

We are Still Here

Online Sermon: http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page_id=3567

On December 30, 2019, Wuhan Municipal Health Commission in China reported cases of what they at that time called “undiagnosed pneumonia.”¹ Since then there has been over 295 million confirmed cases and over 5 million deaths from Covid-19² and we are now facing the Omnicron variant which is 2-3 times more infectious and is spreading at alarming rates across the world.³ While wearing masks, self-distancing and using lots of sanitizer is of some comfort, for many the possibility of catching such a ferocious virus is downright frightful! Given the fact



that Apostle Paul calls us fragile “jars of clay” (2 Corinthians 4:7) and that we live in a fallen world filled with injustice, illnesses, wars, famines and earthquakes and many other tribulations (Matthew 24:6-8) it makes one wonder is it possible to persevere these difficult times in faith and feel a sense of peace in our lives? It is easy to rejoice standing on the rock of our salvation when we are on the mountain tops of blessings but when faced with unsurmountable odds of tribulations that can easily break our bodies and fracture our minds how is it possible to feel

unspeakable joy especially amidst such intolerable pain, unbeatable enemies, broken relationships, financial hardships and/or with incurable diseases? Not only do Christians face unprecedented tribulations in the world but they also face decreasing church attendance for many are either too scared to meet in public places, and with the quick spread of the virus who could blame them, or their lukewarm hearts just don’t want to play church anymore! And though we be hard pressed on every side, perplexed, and often struck down we are not crushed, not in despair or destroyed for we are still here and far from done serving joyfully in God’s kingdom (2 Corinthians 4:8-12)! The following sermon is going to review Biblical stories of those who put their faith in God and in doing so were able to not only persevere heinous enemy attacks, persecution, and illnesses but were also able to thrive and feel unspeakable joy!

Facing Horrendous Giants

Sun Tzu once said, “first learn to become invincible, then wait for your enemy’s moment of vulnerability.”⁴ The problem with this teaching is that since no one is invincible one will

¹ Taken from the following website: [Archived: WHO Timeline - COVID-19](#)

² Taken from the following website: [Coronavirus Cases: Statistics and Charts - Worldometer \(worldometers.info\)](#)

³ Taken from the following website: [Omicron in the U.S.: What to Know \(webmd.com\)](#)

⁴ Taken from the following website: [Sun Tzu Quote: “First learn to become invincible, then wait for your enemy’s moment of vulnerability.” \(quotefancy.com\)](#)

sooner or later face an enemy that one simply cannot conquer! Just thinking about the ferocious ability and nature of such enemies often floods our minds and souls with a sense of doom as fear shreds away peace and hope in our lives. For example, with the desert, sea and marshes barring



any means of escaping some 600 or more of Pharaoh's fiercest of chariots, the Bible states the Israelites "were terrified" and complained to Moses that they wished they had remained slaves of Egypt (Exodus 14)! Scripture also tells us that the Israelite people were "dismayed and terrified" at the mere sight of the Philistine Champion Goliath who was close to ten feet tall, wore a bronze helmet and scale armour weighing about 125 pounds, and a spear shaft that weighed about 15 pounds (1 Samuel 17:4-7)! Then there was the time

when king Sennacherib of Assyria lay siege to the fortified cities of Judah and again the Israelite people were terrified because his commander kept telling them stories of the other great nations that had easily fallen by their hands despite their prayers of deliverance to their respective gods (2 Chronicles 32)! And can you imagine the fear of Elisha's servant when he looked out the window of his hut and saw king Aram's horses and chariots, a formidable and unbeatable force sent just to kill him and his master (2 Kings 6:8-15)? **"We are hard pressed on every side but not crushed"** (2 Corinthians 4:8a).

