

PROTECTION AND PROVISION

- A. Introduction: Hello everyone. Here we are again, livestreaming from our home because of the corona virus pandemic. As you know, the stay-at-home guidelines have been extended to the end of April, so it looks like we'll be doing this for several more weeks.
1. We're using these talks to look at what the Bible says about what is happening around us and why. Our goal is to quell people's fears as we strengthen their trust in Almighty God.
 - a. The Bible makes it clear that increasingly difficult times are ahead for this planet. But God's Word is also very clear that those who trust in Him will make it through.
 - b. The more we know about what is going on and why according to God's Word, the more our confidence in Him will grow and the better prepared we'll be to face what is ahead.
 2. The second coming of Jesus is drawing closer with each passing day. Due to misinformation or lack of information, some people find this subject frightening. But it's because they don't understand that Jesus is coming back to complete the plan of God—and that's a good thing.
 - a. God's plan, conceived in eternity past, is to have a family with whom He can live forever in loving relationship in a wonderful environment. God created human beings to become His sons and daughters and He made the earth to be a home for His family. Eph 1:4-5; Isa 45:8
 - b. Both the family and the family home have been damaged by sin, beginning with the first man, Adam. As the head of the human race his actions affected the race resident in him. As earth's first steward, his actions affected the earth itself. Gen 2:17; Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12; Rom 5:19
 1. Human nature was altered and men and women became sinners by nature, disqualified for a place in the family of God. Human beings began to behave in ways contrary to God, and the human body became subject to sickness, corruption, old age and death.
 2. On top of that, all of creation was infused with a curse of corruption and death. Natural laws and processes set into motion by God at the beginning to bless humanity were altered. This resulted in blight, drought, famine, destructive storms, and earthquakes throughout the world.
 - c. This world is not the way God created it or intended it to be. But there is coming an end to the way things are and a restoration to the way they are supposed to be.
 1. Jesus came to earth 2000 years ago to die for our sin and make it possible for sinners to be transformed into God's sons and daughters through faith in Him and His sacrifice.
 2. Jesus will soon come again to renovate this planet. He will cleanse it from all corruption and death and restore it to a fit forever home for God's family. Isa 65:17
 3. That brings us to the current crisis—the global pandemic we are facing. The Bible reveals that there will be increasingly challenging times in years leading up to His return, including things like pandemics.
 - a. Matt 24:6-8—A few days before Jesus went to the Cross He listed signs that will indicate His return is near. Jesus compared some of those signs to birth pangs or labor pains, meaning that they will increase in intensity and frequency as His second coming gets closer.
 - b. Pestilence is one those signs. Pestilence is a plague or epidemic disease that causes a high rate of mortality. The world is beginning to experience birth pangs. This pandemic is a birth pang.
 1. We explained last week that these birth pangs are not the work of God. They are expressions of the corruption that is present in the world because of Adam's sin. War, strife, pestilence, earthquakes, and famines are part of life in a sin damage world.
 2. These events are increasing in part because there are more people on earth than ever before. More people means more fallenness, more sin, which means more strife, wars, murders, and violence. More people living contrary to God means more effects on the earth. As we pointed out last week, the Bible reveals that earth responds to the behavior of its caretakers.

