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Baptist Church

GOD IS IN CONTROL

Years ago a military officer and his wife were aboard a ship that was caught in a raging ocean storm. Seeing the frantic look in her eyes, the man tried unsuccessfully to allay her fears. Suddenly she grasped his sleeve and cried, "How can you be so calm?" He stepped back a few feet and drew his sword. Pointing it at her heart, he said, "Are you afraid of this?" Without hesitation she answered, "Of course not!" "Why not?" he inquired. "Because it's in your hand, and you love me too much to hurt me." To this he replied, "I know the One who holds the winds and the waters in the hollow of His hand, and He will surely care for us!"

Today is Palm Sunday. If you were to ask me a few months ago if I would be standing in an empty church talking to people at home on Palm Sunday I would have thought you were crazy! The last few weeks have been crazy, and there does not yet seem to be any idea of what is coming next. We do not know what the future holds, but we do know who holds the future.

**Romans 8:31-39** What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? 33 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36 As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I want to remind us of three truths this morning;

1. God’s Power – (31) who can defeat us?

You hear a lot today about the devastating power of the corona virus. As you look online you see the number of people that the virus has killed. That number keeps increasing.

I just want to remind us all today that no matter how powerful you think the virus may be, God is more powerful, and God is in control. God is our defender.

In 2 Kings chapter 6 we read the story of Elisha. The king of Aram was wanting to attack Israel, but every time he tried the prophet Elisha knew what was happening and would warn the king of Israel. The king of Aram was so frustrated that he sent his army to Elisha’s town to find him and kill him.

**2 Kings 6:15-18** When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. "Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" the servant asked. 16 Don't be afraid, the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." 17 And Elisha prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes so he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. 18 As the enemy came down toward him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, "Strike these people with blindness." So he struck them with blindness, as Elisha had asked.

This is an amazing story. You wake up in the morning and you walk outside and see an army with horses and chariots are surrounding you ready to kill you. Would you start to panic? I know I would. Elisha just calmly says “don’t be afraid.” Elisha say the situation from God’s perspective.

We need to pray during times of crisis that God would open our eyes and remind us that he is in control, not the enemy. God has ultimate power. What I love about this story is not that God blinded the eyes of the enemy. The story continues;

2Ki 6:19-23 Elisha told them, "This is not the road and this is not the city. Follow me, and I will lead you to the man you are looking for." And he led them to Samaria. 20 After they entered the city, Elisha said, "LORD, open the eyes of these men so they can see." Then the LORD opened their eyes and they looked, and there they were, inside Samaria. 21 When the king of Israel saw them, he asked Elisha, "Shall I kill them, my father? Shall I kill them?" 22 Do not kill them, he answered. "Would you kill men you have captured with your own sword or bow? Set food and water before them so that they may eat and drink and then go back to their master." 23 So he prepared a great feast for them, and after they had finished eating and drinking, he sent them away, and they returned to their master. So the bands from Aram stopped raiding Israel's territory.

After the army is struck blind Elisha leads them to the city of Samaria. Once inside the city walls and surrounded, God opens their eyes again and they realize that they are surrounded. They have no hope of escape. They were expecting death, and instead they are given a great feast. Instead of death, they saw blessing.

This is the power of God. He can take the most difficult situation and make it a blessing. Even something like a deadly virus that kills thousands of people can be turned into a blessing with God. That is because God is in control. He is more powerful than anything else.

An old country preacher was challenged by a highly educated agnostic. The skeptic asked, “Why do you Christians constantly claim victory in the battle for eternity?” The old preacher replied: “Well, it says in the beginning of my Bible that God was in charge when time started up. Then I flip over to the end of my Bible and read that God will be in charge when time runs down. So I figure that if God’s in charge at the beginning and the ending, there’s nobody else, in between big enough to “whoop Him!”

2. God’s Provision – (33) who can deny us?

God is our defender, but He is also our provider. People are worried these days about having what they need. You go to the grocery store and you see empty shelves. You start wondering if you are going to have enough. If you are going to have the provisions that you need to get through the crisis.

