

*During Pandemic, Still My Strong Deliverer*  
2 Chronicles 7:13-15

Well, as expected, the coronavirus continues to dominate the news. Statistics, measures being taken, directives to our communities continue to be at the forefront. My focus today will not be to restate what you have undoubtedly heard – perhaps multiple times over. But I do want us to consider how we can and should respond as the people of God and the body of Christ.

The Bible has a lot to say about crisis, and we can draw counsel from the word of God as to how we should respond to the situation. So, what should we personally do about the current crisis?

### I. EXERCISE PRUDENCE

When Israel came to Canaan in Numbers 13, God had promised to give them the land, and they were told to possess it. When the twelve spies came back from searching out Canaan, Caleb and Joshua insisted that they obey God and boldly enter the land. Doing that would have been an act of faith because God had told them to do it and had promised to be with them. It was an act of unbelief when the nation decided to not trust God and not do what He had told them to do. But the same action became presumption, not faith, when God said they would not enter the Promise Land, and they tried to do so on their own initiative. That was disastrous (Num. 14).

My point is this: In the absence of a divine command to do otherwise, we are to act w/ prudence. We do not act in *presumption*. Presumption is driven by subtle pride. Faith acts in humble obedience.

We should not presume to ask, “How can this be happening to us?” Belonging to God does not exempt us from human experience or adversity. God will care for us as we trust and obey Him. But we are still in mortal bodies. We are looking forward to being clothed with a glorified body. In the meantime, we do some groaning along with the rest of creation (Rom. 8:23).

Presumption is one extreme. The other extreme is *panic*. But “*God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, love, and self-control.*” (2 Tim. 1:7).

Listen to David’s confidence in Ps. 27:1-5: “*The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When the enemy advances against me to devour me, my heart will not fear ... One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on*

*the beauty of the LORD ... For in the day of trouble, he will keep me safe ... he will hide me in the shelter of his presence, and set my feet upon the rock."*

If you feel yourself becoming anxious, go to passages like this and let the Holy Spirit bring assurance and comfort to your heart. The fruit of the Spirit it is not fear, but peace. We can pray with assurance just like the Prophet Isaiah – *"You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are stayed on you, because they trust in you. Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD himself is the Rock eternal, He is our everlasting strength."* (26:3-4). We do not have to react to problems the same way the world reacts ... The Lord is our peace and our strength. Put your trust in him!

## II. SEEK THE LORD.

Every crisis is a call to seek God! Sometimes events happen as a wake-up call. Consider Israel. Even as God's chosen people, there were times in Israel's history when they become wayward – when they would *presume* upon His goodness—even delving into idolatry. But rather than wiping them out for their disobedience, God would send enough trouble to get their attention.

Before Jerusalem was captured by Babylon in 586 BC (2 Kings 25), there were other attacks that should have served as warnings. Eleven years earlier Jerusalem was attacked & King Jehoiachin taken captive (2 Kings 24). Eight years prior to that, Babylon attacked and took away captives. Daniel was a part of that captivity. In between those events was opportunity to repent. God gave enough of a crisis to get their attention, then gave opportunity to seek Him and get things right.

Israel failed to seize those opportunities. And according to the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 1, their tragic history was recorded and preserved through the centuries for *us* – that we learn from their mistakes and choose to walk humbly before our God – in obedience, dependence, and love.

My greatest *concern* for our nation and world is that we would respond to the current crisis with all our physical and medical and professional resources ... but fail to seek the Lord through it. It is one thing to have confidence, trusting in the Lord. It is another to pridefully think *we* can handle the matter because of our great scientific, cultural and technological advancements.

I am thankful for the public declarations for national and state days of prayer – but we know that it must extend beyond that. We should and must be praying today for God's wisdom and protection. We should and must look to the Lord for victory and not assume that we can handle this with our own strength and know-how. [P]

Referring to the influenza pandemic of 1918, Richard Tow writes: “Prior to 1918, the world was boasting about its scientific achievements, especially in the field of medicine. For over a century, the booming science of medicine had gone from one triumph to another. Researchers had developed vaccines for smallpox, anthrax, rabies, meningitis ... The advances in microbiology had led to the thought of invincibility.”<sup>1</sup>

It was in that context that the world was hit with something they were ill-equipped to handle. It was near that time when people were boasting they had built a ship that could not sink. That ship was the Titanic and you know the rest of the story. “*Pride goes before destruction; a haughty spirit before a fall*” (Pr. 16:18). That principle holds true for nations just as it does for you/me.

Many of us have heard the call and promise of God recorded in 2 Chronicles 7:14. We get a better sense of the context for that verse when we read the verse that precedes it:

*"When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land, or send a plague among My people ... if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land."* (2 Chron. 7:13-15).

