

Did God send this virus?

It's a good question because you can see lots of good things coming out of this time, and it certainly has shown us a glimpse of a better world. God has been at work in an amazing way. It's also a fair point because there is a long tradition of Christian prayer that tries to see all that comes to us in life as a "gift" from God. Easy to say about the nice things, but even the "bad" things often have lots of teach us or can be used to help us grow in some way or other.

Yet.. there is a difference between seeing cancer, for example, as a gift, and saying that God sent it.

We might say that God "allows" things to happen, although some would not go that far either.

There are a couple of reasons why I don't think we can say that God sent this virus.

One is to do with the promise after the Flood in Genesis. God has got angry with the world and decides to destroy it all and start again. Afterwards he regrets his actions and puts a rainbow in the sky and says - never again will I destroy the earth. I think it's possible to see that what applies to a worldwide flood also applies to a worldwide pandemic. Does God just break his promises?

Another reason is the nature of God. Jesus showed us that God was always gentle, forgiving, loving. He healed people even if they didn't say thank you, he fed those who turned him in. I can't see a God who is like Jesus saying - I'll kill a few hundred thousand people to teach them a lesson. It doesn't match the picture of the shepherd looking for the 1 sheep, or Jesus dying for us and saying "father forgive them, they know not what they do". I can't see a God of infinite love deliberately causing such suffering and death.

And that's a third reason. In theology, God has already saved the world from the worst thing possible, which is life without him. We may feel that there are worse things, but that's because we're a bit caught up in this life. God sees a bigger picture - eternity, and not just what happens to our physical bodies but our souls as well. To say that God needs to do this to save the world is to miss the point that this is not a crisis for God, its a crisis for us!

So finally, in my view (and you don't have to agree!) God gave us this world to look after in Genesis. He tells us to till it, to look after the animals, and we are responsible for it. In the past we've exploited and ravaged the earth, instead of "husbanding" it. And sadly sometimes the church has encouraged that. Now we see we need to take care of it - but if God has given it to us to look after, he's not going to force our hand this way or that - he has given us free will and intelligence and so it's up to us. Otherwise we're not really free, and it's not really our earth to look after.

So I really hope that humanity does wake up and smell the coffee, and work together and work harder to look after our fragile home and care for those who most need it. I think it will take a lot of hard work to stop things sliding back to where they were, but it has shown us what is possible. And always God is using bad things to bring good out of it - even the death of his Son, to bring about new life for the world - but no, he didn't send it. (And although the science is not in, it looks like it might be humans being unhygienic in the way they sell and kill animals (bats) that started this off - we truly did this to ourselves!).

stay safe and stay positive!

Simon