



*“Paul Knew Jesus Was with Him in Prison, So...*

*Where Is God in the Pandemic?”*

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There was a wedding where things kind of turned into an uproar. The day before the wedding, at the rehearsal, the groom made the pastor an unusual offer. “I’ll give you \$50 if you’ll change my vows. When you get to the part where you have me promise to ‘love, honor, cherish, and forsake all others and be faithful to her forever,’ I’d appreciate it if you’d leave that part out.” He handed the pastor a \$50 bill and walked away quite content.

Next day, wedding time came. Vows were being exchanged. The pastor looked the young groom straight in the eye and said: “Do you promise to prostrate yourself before her, worship and adore her, obey her every wish, serve her breakfast in bed every single morning, and vow eternally before God and your lovely wife that you will never even look at another woman, as long as you both shall live?” The groom gulped and looked around, and said in a tiny voice, “Yes.” Then the groom leaned over toward the pastor and hissed, “I thought we had a deal!” The pastor slipped the \$50 bill back into the young man’s hand and softly said, “She made me a far better offer!” Well, needless to say, there was some uproar that day for that young couple. Uproar.

Uproar. We've all experienced it. In marriages, in families, in our world. There is so much uproar in our world today. You hear it in the news. You see it online. You experience it many times when you go out to the store. There is uproar that is ever-present during this continuing pandemic. And this uproar shouldn't surprise us.



Long ago, when the Psalms were written, way back then they told us about nations in uproar. "Nations are in uproar," says Psalm 46:1. Doesn't that continue to be the case in our world today? As we keep coping with this coronavirus that has taken over the whole world, and that shut down the whole world, many nations have been in uproar, and continue to be in uproar.

And yet, Psalm 46:2 says, "**We will not fear!**" Nations can be in uproar all day long, we will stand strong. Why do we not fear? Because God is here! As Psalm 46:7 says, "**The Lord Almighty is with us!**" As Psalm 46:1 says, "**God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.**" God is always present!

You may not always see His presence, but God promises He is always present. You may not always feel His presence, but God promises He is always present. You may not even always believe He is present, but God promises He is always present.



It's hard to keep faith in times that are dark – but maybe that's when faith is most needed. Think about Paul and his situation when Paul was in prison for Christ. Paul was guarded. Paul was in chains. Paul was considered dangerous. Can you believe that? Dangerous just for

speaking the Gospel of the good news of eternal life through Jesus Christ? The only one Paul was dangerous to was the ultimate evil one, but yes, the evil one was at work. He had led opponents of Jesus to put Paul in prison.

But while Satan was at work and while Paul was imprisoned, the Almighty Holy One was doing His ever-present work. Do you remember what Paul says in Philippians of his time in prison? **“Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly”** (Philippians 1:14). **“I am in chains for Christ,”** Paul said (Philippians 1:13). Paul didn’t mind the pain or the chains. Paul knew that God would use his suffering for God’s glory.



## GOD and the coronavirus

Even times that are terrible and tragic, God uses for His purposes. Paul believed that God was at work through having Paul in prison. Do you believe God has been at work while allowing us to go through this pandemic? And if God is present even in the midst of the coronavirus, maybe we could be asking, what is God doing through the coronavirus? You know that God is always at work. You know that God’s plan always stands, and nothing and no one can thwart Him. And you know for God to permit something like this to cover our entire planet, there has to be some awfully big purpose and plan of God at work. God can and does work through the most dark and difficult circumstances in life. Do you have faith in that? It’s been amazing to hear how eager people are to hear the Word of God as we endure this terrible pandemic. Did you hear that? Have you experienced that? How people are yearning and turning to the Word of the Lord for hope and strength as we go through this difficult time on

our planet! How is God at work through the worldwide pandemic? People have yearned for His Word and turned to His Word!

During this pandemic, people have been reminded of what a precious gift life truly is. People are being reminded that every second we live and every single breath we take is a gift that the Almighty loving God makes to each of us. How is God at work through this worldwide pandemic? People are being reminded that life is indeed precious, to be treasured, to be appreciated, to be preserved, as a wondrous gift from a loving living God.

During this pandemic, people have come to realize that so many of the things that prior to the pandemic filled up our time and occupied our minds were, in the big scheme of things, really not that important. We have learned that so much of life's stuff is just fluff. How has God been at work through this worldwide pandemic? He has been teaching us what really matters in life.

When Paul was in prison, Paul did not lose hope. In fact, Paul found even greater hope in Jesus while Paul was imprisoned! Do you remember in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, where Paul proclaims that he delights in his hardships? And why? Because those hardships led Paul to rely all the more on the strength of His Lord. Paul found his strength in Christ in his life.

How has God been at work through this worldwide pandemic? For we who know Jesus, this pandemic has reminded us how weak is the strength we have in life, but how great is the strength we find in Jesus Christ! I hate to say it, but this pandemic has shown us how fragile and frail we truly are. How quick we are to give in to sin and let Satan win. Which one of us can say that throughout this pandemic we have never once been anxious or afraid? Which one of us can say that throughout this pandemic we have never once been in uproar? Psalm 46 talks about nations being in uproar, but nations are conglomerations of the citizens who comprise those nations. You and me are part of a nation, this

nation. So when Psalm 46 says that nations are in uproar, certainly God also means that we the people of the nations are in uproar. And I'm not talking about all the political uproar, the bickering and bantering we keep hearing. I'm talking about personally, internally, each one of us has been in uproar.