The passage begins with a situation in which trouble has come (in fact, the description of disaster is not that different than what we face in our own day). What is the response God is looking for?

(1) It begins with *humbling ourselves*. It may sound courageous to stand up to a crisis and say, “We can defeat this!” If we do that with the same mindset Caleb had outside Canaan, it’s a good thing. Caleb added to his boast, “*the Lord is with us*” (Num. 14:8). He preceded it with, “*If the Lord delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us.*”

This must be our mentality. In a crisis, we should be humbling ourselves, not boasting in our self-sufficiency. A pandemic should remind us of our mortality and our need for God.

(2) We must *pray*. Phil 4:6-7 instructs us: “*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*”

Here, we’re given the promise of peace if we will do what? Pray ... with *gratitude* for God’s loving mercy; and with *faith* as we pour out our petitions. Speak to God out of your dependence

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. Richard Tow, “A Christian Response to the Coronavirus Pandemic,” quoted from PBS: American Experience, “Influenza 1918”

upon Him. When the Church forsakes her calling to be a people of prayer, God uses the megaphone to get our attention and to call us back. Let's follow the example of the church through centuries past – when trouble comes, let us be a people of prayer for all the world to see.

Yes, I hope we all are thoroughly washing our hands; I hope we are avoiding public places. But that is not all I hope for. I hope we seek the Lord for His provision. We need His wisdom, His guidance, and His power in all things ... He can & will use this for the furtherance of the gospel.

(3) We must *seek His face*. We must seek a right relationship with God. It's not just that we tell Him what we want or need. We also submit ourselves to Him and pursue His will.

Back in 2 Chron. 7:14, did you catch the “If/then”? If we humble ourselves ... if we pray ... if we seek His face ... then our gracious God *will* hear and *will* answer! Our *Strong Deliverer* is the One who forgives our sin, who restores our lives, who heals our land. Consider the magnitude of that! He can heal the land infected by sickness! He can heal the land of economic chaos! He can heal the land where people cry out from the fringes! He can heal the land plagued by fear!

The danger is that we would look at the coronavirus with purely humanistic eyes. Most certainly, compassion for those suffering from the disease should be central in our response. But we must not think in purely humanistic terms; we must not leave God out of the picture.

As those who believe in a Sovereign God who has a perfect plan – *how is He calling His Church to live in such a time as this?* Perhaps this world-wide crisis is the opportunity of a lifetime. Oh, that multitudes would turn to Christ and find, not only temporal help, but *eternal hope!*

(4) The last condition in 2 Chron. 7:14 is that we would *turn from our wicked ways*. Your wicked ways may not be the same as mine. But they are all a departure from the commands of God.

In Amos 4, God pleads with His people: “*I withheld the rain when the harvest was still three months away, yet you have not returned to me ... I sent plagues among you as I did to Egypt, yet you have not returned to me ... You were like a burning stick snatched from the fire, yet you have not returned to me ...*” (Amos 4:7-11)

Can you hear the sadness of God's heart as He repeats the words, “Yet you have not returned to Me”? Some would argue that a good God would not allow such calamity. But the witness of Scripture is that it serves a vital purpose – it is designed to bring a wayward people back into

right relationship with the Creator who loves them/redeemed. Which brings us to our last point. What can Christians do in times of such crisis? We should *use prudence ... seek the Lord ...*

### III. TRUST THE DELIVERER

Like we looked at last week, the Shepherd who leads us to green pastures and still waters is the same Shepherd who leads us in the darkest of valleys. Our circumstances do not change the fact that He alone can lead us on the path of righteousness. If we trust Him in the calm, we will trust Him in the storm. For He is no less our rock! No less our shelter! No less our Strong Deliverer!

No, in times of crisis, we experience the reality in even greater potency! We still trust in His power. We still trust in His promise. We trust that, *in all things*, our great good God is *in fact* working for the good of those who love him and have been called according to his purpose.” (Rom. 8:28). We may not always understand it, we may not know how it’ll unfold in this life, but our Strong Deliverer is more than able to redeem any situation for His eternal purpose and our eternal good!

If a crisis causes people to turn to the Deliverer and receive eternal life, something beautiful beyond description has come out of it! It is often in times of trouble that people become more open to God. When those opportunities come, may we, by the grace of God, cast off our fears and set aside our self-interest, and proclaim the greatest of good news.

Would you pray with me that God would use us in this crisis to bring about a great harvest for His kingdom? Would you pray that this desperate world will encounter, in our lives, the living hope that is found in Christ alone? So ...

*Exercise Prudence* – in all your decisions and interactions.

*Seek the Lord* – Surrender your life and circumstances to Him – come to Him in humility, dependence, and love.

And most precious of all, *Trust your Strong Deliverer* – trust Him to watch over you, sustain you, and empower you to be one who shines forth, to a desperate world, the wondrous gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Would you pray with me?