

Adapted from C. S. Lewis, *On Living in an Atomic Age*

Dear reader,

I edited this by substituting the words “coronavirus” for “atomic bomb” throughout Lewis’ writing and updating a few of the calamities listed at the end of the opening paragraph and elsewhere. – Pastor Jim

I think you will see that his words below, very much pertain to our present situation:

In one way we think a great deal too much of the corona virus. “How are we to live in an age of the corona virus?” 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 STD’s, an age of AIDs, an age of mass shootings, an age of airline accidents, an age of auto 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 this coronavirus came into our world: and quite a high percentage of us were going to die in unpleasant ways. We had, indeed, one very great advantage over our ancestors—advanced medical technology; 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 coronavirus, 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 diseases. 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*