

GOD WORKS SALVATION IN THE EARTH

- A. Introduction: There is no such thing as a problem free, pain free life in this sin damaged world. But Jesus' promise to His people is peace of mind in the midst of tribulation (John 16:33). We can have peace because we know that nothing can come against us that is bigger than God Who is with us. Isa 41:10; Isa 43:1-2
1. "Nothing is bigger than God" is another way of saying that nothing is too hard for God and nothing is impossible for Him—including seemingly irreversible, unfixable circumstances.
    - a. We've been look at places in the Bible where the statement that nothing is too hard for God are found. The context of these statements gives us insight into what this means for our lives.
    - b. One of these statements was made by Job in the face of great calamity and loss (Job 1:13-19; Job 2:7). Most of the book consists of Job and his friends speculating as to why trouble came his way.
      1. But God redirected Job's attention from "why did this happen" to "look at how big I am" (Job 38-41). And Job was inspired to proclaim: Nothing is too hard for thee (Job 42:2, Moffatt).
      2. In the end, the Lord delivered Job and restored to him what he lost two times over. Job's story illustrates that nothing is too big for God—no sickness in our bodies, no loss due to wicked men, no loss due to natural disaster, not even death itself. Job 42:10-12
  2. Notice the second half of Job's statement in Job 42:2—You can do all things and no thought or purpose of yours can be thwarted (Amp). Knowing this face about God gives us peace of mind.
- B. To appreciate this aspect of God's bigness (the fact that no purpose of His can be thwarted) you must know what Gods' ultimate purpose is. You must see the big picture.
1. All of us want to know our purpose: Why are we here? What are we supposed to do with our life? Sadly, many of us lack knowledge on this vitally important topic and are the worse for it.
    - a. Much of the preaching and teaching we hear about our purpose and our destiny is not biblical / because the church has been influenced by 20<sup>th</sup> century American ideas of success.
      1. We've been infected by the idea that we're all born to be great, meaning we're here to change the world—to be the CEO of a worldwide company, to write the greatest book or song ever written, to discover the cure for cancer, to have a ministry that wins a million souls for Jesus.
      2. There's nothing wrong with any of those goals. However, if your only source of information about your destiny was the Bible you would never draw those conclusions about your purpose.
      3. Most people live ordinary, mundane lives. We go to school, go to work, mow the lawn, wash the dishes, feed the kids, and change the oil in our car. Then we're plagued with thoughts such as: What have I have I done with my life? I've failed God. I haven't fulfilled my destiny.
    - b. What is our purpose—according to the Bible? Rom 8:28 says that all things work together for good for those who love God and are called *according to His purpose*. The next verse (Rom 8:29) clearly states our purpose. Our purpose predates this present life and will outlast this life.
      1. Your purpose is to become God's son or daughter through faith in Christ and then be changed progressively by His Spirit working in you, making you more and more Christ-like in character and power, holiness and love until you are fully conformed to His image.
      2. Jesus is the pattern for God's family. Jesus is fully God become fully man without ceasing to be God. While on earth, He did not live as God. He lived as a man in dependence on God His Father. In doing so, He showed us what it means to be a son of God. (lessons for another day)
      3. You don't become Jesus. You become the you that you were always meant to be, and then you accurately represent Him to your little corner of the world as you live your ordinary, mundane, problem-filled life. As you do, God causes everything to serves His ultimate purpose for you.
  2. God's ultimate purpose for us is bigger than this life. This doesn't mean that God isn't concerned about what is going on in our lives—because He is. But we must understand that the Lord puts off short- term blessing (ending all troubles immediately) for long-term eternal results.

