

## “Trusting God Through Tragedy”

Psalm 34:18-19

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We're all asking the questions of why and how, and how can we be part of it all. How do we answer the questions that are being asked about this devastation that's happened right down the road? - the river flowing through - devastating homes and camps and people and their lives, their businesses right here, our neighbors right down the road in Kerrville and all along the Guadalupe. Is anybody here wondering *why* and *how*? - and, *“Lord, how could you? How do you allow this?”* Those are real questions, aren't they?

It's good to ask the questions. It's good to say, *“Why God?”* David's prayers, they're full of *“Why, Lord?”* and *“How long, Lord?”* But pretty soon, through his prayers, through his songs of the Psalms, he winds up turning to Who. Who is the one who's with me through it all? Who is the one that sees the end from the beginning and the beginning from the end? Who's the one I need right now to comfort me, to hold me as I get through this battle - through this challenge? Praise God that we can ask the questions of why.

We don't have to deny it or bury it or pretend like nothing's going on, or pretend like everything's okay. We can ask the questions, but God also gives his Spirit to lift our eyes back up to him. That song, *“Through it all, through it all...”* - What? *“My eyes are on Him!”* When our eyes are on him, we can get through the storms - and it might be a flood of water that comes out of nowhere. They they say the flood waters rose thirty feet in forty-five minutes Friday morning, and then they experienced devastating floods.

And at the same time, are there places in our lives, maybe even right now, maybe recently, where we've experienced devastating floods where the enemy comes in “like a flood” into our lives? We know those circumstances, and we've experienced those circumstances, and in the midst of the floods, in the midst of the fires, in the midst of the battles that we have, God's saying, *“Express your hurt. Express your pain. Ask the question why and where and and how. But let those questions lead you to Me, says the Lord. I am the One who is with you. Keep your eyes on Me through it all. I am with you.”*

We have a God who has experienced pain more than we could ever endure. Jesus who was nailed to the cross, whipped and beaten and spit upon and who carried all the weight of the sins of the world upon himself. Yet for the sake of “the joy that was set before him,” he endured the suffering of the cross. That's the God we love and that's the God we serve.

When our eyes are on him through the floods - through the storms - our eyes are on a God who has borne our sufferings, borne our pain, and borne our sin - a God who knows what it feels like to go through suffering. Today, our hearts are heavy for what our friends are going through - our neighbors - and it's good that we're praying. It's good that we're available. People there are saying that there's going to be time to come and time to be available, but right now they're sorting out the carnage there. Pastor John Sparks lives in Hunt right on the river and pastors a little church in Kerrville. He knows personally the man who is the camp director of Camp Mystic, the Christian girls' camp, with all these little girls there.

The director literally laid down his life rescuing those girls from the storm. He lost his life, but he was the last to go. What a picture of our Savior - *"No greater love is there than this that we would lay down our lives for a friend."* So, we honor that man of God - Dick Eastman - a pillar of the community over there in the Kerrville area - a mighty man of God - he's not with us anymore, but he's cheering us on from the grandstands of Heaven - a part of the great cloud of witnesses.

Dr. Sandy Kirk used to lead the Fire School of Revival at the Brownsville Revival and moved here to the Guadalupe River right down by Ingram because she wanted to be part of the revival that God's bringing in the Hill Country. She woke up Friday morning about five o'clock to the screams and cries coming out from people being rushed down the river. Can you imagine the trauma of hearing that - experiencing that? That's the depth that our neighbors are experiencing, and as we join with them, the Bible says to bear one another's burdens - but we don't bear them and absorb them into *ourselves*. We bear them to Jesus. We bear them to our *Father* by the leading of the Holy Spirit.

As we stand in agreement - as we pray - we intercede that God would be with them in the storm, with them in the battles. It's okay to talk about - to join with that in our prayers in it with the Lord because the Lord's heart is in this. Psalm 34 says, *"The Lord draws near to the brokenhearted. He saves the crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers them through them all."* Isn't that a good word?

The Lord delivers them how? *"Through them all."* We would like to say that we're protected and we're secure and we have this kind of teflon immunity as Christians that nothing bad ever happens to us and our family - we never have any struggles and none of our sons or daughters ever have any battles or things that are out of our control. All of us who are Christians here - who believe in the Word of God and the presence of God and the power of God - is there anybody here who hasn't gone through tragedy since becoming a Christian?

