

Sunday, March 22, 2020

PASTOR: Hello. Welcome to the streaming of our message this week.

We, of course, are involved in the epidemic, the pandemic of the coronavirus. It's all real strange for us all, isn't it? We are all struggling. It's rather mysterious. It presents a lot of questions as well, I'm sure, for a lot of people, a lot of stress, anxiety and fear.

So one of the things that we would like to do as we reach out to people through our website and through the means of the technology that's available is that we would like to answer some questions today. We entitled our message today why, where, and what, and we're going to see what we can do with that this morning.

For those folks that have been with us in our church have been going through a series with us in the book of Genesis, and we recently have been discussing Adam's fall in the garden, where he fell. And when he fell, the whole human race fell, and not only did the human race fall with him, but that included the world. And the world itself, according to Romans 8, it groans, and because it groans, it's

feeling the consequences of our sin. We have all kinds of disasters, as you know. We have earthquakes. We have this pandemic that we're dealing with.

I was reading this past week about a couple of the pandemics and terrible, terrible sicknesses of the past. You could call them plagues, if you would. Back in 1918, I'm told that they estimate, because of the Spanish flu, that 50 million people died, and they thought that perhaps that this was like maybe even as many as a third of the population had this flu.

And I was reading also, speaking of these terrible things, that back in the 1300s was the Black Plague, and they think that 60 percent of the population of Europe had it and perhaps died from it. Just terrible, terrible disasters.

And so we don't believe we're going through anything of that nature, but it certainly has provided unique and unusual modern-day struggles for us.

And I want to entertain these three questions for you today that people seem to be asking: The why, the where, and the what.

And we don't always know the why of why God

does things but sometimes the word of God gives us -- supplies some answers about some of these things, so we want to look at some of that this morning. We hope it helps you. We hope it helps answer some of your questions. We hope you realize that because we live in this very sinful world that we suffer consequences of that sinful world, but we always understand that God is in charge, that God is the sovereign. He rules in majesty supreme and we need to trust him, and so we're going to talk about that a little bit this morning.

So the first thing I want to discuss with you is why is this suffering happening? Why are all of these suffering situations happening? We're hearing about people all over the globe having various struggles and we're surely particularly interested in our own local situations but we want to know why.

As we mentioned, we live in a sin-cursed world with Adam responsible. When Adam fell, the whole world suffered with him. The whole world groans according to Romans 8, as we shared with you, and so with the earth groaning we find bad things are happening and we understand that. Because of sin, for instance, came the flood. And sometimes we can

initiate that same problem.

You may realize, of course -- and let me just give you a quick example of some of these things. We remember the plague that hit Egypt, and God had a purpose in it, didn't he? Why did God pull these plagues on Egypt, and you remember some of them. They were terrible plagues, everything from blood in the water to lice and flies and even huge hail. Of course, certainly, the death of the firstborn child and just terrible consequences. Terrible consequences from that. The purpose, of course, was that God caused Israel to be able to exit the land.

Think about some other situations, too. Think along with me just for a moment. Do you remember when Israel did exit? They continued to have sin problems, everything from the golden calf to complaining to immoral activities, and God continued to cause death and havoc to exist in their life. God always had a purpose in it, though, didn't he? God always had a plan. He always had a purpose in the midst of those struggles.

We continue through the whole course of the Old Testament, and you see droughts which produced famines. We saw how there were earthquakes even in

the Bible, and they had a purpose and a plan. Even when Jesus went to the cross of Calvary, there was a huge earthquake and darkness covered the land and scared people. It was frightening and it was mysterious, and yet God was always in charge. He's the sovereign God, and so through the course of the Old Testament we continue to see all of these things happening. We see the locusts ravage the land. We see one disaster usually after another that occurs in the Old Testament, and God always had a plan.

We live in a sin-cursed world and so, yes, God always has a purpose for what's happened. His ways, I'm reminded, are higher than our ways. We know from scripture in Isaiah 55:8-9: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways," says the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

I cannot imagine all of God's plans and purposes. I don't understand them all, but we do know, as you that may know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, Romans 8 also tells us for all things work together for what? For good to them that love God and are the called according to his purpose.