- a. God deals in both short-term and long-term provision as He uses the realities of life in a fallen world for maximum good to as many people as possible. Short-term provision includes life's necessities.
  1. God's long-term provision involves His Omniscience or His All-knowingness. God knows what is going to happen before it happens. He is therefore able to use events—even those He does not orchestrate or approve of—and cause them to serve His purposes of good (short-term and long-term) for His creation. He is able to bring genuine good out of real evil. Rom 8:28
  2. God doesn't need evil in order to do good. But this is a tremendous, peace-inspiring promise to those of us who live in a fallen world filled with troubles and tribulation.
- b. Consider Joseph (Gen 37-50). God, in His All-knowingness, saw where Joseph's brother's wicked actions would lead when they sold him into slavery. Joseph ended up second in command in Egypt in charge of a food distribution program that saved multitudes from starvation in a time of famine.
  1. This included Joseph's own family—the line through which Jesus came into this world—along with countless idol-worshipping heathens who heard about the True God, Jehovah, through Joseph's ordeal. This is future provision, reaching down to today and beyond, contributing to the fulfillment of God's ultimate purpose: to have a family of sons like Jesus.
  2. God was with Joseph throughout his ordeal, providing him with what he needed to survive and even flourish in the midst of it. God got him through until He got him out—present provision.
- c. God's present purpose in the earth is not to make this life the highlight of our existence, but rather to draw all men to Him so that they can become sons and daughters through faith in Christ.
  1. I'm not saying that there is no help or deliverance in this life. But we get robbed of peace in the because our mind is filled with questions: Why did this happen? Why doesn't God stop all the suffering? What is God doing? We must be able to accurately address these issues.
  2. Bad stuff happens because that's life in a sin cursed earth. Why doesn't God stop it all? (This is a lesson for another day, but you have no idea what He does stop before it gets to you.)
    - A. The Lord is going to stop all the suffering in connection with the Second Coming of Jesus (Rev 21:4). People really do have free will, and with free will comes the consequences of choices made going all the way back to Adam. God doesn't stop freewill.
    - B. But God bigger!! None of it takes Him by surprise. He is able to put His plan on top of the plans of wicked men and causes it all to serve His ultimate purpose for a family of sons like Jesus (Eph 1:11). And He gets us through until He gets us out.
3. There is more to life than just this life. We need to live with the awareness that the greater part of life is ahead, first in the present Heaven and then on this earth made new (lessons for another day). Rom 8:18
  - a. The apostle Paul had this eternal perspective and it enabled him to live an incredibly difficult life in peace and victory. He was able to call his many hardships momentary and light. II Cor 4:17
  - b. He knew that in comparison to eternity even a lifetime of hardship is miniscule. His troubles didn't weigh him down because he knew that they were producing eternal results (are winning for us a permanent, glorious and solid reward all out of proportion to our pain (Phillips)).
  - c. You may be thinking: Of course Paul's life produced eternal results because he was the great apostle Paul. But my ordinary, mundane life doesn't do that. Consider these thoughts.
    1. The greatest call on Paul's life—the purpose for which he was created—was and is the same one that you have—to be a son of God that is conformed to the image of Christ. Phil 3:11-14
    2. Col 3:22-24—Paul told slaves that their lives are praiseworthy and produce results. He instructed them to do their work as unto the Lord with the knowledge that they would receive the reward of their inheritance from Him in the life after this life. (lessons for another day)
  - d. The Bible gives numerous examples of ordinary people who lived mundane lives. But their lives produced eternal results that they were unaware of because God was at work behind the scenes.
    1. I Sam 20:36-40—Unbeknownst to him, Jonathan's arrow carrier communicated a vital message to David while picking up arrows—a message that warned David to flee for his life. Had Saul killed David at that point, the redemptive line through which Jesus was prophesied to come

would have ended without God's purpose being fulfilled.

2. I Kings 17:1-7—In a time of severe famine ravens brought Elijah bread to eat. Someone baked the bread that kept the prophet alive. Had Elijah died at this point, the knowledge of the true God in Israel would have been wiped out by Baal worship.
3. The list of unnamed people who were woven into God's redemptive plan is long: Someone raised the donkey Jesus rode into Jerusalem on. Someone made the Cross He was crucified on, the robe the soldiers gambled for. All were prophesied and all played into God's plan.

C. We get robbed of peace of mind because we don't have this eternal perspective. When we don't see change in our immediate situation, we presume that God is not helping us. We get discouraged and even angry. God helps us in this life, but His help looks different in each situation. Consider several examples.

1. In 586 BC Israel was conquered by Babylon. The nation had abandoned God to worship idols and was consequently defenseless. All but the poorest people were taken back to Babylon as captives.

a. In Babylon, three princes of Israel—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—were thrown into a fiery furnace for refusing to bow down and worship King Nebuchadnezzar's golden statue. Dan 3

1. The princes were brought before the King who chided: What god can save you? Their answer: We don't have to defend ourselves. God is able to deliver us; even if He doesn't, we won't bow.
2. They knew they would be delivered either way—if they lived or died—because there is life after this life. They knew that what matters most is the life after this life. They knew that even death isn't bigger than God so they had peace in the face of a huge trial.
3. Even though the men went into the fire, they were delivered. Their deliverance came in the form of preservation in the midst of the fire. They came out unscathed. v19-27

b. In this we see answers to questions that rob us of peace of mind. We see short-term and long-term provision. We see God maximizing the realities of life in a sin cursed earth for eternal purposes.

1. Why were these three men taken to Babylon in the first place when they clearly were not guilty of idol worship? They didn't deserve the calamity that came to their country because of other people who chose to worship false gods. And why didn't God keep them out of the furnace?
2. God saw a way to maximize the circumstances and add to His family. King Nebuchadnezzar saw God (Preincarnate Jesus) in the fire with the princes. He knew their God had done the impossible, prompting him to praise God and issue a decree that no one in his kingdom could speak against the God of these men. Then he promoted the three princes. v28-30
3. Nebuchadnezzar eventually acknowledged God as the True God (Dan 4:34-37). Would that have happened had the three princes not been taken to Babylon or thrown into the fiery furnace?