We have all faced enemies that by our own might and power we simply cannot defeat! During such occasions it is imperative that we trust in the Lord with all our heart and allow Him to guide our response to the enemy that is trying to subdue us with fear (Proverbs 3:5-6)! Fear of an enemy can incapacitate even the strongest of Christian but the moment we realize that the



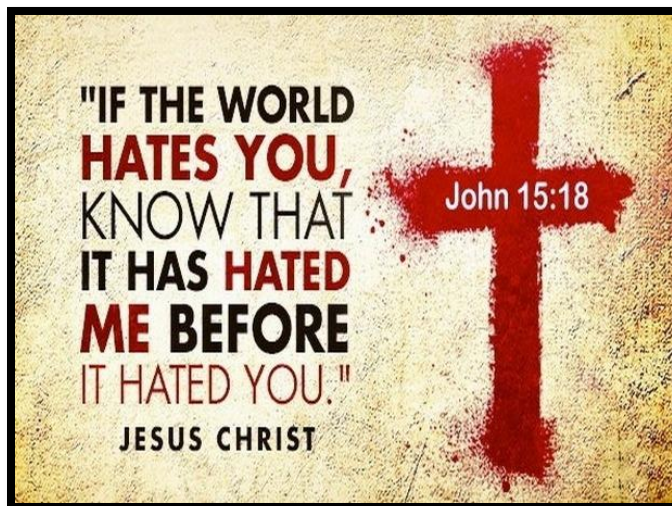
arrows of the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms cannot penetrate the shield of faith (Ephesians 6:12-17), because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4), we get to claim victory and have the peace of God flood into our souls! For example, when the children of Israel stood still God parted the Red Sea and later collapsed it and drowned the "unconquerable" Egyptian army (Exodus 14). When a young shepherd boy put his faith in God with just a sling and five smooth stones, he was able to slough an "unconquerable giant" (1 Samuel 17)!

When king Hezekiah cried out to the Lord for aid the Lord sent a single angel who "annihilated all the fighting men, commanders and officers of the Assyrian king" (2 Chronicles 32). And when Elisha prayed that his servants' eyes to be opened, they were and he saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around them and upon praying to God the "unconquerable" army of king Aram was blinded, rendered helpless (2 Kings 6)! While God sometimes "prepares a

table before us in the presence of our enemies” our “cup overflows” with blessings (Psalms 23) because we know that perseverance leads to spiritual maturity (James 1:2-4) and He who is sovereign over all things seen and unseen (Colossians 1:16) will always do good and protect those (Romans 8:28-31) He calls by name and chose to follow Him! **“We are perplexed but not in despair”** (2 Corinthians 4:8b)!

Facing Intense Persecution

Some of the hardest words to read in the Bible comes from our Lord who said, “if the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first” (John 15:18). Those who truly believe “friendship with the world means enmity against God” (James 4:4) will do what they can to be set apart and a light unto the nations (Matthew 5:14-16) but in doing so will receive intense

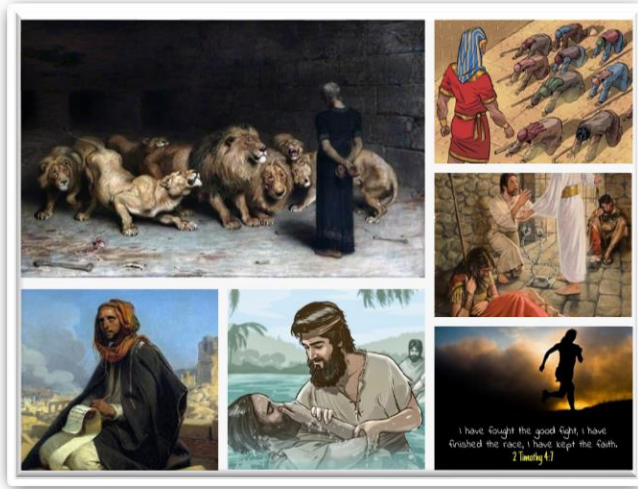


persecution. For example, because Joseph refused to sleep with his master’s wife he was accused of rape and thrown into a prison (Genesis 39:1-19). Prompted by the “fire shut up in his bones” (20:9) Jeremiah spoke the coming of God’s wrath against the corrupt religious culture of his day and as a result he got thrown into a cistern (30)! When the 120 satraps and administrators convinced King Darius to make a decree that no one was to pray to any god or human being except the king, Daniel chose to continue to pray three times a day and he was