Well, turn to 1 Chronicles 1. I've been

very interested in this passage. I've been inclined toward this passage and thinking about that. We were mentioning just a moment ago about plagues happening and all kinds of disasters in the Old Testament. It's a rather interesting one, and we have an indication of why this disaster happened. I'm not going to tell you I understand exactly why all of the things are happening that's going on right now. It could be that God's plan and intention has everything to do with -- it could be judgment, it could be purifying people, catching people's attention. He might surely have a plan that is higher and more broad than we could ever imagine. Perhaps it is to again open our eyes to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and so we want you to understand that. But we have an idea.

In scripture we have a revelation from God, and in God's revelation we could always see where God is going with some of these plans and purposes of his.

So in 1 Chronicles 21 we see immediately it says this in 1 Chronicles 1: Now Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel.

There's a problem going on here of a supernatural nature. The devil is in the midst of

it. The devil uses his super intelligence to tempt people, to try people, and God often allows it again for his plan and purpose. Sometimes it's, again, for the purpose of bringing people back to himself, to get their attention, to purify his own people.

But it says Satan stood up against Israel. He was tempting King David, and David had a problem here and it was his pride. David was a warrior, and because David was a warrior, he was attempted about his military. He was very proud of his military and he forgot that God was giving him victories. It didn't matter how big his army happened to be, but God was the one giving the victories.

Well, David said to Joab, who was his general, and to the leaders of the people, he said this. He said, "Go, number Israel from Beersheba to Dan," one length of Israel to another. He said, "bring the number of them to me that I may know it."

It was basically a numbering, almost like a census. Perhaps some of you, in the mail, got your census report this past week. The United States, every once in a while, every, whatever it is, 10 years or whatever it is, takes a census. They number the people in our country.

Well, in this particular instance David was

tempted by pride through the devil to say, I want to know how big my army is from one length of the country to the other, and he wanted to know the significance of it.

He was proud. I want this big army. My army is huge. It's enormous. We like big today, don't we, in the United States? Bigger is better; right? Boy, this is rough for a lot of churches, you know, particularly mega churches, you know, to not have the crowds pour in. Perhaps this is an opportunity for us, as Christians, to be reminded that we need to hear the word of God. We need to turn back to God and to his word. This is important.

Well, Joab answered. He said, "May the Lord make his people a hundred times more than they are," which was a good answer. He says, "But, my Lord the king, are they not all my Lord's servants?" He said, yeah, we're huge. Why do you care how much bigger that we need to be? He said, "Why then does my Lord require this thing?" Who should be a cause of guilt or why should he be a cause of guilt in Israel? He's succumbing to the temptation of the devil for his pride and his arrogance.

Nevertheless, guess what happened in verse 4? The king's word prevailed. He said we're going

to do it.

Therefore Joab departed. So he went throughout all Israel and came to Jerusalem. Joab gave the sum of the number of the people to David. 1,100,000 men who drew the sword, and Judah had 470,000 men who drew the sword. But he did not count Levi and Benjamin among them, for the king's word was abominable to Joab. God was displeased with this thing. He struck Israel. Disobedience.

You realize that sometimes when things happen, and this is another reason -- this is the reason that we have in this passage. It's not only the arrogance and the pride of David succumbing to Satan's temptation but, in essence, it was disobedience to God because God wanted Israel to always remember that God gave the victory, that God is in charge, that God is the sovereign, that you depend on him, that you call out on the name of the Lord.

So He struck Israel. David said to God, "I have sinned greatly." I appreciate David always, when he did wrong, he confessed. When we sin, maybe this is a wonderful opportunity for us all to take inventory, too, to see where our lives are and confess sins in our lives as well.

He said, "I have done this thing; but now," he said, "I pray, take away the iniquity of your servant." So, in essence, he's been foolish.

So David, meanwhile, waits on God and, meanwhile, God reveals himself to a prophet named Gad and he said, "Go and tell David," in verse 10, 'Thus says the Lord.'" He says, I'm going to give you a choice of three things that I may do it to you.

Isn't that interesting? I wonder how we would respond if we had three choices. If you're like me, I would probably say, don't do any of them, please don't. That's usually our response to all of this: Please, please, don't do it.

But David knows God is merciful. You do remember the passage -- and when we talk about the coronavirus and things of that nature, I think we call on God's mercy, don't you? His mercy is new -- what's the passage? His mercy is new how often? Every morning. Every morning great is thou faithfulness. I'm so very thankful that his mercy is new every morning. Every morning.

So what's David do? He's calling out on God for mercy. And as I read this, I'm always moved by God's mercy. You say, I don't see God's mercy here. He's merciful, believe me. Believe me.

