on the Cross by

[230] Derek Prince, *Secrets of a Prayer Warrior*, (San Diego, CA, U.S.A: Chosen Books, 2009), 150.

defeating Satan's force and holding fast to the promises of the Lord, by boldly claiming it to make it yours in any situation. On the other hand, there are certain spirits of Satan in this world that are working in this world who could trap the mind of people through different tactics. Satan is their leader and these spirits are co-workers who have a network. I would like to mention here a few: the spirit of complexity, anger, lust, loneliness, arrogance, pride, depression, fear, and so on. Once you have identified the spirit behind something, you can cast it out using Christ's authority and by the power of Holy Spirit. When I recognize these spirits, I frequently utter the words against them., 'spirit of fear, get out of here! In Jesus' name, I command you to leave right now and never return.' This was Christ's method for casting out evil spirits (Luke 5:9).

Thus, the entire approach provides a framework to 'how' every believer can overcome this disease and 'when' it is necessary to claim victory over the devil's schemes. As a result, the only way to be safe on this journey is to feed yourself well with God's Word, to overcome any harm by the blood of Jesus, and to claim the authority of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit through your personal testimony.

**Conclusion**

The emphasis of this paper is that the process of releasing the fear amidst this pandemic is still in process and has not yet casted out completely. The journey to the destination is long and full of turns and twists. There are several other problems in this perspective, including economic concerns in Asian and African countries, persecution in several countries, particularly Burma, Iran, India, China, Pakistan, and North Korea. Also, to serve other communities, particularly those that are marginalized and have limited resources, as well as those that are experiencing various crises, and so on. However, following a roadmap to the destination is the initial step in the midst of these trials and tribulations that would help to serve others (the intra-marginalized community) to arrive safely based on the

promise that He will be with us until the end of time (Matthew 28:20).

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