God is not only our defender, he is our provider. Patrick spoke a few weeks ago from the Lord’s Prayer about the fact that God supplies our daily bread. He knows what we need and He provides it for us. It says in verse 32 that god has graciously given us all things. If any charges are brought against us, God has provided for our defense. He has given us everything we need. We do not have to be afraid.

In 2 Chronicles we read the story of a vast army that came against Israel. It says that the people came to Jerusalem the seek help from God. King Jehoshaphat stood in front of the temple and on behalf of the people prayed a powerful prayer;

**2 Chronicles 20:9** 'If calamity comes upon us, whether the sword of judgment, or plague or famine, we will stand in your presence before this temple that bears your Name and will cry out to you in our distress, and you will hear us and save us.' … 12 … we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you."

It was a simple but profound prayer. God heard their prayers and responded;

2Ch 20:15 … Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the LORD says to you: 'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's.

King Jehoshaphat did not know how God was going to save them. He simply prayed that God would save them, and God honored their prayer of faith. They ended up killing one another, so Israel did nothing. God does not ask us to understand his provision, simply to ask for it.

One of C. S. Lewis’ books from the Chronicles of Narnia is the book The Silver Chair. In the book, the children’s faith is tested. Jill and Eustace were given signs by which they could fulfill their mission in Narnia according to the Word of Aslan rather than the appearances of the world. But by the end of the book they have muffed every sign and now face a strange man under deep enchantment. He is bound by cords, desperate to be freed, and begs (while foaming at the mouth) for them to show mercy and untie him.

They think the man is crazy and that he is the enemy so they refuse to untie him. Then he says, “I adjure you to set me free. By all fears and all loves… by the great Lion, by Aslan himself, I charge you!” Now Aslan the Lion had told them, “You will know the lost prince by this: he will be the first person you have met who will ask you to do something in my name, in the name of Aslan.”

So now they are confused. “Could Aslan have really meant them to untie anyone – even a lunatic – who asked it in his name? Jill says, “Oh, if only we knew!” Puddleglum says “I think we do know.” Eustace asks “Do you mean you think everything will come right if we do untie him?” Puddleglum’s response is profound: “I don’t know about that. You see, Aslan didn’t tell what would happen. He only told what to do. That fellow will be the death of us once he’s up, I shouldn’t wonder. But that doesn’t let us off following the sign.” He did not tell us what would happen; he only told us what to do.

They did not know what following Aslan’s instructions would do. It might save them. It might destroy them. All they knew is what they had been told. They did not know what would happen. They only knew what they should do. This is faith. It is trusting in God even when we do not see what He is doing in our lives.

3. God’s Presence – (35) who can divide us?

God is our defender and provider. This passage also remind us that no matter what happens that God is always with us. We talk a lot these days about social distancing. While we may not be physically near to one another for the next few weeks, we are never far from God. There is nothing that can separate us from God.

Rom 8:38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. There is nothing in all creation that can separate us from God’s love. No person, no power and no pestilence. Nothing. God is with us.

Remember that story when the disciples were crossing the lake and a big storm came us? These men were fishermen. They understood the danger a storm like that was. They were afraid. Then what happens?

Mat 8:25-26 The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" 26 He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.

You do not have t be afraid of the storm when Jesus is in the boat, because Jesus is greater than the storm. The safest place on the planet earth to be is in the boat with Jesus. The safest place on earth to be is in the center of God’s will.

I remember back in 1995 when Naomi and I made the decision to move to Kuwait. Petra was only a few months old at the time. Kuwait was just getting over the devastation caused by the Gulf War. Everyone thought that we were crazy, taking a baby and moving into a war zone. It was the knowledge of God’s presence that helped us. It was understanding that, if this is where God has called us, than He would protect us and watch over us.

