

# Making Sense of the Coronavirus

By Ty Blackburn

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**Providence Church**

2146 Buford Hwy  
Buford Hwy, Duluth, GA 30097

**Website:** [www.providenceduluth.org](http://www.providenceduluth.org)

**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch](http://www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch)

Well, good morning Providence Church and we are grateful for the technology we have that enables us to be worshipping with you at home and it is something we should be grateful for. It was a very difficult decision that we came to, to cancel our, basically cancel our in-church services. The elders worked on this, prayed over it, talked about it, looked at the Scriptures, looked at the issues that were out there, and we believe the Lord led us to make the right and wise decision. We ask you to continue to pray for us as we continue to think about how we go forward. We'll have some more things to say about that at the end of the service, what our plans are at this point, Lord willing, and you'll be hearing a statement at the end of this service after the message.

This morning I did want to depart from our exposition of Ezra and Nehemiah to have a topical message today, "Making Sense of the Coronavirus." Making sense of the coronavirus and, well, really I plan to be back in Nehemiah 1 next Sunday, but today with all that is happening, it really feels like almost hourly there are new developments, there's a lot of hysteria in some quarters, the press, you know, obviously has a conflict of interest. This is true about not just coronavirus, it's true about snow, you know? They always get all hyped up whenever there's any threat of snow and then there isn't, and usually when that happens there will be no snow, right? Whenever they're really fired up about it. And it happened, like this year it happened when they weren't even talking about it, then we got quite a bit of snow. But it drives ratings. It gives them something exciting to talk about. Well, a situation like this, that's part of it. Yeah, they've been sort of hyping things, but the reality is there's some very informed people who have great concerns that we need to be concerned about, and so as Christians, one of the beautiful things about being a follower of Jesus Christ is we can be true realists. We don't have to pretend that things are better than they are because things couldn't be any better than they are for the person who knows Jesus Christ. It cannot get better. I mean, in this world and it's gonna get better in heaven, but what I'm saying is, if you belong to Christ, God is only doing good to you every moment of every day of your life, and that good is only getting better each day because the Lord is moving you toward conformity to his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So that's true for us and so we can look at these circumstances with great hope and confidence, and it's really an opportunity for us to shine as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in the midst of the darkness that this world is experiencing. You know, many people are being shaken and to the core. I mean, there's

legitimate reasons for certain people and certain health risk categories to be very concerned. There's reason for those who are loved, have loved ones in those, you know, to be concerned, and so unbelievers who don't know that God's in control, they are left with nothing. They're left with no source of real stability and confidence and this is an opportunity for us to reach out with the good news of Jesus Christ and the good news of God.

I want to begin, we're gonna have, I said it's a topical message making sense of the coronavirus, but we're gonna start in Isaiah 26:3-4 and then we'll be moving around through the Bible as we go through the message this morning. So Isaiah 26:3-4. One of the things about the book of Isaiah is Isaiah's ministry to the southern kingdom, the kingdom of Judah in a time of great tumult and change. In his life, there were great threats that were happening to and Isaiah's life and ministry, great threats that were happening to the southern kingdom and he ministered through those series of really difficult circumstances, and then his message also is telling Judah, the kingdom of Judah, the southern kingdom of God's people, that a whole lot more tumultuous times are coming, and so he's giving counsel on how we can bear up in difficulty, and there are a couple of really wonderful verses found in the 26<sup>th</sup> chapter of Isaiah.

Look at verses 3 and 4.

3 The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, Because he trusts in You. 4 Trust in the LORD forever, For in GOD the LORD, we have an everlasting Rock.

The King James reads, "You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is stayed on you." Brings two of those concepts together, the idea in the New American Standard, steadfastness of mind and then trusting in the Lord. Perfect peace comes from being steadfast of mind in your trust of the Lord. Knowing who God is and trusting in him is what gives us stability and strength and this is a great opportunity for us to grow by God's grace in that reality in our lives.

So let's pray and ask the Lord's blessing on his word.

*Our Father, we do come this morning praising and thanking You. You told us in everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning You. You said we are to rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice; that we should always have an attitude of joy and thanksgiving even as we encounter difficulties and even sorrow. In the midst of sorrow, there is even joy in the midst of sorrow because we know that You are holding us through it and You are performing Your perfect will in it. We rejoice, O God, that we serve a God who is so wonderful and glorious. We pray that You would bless us now through Your word; that You would give us attentive hearts, open hearts; that You would help us even though we're separated physically, that You would help us to be together spiritually, meeting together at Your feet, Lord Jesus, and that You would speak to us through Your word and build us up to be the body that You want us to be for the glory of Your name. Amen.*

Okay, making sense of the coronavirus. You know, to help us deal with circumstances like this, it's always good whenever you feel unsettled, and certainly I think any of us unless you're just pretending everything's okay, you feel unsettled. I mean, if you go to the grocery store, they may not have what you're looking for. It's great likelihood they don't. I heard they're out of meat. We were out of town the last couple of days. We had to drive up to get Maggie from school because school in Louisville closed down and so we drove up and came back in two days and that was tough, and thankfully we had the R. with us because they have Scott up there as well, so we had company on the drive, but it's, you know, everything's changing. Plans suddenly changing. Schools close, working from home. People kind of being crazy at the grocery store. You wonder if they can eat all the bread they've got, you know, before it goes stale or moldy.

