



Peace in the Middle of a Pandemic – Part 5 **You Will Live Forever**

I want to give you a heads up on what is about to happen. In just a few minutes, I am going to give you, wherever you are right now, an invitation to make a decision. This invitation is for everybody, whether you've grown up in church or this is your first time to ever even watch a church service. This invitation is for people who don't really relate to what you've seen or heard so far. This invitation is for people who may feel far from God right now because of your past, or maybe your present. It's an invitation to people who may have felt close to God as some point in life, but that was a long time ago and a lot has happened since then. It doesn't matter about your past, your present, your personality, your politics, your age, your ethnicity—this invitation is for you.

A few moments from now, right where you are sitting, this invitation is for you to begin or renew a relationship with Jesus. I'm going to invite you to make that decision. Before I invite you to make that decision, I want to ask you a question, almost like you and I are having a one-on-one conversation right now. I'm standing right now in an empty room and you're scattered in different places. There are people across the United States and beyond, from South Africa to South Korea, in countries across Europe, Asia and South America. Regardless of where we are in the world right now, the reality is we are all surrounded by this virus and its effects.

I just read an article this morning about its effects and potential spread specifically in Africa. Like most of you, I've been keeping up with news every day this week and I saw the death toll in the United States from this virus has now surpassed 20,000 people—the highest of any country in the world. Most of us at this point either know someone or know of someone who has this virus right now or has died due to complications caused by this virus.

At first it was this thing that's just happening in some province on other side of the world. But now it's hitting closer to home, which is why we're all holed up in our homes. We're all being reminded every day of how vulnerable and frail each of our lives really is. That leads to the question I want to ask,. Again, I want to ask it as if you and I were having a one-on-one conversation.

Here's the question: If you were to contract this virus and die from it, do you know beyond the shadow of a doubt that you would go to heaven for all eternity? Do you know for certain that if you were

to have difficulty breathing tonight and were to go to a hospital alone tomorrow and later this week you were to lose your life, are you 100% confident that you would go to heaven?

I can't think of a more important question to answer than that. When I ask that question, most people either say, "I don't know for sure if I would go to heaven," or "I think I would," or "I hope I would. I'm a pretty good person. I've not done too many bad things." Maybe they would say, "I've gone to church." But do you know that God says none of those things actually gets anyone to heaven? None of them.

God says there is only one way you can know you will go to heaven when you die. I want to show it to you now. I want to read you a story about Jesus, a man named Jairus and his 12-year-old daughter who was sick and about to die. If you have a Bible, you can follow along in Mark 5. We'll begin in verse 21:

21 And when Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered about him, and he was beside the sea.

A crowd was gathering around Jesus, because they knew He had power to heal the sick. Many people had been healed of their diseases by Jesus. Imagine a physician right now with a cure to COVID-19. He or she would absolutely have a crowd around them.

22a Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name...

We see here a reference to the "rulers of the synagogue" and we need to realize these were some of the most revered and respected people in society in that day. Picture a man very well liked and highly respected by the crowds. He approached Jesus...

22b and seeing him, he fell at his feet...

Now, that would have been shocking. The religious elite at that point were not fans of Jesus. For this respected religious leader to come up and fall at Jesus' feet took everybody's breath away in the crowd. They got really quiet.

23a and [he] implored him earnestly, saying, "My little daughter is at the point of death."

We find out later that this is Jairus' only daughter. She's 12 years old and he says, "She's dying." That's why he implored Jesus earnestly. In other words, he begged Jesus, "Please come as quickly as You can." In today's terms, she's in the ICU and she's barely hanging on. So put yourself in Jairus' shoes. Picture your child in this state. As a parent, I don't even want to think about this. I know one parent with whom I have a relationship who is in this state at this moment, with their teenaged child alone in a hospital. Picture your child in this state and you're pleading for somebody to help—and not just somebody. You're pleading before the only person who is your daughter's only hope. Jairus says to Jesus,

23b "Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live."

Do you hear that confidence? Jairus says, “If You will just come touch her, she will live.” This is a profound picture of faith—but it’s about to get even more intense.

^{24a} And he went with him.

What follows is the story we read last Sunday here at McLean Bible Church, but as I read it today, I want you to put yourself in Jairus’ shoes as this happens—your daughter’s condition is urgent.

I think about the two times I’ve been to a hospital with a pregnant wife in labor in the car. I was doing everything I could to obey traffic laws, but there was an urgency there. I did not want to deliver that child in that car. How much more so when your child is dying? “Please run, Jesus. She is at the point of death.” The problem is there’s a crowd in the way.

