

C.S. Lewis on the Coronavirus

(With some poetic license in substituting the Corona virus for the Atomic Bomb, and credit owing to Matt Smethurst of the Gospel Coalition. Matt recently challenged his readers to think about overreactions to our current plight by twisting the words of C.S. Lewis written 72 years earlier at the end of WWII about the atomic bomb. This depicts how timeless and wise his writings are)

In one way we think a great deal too much of the Corona virus. “How are we to live in this perilous age?” I am tempted to reply: “Why, as you would have lived in the sixteenth century when the plague visited London almost every year, or as you would have lived in a Viking age when raiders from Scandinavia might land and cut your throat any night; or indeed, as you are already living in an age of cancer, an age of syphilis, an age of paralysis, an age of air raids, an age of railway accidents, an age of motor accidents.”

In other words, do not let us begin by exaggerating the novelty of our situation. Believe me, dear sir or madam, you and all whom you love were already sentenced to death before the Corona virus was invented: and quite a high percentage of us were going to die in unpleasant ways. We had, indeed, one very great advantage over our ancestors—anesthetics; but we have that still. It is perfectly ridiculous to go about whimpering and drawing long faces because the scientists have added one more chance of painful and premature death to a world which already bristled with such chances and in which death itself was not a chance at all, but a certainty.

This is the first point to be made: and the first action to be taken is to pull ourselves together. If we are all going to be destroyed by the Corona virus, let that virus when it comes find us doing sensible and human things—praying, working, teaching, reading, listening to music, bathing the children, playing tennis, chatting to our friends over a pint and a game of darts—not huddled together like frightened sheep and thinking about viruses. They may break our bodies (a microbe can do that) but they need not dominate our minds.

— “On Living in an Atomic Age” (1948) in *Present Concerns: Journalistic Essays* (C.S. Lewis)

Life is what is going on around us today, while we worry about tomorrow.
Godspeed, Mike Hadro