So anyway, we want to be not like them in that. We want to be wise and we do want to lay aside and have food and that kind of thing, but we don't have to be afraid. But anyway, you look around and you see all these things that are unsettled. I mean, it's pretty amazing that we're gonna have a year without March Madness. I'm a sports fan and I'm not a super big basketball fan but I always, you know, that's like you have to really not be a fan to not watch any of the March Madness, right? And I'm sure some of you aren't and that's okay. We'll pray for you. No, but we're all, you can pray for all of us now because there is none and, you know, there's no baseball. When is that gonna happen? What's gonna happen? We don't know, but again it provides tremendous opportunities to us.

As Jess was saying during the announcements, think about all the distractions that are removed in our lives and the opportunity we have for clarity. This is a gift and grace of God for his people. This is a gift and grace of God for unbelievers who need to realize that there's more to life; that life is short and they're going to stand before God, and unbelievers by nature suppress the truth in unrighteousness and don't want to see the reality of eternity, and so they distract themselves. Well, the Lord is graciously removing many of those distractions. Our God is good in all that he does.

So we are dealing with these unsettling times, changes, looking at people, some people probably panicking around us at times. You know, maybe you sense it in some family members of friends or neighbors or extended family, that there's a sense of real fear and anxiety, and some of you are probably struggling. If you're prone to anxiety, you're probably really struggling and we want to help one another through these times. God has willed that we have this challenge so we can walk together following Jesus and learning how to walk in his peace, to be like that verse in Isaiah, to have perfect peace because our minds are stayed on the Lord. But when you're unsettled, when things are confusing, one of the best things you can do is try to stop and get perspective and to set your circumstances in perspective of the big picture. A lot of times this helps if you're just confused and you're putting something together and, you know, you step back and you look at the instructions again, you look at the picture, what's it supposed to look like, and it gives you perspective so that you can now be no longer confused or not as confused as you try to accomplish your goal.

Well, for us we need to step back and get perspective and I want us to attempt to do that today by really putting this coronavirus thing in context of the big picture of who God is and how God works, and if we remind ourselves of who God is and how God works, I believe it will give us stability and strength and confidence, peace to move forward in a really productive way, in a God-glorifying way, in a way that is edifying to our brothers and sisters in Christ and enlightening to the eyes of unbelievers. So we want, the title of the message, "Making Sense of the Coronavirus," we're going to have two points this morning. The first point is the character of God. The first way that you put things in perspective is you remember the character of God. Remember who God is and what he is like. And this is how the prophet Isaiah is saying what makes the Lord a rock is his character. You know his faithfulness, his firmness of purpose, the reliability of his promises, and you build your life upon those truths, you're building your life upon a rock and you are stable, you are helped.

So the character of God, that's the first point, and there's three subpoints under this first point the character of God. I want to look at three attributes of God. So we're asking the question who is God? What is his character? What is he like? And how does that speak to the circumstances we're in right now? There are three attributes that I want us to focus on. There are many attributes of God and all of them are glorious and wonderful, but I want us to, we only have time to work on three today and I think these three are especially relevant to us to know in times like this. Who is God? What is he like?

The first attribute, the character of God, 1A, he is sovereign. He is completely sovereign. This is the teaching of the Bible unequivocally. There is no way to read the Bible honestly and come to any other conclusions than that the God of heaven reigns over every molecule in the universe. He reigns over every bacteria, every particle of flu virus. He is sovereign over all. Spurgeon used to say, he sat by a window one time, he uses an illustration, he was looking as he was working on his sermon, he sat by a window and he saw the dust particles. You know how when the light's just right, you can actually see the dust particles in the air? And he was watching them fall and the Lord put on his mind the reality that every dust particle is falling exactly where God wills it to fall. That's how sovereign the God of the Bible is. That's what the Bible says about our Lord, that he's that sovereign. Some examples of that, Psalm 115:3,

3 Our God is in the heavens; He does all that He pleases.

Daniel, if you want to turn with me in your Bible to Daniel 4. One of the most amazing personal testimonies that you could ever hear is found in the fourth chapter of the book of Daniel. It's the testimony of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. And after what the Lord does to him in humbling him, he then expresses his belief about our God. He didn't believe this before but the Lord worked in his life, humbled him and then he came to see something, see the Lord totally different. Verse 34 and 35 of Daniel 4, King Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian tyrant, former tyrant writes,

34 But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and

praised and honored Him who lives forever; For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom endures from generation to generation. 35 All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And among the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, 'What have You done?'

