

Seeing God in a Crisis
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We're in a sermon series entitled: 20/20 Vision – Seeing God's Plan for Your Life. I was working on a message this week on Seeing God's Plan for your Family – but I didn't have peace about it. So I prayed and felt led to preach on Seeing God in a Crisis.

I want to remind you that God has a plan for your future. That has not changed because of the coronavirus! God is still on the throne and He is still sovereign and He is still working all things after the counsel of His will and He is still working all things out for your good!

If you are wondering how that can be, then consider the story of Joseph. God used the crises in his life – including being sold into slavery and wrongly imprisoned - so that His plan for the Israelites would be fulfilled. At the end of it all, Joseph said that even what the enemy meant for harm, God used for good!

We are in a global crisis right now with the spread of the coronavirus. We are in a health crisis, a financial crisis and a spiritual crisis as we are fighting a spiritual battle against the spirit of fear.

Before I get to far into this - I want to define crisis. The word crisis is a Latinized form of a Greek word that means to judge, or to decide.

A crisis is more than a stressful time in life.

A crisis is not just having a few problems that you might get around to taking care of sometime.

A crisis is a dangerous situation in life when a solution is needed quickly.

A crisis is a dramatic emotional or circumstantial upheaval in your life.

A crisis is a crucial decision point, a turning point.

And the decisions made in the crisis will determine our futures! That's why we need to be people of the Word and people of prayer! We need God's wisdom all the time – but especially in times of crisis. That's why I love Jehoshaphat's prayer when he was in a major crisis because 2 enemies of Israel were coming against them at the same time. 2 Chronicles 20:12 says Jehoshaphat prayed this:

We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you.

I can't tell you how many times I've prayed that in times of crisis.

Now – this teaching today is not just about the coronavirus crisis. We can experience all kinds of crises in life. Let me give you some examples:

- A crisis is when you've spent a lifetime building a career and the economy tanks and you get laid off.

- A crisis is when a family member dies suddenly in an accident.
- A crisis is when you go to the doctor for a routine checkup and he says, “I found something that doesn’t look good.”
- A crisis is when your teen-aged child runs away.
- A crisis is when you’ve been married for 20 years and one day your spouse says, “I don’t love you anymore. I want out.”

I’ve been around long enough to have faced many crisis times myself. I’ve been pastoring long enough to have faced all these issues with church members at some time.

And I’ve seen people go through crises different ways. I’ve actually seen some people make their tough times tougher. How? By the way they respond.

Tough times become tougher when we try to go through it our way, rather than God’s way.

Tough times become tougher when we turn against God rather than turn to God.
Tough times become tougher when we respond in fear rather than faith!

Listen! Don’t let an external crisis become an internal crisis!
Don’t let the crisis around you become a crisis within you!
Don’t let a crisis – even a grave crisis – become a faith crisis!

In order to go through crisis times in faith, we must change the way we think about crisis times. James 1:2-4 says:

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

I know it’s hard to do this in times of crisis like this. But we can grow spiritually in crisis times. Trees only develop deep roots when they go through windy times and dry times. It’s the same in life.

To develop faith for tough times, you must have some tough times.
You’ll never know God as your deliverer until you need deliverance.
You’ll never know God as your comforter until you need comfort.
You’ll never be transformed in the storm until you go through a storm.

John 6 tells of when Jesus multiplied bread to feed thousands of people.
John 6:15-21 says:

Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make Him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by Himself. When evening came, His disciples went down to the lake, where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. A strong wind was

blowing and the waters grew rough. When they had rowed three or three and a half miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were terrified. But He said to them, "It is I; don't be afraid." Then they were willing to take Him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.

As I studied this – I was intrigued by that last verse. I looked it up in a lot of different versions and they say things like: at once – in an instant – the boat reached the shore. All the commentators agree this was a miracle. After all – the lake is 7 miles wide and they were out in the middle.

They were slowly struggling to get to their destination, but when Jesus got in the boat – the Amplified Version says –

And immediately they reached the shore toward which they had been slowly making their way.