Thank God for his Word and the promises of God. God's Word tells us his will. His will is that we would dwell in the shelter of the Almighty. His Word and his will is that we would enter into the secret place of the Most High. His angels would lift us up and we wouldn't even dash our foot against a stone. That's the Word of God. That's the heart of God. But, at the same time, we live in a broken, fallen world.

The Bible says in Romans 5 that death entered this world through sin. Way back in the Garden, sin opened the door and death entered in. Death, destruction, sickness, disease, wars, floods, fires - those things enter this world not because it's the will of God. It is that the enemy of our souls now has access in this world. The Bible says in Romans 8, "*All creation is groaning as in labor, longing for the revealing of the sons and the daughters of God.*" All creation is decaying. All creation is suffering the judgment of sin and the consequences of death. That's what's going on.

As we're letting the questions of *why* lead us to *Who*, let's remember, even though we are suffering in this world and in our lives - consequences in a broken, fallen world, because death entered the world through sin - there is One who brings life. Jesus said in John 10:10, "*I came that you'd have life and have it abundantly.*" Praise God that we have a God who brings life. It is the thief who comes to steal, kill, and destroy.

That might sound naive or simplistic, but it should be the bedrock of our theology and of our faith - the bedrock of our understanding of the Word of God and the heart of God. It's that God is *good* and the devil's *bad*. God wants to bring life and the *thief* wants to bring *death*. Jesus wants us to have life and have it abundantly. It is the *thief* who comes to steal, kill, and destroy. So when we ask our question of "*Why, God?*" and "*How could you?*" and "*Why didn't you?*" - that helps us be grounded in that truth. God is good. Satan is bad. God brings life and it's the *enemy* who brings death and destruction. That might sound too simple - too simplistic - but that's the Gospel Truth.

The words of Jesus - they're the real deal. And right now we just want to find our grounding in that truth. Yes, *grieve*. Yes, *suffer*. Yes, *ask the questions*. Whether it's the questions of our neighbors on the Guadalupe River or the questions in our own lives when the enemy is coming in "like a flood". But praise God. The Lord raises up a banner. He raises up the standard - and his banner is love. His Word is *love*. His Word is *victory* over us - no matter what we're going through. Thank God that we can be grounded in him. See, be real. Be true. Give the heaviness - give the burdens - give the gut-wrenching feelings of the devastation to God. Don't bury it inside. Bear those burdens, but bear them *to the Lord*. We don't absorb them inside. We *feel* them. We're not detached from them.

Is anyone here tempted to just get detached from it or to not even think about it? There might even be some churches here in the hill country that are not even *talking* about the flood this morning. But praise God, we're at a church where we're not afraid to talk about it, not afraid to enter in, bear those burdens, and to bear those burdens in prayer. In the midst of it, we need the Lord our God. He is the Burden Bearer. Just like he bore our sins, he bears our griefs and our sorrows. All the chastisement, everything that would be needful for our peace has been laid upon him that we might be made whole - that by his stripes we were healed.

That's the Word of God - that's Jesus fulfilling Isaiah 53. That's the God we have - the God who comforts us and loves us and brings us through the battles. *"For the Lord is near to the brokenhearted. He saves the crushed in spirit. Though many are the afflictions even of the righteous, the Lord delivers them through them all."* Thank you, Lord. We might think of Job. in times like this. Job, as the Bible says, was a righteous man, you know - that means his heart was right. He *pursued* God. He *sought* God. And at the same time, the Bible says, *"None are righteous, know not one."* So it wasn't like he was sinless in some kind of perfection. But, he had a heart that was right with God - a heart that sought God.

And at the same time, he *endured*, suffering in this broken, fallen world beyond our imagination. A lot of people say that Job - the book of Job - is the oldest book in the Bible. And, whether it's a literal story or whether it's an expression of spiritual principles and truths - whatever it is - what we know from it is that God is sovereign. And at the same time of God and his sovereignty, there are ways that the enemy of our soul has access to our lives.