Nebuchadnezzar had been thinking that he had made himself king. He had been thinking in this chapter that he had created Babylon the great. "Look at Babylon the great which I made for my glory," he says. The Lord takes away his reason at that moment, judges him and tells him, "Your kingdom is taken from you," and he lives for seven years like an animal. Then at the end of that seven years, the Lord gives him his reason, returns to him and he blesses the Most High God and he acknowledges the God of this tiny people of Israel is the true God, and he understands that that God of that tiny people, the nation of Israel, their God, Yahweh is the God who raises up kings and casts down kings. Sovereign over the big things, completely sovereign over the movements of history, completely sovereign over every election, completely sovereign over every coup that has happened throughout history, every assassination. Our God is in control of that. No one can stay his hand or say to him, "What have You done?"

Proverbs 21:1 says the hand of the king is in the heart of the Lord, like a water course he channels it wherever he wishes. He turns the heart of the king like a meandering river. The king may be going one direction and the Lord turns him the other direction that he wills.

But he's not just Lord over the big things, he's also Lord over the small things. In Matthew 10:29 and 30 Jesus says,

29 Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.

Did you hear that? Not a single sparrow falls to the ground apart from the will of God. So not just the big things, the little things. And then Jesus goes on to say this,

30 But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

The very hairs of your head are numbered. Think about that. Try to count your hairs. Now some of you might be able to do that. I don't really think anybody could, well, I'm not gonna speculate. Most of us could have no, you could not begin to count the numbers of hair on your head but the Lord knows exactly how many. And so when you brush your hair and a hair goes out, as you get older this happens more and more, when you brush your hair and you lose some hair, the Lord knows how many you lost. He's mindful of it. He's sovereign over that. We should be more grateful for our bald spots, actually. It's the sovereignty of God being lived out. You know, praise the Lord. Anyway. It's kind of tough when you guys are all at home. I don't hear the laughter that I sometimes... Thank you, guys, for working harder, the ones that are here are really trying hard.

But he's sovereign over the small things. He's not only sovereign over the big things and the small things, he's sovereign over the bad things, the things that we see as bad and that, in some sense, legitimately see as bad or harmful. He's sovereign over evil. The Bible makes that clear. Absolutely sovereign over evil, yet evil is evil and God is not the author of anything that happens that is evil, he does not make it happen and yet he's sovereign over it. He allows only, he permits only that which is perfectly in accord with his glorious perfect will. That is the clear teaching of the Bible. Anyone who tells you different is just being a spiritual ostrich. They're pretending so that they can, because they can't deal with the fact that God is sovereign, how can evil exist, how can these things happen. There's some mystery to that. I understand it's hard. You will find yourself in circumstances that can be very very perplexing but there is no hope in denying and suppressing the truth of the Scriptures. In fact, hope is found in realizing that the Bible does say that even though horrible things happen, that God is going to even judge, that he hates himself even as he allows. But there's an amazing comfort from knowing that there is a purpose in the mind and heart of God behind allowing it. There is a good purpose for everyone who belongs to him. That is an undergirding truth that will stabilize your soul no matter what happens and this is not the made up desires of our heart, this is the word of the living God.

I'll give you an example of this. Lamentations 3:37 and 38.

37 Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass, Unless the Lord has commanded it? 38 Is it not from the mouth of the Most High That both good and ill go forth?

That could be translated evil, that both good and evil go forth. The word for "evil" in the Old Testament and New Testament but the main idea, there's some other, there's a couple of words but the main word used for "evil" means "harm; that which brings harm or destruction to that which was good." So it tears down that which is good. And the writer of Lamentations, the same chapter that we read earlier, that Ted read earlier, Lamentations 3, he says it's from the mouth of the Most High that both good and ill go forth.

Isaiah 45:7, "Is there any God besides Me." And the Lord goes on to say, "I am He who creates well-being and calamity. I do both of these." He creates calamity. He creates well-being because of his sovereign rule.

