

## God is my Refuge and Strength

09.05.2021

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Today is a stand alone message

It's not part of any series

I initially scheduled it that way because it was Labor Day weekend

And I know you people

All summer, you go to the lake and go to Disney and go to see grandma

And then the kids get back in school

And things start getting back to normal

And then we get to Labor Day

And you get a 3-day weekend

And you're like, it's been 2 weeks since we've been on vacation

We've got to get out of town

So we made today a stand-alone

But I'm glad we did because I have a very important discussion we need to have

You know, there's always something going on

Life has a way of throwing curveballs

And so there's always something

But the other day, it hit me

There are about a half-dozen items

That would normally be THE THING:

So you have the flooding in **Waverly** – which is horrendous

And **Hurricane Ida** that pounded New Orleans

All of the mess with **school board**

And the **masks**

And then, of course, you have the **virus** itself

In Tennessee, we recently passed last December so we now have more active cases than we've ever had

And the evacuation in **Afghanistan**

Which just seems to be getting worse by the day

Normally – any one of those items would be THE STORY

But today, it's just one of several

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On top of that

I've spoken with several families in the last few weeks

Who have very specific things in their own family

That are all-consuming

Health things

Job things

Things with their kids

And I know *that's* true for lots of us.

So I wanted to take a moment.

And bring some comfort from God's Word

**Psalm 46:1 - God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.**

God is our refuge

You can take shelter underneath His protection

God is also our strength

He will fight for you

He will go to battle for you

He will be your strength

**God is our "ever-present help" in times of trouble**

That phrase "ever-present" is fascinating to me

I spent a few minutes thinking about

What does it mean to be "ever-present"

God's always on-time

He's always relevant

He's ever-present

He's not ever *just* past

Or *just* future

He's always present

He's never absent

He's always present

He's an "ever-present help" in times of trouble

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And while the Hebrew word matsa doesn't ring any bells for us

I wonder if that's true for the ancient Jew

Back in the Garden of Eden

On day 6

God made all the animals

And then He made Adam

And He brought all the animals to Adam

So that Adam could name them

Which is cool

And we don't know for sure

But the picture I get has Adam there

By himself

With pairs of animals coming to be named

Kind of like Noah's ark 1,600 years later

Where animals come in pairs

2x2 – male & female

And Adam names each one

One pair after another

And the only one who doesn't have a partner

Is Adam

**The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone”... But for Adam no suitable helper *was found*. – Genesis 2:18-20**

Literally – “For Adam no suitable helper *was present*.”

**Psalm 46:1 - God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.**

This is the picture all through the Scriptures

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Look at this passage from the book of Lamentations

Lamentations, by the way

Is a book of lament

Written by Jeremiah the prophet

So it's dark

And raw & real

But catch his words

Because disasters and struggles and difficulties should draw us

Closer to God

Not further away

**Lamentations 3:19-21 - I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:**

This is powerful

He's not whitewashing his feelings

He's not saying "everything's dandy, praise the Lord"

He's saying "this hurts"

"It's painful"

Notice his words – "bitterness", "gall", "my affliction"

Also notice he's real about his crisis of faith

**"my wandering" {HIGHLIGHT}**

He said, I remember that well

But – yet

Feelings don't get to be in charge

Yet – this I call to mind and therefore

In response to that Truth he calls to mind

I have hope

What's he call to mind?

Verse 22:

**Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, (even though it feels overwhelming it's not) for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; (He is ever-present) great is your faithfulness.**

Disasters and struggles and difficulties should draw us

Closer to God

Not further away

And we've got our share right now

So as we face these things

Personally

And as you represent Jesus out in a world

That is facing all these same things

Without that ever-present help in times of trouble

## Word #1: Humility

Humility

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In Revelation 11

There's an end-times prophecy that baffled theologians for centuries

It's about 2 witnesses

Prophets

Who will pronounce judgment on the world

From the streets of Jerusalem

Revelation 11:7-8 says:

**Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them. Their bodies will lie in the public square of the great city—which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt—where also their Lord was crucified.**

So these two guys will get murdered in Jerusalem

This is a sign that we're in the very last days

But it's this next part that confused people

Verse 9:

**For three and a half days some from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial. The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth.**

Baffling

For hundreds of years

From the time John wrote this in the first century

Down through the ages

Theologians questioned

And sceptics mocked

The idea that the whole world would watch these two guys

Until the last couple of decades

When the whole world can watch events in real time

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We live in a time

When we are bombarded with bad news from all over the planet

All the time

**Put that list up again**

For most of human history

We, living in Spring Hill, TN



Wouldn't have ever known about Waverly or Ida or Afghanistan  
Over the last couple hundred years  
We'd have found out about those  
When our weekly newspaper was delivered  
Now our phones are dinging us with constant updates  
And add in social media  
Where we're connected to countless examples  
Of "friends" being upset or in need  
Story after story of people we'll never meet facing tragedy  
It's no wonder that mental health is in a free fall  
Anxiety, depression, and fear are all skyrocketing