thrown into the lion’s den (Daniel 6). Because John the Baptist told king Herod it was unlawful for him to have his brother’s wife, he was not only thrown into prison but later beheaded (Mark 6:14-29). Due to overwhelming approval of the Jews King Herod had James the brother of John put to death by the sword and Peter imprisoned hoping to have him executed as well (Acts 12:1-19). And due to his belief in and testimony concerning the risen Savior, Apostle Paul five times received from the Jews the 40 lashes minus one, three times was beaten with rods, once pelted with stones, three times shipwrecked and was always in danger of violence from bandits, fellow Jews, and Gentiles (2 Corinthians 11:22-29). **“We are struck down but not destroyed”** (2 Corinthians 4:9b).

Though we will be persecuted for righteousness’ sake (Matthew 5:10) believers have hope for they are never abandoned by the Lord whose “power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9)! The Lord was with Joseph and not only was he put in charge of the prison but would later become second in command over all of Egypt (Genesis 41)! Despite there being constant plots against his life with the Lord’s protective arm Jeremiah continued to prophesy during the 70 year exile of Israel and her eventual restoration spanning almost four decades and the last five kings of Judah! An angel of the Lord was sent to close the mouths of the lions and as a result not only did Daniel survive but his faithful testimony resulted in King Darius issuing a

decree that “every part of his kingdom people must fear and reverence God” (6:26)! While John the Baptist’s persecution resulted in him losing his life Christ said that up to this point in history

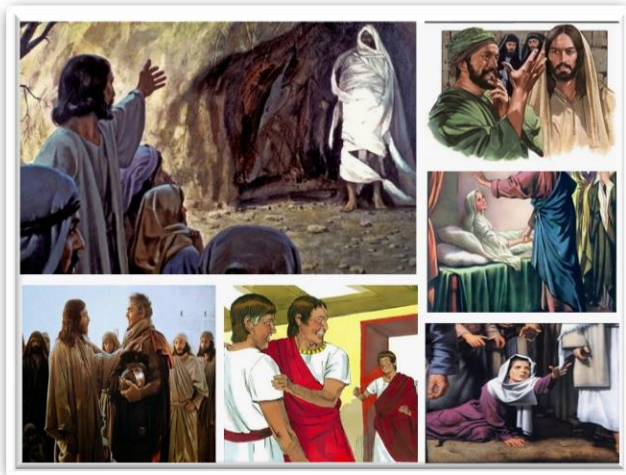


none were born greater than John (Matthew 11:11)! Even though Peter was bound and locked in Herod’s “impenetrable” prison while the church was praying for his release the Lord sent an angel and his chains fell off and he walked out free without anyone even noticing him leaving (Acts 12:8-10)! And despite Paul “suffering greatly for Jesus’ name” (Acts 9:11), he continued to count his life worth nothing in comparison to finishing the race well and receiving the crowns of righteousness (Acts 20:24; 2 Timothy 4:8). From all these life events we learn that serving in

God’s kingdom is often far from easy but whether the persecution leads to God’s protection and deliverance or us dying as martyred saints either way we can be rest assured that our joy and hope will never waiver when we see Christ as our portion, Lord, Savior and King (Lamentations 3:24)! **“We are persecuted but not abandoned”** (2 Corinthians 4:9a).