And the greatest example of this is in the book of Job. You read the book of Job and if you haven't read it in some time, this would be a good thing to do, to read the book of Job especially even the first couple, if you wanted to do it in the shorthand version, read the first two chapters, maybe the third chapter, and jump, jump on over to chapter 38 to 42. I mean, the other chapters are important but that's all the dialogue between Job and his three friends. But in the first two chapters, what you have is Job and the Scripture is clear, he is a godly man. He's not done anything deserving of judgment or discipline. If you read the chapter and what the words say, there's nothing that says Job deserves to be disciplined. He's not been disobedient. He's not doing anything. I mean, he's a sinner and

he does it, if he gets what he deserves, he gets like what you and I deserve. What do we deserve? We deserve hell. What I'm saying is, though, as a man who's trusting in God's salvation, an Old Testament believer in the coming Messiah, Job a righteous man, in that sense, by faith and a godly man in character. He's becoming more and more godly and it says there's nobody like him. The Lord says that about Job to Satan, "There's nobody like him, fearing God and turning away from evil." That's God's statement about Job. Then Satan says, "Well, does he fear you for anything? Let me, you've got a hedge around everything. Let me touch what he has and he'll curse you." And so God says, "You can touch anything he has, only don't touch him."

So Satan is actively operating. Evil, and Satan attacks his flocks and herds of camels and donkeys and sheep. He loses everything. He loses all of his sons and daughters and Satan causes a wind to blow so that the house collapses on them where they've having a banquet. And so remember how it happens, as you read that first chapter, a servant comes in, tells him, "I was, you know, with the camels." I can't remember exactly, I may be wrong on the particulars. "The Sabeans came and they stole all of them and they killed every one of your servants and I alone have escaped." And while he was still speaking, this is in the Hebrew, while he was still speaking, another servant came in and he said, "I was tending the sheep and the Chaldeans came in and they stole them and they killed all of your servants and I alone have escaped." Another servant comes in and said, "I was with your children and they were having a banquet, all of your sons and daughters were having a banquet, a time together, and a great wind blew and the house collapsed upon them and killed them and all of the servants and I alone have escaped." And you see in the text that Satan is actively at work to bring this destruction, but what does Job say? Job says, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." And the Scripture then adds, the author, the inspired author says, "In all this Job did not sin with his mouth or blame God."

In chapter 2, Satan comes back into God's presence and God says to him, "Have you considered my servant Job? Though you incited Me against him, he maintains his integrity." And Satan says, "Skin for skin. It's because You haven't let me touch him. You let me touch him and he will curse You to Your face." And so he says, "Touch him but don't touch his life, don't take his life." And so Job gets boils from the top of his head to the bottom of his feet. He is in abject physical misery. He is in pain and agony unspeakably, so much that his wife says, "Job, curse God and die. Kill yourself." His wife says that. I heard someone say isn't it interesting that Satan didn't kill Job's wife when he killed the children. He apparently knew what he was doing.

So his wife says that and what does Job say to his wife? Here he is in misery, he's out sitting on the trash pile scraping his wounds with a potsherd, scratching himself because he's in such agony and she says, "Curse God and die," and he says, "Shall we accept good from the hand of the Lord and not evil? You speak as a foolish woman." Again the text says, "In all this Job did not sin with his mouth or blame God." He didn't blame God. He said God was sovereign, though. God is in control but God's not to blame because God is free to do whatever God wants to do and I don't deserve any better than this, but I know that God has done this. In fact, at the end of the book of Job after he argues with his

friends and he's basically right the whole time there, they're very foolish, ungodly counselors surprisingly. They're professing believers, they're well-schooled in doctrine, but they're missing the main point of God's freedom and the fact that they think that if this happened, you must have sinned. They keep accusing him rather than comforting him. Very interesting verse. The Lord restored, this is 42:10,

10 The LORD restored the fortunes of Job when he prayed for his friends, and the LORD increased all that Job had twofold. 11 Then all his brothers and all his sisters and all who had known him before came to him, and they ate bread with him in his house; and they consoled him [and listen to this] they consoled him and comforted him for all the adversities that the LORD had brought on him.

The text again says that the Lord did it. In fact, it could easily say "evil, all the evils that the LORD brought on him." So the Lord is sovereign.

Now in the reality, Job, it was a much better end than he had at the beginning. He got to know God so God had a good purpose even in that, but the important thing here is we must know God is completely sovereign, even over evil. This means he's sovereign over the coronavirus. He's sovereign over the flu. George Whitefield said, "You are immortal until your work is done." God is so sovereign that you're immortal until your work is done. It doesn't matter what happens around you, you're immortal until your work is done. That doesn't mean be foolish and God may, he may take my life with the coronavirus, he may take some of our lives with the coronavirus. He may. We don't know. I don't think we should be unduly fretful and worried about that, but we just entrust ourselves to God. We ask God, we should pray that he doesn't do that. It's appropriate to pray and ask the Lord, "Protect us." It's appropriate for us to take appropriate actions and act wisely, which is why we're doing what we're doing this morning, but ultimately we don't trust in the efforts that we make. We trust completely in the Lord. He works through means, though, and so he works through giving us wisdom to take certain steps but even then you don't trust in the steps you take.

