

## *To God Alone Be The Glory*

Listen to the words of this song. See if you can identify with what the song is saying. “When you’re up against a struggle that shatters all your dreams, and your hopes have been cruelly crushed by Satan’s manifested schemes, and you feel the urge within you to submit to earthly fears, don’t let the faith you’re standing in seem to disappear...” Earlier this year it certainly felt like a crushing blow to Christians in this and other states when groups of any size over ten were required to stop meeting for a while. Many of us had plans to go here or go there, especially to visit relatives and exchange hugs. Think of the residents in elder care facilities, still isolated away from loved ones. Think of the households who have lost loved ones without being able to be present for their final earthly hours. Talk about dreams getting cruelly crushed.

But the thing that really wrenches my heart as a pastor is when Christians damage their own faith, or someone else’s faith, by saying unloving things. It has been like a series of punches in the gut to witness Christians with otherwise solid faith become easily set off, sometimes by fears, sometimes by anger. This is one of Satan’s manifested schemes for ruining faith. Do you realize how many people have stopped attending church over the years because someone tried to press their point of view too hard in a church matter? Look how many churches have new divisions in their membership these days over something simple like wearing a mask or not. At the first sign of what

appears to be a lack of reasonableness on either side, tempers flare, unloving words are spoken, feelings are hurt, relationships are damaged. I can guarantee you that people on both sides are saying, “I just can’t believe a Christian would act that way.” Reconciling could be as simple as all sides humbling themselves and saying, “I’m sorry for my part in this. Even though I feel strongly about my point of view, because our unity as a church is so important to our Savior Jesus, I will yield to you because you are more important than this thing we disagree about.” If only Christians would do this. But instead too often we give up on the one thing that can really help: God’s Word.

Here are two ironies to pray over. 1) Our worship videos are online 168 hours per week. There’s no longer any excuse for anyone with internet access to skip church. But it seems that fewer members are worshipping faithfully now than when we could gather only at 9:00 on Sundays. Which leads to the second irony. 2) Those who are skipping church won’t hear this call to make ‘feeding their faith with God’s Word’ their highest priority.

So everyone loses... except Satan, of course. He just sits back and laughs because those fearful Christians or those angry Christians have forgotten who the real enemy is. Whenever they cut themselves off from God’s Word, their faith begins to disappear. \*I’m telling you this because Satan is looking to separate you from God’s message. And I want you to be ready.

Israel wasn't ready. Their faith was disappearing. They had become slaves in Egypt. That's how Satan was crushing their dreams. But now, after decades of waiting for freedom, God announced: it was time for Israel to be rescued. But God's rescues don't happen like on television where the problem is introduced and solved in 30 to 60 minutes. In real life God works out problems very slowly. He makes us wait and wait and wait until the actual right time.

Moses had thought it was the right time to rescue Israel forty years earlier. That's when he murdered an Egyptian who was striking an Israelite. Moses had to flee to the land of Midian. For decades he thought Egypt was in his rear view mirror, till that one day when he saw a bush over yonder burning and burning and burning without burning up. He went over to investigate, only to be sent by the Lord back to Egypt to lead Israel to freedom. Of course, Moses didn't want to go. Almost no one wants to do things God's way when it means changing course. We prefer to lean on our own understanding. Remember Moses' five excuses? "I'm a nobody; I can't do this." Yes, but I will be with you, said the Lord. "Whom shall I say I represent?" I AM, the covenant God, has sent you. "What if the Israelites don't believe you sent me?" Throw down your staff and it will become a snake: they will believe you. "I can't do this because I'm not a very good public speaker." I will help you speak. "God, can't you just send someone else who's actually interested?" No. I'm sending you. And I'll send your

brother Aaron with you as a helper. \*Did you hear all the promises God gave Moses to build up his faith? That's what faith rests on: God's promises. So Moses and Aaron went to the leaders of Israel and shared the promise that the Lord was about to rescue them from slavery in Egypt. And the faith of the elders rested on God's promises.

