

# Nations Seek to Alert Public About Coronavirus Without Causing Panic as Death Toll Rises

*The Wired Word for the Week of February 16, 2020*

## In the News

Li Wenliang, the Chinese ophthalmologist who was detained by police, labeled a "rumormonger," and forced to recant after he warned about a potential "SARS-like" virus in December 2019, died of the virus February 7 in Wuhan Central Hospital in China where he worked. He was 34.

The Chinese people reacted to his death with grief and anger, calling for an apology and the restoration of Li's good name, and demanding the freedom of speech for which Li was excoriated.

Within weeks, the government had reversed course, acknowledging the outbreak of the Corona Virus Disease named COVID-19 (aka novel coronavirus pneumonia or NCP) and treating it as a major national emergency. The super-virus can cause respiratory illnesses such as the common cold, pneumonia and bronchitis.

Many accused authorities of allowing the virus to spread by disregarding Li's warnings. Federal and local officials are pointing fingers at each other, attempting to shift blame for the outbreak.

As Chinese President Xi Jinping had his temperature checked at Ditan Hospital in Beijing, he told doctors in Wuhan via video link: "We must fight the battle, the total warfare and the people's war against the epidemic with full confidence ... that we will definitely win."

As of February 12, COVID-19 had caused 44,000 infections and more than 1,100 deaths in mainland China, mostly in Wuhan, the city of 10 million at the epicenter of the epidemic, and the surrounding Hubei province. Globally, the number of fatalities has surpassed those due to the 2002-2003 SARS outbreak. At least 28 countries have confirmed cases and several nations have evacuated their citizens from Hubei. *(This is a developing story. Check your news outlets for further updates.)*

"If the world doesn't want to wake up and consider the virus as public enemy number one, I don't think we will learn from our lessons," World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said Tuesday.

The entire city of Wuhan is under quarantine. Two new hospitals have been built in a matter of days to handle the increased demand for medical care. When not hospitalized, those who test positive for the virus are required to stay at home or are placed in massive quarantine centers. Healthy residents are also confined to their homes. Schools and businesses are closed, causing massive disruption to the world's second-largest economy and international supply chains that trade goods and services with China.

To help stem the spread of COVID-19, product delivery into and out of China has been delayed, flights in and out of the country have been canceled, holidays, conferences and events throughout Asia have been postponed or put on hold indefinitely, impacting tourism, the education sector and industry. Since the epidemic began, food prices in China have soared 20.6 percent. The

longer the health crisis lasts, the greater the chances that the Chinese will face shortages of fuel, food, medical supplies and other essentials.

COVID-19 has kept nearly 4,000 people quarantined aboard the Diamond Princess cruise ship in Yokohama, Japan, until at least February 19. So far, 135 people on board have been hospitalized after testing positive for the virus. The ship arrived in harbor February 3. Passengers who have had close contact with infected persons will have their confinement extended for two weeks since their last contact with a confirmed case.

It's been said by people from other countries that "When America sneezes, we get the flu." Conversely, when China gets COVID-19, people across the globe get pneumonia. A virus on the other side of the world can have a domino effect on global health, economy, politics and human relations.

"The spread of the coronavirus poses an emerging risk to Japan's economy [which is the third largest in the world], although the economic impact will depend on the extent of the spread of the disease and policy responses," said Paul Cashin, the International Monetary Fund's mission chief for Japan. Nissan Motor Co. will temporarily halt production at its Kyushu plant in southern Japan, due to the inability to get needed parts from China during the COVID-19 crisis.

TWW team member Mary Sells, a vice president of sales for a business-to-business publishing company, wrote: "Most of my customers import products from China to sell in the United States and are always impacted by the two-week closure of factories for Chinese New Year when many travel to unite with families. The extension of two more weeks of closures to limit travel after the holiday has factories unable to produce orders and people unable to return to work to earn wages. This also is compounded by air and sea freight carriers cutting their schedules and unable to move merchandise."

Sells added that "when people will be able to return to work and when carriers will resume operations is a moving target daily and weekly. This means thousands of American small businesses cannot sell goods to their customers, creating sales losses and potential for some to need to lay off employees."