And one way the enemy of our souls had access to Job's life was because death entered the world through sin - and all the devastation, all the destruction that he and his family and his business and his relationships - *everything* he went through - and more than any of *us* have gone through, that despite all we've been through, it's not like *Job* went through. But Job turned his eyes to God - there came a time where Job repented in dust and ashes. There was a *shifting* in his mind, a shifting in his *heart*. He said, *"God, I didn't even understand. I spoke words that I didn't even know what they meant."* And God heard and God restored. It says, *"The latter years of Job were greater than the former years."*

That's a picture of God inviting us to cry out to him where we don't understand - crying out to him where we have our questions. We're crying out to God - a God who hears, and a God who answers. And in due time, God turns it all around. Like Romans 8:28 says, *"God causes all things to work together for good for those who love him, who are called according to his purpose."*

That's not God on the front end willing and doing bad, wicked, evil things, sending a flood to kill a bunch of little girls in a Christian camp. That's not the will of God. Don't let anybody put that on God that somehow that was God's will or God's heart. That's a lie in the name of Jesus. God's heart was *breaking* when that happened. God was fighting in ways that we don't even know. Pushing back the darkness in ways we didn't even see. But at the same time, death has access in our broken, fallen world. 1 Corinthians 15 says, *"The last enemy to be destroyed is death."*

So, we're going to have to deal with death and sickness and disease and destruction, and devastation, and fires, and floods, and bankruptcies, and loved ones going to prison, and sons losing their minds, and daughters getting on drugs, and all the things that we battle in this broken, fallen world. We're going to go through it. All that is the manifestation of death at work in the world. But there is One who brings life - Abundant life. And his name is Jesus. Hallelujah. And he is with us. He's the God who is always with us. He *never* leaves us - *never* forsakes us. He says, *"I am with you - Always."*

*Always* in the flood. *Always* when we don't understand. *Always* when a bunch of little Christian girls get swept down the river in a heartbreaking, devastating tragedy. Always. God is with us always. Whatever our floods are - whatever our battles are - there's a God who's with us always. And he's right here. Right here, right *now*. He says, *"Look to me and I will get you through."* *"Through it all, through it all. My eyes are on Him."* Thank you, Lord. Just remember how Romans 8:28 talks about how God causes all things to work together for good.

He's coming *with* us. He's bringing us *through*. He's even causing the devastating things that he never willed, never wanted, where death had a role. where the spirit of death was at work in this world, he brings it all around to the *good*. And the next verse, Romans 8:29, reminds us of the greater purpose: *"For God is using it all that we might be conformed into the image of the son of God."* Whatever we go through in this world, if our eyes are on him, if our hearts are open to him, God will use it all. God will meet us in it all, even using us to make us more like Jesus through the battle.

We wish it was easier. We wish we didn't have to go through the brokenness and the trials and the tribulations, but Jesus said, *"In this world, you will have tribulation. You will have trouble, but be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world."* Thank you, Lord. We have a God who has overcome. And when we are in him and he is in us - we are in Christ and Christ is in us - then he empowers us to overcome.

## Prayer

*Dear Heavenly Father, in the name of Jesus, we draw near to You right now. We invite You. to come and draw near to us. We know that You are the God who is with us always, and we're just needing you right now. Draw near to those, Lord, who have lost people, homes, and businesses - those who have been devastated by this flood. God, draw near to them, in the name of Jesus. And Lord, draw near to those first responders and volunteers - those who are searching for people along the river. Thank You, God, for the Word of hope. We heard that a little girl was snatched up 22 miles down the river today alive out of that river. Thank you, Lord. Only you could do that, Lord, and we just thank You. You are doing it. You're sending your Word. You're sending your angels. You're moving in power. Thank you, Lord.*

*And Lord, we're praying for the days ahead that those who are still in shock or numb by the pain to experience You. Lord, be with them. Be with all those right now as the shock wears off. Let them know that You're right there with them. You're bringing them through this battle. You will be their stability and their security through it all. God, be with us as You show us how to respond, how to participate, how to come alongside those that are suffering, that are questioning the physical help and the spiritual help. Lord, thank You for the gift of prayer and intercession - that even right now, we can intercede. We can intercede that you would push back the darkness and push back the grief and the sorrow and bring healing and peace and transformation.*

*Bring hope, Lord. We pray for hope. May the God of all hope bring peace as You establish Your people on You. Thank You, Lord. We don't have to grieve as those who have no hope. For our hope is in You. Our eyes are on You through it all. We pray healing in the name of Jesus. Lift off the grief and sorrow and shock and heaviness and weariness. Lord, here when we're gathered together in the presence of the Lord, let that be lifted off of us now. Lift it off in the name of Jesus. We're not detached or indifferent to the suffering. We're willing to feel it and let it lead us to prayer, but at the same time, it shall not overwhelm us. It shall not overcome us. It shall not leave us stuck in the grief or the sorrow. - not stuck in the questions, Lord. For the questions lead us to Who? Who is the one who is with us? Who is the one who's with us in the midst of it all? We thank you, Lord. In Jesus name. Amen*