- B. The men who heard Jesus utter these words about birth pangs not freaked out by what He said because they heard them in the context of God's overall plan. Let's put this passage about birth pangs in context.
1. Matt 24:1-3—As Jesus and several of His first followers came out of the Temple in Jerusalem a few days before He was crucified, Jesus' disciples pointed out the various Temple buildings.
 - a. Jesus responded by telling them that all the buildings were going to be demolished. That's a heavy statement because the Temple was the center of their national, religious, political, and cultural life.
 - b. However, instead of getting upset, the disciples asked Jesus what signs will precede His coming and indicate that His return and the end of this world is near. Why weren't they afraid?
 1. They knew that the end of the world doesn't mean the end of this planet. It means the end of this age—the age when things are not as they're supposed to be, not as God intended them to be because of sin.
 2. They knew that the end of the world doesn't mean the obliteration of the planet. It means the renovation and restoration of the family home to what God always intended it to be.
 - A. Just as God spoke in the beginning and created the heavens and the earth, He will again speak and the fire of His Word will cleanse this planet of all corruption and death.
II Pet 3:10-12
 - B. We're afraid of "the end" because we mistakenly think that it's the end of all good things. But it's the opposite. It's the end of all bad things. The wonders and joys of life on earth will remain, but no longer marred by sorrow, sickness, pain and suffering, or death.
 3. They knew from the Old Testament prophets that the coming of the Lord to renovate the earth will be preceded by a time of calamity and tribulation (lots of lessons for another time). But they also knew from the prophets that God's people will make it through. Joel 2:28-32
 - c. Notice something else Jesus said in answer to their questions that is particularly relevant to what we are facing right now. In His answer we find evidence that we will come through this present pandemic. We will come out of this because the end is not yet.
 1. When Jesus referred to these signs that will His return is near—wars, rumors of wars, ethnic groups rising against ethnic group, famines, pestilences, earthquakes—He said two times that these were the beginning of labor pains, but that the birth of the new age is not immediate.
 2. v6—These things must come to pass, but the end is not yet; v8—All this is but the beginning—the early pains of the birth pangs (Amp).
 2. We've made the point in previous discussions that the Bible is 50% history. About 25% of its content is prophecy or predictions about future events like what Jesus described in His answer to the disciples.
 - a. These prophecies set the Bible apart from every other religious book. Only God knows the future before it comes to pass. Therefore, only a book inspired by Him can correctly predict future events. Isa 46:9-10—For I am God—I alone...only I can tell you what is going to happen even before it happens. (NLT)
 - b. The Bible contains many prophecies that have already been fulfilled, giving us the assurance that what is not yet fulfilled will be. This is a topic for another time, but consider just two examples.
 1. The Book of Daniel predicted the rise of the Medo-Persian Empire fifteen years before it came on the scene as well as the rise of Greece 250 years before it appeared. Dan 8:19-21
 2. The prophet Isaiah identified the first king of Persia by name (Cyrus) 150 years before the ruler was born. Isa 44:28
 - c. In regard to where we are now on the time line of history consider this thought. The Bible states that a worldwide system of government, economy, and religion will be in place when Jesus returns. Rev 13:1-18
 1. When those words were written (about 95 AD) global anything was unimaginable, let alone possible. Yet here we are with a pandemic—a global disease—made possible because the

movement of people around the world is now common place. The world is tied together by trade, communication, and banking.

2. The world is beginning to think in terms of world government as national borders are being deemphasized or abandoned in many parts of the world. The world increasingly thinks in terms of: We are a global community that must come together to solve global problems.
 - d. God gives information about the future in His book for a number of purposes. Consider these two.
 1. Although events and circumstances may take us by surprise, the fact that God knows the future before it arrives assures us that He is not surprised. And, He is ready with a strategy in mind to cause it to serve His purposes and get His family through whatever comes our way.
 2. Prophecy fulfilled confirms God's reliability and faithfulness. If one thing He says has come to pass, then we can trust that others will also.
- C. In the face of this pandemic, the most important thing you can do is increase your faith and trust in Almighty God by looking at what He shows us about Himself in Book, the Bible.
1. God's Word to His people is always: Fear not for I am with you and nothing can come against you that is bigger than me (Isa 43:1-3). What does this look like in the real world? Consider this thought.
 - a. Probably one of the best known passages in the Bible is: "Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for thou art with me", found in Psalm 23.
 1. The psalm opens with "The Lord is my shepherd (v1)" and goes on to compare God's care of His people to that of a Good Shepherd who protects and provides for his flock.
 2. Verse v4, "Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death", is often cited at funerals to bring comfort to people who've lost a loved one.
 - b. But that's not what this passage is about. It extols God's protection of and provision for His people in this life. The valley of the shadow of death is life in this world.
 - c. This world is infused with a curse of corruption and death that makes it a difficult and dangerous place. But it is possible to walk through this world without fear because the Lord is our protector and provider.
 2. David, the author of this psalm, walked through a literal valley and faced a formidable enemy who was intent on killing him. Yet because God was with him to help him, David survived. I Sam 17
 - a. About 1063 BC a powerful people known as the Philistines came against the fledgling nation of Israel (located in what is today modern Israel). Both armies gathered for battle on opposite hills with a valley between them, the Valley of Elah. The valley is about eleven miles SW of Jerusalem.
 1. Every day, two times a day, for 40 days, a mighty Philistine warrior named Goliath (an unusually large and powerful man) shouted across the valley and issued a challenge to Israel— Send a man out to fight me. If he kills me, we will be your slaves. If I kill him, you will be our slaves. v8-10
 2. v11; v16; v24—His challenge brought fear to every man in the army. And the forty days of constant torment only increased their fears. Fear torments you before anything happens.
 - b. David, a young shepherd boy who tended his father's sheep, came to bring food to his older brothers who were serving in the army. David heard Goliath's challenge and accepted it.
 1. It was a seemingly impossible situation. Goliath was a man of war from his youth up. David was a teenager with no military training. Goliath had full offensive and defensive armor. David had a sling shot.
 2. But David went down into the Valley of Elah (the valley of the shadow of death) with the confidence that God was with Him. He believed that God would help him in the valley just as He had in the past when a lion and a bear attacked his father's sheep. v34-37
 3. David ran to meet Goliath, hurled a stone from his sling and hit Goliath in the forehead. The