This is what Psalm 20:7 is talking about when David says some trust in chariots and some in horses but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. Does that mean if you're, you know, a General in the army of the Lord you don't need chariots and horses? Not at all. Yeah, build chariots, train your horses, sharpen your swords, but don't trust in them. Trust in the Lord. Don't trust in the doctor, trust in the Lord. Praise God for the doctor, talk to the doctor, go to the best doctor that you can, all that's wise and appropriate, get a second opinion if you need it, but don't trust in that, trust in the Lord and praise the Lord for what he does through doctors and nurses because he's the one who put that person in your life, he's the one that gave them the skill. Even if they don't know him and don't know it, he is the one who does every good thing so trust in him.

You know, Isaiah 52:7 says how lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who announces to Zion. What's the good news? What is such good news that it makes someone's feet look beautiful? Here's the message: your God reigns. That's good



news. No matter what happens, you can know that God is reigning and ruling over every detail of your life.

So your God reigns. That's the first aspect of the character of God that we need to see to put our lives in perspective and to understand what's happening today. God reigns over the fact that this outbreak is happening. If it gets a lot worse or if it gets a lot better, either way we know God is in charge. It doesn't mean we don't pray. We should be praying regularly for the efforts that people are making to stop the spread of this virus but we can still rest knowing that God is going to do what he's going to do that is right and best. And we should always, you know, as we pray, pray for what you feel like is the best but then always, "But Lord, Your will be done. If it's better for not what I'm asking for Your kingdom, for what You're really doing in my life and what You're doing in the lives of people around us, do what is best for Your name."

So the character of God. He is sovereign. So still part 1, the character of God. Secondly, not only is our God sovereign, he is good. He is good. The God who reigns is good. This is why that's such good news. If he wasn't good and he reigned, it wouldn't be such good news, but he is good. He is truly good. He is good through and through.

Psalm 119:68,

8 You are good and do good.

Psalm 145:9,

9 The LORD is good to all, And His mercies are over all His works.

He's good to all and his mercies are over all his works.

James 1:17,

17 Every good and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, in whom there is no shifting shadow [or variation].

Every good and perfect gift. Everything that is truly good and a blessing is a token of the goodness of God.

One of my favorite passages is when Moses asked the Lord to show him his glory, Exodus 33:18. He says, "show me Your glory," and the Lord says, "I will make all of My goodness pass before you and I will proclaim My name to you." So he's making his goodness pass before him and proclaiming his name. The next day, he says, "I'm gonna do this tomorrow, let all of My goodness pass before you," and that's when Moses is in the cleft of the rock and the Lord passes by in front of him and proclaiming his name, and he says, "The Lord, the Lord, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness, who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin, but who will by no means leave the guilty unpunished."

Our God is good. He is good through and through and he is a God to be sought because he is good. So when he afflicts, what should you do? Run to the God who is good. The God who is afflicting you is good. Run to him. Don't run away from him. That's insanity to run away from God. Run to him.

I said earlier that if you're a Christian, you can know that everything in your life is the very best thing that it could be at that moment. Let me tell you where that's found in one verse really clearly in Romans 8:32. This is in the middle of that passage about the purposes of God and suffering, Romans 8:18, for the sufferings of this present age are not worthy to be compared with the glory that will be revealed in us, and he talks about suffering. In verse 32 he says,

32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all,  
how will He not together with Him freely give us all things?

This is an argument from the greater to the lesser. He's saying if God did not spare his Son, if God, or what is more precious to the Father than his Son? Is there anything more precious to the Father than his Son? No, and if God did not hesitate, he did not spare his own Son, he delivered him up, gave him over as an offering for our sins, if God gave us that, tremendous gift, the gift of his Son, how then will he ever not give us good things with him? He's already proved his love and goodness to you in an infinite way, and Paul is saying in the context of this discussion of suffering, this means that everything God brings into your life every day is only a token of his continuing love for you, the love that made him give Jesus in your place. That's how good he is.

So if you know that he's that good, you know that he's sovereign, he's reigning but he's completely for you, he's not against you. In fact, he goes on to say God is for you in the immediate verses after this. If we really believe that, that should radically alter the way we see things. It doesn't mean that when sorrow happens, when affliction happens, of course, there's times to mourn. We're not to be happy about the pain and the agony and the true evil, the harm that comes. We can hate that in a godly way because even those things, this is the way the Lord is, he hates that. He hates the evil. He hates to see... There's another verse in Lamentations 3, he does not afflict the sons of men willingly around verse 32 or 33, Lamentations 3. The Lord does not afflict the sons of men willingly. That is, when he brings affliction into your life, he does it not willingly, not in the sense of any kind of pleasure or even acceptance of the fact. It's regrettably that he has to bring the affliction. Now in the mind of God, he knows what he's doing and so there's really no regret for the Lord. What I'm saying is he's trying to show us, though, that he does it with compassion even as he does it, and this means it's always measured out.