I will never forget when we landed in Kuwait. It had been a very long flight and Naomi and I were exhausted. Petra was screaming her head off as we walked through the airport. It was hot and unfamiliar. We got to the line for customs and it went on forever. We knew that it would take hours to get though it. I remember at that moment thinking “Oh God, what have you gotten us into now?” Just then I looked up and saw a familiar face coming towards me. On an earlier visit I had met a guy from the church who worked for the US embassy. He walked up to us and said “come with me.” We walked past everyone right through customs. He just flashed his embassy badge and what should have taken hours was over in seconds. In a few minutes we were in an air-conditioned car off to our new home. On the way I felt God say to my spirit “See, I told you. I got this …”

**Psalms 91:1-9** He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. 2 I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." 3 Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. 4 He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. 5 You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, 6 nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday. 7 A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. 8 You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked. 9 If you make the Most High your dwelling-- even the LORD, who is my refuge

God is our refuge. He is our strength. We can trust in the Power of God, the provision of God and the presence of God. He has promised us;

**Isaiah 43:2** 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; the flames will not set you ablaze.

With Jesus in the boat you have nothing to fear. The safest place on earth to be is in the center of God’s will. But that begs the question, are you in the center of God’s will? If Jesus is not in the boat then you SHOULD fear the storm. Without Jesus in your life then you missing out on God’s power, provision and presence in your life.

I believe that perhaps the lesson that this pandemic is teaching us is the simple truth that everything we have can be taken from us in seconds. We think our own position or possessions can save us? We think we are safe? It is an illusion. We think that Covid-19 is bad? There are far worse things out there than it. Life is fragile and has no guarantees.

There is only one way to be truly safe, and that is to make the Most High your dwelling. To give your life to Jesus so that your life is hidden in Him. You do not have to be in a church to do that, you can do it in your living room or wherever you are hearing this from today. It is simply a matter of confessing that you do not have it all together. Ask Jesus to become Lord of life and accept the gift of salvation that He offers.

It is God’s power, God’s provision and God’s presence that we are hanging on to in these days.

A Scottish preacher named McLeod Campbell was asked by a friend, “Tell me, how do you know that you have always got a hold of God?” He answered, “I don’t always know I’ve got a hold of God. But I DO ALWAYS KNOW that He always has a hold of me!”

I once heard that the great missionary David Livingstone was exploring an area of Africa. On January 14th, 1856 he wrote in his journal that he was surrounded by hostile people. The war drums were beating and it was sure that he would be attacked the next morning. And this is what he wrote "Felt much turmoil of spirit in prospect of having all of my plans for the welfare of this great region and this teaming population ended by my death tomorrow." He was sitting at his campfire alone and a hostile and unfamiliar place. And then he wrote this, "but I read that Jesus said, 'All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth, go ye therefore and teach all nations, and lo I am with you always even to the end of the world.'" And then David Livingstone wrote in his journal, "This is the word of God and I know it to be true." So that's the end to it. He just simply said, "Jesus has said, I'll never leave you." And then he wrote this, He said, "I will not cross timidly tomorrow as I had intended. Why should such a man as I flee? I shall take observations for latitude and longitude tonight, though it may be the

last, I feel quite calm now. Thank you God."

He was alone and in danger, but in the midst of that darkness he knew that God was with him. That knowledge changed everything. Jesus told us that He would never leave us or forsake us. Do you believe that? Let me ask that in a different way. Are you living your life in a way that shows you believe that?

**John 14:27** Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

My prayer for us this Easter season is that, although we may be socially distant, may we be spiritually closer. Closer to Jesus and closer to one another.

This coming Friday at 11:00 am we want to have a Good Friday service, but do it a little differently. We are going to be ending the service with a time of communion. So how do you celebrate communion in your own homes? Make sure that you have some crackers and juice ready.

Remember that the elements that we use for communion are only reminders of the real thing. Jesus took the two most common things of his day (bread and wine) and used them to represent His body and blood. Throughout history churches have used different variants of these things. When the Vineyard church first started, John Wimber wanted to emphasize this point so they would serve pizza and coke for communion. What you have is not the important thing, it is simply that you have something ready to take as we celebrate communion together.

God is in control. Remember that in the coming weeks. No matter what happens. No matter how bad things seem, God is in control. If you have never accepted Jesus into your life you can do that right now.