So Gad, in verse 11, came to David. He says, "Choose for yourself, either three years of famine, three months to be defeated by your foes with the sword" -- in other words, your enemies come in and they overtake you and so they're going to come and do that -- "or else for three days the sword of the Lord -- the plague in the land, with the angel of the Lord destroying throughout all the territory of Israel." How about an answer?

So David said to Gad, oh, man. He says, "I am in great distress." That's really what happened. I'm in great distress. He says, "Please let me fall into the hand of the Lord, for his mercies are very great." He's acquainted with God's mercy. I encourage you, cry out to God for mercy, but do not let me fall into the hand of men.

So the Lord sent a plague upon Israel, and 70,000 men of Israel fell. You say, this doesn't sound merciful. Perhaps in our human terms it seems that way, but God is judging. God is purifying. God is working his plan and his purpose. He doesn't miss anything. Perhaps they all deserve to die. We forget that sometimes.

Verse 15: God sent an angel to Jerusalem to destroy it. As he was destroying, the Lord

looked, and what did he do? He relented of the disaster. In other words, he was merciful. He said to the angel who was destroying, "It is enough; now restrain your hand."

Perhaps the people of Israel should have all been confessing, purifying, obeying. Perhaps that would have helped as well as calling out on God because God is a merciful God.

So the angel of the Lord stood by the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. David lifted his eyes and saw the angel of the Lord standing between earth and heaven. This is absolutely frightening in this passage. Okay? This is the angel of the Lord. He's up in the air standing between earth and heaven, in verse 16, having in his hand a drawn sword stretched out over Jerusalem.

So what did David and the elders do? They were clothed in sackcloth at this point. You know, this is happening and they're upset and they fell on their faces. I think that's not a bad idea either.

So David said to God, "Was it not I who commanded the people to be numbered?" You see, now we see something very, very noteworthy. David is not only saying he sinned previously but now he is saying, Take me. Don't take my people anymore. And

this is part and parcel of the stopping of this whole terrible ordeal.

He says, "I am the one who sinned. I am the one who did evil." He says, "these sheep, what have they done?" He says, "Let your hand, I pray, O Lord, be against me and my father's house, not against your people that they should be plagued."

Therefore, the angel of the Lord commanded Gad to say to David that David should go and erect an altar. It's an interesting thing, and that's exactly what happened.

I'm going to stop here at this point. It's very time-consuming. Interestingly enough, it is considered, with pretty good backing, that where David built this altar and bought the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite, they believe that rock hard, flat place up on that Temple Mount is where the Dome of the Rock is today. They believe that is a very consequential place even in the future, so I just mention that to you. That is what is considered.

Well, why? We see God does give reasons and significance to things.

Second of all, where is the Lord, people ask. First of all, people say why is this happening? We see God always has a plan and purpose. We see God

is sovereign. We see God doesn't just do things out of no reason. His ways are higher and greater, but second of all, where is the Lord? People ask that.

I remember an old song back in the 1960s and it was about the wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald, and the singer said, where does the love of God go when all of these things happen? The love of God never went anywhere. That's God's character.

And so we need to talk about where is the Lord in the midst of these problems, and first of all, I want you to be mindful, indeed, God is sovereign. He is present. He is purposeful. He has a purpose. He is there and so the Lord is a present help in time of trouble. Is that not true? That's what scripture says. He is a present help in time of trouble.

I think in times of trouble he is never nearer than when we have trouble. I was thinking about an old friend of mine, Dr. Merrill Unger. I remember Dr. Unger went into the hospital for brain surgery, and he was still working on a book while he was in the hospital and I went to visit him. Interestingly, he hemorrhaged, Dr. Unger, and he died just within days later, but I remember one of the last things that he told me when I visited him is he

says, oh, I have such peace, he says. I have such peace.

I believe God provides that for his people. I think even in the midst of this pandemic that God provides a wonderful peace. I think he can do that for us. I really do. He is a present help in times of trouble. And he is never nearer. He is the God who is there.

In Psalm 46:7 we're told, the Lord of hosts is with us. He is with us. He hasn't gone anywhere, folks. He hasn't gone anywhere. He is with us.

And so when people tell you, where's he at? Where's God in all of this? He is with us. He is never nearer. He is a present help in times of trouble.

Scripture reminds us. 2 Corinthians 1:3 says, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Father of mercies and God of all comfort. He is the God of all comfort. You need comfort today? You need mercy today? He's there. Turn to him.