Facing Illness and Death

Even though there have been over 295 million cases of Covid and its variant Omicron is likely to quickly expand that number, we must never forget that One whom every knee small



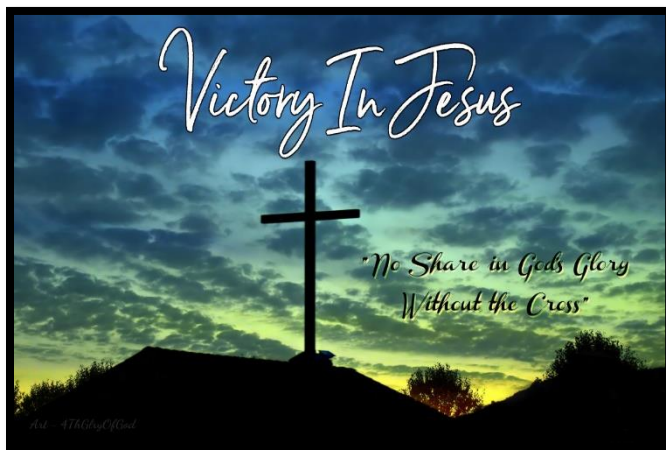
bow can annihilate any disease with but a single command or touch! When a “certain royal official” begged Jesus to come and heal his son before he died the moment Christ said, “your son will live” he was cured (John 4:43-53). Due to his faith in Christ’s authority over sickness the moment he heard the Lord’s words “Go, let it be done as you believed it would” the centurion’s paralyzed servant was healed (Matthew 8:5-13)! The moment the man with the withered hand obeyed Christ and stretched out his hand he was fully healed (Luke 6:6-11)! When Jesus touched the hand of Apostle Peter’s mother-in-law the

fever left her (Matthew 8:14-17). When a woman subject to bleeding for twelve years touched the cloak of Christ and heard His words “take heart, daughter, your faith has healed you” she was cured (Matthew 9:20-22)! And if that were not proof enough that Jesus has authority over any ailment, are there not also historical accounts of Him even raising the dead? For example, when

Jesus touched the bier and said, “young man, I say to you, get up” the only son of a widow who had died was raised back to life (Luke 7:11-17), when Jesus touched and said, “little girl, I say to you, get up” her spirit returned (Mark 4:35-43), and even though Lazarus who laid in a tomb dead for four days the moment Christ shouted “Lazarus, come out” life returned to him and he walked out of his tomb (John 11)! Diseases and death have no mastery over believers (1 Corinthians 15:55) because while we might suffer for a while it is nothing in comparison to the comfort and joy, we receive both here on this earth under His wings and later in heaven in His presence! **“Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day”** (2 Corinthians 4:16)!

Conclusion

It has been two long years of living with Covid-19 and while the wearing of masks, self-distancing, and constant threat of ailment or death might seem unbearable for us jars of clay **WE ARE STILL HERE!** While we are created from the dust of the earth and are easily broken as God’s own, we stand firm on the Rock of our salvation for we know the fiery darts of fear cannot



penetrate our shield of faith if we trust in the Lord with all our hearts and stay protected under His wings! We are hard pressed on every side with injustices, illnesses, wars, famines, earthquakes, and intense persecution but we are far from crushed, in despair, abandoned or broken for He who rose from the dead and conquered the grave is our Savior who has promised not an easy but a good life! There is no enemy no matter how strong, no persecution no matter how intense, and certainly no disease that the moment the Lord says “BE GONE” can

do anything but obey and be rendered inert! And even if the Lord allows us to go through moments of intense suffering and pain, we will bow low, look up and continue to feel unspeakable joy for whether we persevere in pain or die as martyred saints we are the Lord’s ambassadors and royal priests that are destined to receive not only crowns of righteousness but a home with our Creator, forever in His presence. So, our message to this fallen world is one of hope! Though the gates of hell might rage against the church and its subsequent persecution reduce her numbers we will not succumb to fear but remain joyful for the ruler of this dark world has been defeated by the Lamb and as such he cannot and will not stop the Good Shepherd’s own from worshipping in His name and in His house! Joy and peace within one’s heart is not a by-product of mountain-top blessings of any easy life but of knowing and trusting that He who knit us in our mother’s womb is sovereign over all things seen and unseen! As long as we are here, we will love the Lord with all our hearts, minds, souls and strength for no matter what happens to us we will rejoice for He is unconquerable, especially in His love for us, His own! **WE ARE STILL HERE** not as broken but as redeemed!