

The Joy of Resting in Our God

In my previous three articles we've focused on Psalm 121 and the fact that God is the "keeper" of all Christians. The words translated "keep" and "keeper" are pervasive throughout the Psalm (vss. 3-5; 7-8). God "keeps, guards, protects and preserves" his people daily—no matter what we go through. As we conclude this series, I want to make a few points of practical application.

—We've seen that, for God to be *our* God, we must be in a right relationship with Him. This happens, by God's grace, when we give up trying to make ourselves right with God by what we do; we recognize that we are sinners without hope, in and of ourselves, and by faith we rest in the perfect work of Jesus Christ alone.

—Our initial coming to faith in Christ is only the beginning. God is at work in us, by his Word and Spirit, making us holy. The scriptures teach us that God's "keeping" in our lives comes by way of ordained *means*. The Westminster Confession of Faith states it this way, "God in his ordinary providence makes use of means" (5.3). What this teaches is that, although God is not limited, the ordinary way that he works in our lives so that we grow spiritually, receive his blessings, and find joy and fulfillment in the Christian life is through the ordinary means of grace given in the local church. The Westminster Shorter Catechism #88 speaks of three means that are primary; the Word, especially the faithful preaching of the word, the right use of the sacraments (baptism and the Lord's Supper) and prayer. We also want to have regular fellowship with others in the local church which includes the use of our gifts and our service; ongoing repentance for our sins and forgiving of others; worship; and seeking obedience to God's revealed truth at every point.

—Even though God has promised to "keep" his people, suffering is a very important part of our Christian lives and spiritual growth. God has promised that we will suffer. People everywhere are making statements about what God is doing with the corona virus. Is this God's judgment for sin? To answer that question, we can say that throughout the Old Testament we see God judging the nations as well as punishing the nation Israel for ongoing sin. And yet, without direct teaching from scripture we have no reason to make pronouncements about what God is doing in our lives as if we can know for sure. What's important is this: "how will we respond to God's acts of

providence?" Does God bringing the corona virus mean that we're very close to the end of time and the return of Christ? Again, although we can't know that for sure, we know that every day is one day closer. We need to heed the scriptures that teach us to be prepared for the return of Christ at any time.

—How will we respond? In our brokenness we may struggle with unhealthy fear and anxiety at times. And yet, we want to increasingly turn our minds and hearts to the truth of God's word. In summary, we want to respond in a way that honors God at all times. This will include—but is not be limited to—living as if we believe that God is in control and is bringing the corona virus—as in all things—for the ultimate benefit of the Church (Eph. 1:22-23). Even though we can't possibly know all that God is doing, it's important that we trust Him. And yet, trust is not presumption. To trust God in these times is to seek to follow the principles and precepts of God's word for the benefit of ourselves, our families and our neighbors. God is in complete control. We want to redeem the time that we have, e.g., we should find genuine joy and rest in what God is doing even as we're saddened by death and disruption. We want these difficult times to be an opportunity for teaching our children and others of God's faithfulness.

In my first article in this series on Psalm 121, I referenced a book by a Jewish Rabbi named Harold Kushner who basically said that although God wants to help us, sometimes even God can't bring about needed positive change and healing in this world. Rabbi Kushner was wrong. *Nothing* is too difficult for God. He's at work in our world, and in our lives, moment by moment for our good and his glory. As we continue to hear from God through his Word we can know great joy and comfort. If we have believed in Jesus Christ by grace through faith alone, the Triune God is *our* Keeper.

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