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In 2018, the University of Pittsburgh

Divided a group of college students into 2 categories:

They asked the first group to limit their time on Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat

To 10 minutes / day on each platform

30 minutes total

The second group continued as usual

They rated both groups on loneliness, depression, and anxiety

After 3 weeks

They rated them again

The limited group showed "significant reductions" in all three

After only 3 weeks

As compared to the regular group

Is it possible that constant access to pain from around the world – and constant access to opinions from around the world – is not good for us?

The first word I want us to focus on is humility

Because I don't think we were designed to *oversee* this much

The first temptation ever recorded – “you can be like God”

Is playing itself out before our eyes

And it's not going well

You can't be like God

Me either

There's a gravitational pull

To put you in the center of your universe

Resist it

With humility

## **Word #2 – Comfort**

In John 14

Jesus is telling His disciples

That He's going to leave them

He would be arrested a few hours later

Then beaten and crucified

And He's preparing His friends  
For what's to come

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You know, that would really stink

If you're the disciples

Jesus is leaving

Just when you need Him the most

When they're watching the arrest and the mocking and the torture and the  
crucifixion

It would be so helpful to have Him there

When you're going through the hardest parts of this life

To have Jesus literally walk through that with you

Would bring such comfort

In the middle of all this discussion

About death and suffering

He says these words:

**I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a  
gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid. – John 14:27 (NLT)**

How can that be?

How can they have peace of mind & heart

If Jesus is leaving?

He tells them in the previous verse

This is verse 27

Look at verse 26:

**When the Father sends the *Advocate* as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you.**

They are at peace now

Because Jesus is there

They are not troubled or afraid now

Because Jesus is there

And when Jesus is not there

The Holy Spirit will be there as His representative

Verse 26 (NIV, NLT) translates that word as “advocate”

**Other translations say: Counselor (RSV), Helper (NASB, NKJV), Friend (MSG, NIrV)**

Or my favorite

**The Comforter (KJV)**

Jesus is literally saying

It’s gonna get bad

But “the Comforter’s” coming

So don’t be troubled

Or afraid

Go to God for comfort

Ask God for more of the comforter

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I think it's so cool

My brain works like this

We started this message

Talking about God as a refuge

Someone you can hide under

To cover you – like a warm blanket

And now we're asking God

To give you more of the comforter

You know – sometimes life can steal the covers

And you wake up cold and shivering

Feeling exposed and vulnerable

You need to ask God for more of the comforter

Your comfort is not going to come from an easy life

Living in a free, affluent society can trick us like that

But your comfort is not going to come from an easy life

Life is hard

But God has provided us a comforter

To be a refuge for us

And I don't think it's a coincidence

That when things are hard

There's a natural urge

To just crawl up underneath a warm blanket

You were made for the comforter

Disasters and struggles and difficulties should draw us

Closer to God

Not further away

Humble yourself

You're not God

Seek the Comforter

He's been there all along

Waiting for us to cry out to Him

### **Word 3 is Hope**

See if you can follow this line of thinking

**Romans 5:3b-5a (RSV) - We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us.**

It's something like this:

**Suffering → Endurance → Character → Hope**

So suffering... pain... hurt...

Is the seed that ultimately leads to hope

Don't give up when you're hurting  
    Don't give up till you get to endurance  
    Don't give up till it builds character in you  
Because eventually  
    If you don't give up  
You'll get to hope  
    And this hope does not disappoint

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This hope points to a God in Heaven  
    Who created things the way they should have been  
    And knows how to fix them

This hope points to Jesus  
    Who cares enough about broken humanity  
    To take nails in His hands to pay for our sins

And this hope points to the Comforter  
    Who longs to cover you... as a refuge

This hope... does not... disappoint

And one day  
When we stand before our Creator  
Our hope will be fully realized

**2 Corinthians 5:1-5 (MSG) - Sometimes we can hardly wait to move—and so we cry out in frustration... The Spirit of God whets our appetite by**

**giving us a taste of what's ahead. He puts a little of Heaven in our hearts  
so that we'll never settle for less.**

Hope and longing

Are just signs that we were made for more

Made for a different home

In Heaven

And we were made for our soulmate

His name is Jesus

And nothing else in this life

Will full satisfy

That longing and hope for more