The World Health Organization has sent an investigation team of epidemiologists to China "who will be able to really understand the transmission dynamics going on, understand the severity of the illness, understand the challenges that China is facing with this outbreak," Dr. Amesh Adalja of John Hopkins University said.

China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang reported that a 60-year-old U.S. citizen, who had underlying health issues, died in Wuhan on February 6 after being infected by COVID-19.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends that Americans avoid all nonessential travel to China.

Since January 31, American citizens who have traveled to Hubei Province (where the outbreak originated) have been under a mandatory two week quarantine. U.S. citizens traveling from other parts of China are being screened at 20 airports across the country for signs of the virus. The government has also banned "foreign nationals" who have traveled to China in the past 14 days from entering the United States.

The CDC recommends that people consult a healthcare provider if they have symptoms of COVID-19, such as a cough, trouble breathing or fever.

Until a vaccine becomes available, there is no particular treatment for COVID-19. Most infected people do recover on their own with rest, hydration and medication to relieve symptoms. To prevent the spread of respiratory viruses such as COVID-19, people should follow recommended sanitation protocol such as frequent washing of the hands with soap and water, avoiding contact with sick people, and self-quarantine if they are symptomatic.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[China Coronavirus Outbreak: All the Latest Updates. \*Al Jazeera\*](#)

[Coronavirus Deaths Exceed 1,000: Live Updates on 2019-nCoV. \*Live Science\*](#)

[2019 Novel Coronavirus: Situation Summary. \*The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention\*](#)

[Wuhan Hospital Announces Death of Whistleblower Doctor Li Wenliang. \*CNN\*](#)

[On Cruise Ship Quarantined in Japan, Any New Cases to Reset the Isolation Clock. \*NPR\*](#)

### **The Big Questions**

1. If you became aware of a possible danger to the public, but believed that you would likely face retaliation from powerful interests if you spoke up about it, what would you do?
2. Have you ever been quarantined? If so, describe the experience. If not, what do you imagine it would be like?
3. Has anyone ever given you a warning or advice you did not want to accept? Why did you resist? Do you have any regrets about that?
4. Were Chinese officials wrong to try to control the narrative about the coronavirus in the early stages of awareness of the disease? Why or why not?
5. How might concern for people's eternal destiny shape your actions if you believed their souls to be in mortal danger?

### **Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope**

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

#### **1 Kings 22:20-23**

*[The prophet Micaiah said to King Ahab,] "And the LORD said, 'Who will entice Ahab, so that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' Then one said one thing, and another said another, until a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD, saying, 'I will entice him.' 'How?' the LORD asked him. He replied, 'I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' Then the LORD said, 'You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do it.' So you see, the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; the LORD has decreed disaster for you."* (For context, read 22:13-28.)

Israel had peaceful relations with Aram (now present-day Syria) for three years, after which Ahab, the king of Israel, got it in his head that Aram had a piece of land that belonged to Israel. He asked Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, to join him in battle to claim the land, Ramoth-gilead, east of the Jordan River (vv. 1-4).

Jehoshaphat agreed, as long as Ahab consulted the Lord first. So Ahab gathered 400 prophets together to ask whether he should go to war. Without even bothering to ask God for direction, they all told Ahab what they thought he wanted to hear: "Go up; for the LORD will give [the land] into the hand of the king" (vv. 5-6).

But cautious Jehoshaphat wanted to know if there was any other prophet of the Lord they could consult (v. 7). Ahab admitted there was one, Micaiah, but he said, "I hate him, for he never prophesies anything favorable about me, but only disaster." Jehoshaphat persuaded Ahab that he should hear what Micaiah had to say anyway, so Ahab called for him (vv. 8-9).

While they waited for Micaiah to arrive, all the other prophets predicted a fabulous victory for Ahab (vv. 10-12). Meanwhile, the messenger who had gone to summon Micaiah advised him to fall in line with all of Ahab's yes-men and tell the king what he wanted to hear, but Micaiah responded, "As the LORD lives, whatever the LORD says to me, that I will speak" (vv. 13-14).

When Ahab asked Micaiah's advice about whether he should go to war, the lone prophet gave Ahab the party line, that he should go to war, for he was sure to triumph (v. 15). But Ahab knew Micaiah wasn't telling him the truth, and pressed him for the message he really had from the Lord (v. 16).