A. What kind of seed was planted in the King when he saw God in the flames with the Hebrew princes? How many thousands of people throughout Nebuchadnezzar's empire were influenced by his testimony? How many people were added to God's family through this?

B. Do you think that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—who are enjoying the wonders of the life to come—would change anything about what happened to them?

c. I realize that this is hard to relate to because we aren't facing death in a fiery furnace. It's our job or our family or our neighbors, etc. that plague us. But there is a principle here that can encourage us.

1. God works in our lives by His grace through our faith. Present provision comes to us by His grace through our faith, our confidence in God's faithfulness to keep His Word to us.
  - A. We try to believe God, stand on His Word, claim the promises (all the things we've been told to do). But it's not an expression of our faith in God. It's a technique to get help.
  - B. It's fear masquerading as faith because, out of the corner of our eye, we see the monster in the closet—that worst case scenario. What if this doesn't work the way I want it to?
2. This incident in Dan 3 assures us that even if the worst case scenario happens—it's not bigger than God. The princes were not afraid of the worst case possibility—being thrown in the fire.
  - A. There's peace in being able to look at the worst thing that can happen in your situation and

realize that it isn't bigger than God and nothing can thwart His ultimate plan and purpose.

B. God's message to His people in this incident is: If you stay true to Me, I'll stay true to you. I will be with you and get you through until I get you out. I will work this for maximum good—short-term and long-term.

d. We have hope even in the face of impossible, irreversible circumstances—and that certainty gives us confidence and peace now. God's plans and purposes cannot be thwarted.

1. Job 19:25-26—Job got his health back. But he still got old and died (as do we all). Yet he knew that he had a future and a hope because of God's plan to have a forever family. Job knew that he would one day return to this earth to live with His Redeemer forever.

2. Gen 50:24—Although much was restored to Joseph by the end of his ordeal, he never went back to his homeland. But he made his family swear to take his bones with them when they returned home. When Joseph's body is raised from the dead, he will stand in his home land.

3. II Sam 12:23—When David's infant son died he knew that it was a temporary separation. The child couldn't return to him, but he knew that he would one day go to be with him.

2. Jer 29:11 is a favorite verse: For I know the thoughts and plans that I have for you says the Lord, thoughts and plans for welfare and peace, and not for evil, to give you hope in your final outcome (Amp).

a. Many stand on that verse as their promise that they are going to find a mate, or have a dream house, or get that promotion on the job (and are disappointed when they don't get these things).

1. I don't want to limit God in anyone's life. A mate or a dream house or a job promotion may be part of His short-term provision for you—but, maybe not. That's not the idea in this verse.

2. This verse makes a much greater promise. No matter what you face in life, no matter the loss or calamity, there is hope in your final outcome. That's future, long-term provision.

b. Let's consider the context of Jer 29:11. This promise was given to Israel when they were about to be overrun by Babylon because of their persistent, unrepentant idol-worship.

1. Their nation would be destroyed and they would be taken away as captives for the rest of their lives. The Babylonian captivity lasted seventy years (Jer 29:10). Most of them would die in Babylon. Yet they were not without hope because of God's long-term provision.

A. Some returned to Canaan after seventy years to rebuild their society. But it never reached its former glory. And they remained under foreign control, a conquered people, until Rome destroyed their nation and they were scattered again in 70 AD.

B. This promise looks beyond this present life to the life after this life. God will come to live with His redeemed family in His kingdom on this earth after it has been made new and delivered from every trace of sin, corruption, and death (lots of lessons for another day).

2. Jeremiah the prophet was sent to Israel in the final days before destruction came. His message was: Turn back to God and save your nation. Most didn't listen and destruction came.

A. Yet there was hope in this irreversible circumstance. You may recall that God instructed Jeremiah to buy land in Israel because people would one day live there again. Jer 32:1-27

B. Jeremiah is an example of one who proclaimed that nothing too is difficult for God when he was facing the complete destruction of life as he knew it.

C. Along with the promise of long-term provision, God gave His people short-term provision. He told them to live in a way that would provide them with peace in captivity. Jer 29:4-7

c. God didn't orchestrate any of these circumstances (idol-worship of His own people, wickedness of the conquering Babylonians) but He saw a way to use it for good and work His salvation in the earth.

1. God was able to give the idol-worshipping Babylonians an effective witness of Himself through His care of His people while they were in Babylon. (There are other examples besides this.)

2. Israel's captivity cured them of idolatry. They never again worshiped idols. The Redeemer's line was preserved—long term provision for all of us. God's purposes can't be thwarted.

D. Conclusion: Ps 74:12—Yet God my King is from of old working salvation in the midst of the earth (ESV).