In fact, that brings us to the third point. This is now the first point, third subpoint. The character of God: he is sovereign, he is completely sovereign; he is truly good; third point, 1C, he is perfectly wise. He is perfectly wise. Job 12:13,

13 With Him are wisdom and might; To Him belong counsel and understanding.

Job 36:5,

5 ... He is mighty in strength of understanding.

Psalm 147:5,

5 ... His understanding is infinite.

Romans 11:33,

33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!  
How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!

A. W. Tozer says this, he defines wisdom this way because wisdom is not just knowledge, wisdom is knowledge applied to life. Human wisdom, I mean, for us to have God's wisdom in our lives means that we are taking truth, knowledge, and learning how to apply it to our lives with skill. That's wisdom. But that's not what Tozer says, this is the quote of Tozer. He defines God's wisdom or wisdom is defined this way, "The ability to devise perfect ends," e-n-d-s, perfect goals, perfect ends, "The ability to devise perfect ends and to achieve those ends by the most perfect means." That's wisdom, to devise perfect ends and to achieve those ends by the most perfect means. The most perfect way to accomplish the goal is what God always always always does.

He's not like us. We, how often does that ever happen for us that we even think we got close to the perfect... I mean, I guess if you have exactly the right tool, there's something about that. I've gotten a little older and I've learned a little more about going to Home Depot and buying the right tool. You know, as a young man I didn't, I'm not, I didn't learn, I didn't watch my dad enough. I didn't see how important that was, so young people, young people, watch your father, girls, learn from your mom. Anyway I didn't learn that enough and so I go to Home Depot and I'm looking at all these tools and I have no idea what I need. All these wrenches, all these, you know, you sort of just pick something out, "I think that works." But when you have exactly the right tool to accomplish something, man, that is, that's awesome, especially if it's a complex thing. You have the right tool to do this and the right tool to do that, and the right tool to do that, and it works, at least you also don't have the right tool in yourself sometimes so sometimes the right tools with me don't equal the right result. But sometimes they do by the grace of God, but wisdom is God always has the right goal in mind and he has every perfect instrument to accomplish that and he does it perfectly.

So in your life what he's trying to accomplish in your life, he's doing perfectly. You are probably, and I'm not, I'm often not cooperating with his plan, but even then he knows how to deal with that and has accounted for that. Sometimes he's disciplining us. If God is sovereign, completely sovereign and he's truly good and he's perfectly wise, there is

absolutely no reason to ever be anxious or fearful about anything. He's in control. He knows what is good. He has the perfect goal in mind. He knows exactly how to accomplish it. He's not forgotten anything. There's nothing in your life that's unaccounted for in his plan for your best. No reason to be anxious.

An image I remember thinking about sometime the Lord put on my mind when thinking about anxiety and fear and worry and how that reflects on God and our belief about God. I thought about as a little kid, you know, how you trust your parents. Your parents take you to the park and they say, "You can go on the slide, and we're gonna swing, and I'm gonna push you on the swing." And a kid, imagine a child who would say, "I don't think that swing can hold me. I don't think that slide's safe." Continually second-guessing his mother or his father. I mean, I guess this can happen but it's pretty rare. Children naturally trust their parents. You don't sit there and think that if dad said it's okay, it can't possibly be, unless you suffered through a really really ungodly wicked parent. But that's what it's like, it's like we who God has laid out your life, he's ordained every step of your life, the numbers, the days of your life were numbered before there was yet one of them, Psalm 139. He's ordained and laid out every good work before you. And so every day you get up, it's like as a little child getting up, you know, when you're little and you don't plan your day at all and you just do what mom or dad says. Maybe it's, "We're going to," let's think of, you couldn't do this right now but you go to Disney World. They're closed. But if you went Disney World and you had the park hopper and so you could go to Magic Kingdom, Animal Kingdom, the studio thing, whatever, Epcot, and so every day as a little kid, say you're 5-6 years old, and every day is gonna be fantastic and you don't care where you're going, you know mom and dad are planning a great day. So we're going and, you know, now you're a sinner so sometimes you're wanting ice cream when you shouldn't want ice cream at all, so there's some moments but basically there's a sense of complete confidence and joy, joyful expectation as you wake up each morning and as you progress through the day. Now my contention is if we understand the Bible, we would understand that the child at Disney World with a week ahead of him of his parents taking him to all these wonderful places, caring for him, has nothing on us. We have it far better because our God who knows everything and who loves us with perfect love has laid out every single day of your life to bless you and to accomplish his purposes, and if we believe that and we meditate on that, we will have peace. He keeps in perfect peace the one whose mind is stayed on him.