So – we are believing for a miraculous sudden end to the coronavirus. But there's some things I want us to learn from this:

1- Jesus sent His disciples into the storm

Matthew's account of this says in Matthew 14:22

Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of Him to the other side...

That story ends with the disciples learning about faith. Why does God allow us to go through storms? There's no one single answer to that – but let me show you some things.

There are 4 major stories in the Bible that involved storms at sea. And people went through these storms – or times of crisis – for different reasons. For instance, Jonah went through a storm because of his own disobedience. So some storms are of our own making - our disobedience can cause storms in life. The only way out of those storms is repentance.

Interestingly enough – other people's disobedience can cause us to be in a storm. The sailors on Jonah's boat were in a storm of Jonah's making.

The Apostle Paul was in a similar situation on a boat headed for Rome. He got a word from God that they needed to wait and not sail at that time or there would be disaster. They chose not to listen to Paul and they ended up shipwrecked.

Paul had done nothing wrong. He gave the sailors a word from the Lord not to sail – but they disobeyed. Their disobedience got them into a storm and a shipwreck.

Paul was subjected to the storm because of other people's disobedience.

So, Jonah got into a storm for disobeying the word of God.

Paul got into a storm when others disobeyed the word of the Lord.

But the disciples got into a storm while obeying the word of the Lord.

This might surprise you – but you can be in the middle of a storm and in the perfect will of God at the same time!

We tend to think of storms as destructive, but when we are walking with God - storms can be instructive. We can be transformed in the storm! Please understand that all of us go through storms in life. Christians are not exempt from crisis times. Yes, God protects us. But tough times come to everyone. Accept it. Nobody has a problem free life or a trouble-free life. We should not be surprised by crises. 1 Peter 4:12-13 says:

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed.

You will never develop tough faith if you only believe God delivers us from tough times rather than understanding God also takes us through tough times for a purpose. That purpose is God's glory and our good.

Yes sometimes God delivers us *from* tough times – sometimes He takes us *through* tough times. We cannot allow ourselves to turn against God or think that He is not good when we go through tough times.

God is good when He delivers *from* the storm and God is good when He takes us *through* the storm! Think about it:

God did not deliver David from Goliath; He strengthened David to go through the battle.

God did not deliver Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego from the fire: He took them through the fire.

God did not deliver Noah from the flood: He took him through the flood.

There are times God may allow us to go through the flood and the fire. But the truth is God will be with us and the flood will not drown us and the fire will not burn us! We have God's promise on that in Isaiah 43:1-2

Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned.

Tough times come to everyone, but we need tough faith to believe that God will get us through. And not barely get us through.

I don't want to come through tough times having just barely survived!
 I don't want to come through deprived; I want to come through revived!
 I don't want to come out striving – I want to come out thriving!
 Storms come in everyone's life – but those who trust in God – come out transformed in the storm!

You choose how you respond to crisis. You can't choose everything that happens to you, but you can choose how you respond. What do you do when you face tough times?

Tough times prove the reality of our faith. When tough times come:
 You can respond in faith or in fear.
 You can respond by turning to God or turning from God.

I want to help you see God in a crisis. To do that, here's what we must realize:

2- Now only did Jesus send them – but Jesus saw them.

Jesus knew what the disciples were going through. He saw the storm and he saw them struggling. And He sees your storms and your struggles.

Some people ask, “Where was God during 9/11? Where was God when I lost my loved one? Where was God when I was in my storm, my crisis? Where is God during this coronavirus crisis?”

Think of it like this. Where was Jesus in this storm? He chose to enter into the storm for His disciples' sake. They didn't see Him at first – but He saw them!

And when we go through storms, sometimes it's hard to see God, but He sees us and He is there for us! He promised He would never leave you or forsake you. He sees what you are going through and He promised not to allow you to go through more than you can bear.

Jesus sent His disciples and Jesus saw His disciples – just like He sent you and He sees you! And here's the great thing:

3- Jesus CAME to Them

Now – I don't know why Jesus sometimes waits until we're about to go under before He comes over! I just know – at the right time – He will show up! A God who sees your storm is also going to come to you IN that storm.