^{24b} And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him. ²⁵ And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years...

Basically, this woman has been sick as long as Jairus’ daughter has been alive.

²⁶ and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse. ²⁷ She had heard the reports about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. ²⁸ For she said, “If I touch even his garments, I will be made well.” ²⁹ And immediately the flow of blood dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. ³⁰ And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone out from him, immediately turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my garments?”

Now at this point, if you’re Jairus, you’re thinking, “Why are You stopping and turning around? Why are You asking such a ridiculous question, because tons of people are touching You?” This is exactly what the disciples asked too.

³¹ And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, ‘Who touched me?’” ³² And he looked around to see who had done it.

Again, picture Jairus’ daughter dying and Jairus sweating, thinking, “Come on. This is no time for small talk.” Everybody else in the crowd is thinking the same thing. “Doesn’t Jesus know how important Jairus is and how urgent his daughter’s situation is?” Meanwhile...

³³ But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him and told him the whole truth. ³⁴ And he said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

Now, that was a powerful moment for this woman, but this was a painful moment for Jairus. Listen to what happens.

^{35a} While he was still speaking, there came from the ruler's house some who said, “Your daughter is dead...”

Those are the words no parent ever wants to hear. I think about parents in our church family who have heard these words, even over this last year. If I think about their faces and those funerals, I think about the emotions in Jairus' mind and on his face in this moment, as his jaw drops and his eyes fill with tears. He looks over toward Jesus and this random woman. Then the people say to Jairus,

^{35b} *“Why trouble the Teacher any further?”*

In other words, “It’s too late. There’s nothing Jesus can do now.” *“But...”* Ah, that’s a good word. What a great word, a glimmer of hope! *“But...”* It’s the first clue we have in this story that death is not the end of the story.

^{36a} *But overhearing what they said...*

The word there for “overhearing” could be translated “ignoring.” It’s a great word. Overhearing, ignoring, disregarding what they said about the death of Jairus’ daughter,

^{36b} *Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, “Do not fear, only believe.”*

What a statement! I can imagine how Jesus looks at Jairus, standing there shocked by the news that his daughter has died. He has tears filling his eyes and Jesus says, “Jairus, you have two options.” One option is fear, which I am going to define as “trust in this world.” It’s trust in what they are telling him—that it’s over. Trust in what doctors could do or could not do. Trust in this world. As long as you trust in this world, it will ultimately lead to fear.

That makes sense, right? We know this. We’re being reminded of this right now. We can’t trust in our health or even in our best medicine. We can’t trust in our jobs. We can’t trust in our economy. These are ultimately unsure foundations that only lead to fear. So that’s one option Jesus gives Jairus.

The other option is faith, belief, which I’m going to define as “trust in Jesus.” This is a pretty outlandish option at this point. Jesus is the One Who let Jairus down. Jesus was the Healer of diseases, but it’s too late for that. At this point Jesus has never raised someone from the dead. Nobody had ever seen or even imagined that. That was preposterous, unthinkable, unimaginable, beyond the realm of possibility. Trust in Jesus required faith against all odds.

If you put yourself in Jairus’ shoes, you can picture Jesus saying you, *“Do not fear, only believe.”* You have two options, b then Jesus takes you by the arm and begins to walk with you to your home. That’s exactly what Jesus did.

³⁷ *And he allowed no one to follow him except Peter and James and John the brother of James.*

As they walked, imagine the chaos in the crowd that’s left behind. “Jesus just blew it. Jairus’ daughter is dead, because Jesus didn’t get there in time.” Now, we don’t know how far they had to travel.

We know it was far enough that by the time the messengers got the word to Jairus and they finally made it to Jairus' home, the mourning process was in full motion.

³⁸ They came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and Jesus saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly.

Imagine that scene, again from Jairus' shoes. You see your wife's face. Maybe your son or sons who lost their sister. Your extended family. All your friends. They're not at a funeral home. They didn't have those then; it's all at your home. All of these people are mourning and crying, weeping and wailing loudly. The custom in that day was for people to rip their clothes and shout in agony. It was into this scene that Jesus entered.

^{39a} And when he had entered, he said to them, "Why are you making a commotion and weeping?"

What kind of question is that? "Because this precious little girl just died, that's why. And by the way, Jairus actually thought You would help her and heal her. We see how well that worked out." Then Jesus says,

^{39b} "The child is not dead but sleeping."