But then the trouble started. Moses told Pharaoh, "The Lord wants you to let Israel go into the wilderness for three days to worship him." But Pharaoh said, "Moses, why are you taking the people away from their work? They're supposed to be making bricks." That same day Pharaoh told the slave drivers, "Stop giving the Israelites straw (one of the ingredients for making bricks), but require them to make the same number of bricks each day." The slave drivers repeated the order to the slaves: "No more straw, same number of bricks." The Israelite slaves spread out all over Egypt to get straw, but they couldn't make their quota of bricks. So the head slaves were beaten. The head slaves went to Pharaoh and asked, "Why are you treating us this way? You give us no straw but you require the same quota of bricks." Pharaoh replied, "Lazy, that's what you are—lazy! That's why you keep asking, 'Let us go for a few days to sacrifice to the Lord.'" The head slaves went to Moses and said, "Look what you've done to us. We thought you were going to rescue us. But you have made us a stench in the nostrils of Pharaoh and have put a sword in his hand to kill us." Moses went to the

Lord and said, “Why have you brought trouble on this people? Is this why you sent me to Egypt? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought [even more] trouble upon this people, and you have not rescued your people at all.”

Do you see what was happening? They were up against a struggle that shattered all their dreams, and their hopes were being cruelly crushed by Satan’s manifested schemes, and they felt the urge within them to submit to earthly fear. And they needed to be reminded not to let their faith in the Lord disappear.

What do you need when your faith is weak or is being tested or seems like it’s disappearing? You might say, “I need more faith.” But how do you get more faith? The Lord gives faith only through his Word and Sacraments. He works faith through his promises, especially the promise that God will not count your sins against you since Jesus died on the cross for you. Faith gladly responds to God’s promises.

When Moses complained to the Lord, “I did what you said, but more trouble was stirred up for your people,” God’s answer was, *2I am the LORD. 3I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, and by my name the LORD did I not make myself be known to them? 4I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan,*

*where they lived as aliens. Do you get the Lord’s point? He’s saying, “Look back in history, Moses. I made myself known in the past by establishing covenants with your forefathers.”*

Am I misreading your eyes, or are you unimpressed? Think about it. God is God. He doesn’t have to bend down and take notice of people, especially the way we take his name in vain (omygod) or the way we fret when we experience setbacks (What am I gonna do?). But he does bend down. God not only took notice of the patriarchs, he decided to bind himself to an agreement with them. It was a one-sided agreement: “I’m going to give you this land in which you are living as aliens—well, not to you directly, but to your descendants.” Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob put nothing on the table. God put it all on the table. Lord, help us be impressed by your grace! ‘Your all’ is still on the table for us.

Our printed Bible regularly signals our eyes to think about God’s one-sided agreements (covenants). Whenever God’s name, the LORD is spelled capital L, capital O, capital R, capital D—that’s the signal. This name is usually associated with ‘God acting on behalf of his people.’ (See both spellings of Lord in Psalm 110:1.) This special spelling of the LORD, which literally means “HE IS,” is used when God talks to Moses from the burning bush. He calls himself, “*I AM WHO I AM. Tell the Israelites I AM has sent you to them.*”

God wants us to think about his covenants when he tells Moses in our text: “*2I am the LORD. 4I established my covenant with Abraham.*” Then he adds: *5I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant.* God isn’t saying that he forgot his covenant for a while. His intent comes out clearer when we translate the Hebrew more literally: “I am remembering my covenant.” In other words, “It’s time to make good on what I promised.”

*6Therefore, say to the Israelites: ‘I am the LORD (there’s that covenant name again), and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians (there’s a promise). I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. 7I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. 8And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the LORD.’”*

You know, it took about four months for all ten of the plagues to fall on Egypt before Pharaoh finally agreed to let God’s people go. It took another 40 years for the Lord to bring the Children of Israel into the land he had sworn to

give Abraham, which by the way the way he had sworn to do 400 years earlier. See how the Lord likes to make people wait? As if waiting is good for us... As if having to put up with inconveniences is good for us... As if ‘difficulties with no end in sight’ is good for us... if only we will cling to God’s promises in the Bible.

What if the Lord allows this virus to keep spooking around for another six months? What if the Lord allows our scientists to find an actual cure, but then not enough people trust that the cure is actually a cure? What if some people use scare tactics and falsely claim that accepting the cure is the same as accepting the mark of the beast? \*Jesus told us to expect trouble. Revelation indicates that trouble is going to get more intense as the end approaches. But our Savior also showed us the path to walk. You already know the path. We have God’s commandments to guide us between right and wrong. And we have the Lord’s promises to rest our faith on. God is probably going to make you wait for solutions to at least one of your problems. Problems can pile up heavier and heavier, by which Satan tries to crush your dreams of living free in Jesus. Don’t let your faith seem to disappear. The LORD made a covenant with you to bring you into his loving presence eternally. Wait patiently for him to keep his promises. He will. He’s the LORD.