So that's who God is, how that gives us so much perspective. So not just who God is, the character of God, but also how God works. This is the second main point that we need to understand. We need to understand the first point was who God is, but how God works. His ways, the ways of God. The first point was the character of God, the second point the ways of God. Not just who he is but how he operates, how he works.

Isaiah 55:8-9,

8 For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are My ways your ways," declares the LORD. 9 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, So are My ways above your ways, And My thoughts above your thoughts.

God's ways are not our ways. His ways are much more wonderful than our ways but his ways are mysterious to us. We can't see his reasoning. We have to trust by faith. Knowing who he is and what he's revealed of himself in his word gives us the ability to trust him with the things we don't understand. His ways. They are different than ours but his ways always accomplish his goals. You could say his ways, the ways of God, the purposes of God. He purposes in all his ways to do good to his people.

Turn over to Romans 8. We mentioned verse 32, "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" But you look at verse 28, a very familiar verse, one of the most probably memorized verses, or at least parts of it, people know part of the verse. Unbelievers often quote this. "we know that God causes all things to work together for good," they usually stop there but the verse has much more to say and it qualifies what is good.

28 ... we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

He causes all things to work together for good to the people who love him. That's the condition, that they've had his grace at work in their life, they've come to know him by faith, they've repented of their sins, placed their faith in Jesus, now they love him and everything in your life if you are a person who loves him because of what Christ has done for you, you can know God is working everything for good. All that we said earlier presupposes this, that God is working for the good of those who know him and love him.

But he goes on to define what is good. This is one of the problems we have as Christians, we get confused about what good is. We want to take this verse and say God's working all things together for good, means he's working all things together for my well-being and prosperity and comfort, right? But that's not what that word means because that's not what is really good and best for you and me. God loves us too much to give us that little. He defines what is good in the next verse because what is good is that which accomplishes his purpose. What is his purpose? Verse 29,

29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;

Your highest good, my highest good is to be made a little more like Jesus. That is the very best thing that God could give to me today; the very best thing that God could give to you today is to be made a little more like Jesus because as you become more like him, you're united to him, you're loving him, you're treasuring him, and you are having his peace, his joy, you're loving what he loves, hating what he hates, you have his wisdom.

So God's good is what is truly good which is to make us more like Christ; to help us put off sin and to love holiness, but he brings about this good in surprising ways, but it's really clear in the Bible this is how he's gonna do it though people, we miss it, we forget

it and many Christians act like it's not even here what I'm gonna share with you. To be made like Jesus, what does it take to be made like Jesus? If the good that God wants to lead me into, if the joy, the really joyful thing, we'll be able to be more like Christ, to be more meek and less angry; to be more grateful and less lustful; to be more peaceful and less anxious; for the Lord to lead us into that, how does that happen?

Turn over to Hebrews 5. It's an amazing verse, Hebrews 5:8.

8 Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.

That is an astonishing verse. This is saying that Jesus Christ though he was perfect and sinless, he learned obedience through suffering. He grew in his character, his human character. Never sinned but he grew in his character. He was learning obedience the same way the Bible says he grew in wisdom and in stature. These are amazing miraculous things, aren't they, that God, the God-man in his humanity, he learned obedience. But if he had to suffer to learn obedience, is it any surprise that the Bible says we have to as well?

We must suffer, in fact, this idea of suffering is also there in Hebrews 2:10, turn a page over. The author of Hebrews says,

10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.

That God the Father, it was fitting for God the Father to perfect the author of our salvation through sufferings. He perfected him through sufferings.

Turn a couple of books over, turn past the book of James to the book of 1 Peter, 1 Peter 4:12, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you," he says, "Don't be surprised that you are now in the midst of this fiery test."

12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you;

Man, what's happening? Why are we going through this? This is weird. This is crazy. What's happening? The author, Peter is saying, "Listen, when you're suffering, don't be surprised like it's some weird thing. No, this is what you should expect. God's gonna bring us through trials to make us like Christ."

It's not a strange thing. Look up to verse 1 of this same chapter. He reminds us of Christ's suffering. 1 Peter 4:1.

1 Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose,

If Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves, prepare to suffer. We're to do that. It doesn't mean we love suffering, we don't have to love it for in itself the suffering. No, we should love what it produces, though.

Look what he goes on to say,

because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,

There's something about suffering that makes you let go of sin. You suffer and you see that sin's not what it was cracked up to be. It's not what Satan says it is, it's not what the world says it is, it's not what my flesh says it is. It's nothing of value. It's disgusting and we see that as we suffer. It helps you remember what's important. It snaps you out of it.