So Micaiah then prophesied that going to war with Aram would be disastrous (vv. 17-18). He explained that he saw the Lord sitting on his throne discussing how to persuade Ahab to go into battle (v. 19). A spirit volunteered to entice Ahab by putting lies in the mouths of all his advisers.

Micaiah was punished for his honesty. Ahab's chief prophet slapped and insulted him, and Ahab ordered that Micaiah be imprisoned and given reduced rations until he returned triumphant from battle (vv. 24-27). Micaiah replied simply that if Ahab returned in peace, it would then be clear that the Lord had not spoken by him. He exhorted, "Hear, you peoples, all of you!" (v. 28).

Ahab listened to the advisers who flattered his vanity, and he refused to heed Micaiah's words. He went to war and was killed; his people were scattered, just as Micaiah had predicted (vv. 29-38).

**Questions:** What parallels do you see between the incident in the text and the way Chinese authorities initially responded to Dr. Li when he tried to warn people about COVID-19? When have you seen similar behavior in the history of our own country? What prompts leaders to pursue potentially disastrous policies and actions even when they have been warned about the negative likely consequences of doing so?

What does it take for an individual to speak truth to power, knowing that he or she will probably face public scorn, character assassination and other forms of retribution? What would it take for you to be willing to stand up alone and tell the truth, when you know you will probably suffer for it?

**Mark 6:4, 11-12**

*Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house. ... If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. (For context, read 6:1-13.)*

Jesus came to his hometown of Nazareth and began to teach in the synagogue. But those who heard him were offended that this hometown boy should presume to teach them (vv. 1-3). He was unable to do great deeds of power there, because of their unbelief (vv. 5-6).

Then he sent the twelve disciples out to nearby villages to cast out demons and heal the sick (vv. 7-13). He warned them that not every place would welcome them. Some would refuse to hear their message, just as some rejected him and his message.

Their message was not exactly pleasant to hear. They were proclaiming that all should repent: not exactly a popular message, then, or now.

Jesus' cousin John (the Baptizer) had spoken a hard message, too, and it cost him his life (vv. 17-20, 27-28).

John the Gospel-writer said that because of Jesus' difficult teaching, "many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him" (John 6:60, 66). He also said that Jesus "came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him" (John 1:11).

**Question:** How do you reconcile the biblical call to "bring good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18) with the call to speak truth that is not necessarily pleasant or popular?

### **2 Timothy 4:1-5**

*In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully. (No context needed.)*

Even though Paul's message resonates in a particular way with pastors, since his letter is written to one, we do well to pay heed to his words, whether we are clergy or lay people.

Paul charged Timothy to persistently proclaim God's message "whether the time is favorable or unfavorable." He urges Timothy to teach patiently, using persuasion to convince, truth-telling to rebuke, and words of encouragement to strengthen resolve and build character.

**Questions:** Would you say we are living in a "favorable" time, or an "unfavorable" time? Explain.

Share about a time someone used persuasion to convince you of truth, or gave you an honest rebuke that you needed to hear, or encouraged you when you were downhearted. Do you think it is easier to convince, rebuke, or encourage someone?

In what context do you have opportunities to "convince, rebuke, and encourage," and to "do the work of an evangelist" (one who brings good news)?

### **Luke 8:11-15**

*[Jesus said,] "Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. The ones on the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe only for a while and in a time of testing*

*fall away. As for what fell among the thorns, these are the ones who hear; but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance."* (For context, read 8:4-15.)

Jesus told his listeners the parable of the sower, sometimes called the parable of the four soils. A farmer scattered seed on the ground at planting time. Some seed fell on a path where it was trampled on and gobbled up by birds. Some seed fell on rocky soil, where it took root quickly, but withered for lack of moisture. Some seed fell among thorns, which grew up to choke the seedlings. Some seed fell into good soil, sprouted, and grew to produce a hundredfold crop (vv. 4-8).

**Questions:** What bearing might this parable have on situations like the one the world faces with the COVID-19 virus?

Which type of soil most resembles your receptivity to the word of God right now? What obstacles hinder you from really listening to and doing God's word? What do you need to do to remove those obstacles so that you can produce a crop worthy of the seed of God's word scattered in your heart?