Now, what's interesting about this word "sleeping" is that it's used in other places in the Bible to describe death—real death. Jesus is not saying, "She's just in a coma." The reality is Jairus' daughter has died. Jesus knew that. Jairus knew that. Jairus' family knew that. These mourners knew that. There was no doubt. But the connotation of this word Jesus uses is obviously different. Jesus understood death differently: although death is real; it's not the end. So what did the people at Jairus' house do then?

^{40a} And they laughed at him...

The word for "laugh" basically means they derided Him with disdain. They mocked Him. Much like many even right now mock any mention of God. I read an article a couple weeks ago in the Washington Post, with a sea of comments in response, ridiculing any reference to God or Jesus in this crisis. "Science is supreme," they said. "Forget God. He's a figment of your imagination." Those commenting are not the first to laugh in God's face.

"But..." Another "but." It's a great word.

^{40b} But he put them all outside...

The language literally is He told them, "Get out!"

^{40c} ...and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him [Peter, James and John], and went in where the child was.

Again, picture this from Jairus' perspective, walking into that house, that room, and seeing your daughter for the first time since you left her side. You had told her, "I'm going to Somebody Who can heal you. I will be back as soon as possible." But you didn't make it back in time. You didn't even get to say goodbye to your little girl. Then, in the emotion of that room, you watched what Jesus did.

^{41a} *Taking her by the hand...*

By the way, to touch a dead body would be to make yourself unclean. But apparently Jesus was not concerned about that.

⁴¹ *Taking by the hand he said to her, "Talitha cumi," which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise."*

"Little girl" was a tender term of endearment, like we might say today, "Hey, sweetie," or literally in that day, "Little lamb, arise." One verb. One imperative command.

⁴² *And immediately the girl got up and began walking (for she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement.*

"Immediately" twice in one sentence. Picture it. Jesus takes her by the hand, says one word—"Arise"—and immediately she sits up and starts walking around. I can only imagine what that means. I don't picture her saying, "All right, let me take a couple laps around the room." She is running straight into her mom and dad's arms. They are staring at her with amazement, as are Peter and James and John. Everybody but Jesus is shocked. He just took someone who was dead—not just sick, not just in a coma, not just looking dead, but dead—and Jesus gave her life.

The story doesn't describe this, but I want to see the looks on the faces of those who were laughing at Jesus when that girl comes walking out of that house. In fact, that's what I would picture to be a great end to this story. The way I picture it, this girl comes walking out, standing next to her mom and dad, and they shout, "Jesus raised our little girl from the dead!" They bring that crowd to come and see and believe in Jesus. That's how I think the story should end. But, that's not how the story ends. Watch this with me. Listen to the last sentence in the story.

⁴³ *And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.*

What? Okay, I get the second part. This is a girl who's been sick and she needs nourishment. It's actually a powerful picture of Jesus' personal compassion to say, "Feed her. Care for her." I love that. But the first part? Jesus "*strictly charged them that no one should know this*"? Nobody? Don't tell anybody about this? Why not?

The answer to that question is the key to understanding this story, and the same answer is the key to understanding the pandemic we're in right now, so please don't miss this. Please pay close attention to

this. Jesus knew that something else was needed—something greater than healing people of diseases and something greater than even bringing someone back from death. Think about this with me. That woman who earlier was healed of her disease, one day she would get sick again and die. This precious little girl, now walking around her house, one day, maybe decades later, she would also die.

Please hear this reality today, in the middle of this coronavirus crisis. Apparently we need something greater than a cure to a disease that will keep us from death. Let me say that again. We need something greater than a cure to a disease that will keep us from death. Because even if we have a cure for COVID-19 and every other virus, the reality is you and I are still going to die one day. You are going to die. I am going to die. It doesn't matter how healthy any of our bodies are right now.

I was reminded of this two weeks ago when I blacked out all of a sudden, collapsed and gashed my head in a way that could have been much worse. It doesn't matter how healthy we are. At some point all of our bodies are going to wear out. I don't mean to be depressing, but I do mean to be eye-opening. This is all of us. The most educated, the least educated, the richest, the poorest, black, white, Latino, Asian, Native American, African—we're all going to either get sick and die or experience a sudden death one day. It could be any day for any of us. That's just reality—and Jesus knew that.

Jesus knew the reason for that. So why do we have sickness, disease, suffering and death in this world? Why do our bodies waste away? There's a reason for this and it all goes back to the entrance of sin into this world. God created the world—and you and me—to enjoy Him, to enjoy each other, to enjoy the world in perfect harmony. But we turned from God to ourselves. Every one of us has chosen to trust ourselves over God. That's the story of every one of our lives. It looks different for each of us, but the core story is the same. The Bible calls this sin in our hearts and our sin separates us from God and ruins the harmony God designed for us—with Him, with each other and in the world. That's why we have sorrow, sickness, coronaviruses, cancer, disease and death in this world, because we are separated from God. If you or I die in this state of separation from God, we will spend eternity in suffering away from God.