We must have faith that Jesus sees us and is there for us! Jesus was not afraid of this storm. Why? He knew His purpose – He knew His death would take place on a cross, not on a boat. So He had peace in the midst of the storm.

You see, storms reveal our level of trust in the Lord.

If you can't look the darkest storm in the face and not rail against God, or blame God – your view of God still needs some work. We've got to come to the place of knowing the heart of God so well that we know we will come out transformed in the storm.

God has a plan for us – a future and a hope for us – if Jesus said we're going to the other side – bank on it – the boat's not going down – we're going through to the other side.

Paul's storm ended up in shipwreck. Yet God used that in a mighty way. God used Paul to heal the sick and preach the good news on the island of Malta.

We can trust God that even when we get into storms for reasons outside of our control – He will bring good out of it! We may end up somewhere different from where we thought we were headed, but God brings good out of it anyway. It all depends on how you look at it. You can look at what you've lost or what you've gained. You can choose to give up or go on.

The disciples feared needlessly because they did not trust Jesus' words. If they had just thought for a moment, they would have remembered that He had said, "Go to the other side." He didn't say, "Go out to the middle of the lake and be drowned."

They could have said to the raging waves, "You can do us no harm, for Jesus Christ sent us! He said we're going across, so we're going across." Would they have made it? Yes. Will you make it? Yes. You need to say to your storm – I'm going across! I'm not going down.

So, what's rocking your boat? What's flooding your ship? What kind of storm are you going through? Is it a strained relationship? Is it a financial difficulty? Is it a health problem? Is it a secret sin? An emotion that's overwhelming you? Guilt? Or grief? Or anger? Or bitterness? Or jealousy? Or worry? Or fear over the coronavirus?

Maybe you feel like the circumstances of life are tossing you back and forth and you're thinking, "I'm going under! I'm not going to make it!" If that's the way you feel, then God wants to say to you today, "No matter how big the storm is, I see you and I'm with you."

Only Jesus Christ can calm the storm in your life right now. Sometimes Jesus calms the storm, sometimes He lets the storm rage and calms His child. Either way – we get peace.

No matter what we go through, we need to hang on to Romans 8:28 which says:

All things work together for good to them that love God.

Now, things in themselves are not always that good- but God works it all together for our good.

For instance – eating a pound of flour is not good. Eating a pound of sugar is not good. Drinking a bottle of vanilla extract is not good. Eating a bowl full of raw eggs is not good. Eating several sticks of butter is not good. Eating any of those things by themselves will make you sick. But if a master chef mixes all these ingredients together – the result is a good thing called a pound cake.

I'll never forget the day when I was a boy attending our church's picnic. We were out in the country in Mississippi and those women could cook. Chicken – potato salad – black-eyed peas - rolls and cornbread. But that day I discovered the joys of pound cake. It's been my favorite cake ever since. What makes it good is not all the ingredients on their own. What makes it good is a cook mixing all the ingredients together and making something good out of things that are not so good on their own.

And there are experiences in life that taken by themselves are not good – but God is at work mixing and blending them all together for your good.

There are experiences in life that are as fragile as eggs.
Those experiences can break us.

There are experiences in life that are as sweet as sugar.
Those experiences make life fun.

There are times in life where the heat gets turned up and we melt like butter.
Those times refine us.

And God takes all those times – the brokenness and the sweetness and He mixes it all together. Those are times when we feel mixed up or messed up. But when God is finished – all that brokenness and sweetness and mixed up mess all work together for our good!

So - I want to encourage you today to see God in this crisis.
Life may be fragile right now and you're barely holding it together.
Life may be sweet right now and you're living your dream.
Life may be beating you up right now and you're down or confused.
Life may be painful right now and you're discouraged and defeated.
I came to tell somebody, today, don't give up.

God promised to work everything together for your good, so if it's not good yet,
God's not done yet!

God promised it will all work out in the end, so if it's not working yet, it's not the end yet! You might be in a storm, but God sees you and He is there for you!