

God will never abandon his children

Pastor Tim Melton

On December 7, 1998, there was an earthquake in the northwestern part of Armenia. It was estimated that 25,000 people died. In one small town a father survived the earthquake and immediately ran through the streets to the school where his son had been attending class.

Once he arrived he saw a pile of rubble in the place where the school had once stood. He figured out in what area his son might have been when the earthquake occurred. He then climbed up on the pile of rubble and started digging. After an hour or two, others began to call out to him, telling him how hopeless it was and that no one could have survived. They told him to come down off the pile, but he ignored their pleas and he kept digging. He dug for 4 hours, 8 hours, 16 hours, 24 hours, 36 hours, and finally, at the 38th hour he heard voices coming from the rubble.

He called out to his son. *“Armand! Is that you?” “Yes, father, we are okay!”* Armand and 12 other students were tucked away in a small space that had protected them. Armand yelled to his father, *“I told them that if you were alive, that you would come save me, and if I was saved, then they would be saved as well. You promised me that you would be there for me if I ever needed you, and you did it father, you really did it!”*

That is a great story that describes an earthly father, but how much greater is this truth when it can be said of our heavenly Father. The Father will always come for us. He always hears and always comes to the aid of his children. We see it throughout scripture. He sent Moses to deliver His people from slavery in Egypt. He sent the Judges to deliver His people from their enemies. He sent the prophets to call His people back to Him. He at times even sent angels to assure His people of His presence. All of these were types of the true Deliverer, Jesus Christ, who would come to deliver God’s people completely and eternally.

Today is Palm Sunday, and as we think back to that triumphant day when Jesus rode that simple donkey into Jerusalem, we see once again the coming of Immanuel, God with us. He does not always come in

the way or in the timing that we expect, but do not be mistaken, the Father never abandons His children.

After all those centuries of prophecies, the promised Messiah had finally come. A week later, He would lay down His life on a Roman cross to pay for the sins of the world. He would then, three days later, be raised from the dead. Through Christ, our sins had been paid for, and God, the Father, had drawn near to His children, but it did not stop there.

In Acts 2, we see the Holy Spirit come. God was not content to merely be near us in the flesh. He has come to live in us in Spirit. Christ now lives in us and we in Him. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. Nothing can take us out of His hand. Regardless of what happens in our world or in our lives, the presence of God will never leave. He will always be with us. From this day forward, from now until eternity, we will never face a day alone. We dwell in the presence of God. We will never again face the difficulties of life as an orphaned child with no one to turn to. There will be trials and tribulations, but we will face every situation in the presence of God, our Father, . . . and that reality, that fact, makes all of the difference.

I saw an advertisement online this week by a Canadian astronaut, named Chris Hadfield. He said this: *“No astronaut launches through space with his fingers crossed. That is not how we deal with fear. The more you know, the less you fear.”* That phrase caught my attention. *“The more you know, the less you fear.”* He was talking about science, but it made me think about God. The more we know . . . about Him. The more we know about His ways. The more we know about His power. The more we know about His character. The more we know about what He has done in the past. The more we know about what He promises for the future. The more we experientially know of Him in our lives. The more we know about Him in our minds and the more we know Him in our hearts . . . the less we fear.

This ongoing, relational, experiential “knowing”, in scripture is described with many different phrases. Abide in Him. Fellowship with Him. Walk with Him. Rest in Him. Trust in Him. Call out to Him. Be found in Him. Hide yourself in Him.

For those of us who have turned from our sins and put our faith in Jesus Christ, we are the temple of God. We are His dwelling place. The Holy Spirit now lives in us. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. Nothing can take us out of His hand. That is the beauty of our lives, that we will, from this day forward, forever live in the presence of God. That fact should make all the difference.

We do not face the coronavirus alone. We will not face marriage problems alone. We will not face parenting alone. We will not face temptation alone. We will not face an unknown future alone. We will not face financial problems alone. We will not face loneliness alone. We will not face sickness alone. We will not face death alone.

We will never, again, face anything alone, because we dwell in the presence of the Lord most high and He dwells in us.

In Psalm 139 we read about the vastness of His presence:

“Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.”

Praise God that we will never be out of His sight and beyond His reach. For this reason, do not fret like those who have no hope. That is not who we are.

