

Reassurance in Distressing Times

We live in distressing times locally, nationally and internationally – and some personally. Where is God in all this? Where is God in the turmoil of Iraq, Israel/Palestine, Sudan and Zimbabwe just to mention a few countries? Where is God in the corruption and injustice, the HIV/AIDS problem, crime and other issues glaring at us in our nation? Where is God in all house break ins, hijackings, molestations and other issues rampant in Loudium? Where is God in the midst of all our personal distress?

Maybe He is further than we would like Him to be but closer than we think He is!

John 6: 16 – 24 (Matthew 14: 22 – 36; Mark 6: 45 – 56)

1) God sometimes withholds His hand

- Jesus sent His disciples ahead of Him in the boat while He went up the mountain to pray.
- He was still on land when the boat was in the middle of the lake being buffeted by the wind and waves and the disciples were struggling to row.
 - Jesus stood and watched them struggle.
 - He probably knew that this would happen but, nevertheless, he still sent them ahead without Him.
- Remember Elijah when he had just challenged the prophets of Baal and then felt like God had left him when Jezebel threatened his life that he prayed that he would die.
- Jesus felt that God had forsaken Him when He was on the cross to the point that He cried out “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”
- There are times in our lives that we might feel that God has forsaken us and we cry out to him from the midst of our ocean of despair and wonder if He is even listening.
 - It is at times such as these when we are struggling and wonder what is happening – especially when we have done all to take care to be obedient to the Lord.
 - We might have even seen the great works of God in providing for our needs miraculously as did the disciples when Jesus fed 5000 men but now were start doubting if it was all real because of our present distress.
 - We might have been used by God to bring someone to faith in Christ or set someone free from some bondage and then, like Elijah, run out of steam and fall into deep depression to the extent of wanting to die.
 - Or we might have made a major decision saying to God, “Not my will but yours be done” and then reel in the turmoil of the reality that that entails so that we cry out “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me.”
- During all this where is Jesus?
 - Was it a lie that He said that He would never leave us nor forsake us?
 - No! Absolutely not.
 - Jesus was on the mountain watching over His disciples.
 - He had withheld His hand for a time but was always near enough to see our distress and to act in His own time.
- The Israelites probably wondered if their slavery in Egypt would ever come to an end and probably wondered if God cared at all.

- But during all that time God had seen their misery, heard their crying out and was concerned about their suffering (Exodus 3: 7)
- He then set them free in His time.
- We might be looking around and wondering how Jesus would get to us when we are in the middle of the lake of despair.
 - What hope is there?

2) Reassurance in times of distress

- Whilst the disciples could have been looking for logical ways for Jesus to get to them He did something completely illogical and out of the ordinary.
 - He came to them walking on the water.
- God knows our limits and will approach us in our distress.
 - However the way He approaches us may be very different to the way we expected Him to approach us and we may even fear or reject Him at first.
 - Remember that God approached the Israelites by sending Moses and they rejected Moses.
 - When God approached Elijah He was not in the powerful wind, the earthquake or the fire – these are ways that Elijah would have expected God to appear to Him. God was in the gentle whisper. Something totally contrary to Elijah’s personality.
- Jesus then reassures His disciples with the words, “It is I; don’t be afraid.”
 - Isaiah 43: 1 – 2 “But now, this is what the LORD says-- he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned 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; the flames will not set you ablaze.
 - Luke 12:32 "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom”
- How often we worry and are concerned about loved ones welfare who is staying a far way away and then we get a visitor who comes from him and reassures us that he is doing well. How those words of reassurance refresh us.
 - PR 25:25 “Like cold water to a weary soul is good news from a distant land.”
 - So it is when Jesus approaches us in our distress and speaks words of reassurance into our souls.

3) Moving forward regardless of the circumstances

- Living in distressing times can cause us to become caught up in ourselves
- When Jesus approaches us we take our eyes off ourselves and look at Jesus to see what He wants of us in the midst of our distress
 - Peter told Jesus to call him out of the boat if it was Him (Matth. 14: 28)
 - He then got out of the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus.
- Jesus wants us to put our own distress and fears aside to take steps in faith to move forward in His purposes.
 - There are many people who do not know Jesus and live in distress. Maybe Jesus won’t appear to them by walking on the water but is it possible that that is what He wants us to do. Not literally walking on water but stepping out of our comfort zones even when our feelings tell us otherwise.