We have been in uproar because our schedules have been rearranged and our lives have been changed. We have been in uproar because we have had to adapt and adjust. We have been in uproar because we have been anxious and concerned, whether for ourselves and our health, or for the health and life of others. But can you believe it, through it all, God has been as cool as a cucumber?! Do you think that God has been in uproar while the whole world has been in uproar? No way. God is tranquil and calm when the whole world is on high alarm and up in arms.

So, think back to when Paul was in prison. Paul proclaimed, even while in chains, **“I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance!”** (Philippians 1:19).



It's interesting to look at the original Greek and the nuances that come out from that word 'deliverance' as we look at the English translations. What Paul is actually proclaiming is his full faith that even while in chains God was at work for his safety, for his rescue, for his deliverance, and ultimately, for his salvation. Would that be hard for you to believe? If you were wrongly imprisoned for preaching and teaching about Jesus, could you believe that through those chains God was at work on your behalf?

What could God be trying to deliver us all from by allowing the whole world to suffer month after month through this pandemic? Could He be trying to relieve us from our over-reliance on the fluff and stuff that this world offers us? Could He be trying to deliver us from our false reliance on the powder puffs of this world rather than the powerful stuff in His

Word? Could God be trying to use this trying time to draw us all closer to Him?

You know, when you're in prison, you have a whole lot of time for reflecting. When Paul was imprisoned, he reflected deeply on life's greatest blessing -- the forgiveness he had through Jesus Christ, who gave His life to pay the price for all the sins in Paul's life. During this pandemic, have you been reflecting on what a great blessing you have in the forgiveness you have through Jesus? Jesus was sent from above, because of God's great love, for you. Jesus was lifted up, on the cross, so that you might be lifted up from death to life, through Jesus Christ who paid the price for your sins. What a great blessing to have the forgiving of your Heavenly Father through His Son your Savior. Maybe this pandemic has reminded us that many of the things of this life can easily be taken from us, even life itself, but no one can take from us the forgiveness and far better life won for us by Jesus! Has this pandemic drawn you even closer to Jesus?

Certainly, in Paul's case, his being in chains and in prison drew him closer to Jesus. You know that you often hear of prisoners being fed nothing but bread and water. Well, while he was in prison, Paul was certainly fed with bread and water. He was fed by the bread of life, Jesus Christ. Paul was fed by the Word of God. Jesus says, "**I am the bread of life, he who comes to me shall never go hungry**" (John 6:35). Jesus said, when the devil tried to get Him to turn stones into bread, "**Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God**" (Matthew 4:4). While in prison, Paul eagerly fed on life-giving bread, Jesus Christ and His Word.

While in prison, Paul was sustained by water. Not just the water Paul drank of physically, but also the water Paul drank of spiritually. While in prison, Paul wrote some of his Epistles. Our Lutheran scholars who created the Concordia Self-Study Bible believe that at the same time he was in prison writing the Epistle of Philippians, which we have been



reflecting on, Paul also wrote the Epistle of Colossians, where Paul proclaims about baptism: **“You have been given fullness in Christ...having been buried with Him in baptism, and raised with Him....When you were dead in your sins, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins!”** (Colossians 2:9-15) Paul treasured the waters of Holy Baptism, where God pours out forgiveness through Jesus.

Did you know that Paul experienced different kinds of imprisonment during his life and his ministry for Jesus Christ? Did you know that when Paul wrote Philippians, he was under what they call house arrest? This was different than other imprisonment Paul experienced, where Paul was in a dank dark dungeon. Paul, when writing Philippians, was under a type of imprisonment which was a house arrest.

House arrest. Maybe you relate to that! Maybe you feel like you have been under “house arrest” during this pandemic. Maybe in a sense you feel a bit like Paul. During this so-called house arrest, have you also like Paul been feeding on the bread and water of your Lord and Savior? Have you been treasuring and devouring God’s Word? Have you been remembering and re-drinking of the blessings God poured out for you in the waters of Holy Baptism? And have you, like Paul, through it all, been trusting that God is working even while you are “imprisoned”?



Paul proclaimed, **“I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed”** (Philippians 1:20). Paul knew that Jesus Christ was at work in his life even while he was under house arrest. Will you trust that while you continue under this present pandemic’s “house arrest” of social distancing and mask-wearing protocol, through it all, God is at work for you through Jesus who loves you and is with you?

Psalm 46 talks to us about being at peace: peace even when the earth is giving way, peace even when the mountains are falling into the heart of the sea, peace even when the turbulent waters of the seas are roaring and foaming. Certainly the waters of the sea are turbulent and roaring and foaming when there is a hurricane forming. But did you know that when a massive hurricane is raging and rampaging, often spreading 300-400 miles wide at one time, a mere 25 feet below the surface, the waters of the sea are calm and clear as can be? In fact, the fish down at that level seem oblivious to the thunderous tumultuous storm just 25 feet above them.

You and me have that same tranquility through Jesus! Nations can be in uproar; we are at peace through our Lord. The whole world can be turned topsy turvy; we have tranquility in Christ. Like Paul, through it all, we trust that our Lord is always at work, our ever-present help in times of trouble.

May Christ be with you to bless you and sustain you. May you steadfastly continue, fed by His true bread and water, His Word and Sacraments, which give you the peace of the Lord when nations are in uproar. In Jesus' name, Amen.