To walk in the presence of God we must fix our eyes on the Savior, not the storm. Just like the apostle Peter walking on the water. As long as Peter kept his eyes on Jesus, he was fine, ***“But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, ‘Lord, save me.’ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’”*** (Matthew 14:30-31).

We must continually remind ourselves of the gospel. It is much like those of us who are now homeschooling our children. Their attention is so quickly drawn away to anything else but doing their schoolwork. How often we must redirect them to the work that has been assigned to them to do.

We are the same way with Christ. The world bombards us with so many distractions and faulty perspectives. Throughout the day we must take the initiative to fix our eyes on Christ, lest our attention be drawn away. We fix our eyes on Jesus through Bible reading, prayer, listening to worship music, being in contact with other believers, reading good Christian books or watching good Christian videos, or other creative ways of keeping Christ on the forefront of our minds.

As the author of Hebrews writes, ***“Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith”*** (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Put off the distractions and put on that which puts our focus on Christ. It is like a racehorse that wears blinders, which keep them focused and only allows them to see straight ahead, so they will not get distracted. Diligently fix our eyes on Jesus, the one who grants and grows our faith.

We must also pray. ***“Present your requests to God and the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus”*** (Philippians 4:6-7). As we pray we are admitting our need for God. We are surrendering to His will. We are trusting him as our Savior . . . Oh, how desperately we need a Savior!

We received an email this week from the administrator of a retirement home here in Madrid where one of our older women lives. They wrote: *“Today, 4 more residents died. It is not possible to confirm if they had the virus or not because no one tested them to verify it. We still have not received any help. We have not received the needed personal, protective equipment or any tests or responses to our other requests. Today, three of our helpers did not come to work and we do not know why. Our receptionists have been assigned to other tasks more important than answering the phone. If you want to talk with a resident, leave a message, and the medical department will communicate any major changes in the resident’s*

status. We need helpers. We would welcome anyone who would be willing to come and serve meals, clean rooms or help us in daily tasks.”

As I read the message, I could almost hear the desperation in his voice. Our culture, and sometimes even we, have put our trust in so many other things: money, education, jobs, ability, and now we are faced with something that we cannot solve on our own. This is bigger than our governments, our scientists, our educational system, even all the money in the world.

In the midst of this crisis, let the urgency of the moment drive you back into the arms of God. He is the only One who is big enough and good enough to be trusted with our lives and our futures. May we once again put our faith and hope in the only One who can save. In this, our life is built on the Rock of Christ and His Word that stands firm.

Take a look at this picture behind me. I first saw this framed photograph when I was in seminary. It used to hang behind the counter at the campus bookstore. I would see it each time that I would need to go in and buy books. It always got my attention. One time, when I was at the bookstore, I asked how much it cost. It was about \$150 dollars. For some that isn't much, but for a seminary student, 20 years ago, it was a fortune. I decided that I was going to buy it. I saved money, sold various items at a secondhand store, and finally had enough money saved to make it mine. It has been with me ever since. That's been over 20 years. It is a photograph taken at a lighthouse off the coast of France. Do you see that man surrounded by the overpowering wave? It is the truth of the Christian life.

Those who have built their life upon the rock of the truth of God's Word have no need to fear. Yes, the storms will come, rain will fall, the winds will blow, and the floods will rise, but we dwell in the presence of the Lord Almighty.

We are not a people of the sand. We are a people of the Rock. So, stand firmly in your faith. Resting in Him. Trusting in Him. Rejoicing in Him. Putting your complete hope in Him. It is in Him that we will find everything that we need during these days and the days beyond.

Let us close with the words of Psalm 18:2:

“The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.”

Discussion questions:

- 1)** What from this sermon most caught your attention?
- 2)** When you think back through your life, when was a time that you really needed God?
- 3)** Do you agree that we easily get distracted and often take our eyes off of the Savior and focus on the storm? Explain.

- 4) How would you explain, from a Christian perspective, the phrase “the more you know, the less you fear”?
- 5) What can we do to get to know God better?
- 6) What can we put away that might be keeping us from knowing God better?
- 7) What do you think God wants you to remember from this sermon and discussion?
- 8) What do you think God wants you to do because of that?
- 9) How can we pray for you?