Jesus, knowing this, came to do the unimaginable, the unthinkable, that which was beyond the realm of possibility in our minds. Jesus came, not just to heal many people of their diseases, as awesome as that is, not just to bring a couple people back from the dead, as amazing as that is. This is why Jesus said, "Don't tell anybody about this, because they'll think that's the point of My coming. The point of My coming is so much greater than this. The point of My coming is to take on the root of sickness and the root of disease and the root of suffering and the root of death. I came to take on sin itself."

This is what Easter is all about. Jesus lived a life with no sin in Him, which means He did not have to die, but He chose to die to pay the price for our sin. Jesus died on the cross for us. But His death was not the end of His story. Three days later Jesus rose from the grave and this is the greatest news in all the world. Sin—the root of all sickness, the root of all disease, the root of all suffering—has been severed and

death has been defeated. And eternal life is now available to anyone, everyone, anywhere, everywhere who believes in Jesus.

So let's come back to this word "believe." Come back to this call to faith, to trust in Jesus. Not trust in this world, not trust in your health, not trust in your job, the economy, anything in this world—including yourself. Faith is trust in Jesus and that is the only way you can know you have eternal life in heaven. Not by trust in this world or trust in yourself. Not by trust in how good you are, how moral you are, how kind you are, how much you've gone to church. None of that matters.

You're a sinner separated from God in this world and cannot solve that problem on your own. You must trust in Jesus for life—trust Jesus with your life now and trust Jesus with your life forever. Believe. And when you trust in Jesus, this totally changes everything about how you handle the COVID-19 crisis.

Let me tell you a story I told one Sunday before I even became a pastor here. Growing up, I was a runt. Even in high school, I was the smallest kid in the class. I remember going off to basketball camp as a freshman and it was the tradition in that day for the seniors to take freshmen and "initiate" them in different ways. I'll never forget, sitting there at basketball camp in my dorm room with a buddy of mine who was also a freshman. All of a sudden a couple big senior guys bust our door open, come in, grab my buddy off the bed and carry him out. I don't know exactly what happened as they took him out. All I heard is them taking him into the restroom, flushing the toilet and my buddy comes back with some really wet hair.

Then they throw him down on the bed and come and get me. As soon as this guy picks me up and turns to walk out of the room, immediately another senior walks into the room, sees this guy holding me and says, "Stop! We can't take him." Now, I had no idea who this guy was that just walked in the room, but I immediately loved this man. This guy who was still holding me said, "Why can't we take him?" The guy who had just come in said, "We can't take him, because that's Platt's brother."

See, I had a little secret weapon: my older brother. He was not a runt. My older brother Steve was the state heavy-weight wrestling champion—not a runt at all. I'll never forget what the guy who's holding me said. He turned and looked me up and down. Then he said to the guy who just came into the room, "This is not Platt's brother. This is Platt's left leg!" I don't think he meant that as a compliment, but I was pretty proud to be Platt's left leg on that day. The guy put me down, walked out of the room, and nothing happened to me.

I remember one other time when my granddad had gotten me a jacket that I loved. I wore it everywhere. Even if it was hot outside, I wore that jacket. One day I wore it to school, put it down at the beginning of the day, came back at the end of school and the jacket was gone. Someone had stolen it. I remember my dad coming to pick my brother and me up and I told him what had happened. He went in to talk with the principal. I was sitting there, pretty upset.

Then Steve came up to me, put his arm around me and said, “David, I heard your jacket was stolen.” I said, “Yeah.” I was pretty distraught. He said, “Let me take care of this.” I saw him walk over to the ringleader of this sort of thing in the school. He pulled him aside and said, “Listen, my brother’s jacket was stolen and if you don’t have it back to me by tomorrow morning, then you and I are going to have a talk.” The guy walked away.

Next morning, I was in my first class, standing by the door, looking out in the hall, then all of a sudden, around the corner and down the hall, I see my older brother Steve. You’ll never guess what he was holding. He’s got my jacket! He comes, pokes his head in my room and hands it to me. Then he said, “David, I just want you to know, no matter what happens to you, your brother has always got your back.”