We're told he will never leave you nor forsake you. We're told in Philippians 4:7: The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Listen. I don't know about you, but sometimes we need a little peace. We need that peace when there's turmoil and the waves seem to be rising high and we're getting beaten about and we're saying, oh, what am I going to do; what am I going to do? Remember, God is there and he can provide a peace that passes all understanding. Oh, folks, turn to the Lord. Turn to him.

I am reminded during times like this, too, often people, when they say where is the Lord, I want people to understand that there is help even both now and forevermore in Christ Jesus.

The Bible says that he's the good shepherd. He lays down his life for his sheep. The Bible tells us very certainly that Jesus came into the world, into this sin-cursed world. He came to go to the cross of Calvary to pay for the penalty of our sin, and I want people to understand that may be listening to this. You say, I don't have any peace; I don't have any comfort; I don't even have any hope. There is hope in Jesus Christ. Because we're all sinners and live in a sin-cursed world, we need to understand that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, that there is none righteous, no not one, and that we desperately need a Savior. Do you ever think

he's the one who saves, he's the one who rescues you? I want you to know the greatest rescuing and the greatest need in our life is to be rescued from our sin, death, and hell, and if you don't know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior today, I remind you today that Christ Jesus can save you from all your sin. He can save you from an eternity of hell. And certainly we invite you to know Christ Jesus as your Lord and Savior. He is the God who is there. The Lord of hosts, he is there.

One more question we want to answer today because these seem to be the most prominent questions. What can I do about it? What can I do about it? We shared one thing you can do. You can trust Christ; right?

I am reminded sometimes people want ease and comfort and at times this world is a tough world to live in. You do realize, when you read Isaiah 53, Jesus is called the suffering servant. He is a man of sorrow, acquainted with grief. And because of that, he knows your sorrows, your pain. He's acquainted.

I love the passages in what the word of God tells us in Hebrews 2:18. It says, for in that He himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to

aid those who are tempted. Aren't you glad he can aid you today as well?

What can I do about it? I can seek the Lord for aid. I can seek the Lord. If I'm suffering today, I can turn to him. What can I do about it? I can turn to the Lord.

Hebrews 4:15 says, for we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

He sympathizes, folks, with us. Ever need somebody with a sympathetic heart? Our Lord is sympathetic toward you. He is merciful and gracious and loving and kind and when you have the thought that why is he doing all of these things? We want you to understand this sin-cursed world. Bad things are going to happen to us. When we ask ourselves, too, where is God, he is there. He is there for us.

What can I do about it? I want you to understand I'm called to trust him. I am called to depend on him. I am called to draw close to him. When things go awry, when things go wrong, when things go haphazardly, my prayers are heard by God. He is sympathetic. He understands our deepest needs.

Let me just pause here just for a second.

Folks, listen to me. Listen to me. I think this is a wonderful opportunity to pray. Cry out to God. Pray to him. Pray and ask God for mercy and grace. Pray to God that maybe you could help other people as well.

Sometimes we become self-centered and we think it's just about me, but there are other people that are very, very needy and perhaps God is giving you the strength and the grace to get through all these things. Perhaps you need to help someone. Perhaps you can do that. Show some brotherly love, extend the love of God in Christ Jesus to someone else. What a wonderful opportunity. I encourage you to do that, to love someone else as well.

These are interesting days. Perhaps God is using these days to call even Christians out to step up. It's a wonderful opportunity for us to step up as well and not just be self-interested in the things of our own. I know it would be easy to do with all the quarantine going on, but I would encourage you, too, in all of your needs to remember the needs of others as well.

Well, Psalm 46 says this. Let me leave you with this this day. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will

not fear, even though the earth be moved -- or removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling.

At the end of that chapter it says, be still, be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!

Surely we want God to be glorified, don't we, in the midst of all these things. Isn't that the grand purpose of all things is that God might be glorified? Is that not what we call people to do is to glorify the King of kings and the Lord of lords? But the Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Amen and amen.

Thank you, heavenly Father, for your word. We thank you that we can turn to you, and we cry out to you today for the needs of others. We pray you will quiet and calm the hearts of people, that you will still the hearts of those, and let people be reminded to know that the Lord is near. Be still and know that I am God, he says. How wonderful. So be with all the folks that are troubled today and the needy people that are out there. Provide today,

Lord. We seek your mercy and your grace now. In the
precious name of Jesus. Amen.