giant fell face down on the ground. David took Goliath's sword and cut off the man's head.

3. This is a real person who really lived and got real help from God in the midst of life's hardships. This and other historical accounts like it were written to encourage each succeeding generation by recounting how God helps His people in impossible situations. Note these points.
 - a. David knew that God was with him and that God with him was what he needed to meet the challenge he was facing. We know this from other things David wrote.
 1. David wrote—You both precede and follow me...I can never escape from your spirit! I can never get away from your presence! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the place of the dead, you are there (Ps 139:5-8, NLT).
 2. David wrote in Ps 42:5—I will put my hope in God; I will praise (thank) Him again, for his presence is salvation (Lit Hebrew).
 - A. God is omnipresent. There's no place God is not. Where ever you are, there He is. There's never been a time that God was not with you.
 - B. God has already demonstrated His willingness to help you by dying for your sin. If God helped you on your worst day (which was any day before you acknowledged Jesus as Savior and Lord), with your greatest need (salvation from your sins) why would He be unwilling to help you now. Rom 8:32
 - b. Ps 23:4—David wrote: I will fear no evil because you are with me. Notice, David made a choice, exercised his will. I will not fear. Remember, fear not doesn't mean that you do feel afraid.
 1. David also wrote Ps 56:3-4—What time I am afraid I will trust in you. In the face of fearsome circumstances David chose to believe what God said despite what he could see and feel.
 - A. David went into battle acknowledging God, expressing his confidence that God would help him. David faced his enemy praising God. I Sam 17:37; 45-46
 - B. God was with every man in the army when David faced Goliath. Each one of them could have done what David did by the power of God. Yet they were all in terrible fear and none of them accessed God's help and provision.
 2. Note David's testimony about life in a fallen world, life in the valley of the shadow of death. Ps 23:5—You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. That's provision and protection.
 - c. David's testimony at the end of his life was: Once I was young, and now I am old. Yet I have never seen the godly (the righteous) forsaken, nor seen their children begging for bread. Ps 37:25 (NLT).
- D. Conclusion: Enemies do come against us in this life because we live in a fallen world. This pandemic is an enemy. But there is provision and protection in the midst of these challenges.
 1. God works on the behalf of those who trust Him. As we go through these challenging days, don't feed your fears, feed your faith. Don't focus your attention on what scares you. Focus on what strengthens your trust in God—the Word of Almighty God who knows all, sees all, loves all, and is faithful to keep His Word to all.
 2. The end of this age is at hand and the return of the Lord is near. But that's a good thing! The best is yet to come for those who know the Lord. He will get us through until He gets us out. More next week!