Now, here’s why I share that story. This COVID-19 crisis has been described as a war. We’re in a battle against this virus. Everybody wants to win the battle and defeat this disease. We talk about “coronavirus survivors”—people who have faced COVID-19 and lived through it. I appreciate in a sense what that means. We can rejoice in what that means. But I do fear that term runs the danger of missing the point. It encourages the impression that if you get COVID-19 and live, then you’ve won the battle with this virus. This also implies that if you die, you’ve lost the battle. But I don’t think either of those things are actually true.

Beating COVID-19 is not about staying alive. That’s what the world would say, but it’s not true. If you live through COVID-19 and you’re still not trusting in Jesus, then you haven’t won anything. Your trust is still in this world and you haven’t won anything at all. In fact, I would say that COVID-19 has won, because you’re all the more convinced that you can face whatever this world throws at you on your own. That’s not a win; that’s a loss that will ultimately lead to eternal loss.

Do you want to know what the win is? The win is knowing yes, we’re in a battle, and yes, many will live through it, and yes, many will die in it. But in the end, there is only one God Who has ultimately created all of us. There is only one Physician Who can ultimately heal any of us. There is only one Ruler Who has defeated sin. There is only one King Who has conquered death. His name is Jesus and He has your back. Knowing that is the “win.” When you know Him, then your hope is not in the latest projections. Your hope is now in His loving provision. When you know Jesus, your peace is not based on your personal odds. When you know Him, your peace is grounded in the one true God. When you know Jesus, then you know that even if one day soon you find yourself struggling to breathe in a hospital alone, you will have no reason to fear. Do you know why? Because the One Who conquered death has your back and you are 100% confident you have eternal life.

So I ask you, right where you’re sitting now, do you know that? Do you know with 100% confidence that if you were to die today that you would go to heaven, because you have put all your trust in Jesus as your life? Again, this may be the first time to ever watch or be a part of a church gathering for you. Or you maybe have grown up in church; maybe you’ve even called yourself a Christian, but you

know if you were to stand before God right now, it would be clear that Jesus is not your life. You may believe certain things about Jesus, but you're not trusting Jesus as your life.

For many, you have all kinds of excuses for not trusting Jesus with your life. You say, "I've still got questions." That's great, but today you can get them answered. Start that conversation right now. Don't waste another minute.

You say, "Well, the church has too many hypocrites." With all due respect, you know that has nothing to do with it. The medical profession has some crazy people out there too, but you're not ignoring all medicine right now. Somebody else's hypocrisy has nothing to do with you. Besides, you've probably had your own hypocritical moments. So be glad that Jesus loves hypocrites; that means there's hope for you too. That's the point. Jesus didn't come for the perfect, because none of us are. He came for the imperfect, which qualifies every single one of us.

You say, "I'll do that later." But I want to warn you: there may not be a "later." I cannot say this more plainly. You are not guaranteed tomorrow. I'm not either. You or I could die at any moment, then this opportunity will be gone forever. Even if you live for many more years, you don't want to harden your heart toward God right now, hearing the voice of God's Spirit speaking to you like He is today and you saying, "Maybe later." God will let your heart harden all the more and you may never come back to this moment. I say to some of you, this could be your last opportunity. Today is the day. Don't make excuses. Today's excuses will be tomorrow's regrets.

Five minutes into eternity, what are you going to be glad you held on to that kept you from Jesus? I want to invite you to decide right now to put your trust in Jesus. This is a defining moment. Today is a defining day for you to do what God is calling you to do: to put aside your pride and place your trust in Jesus. So let me invite you to bow your heads with me. Right where you're sitting, let me invite everyone who's listening to the sound of my voice to bow your heads and close your eyes, so you can avoid any distractions. Just see yourself before God. I ask again, do you know for certain that when you die—not even if you were to die, because that's a reality for each of us—but when you die, you will spend eternal life in heaven?

If the answer to that question is not a resounding "Yes" in your heart, then I want to invite you to pray to Him. Say in your heart, "God, I want and need Jesus to be my life. I know that I have sin in my heart that separates me from You. I hate my sin that separates me from You, so today I am turning from it. I need You to save me. Today, I am putting my faith, my trust, in Jesus, in His death on the cross for my sin and in His resurrection from the grave as my Lord. Today I trust in Jesus with my life."

O God, we praise You. We glorify and worship You for the reality that death is not the end of our story, that sin is not the end of our story, that sickness and coronavirus is not the end of the story, that COVID-19 will not have the last word. We praise You, Jesus, that You have the last word.

God, I pray for all who are trusting in Jesus now, that they would know the wonder and beauty of eternal life with You as Lord. God, I pray for all those who know You in this way, that You would help us make this good news known with urgency in these days. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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