So this is an opportunity, this trial, we don't know how bad it's gonna be, maybe it's not gonna be that bad for us, we pray that it won't. I mean, it's appropriate, as I said, to pray that it won't. God says that we're to ask him and take our requests to him, but we're to do so with thanksgiving and an attitude of submission and we ought to be also praying, "Lord, maximize the benefit for Your kingdom in my life of this circumstance, and I'm thankful that You're gonna make it as painless as possible." He's gonna do it with the minimum pain because he's wise. There's no collateral damage with what God does. He never has collateral damage in your life or the people around you. Whatever happens, you may think it's collateral damage but it's not because God is perfectly wise. Everything is measured, every particle of dust falling exactly where he wills.

So while we have this time of less distractions, while we have this time of legitimate concern, not becoming anxious hopefully by God's grace but being concerned, being wise, being mindful of the fact that if this gets worse, that it's potentially really could be hurtful to us or those we love, what an opportunity to let go of sin and to treasure Christ. What an opportunity to see what really matters. What an opportunity to, as David says, "Lord, teach us to number our days."

I love that. I read, I mentioned Psalm 139:16 earlier where he says, "You formed my inmost being in my mother's womb. You formed my inmost being," and then he said, "You saw my unformed substance." As we were in our mother's womb being formed in our mother's womb, God saw our unformed substance and he goes on to say this, "and You had written in a book the days that were numbered for me before there was yet one of them." He's looking at us in the womb and he knows exactly how many days we're going to live. It's all written.

But then what our problem is, we think we're gonna live forever, especially when we're young. It starts changing as you get older, doesn't it? But when you're young, you think you're gonna live forever, especially I don't know, the 15 to 25 age range, that's when you're the most insane in this area and I say that not as an insult to those of you who are

15 to 25. I was there and I was insane too. I don't know if it's worse on guys or girls but probably guys. I think, anyway, that's enough about that.

I'm pontificating about my own speculation but the reality is that we have trouble, the Bible says we have trouble numbering our days. We don't realize how short life is and so circumstances like this, pray and ask the Lord, "Help me number my days so that I make the most impact for Your kingdom every single day." If I only knew I had this many days to live, how would I live? This is an opportunity to think like that and so we need to meditate upon these truths of who God is, how he works and what his purpose is in our lives. His purpose is to make me more like Jesus. His purpose is to make you more like Jesus. That's the goal and that's the best goal. That is the most wonderful goal. That is the most delightful goal. That is the most joyful goal to be more like Jesus.

How that gives perspective. A sudden diagnosis, stage IV cancer could happen to any of us, probably will happen to some of us, perhaps a number of us. When that comes and you realize that this is just another opportunity to walk down this path to become more like Jesus and what is the best thing is to be more like Christ. What is the worst thing? Not to die of cancer, the worst thing is to not honor Jesus as we walk through that, and the Lord has put us together to remind each other this is, hey, this isn't a surprising fiery ordeal. If it lasts two months, if it lasts 10 months, either way, if it gets worse, the economy tanks, we lose jobs, it's okay, the Lord has measured it all out and we are in this together. But more than that, he is with us and he's fulfilling his purposes to make us more like his Son and since that's the only thing that matters and that's the only thing that is truly good, we can really have joy. We ought to be if we're thinking right, we will be joyful.

Now we're gonna need to encourage each other continually. That's why all the "one anothers" are there. We forget and we're gonna forget. I'm gonna forget. You're gonna forget. You're gonna need to remind me. I'm gonna need to remind you. But isn't it wonderful to know that this is, our God is such a glorious God, his ways are perfect, his character is wonderful and perfect, he is sovereign, he is good, he is wise, his purposes will be fulfilled and accomplished.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, how grateful we are for You and who You are, that Your word is spoken to us with such clarity to give us the assurance that You are, Lord, reigning and ruling, that You are completely good and trustworthy and completely wise and skillful in all that You do. We do say, Lord, our ways are not Your ways, our thoughts are way below Your thoughts. We can't begin to measure how unsearchable are Your judgments, unfathomable are Your ways but how glorious. Give us faith. Lord, for those who don't believe even among us who haven't really been saved, may this be a time where You open hearts to repent and believe, even today to repent and believe, to repent of sin and turn to Christ and embrace Him as Lord and Master, to take the yoke and walk with Him. And for those who belong to You, Lord, that we might grow, that we might thrive, that we might look back in years to come if we're still here, in years to come look back with*



*gratitude and amazement and we might say like the Psalmist says as he looked back over this horrible event, "The Lord has done it and it is marvelous in our eyes." Lord, for Your glory do that in our lives, in Your church. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*