

Uncertain Times and Unhealthy Fear

It's been said that we're living in unprecedented times. "Social distancing" and "sheltering at home" are, temporarily, the new normal. Many are currently unable to go to work, many others are sick, and sadly, many have died from the Covid 19 virus. As we think about the times in which we're living, I want us to take a brief moment to ponder the promises of God to his people. In this short series of articles we're looking at Psalm 48 and how it pictures God's love for his people at all times—especially during these uncertain times that can potentially cause unhealthy fear, i.e., fear that irrationally hyper-focuses on the problems of life and yet, fails to consider the solution that God gives in Jesus Christ. Last time we saw that God shows his love for his people in two ways; by his presence and by his protection. I want to continue to look briefly at some other aspects of God's protection that we see in this Psalm.

—Protection

Although it may manifest itself in different ways, the Psalm shows us that there's "trembling" and "anguish" that overwhelms God's enemies because of his protection of his people (verses 5-6). God shows his power, in verse 7, by his control of nature. "By the east wind you shattered the ships of Tarshish." The naval war fleets of the pagan kings, as well as their warriors, have no real hope of victory when God determines to protect his people. Scholars teach us that the "ships of Tarshish" were mighty in battle and able to travel long distances. These ships were the pride of many seafaring nations and yet, they were no match for God. As God's people, we have experienced his protection many times throughout our lives. We truly have no reason for unhealthy fear because of God's promised protection according to his perfect will for each of our lives. Listen to these promises from another Psalm: "The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you." (Psa. 9:9-10) We've seen God's love in both his presence and his protection. Let's move on now to a third category given to us in this Psalm. God's love is a persevering love.

—Persevering

Beginning in verse 9 the Psalmist writes, "We have thought on your steadfast love, O God, in the midst of your temple." As we gather for corporate worship in the local church, do we think deeply about God's persevering love, i.e., love that is steadfast and not subject to change? Another Old Testament text that clearly shows God's constant love for his people is Exodus 34. When Moses asked God to show himself the text says, "The LORD passed before [Moses] and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness....'" (Ex. 34:6)

Returning to our Psalm: "Your right hand is filled with righteousness." (vs. 10) There's an acknowledgment in verse 11 of God's "judgments" which also express his covenant love. Notice the end of verse 13: "...that you may tell the next generation that this is God, our God forever and ever...." This is a promise that God's love is "forever." It will not fail to persevere.

Throughout the generations, God is always faithful. Our faithfulness to God and our love for God will ebb and flow, but his love toward his people always remains constant. We may experience his love in differing ways—love in comfort as well as love in discipline—but no matter what trials and suffering may come into our lives they come to us, ultimately, out of God’s constant and perfect love.

Let me summarize this article by noting that nothing that has been said about God’s presence, protection and persevering love should make anyone presume upon God’s goodness. We’re called to be wise (Colossians 1:9-14; James 1:2-5) and to obey the government within certain biblical parameters (Acts 5:29; Romans 13:1-7). It’s important that we realize that, although Christians will certainly suffer in this life, we must trust that God is working all things together for our good and his glory (Romans 8:28). Our lives must be lived with an eternal perspective. The more that we can live, by grace, in light of the certain return of Jesus Christ, the more that we will avoid unhealthy fear. May God continue to help us by his grace, word and Spirit, to seek to put away any unhealthy fear and anxiety during these challenging and uncertain times.

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