

Times of Crisis

by John McGregor

This sermon by Pastor John McGregor focuses on finding encouragement and guidance in times of crisis, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. It emphasizes the importance of turning to God's timeless word for security, peace, and strength. The sermon highlights four key aspects believers have in times of uncertainty: God's promises, provision, presence, and power, urging listeners to choose life and blessing by drawing near to God.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 30:19, Deuteronomy 31:8, Isaiah 55:6, 1 John 4:18, Acts 2:23

Topics: "Encouragement in Crisis", "God's Promises and Presence"

Description

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Transcript

John McGregor, Pastor John McGregor. I'm the lead pastor at Heritage Alliance Church in Regina, Saskatchewan in Canada. And I know that you are viewing this in beautiful South Africa.

It has been my privilege to be in South Africa many times. And so I'm so happy to join you in this precious time and especially to be a part of the AWAKEN 2020 series as we look to the Lord together in these very troubled times for our world. It's great to be able to just come together even through technology and to have our hearts lifted and filled and to know the goodness of our God.

I am happy today to share a word of encouragement. I've titled these thoughts today, times of crisis. And we're really thinking about what should believers do in times of anxiety, times of fear, times of crisis.

Now we know in our world this is an uncertain time and uncertainty brings us to points of crisis, doesn't it? We hear all around the world, every part of our world is affected by COVID-19 and the many implications that come along with it, health implications, economic implications, national implications. I know that you in South Africa have been on lockdown just as we have been here in Canada. And we are looking to God to help and to carry us through this time.

It is indeed a time when there are many voices out there and there can be so much confusion. What is right, what is true and so on. And so I want to begin by saying that a believer has a tremendous advantage because we can go to the timeless word of the living God and that is where we find our security, that is where we find peace and strength and encouragement from him.

Isn't it interesting that despite all the advances in our world, one little virus has brought everything to a standstill. It shows us that our world is not quite as smart as perhaps we thought it was. And it also shows us that the things of this world are passing just as scripture says.

And so it encourages us as we look at the circumstances and the uncertainties and so on, it encourages us to be sure that we are in Christ Jesus and have an eternity with him that is secure no matter what happens here upon this earth. So as we think about uncertainties and anxieties and stress and all of those fears that can come, let's turn just now to the word of God and let's consider what it is that we can be encouraged with through his word and by his Holy Spirit. I'm reading from the book of Deuteronomy in the Old Testament and chapter 30 toward the end of it from verse 19 of chapter 30 through verse 8 of chapter 31.

Here is what the word of God says. I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Therefore, choose life that both you and your descendants may live, that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey his voice and that you may cling to him.

Cling to him for he is your life and the length of your days and that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to give them. Then Moses went and spoke these words to all Israel. He said to them, I am 120 years old today.

I can no longer go out and come in. Also the Lord has said to me, you shall not cross over this Jordan. The Lord your God himself crosses over before you.

He will destroy those nations from before you. You will dispossess them. Joshua himself crosses over before you just as the Lord has said.

And the Lord will do to them as he did to Sion and Og, the kings of the Amorites and their land when he destroyed them. The Lord will give them over to you and that you may do to them according to every commandment which I have commanded you. Be strong and of good courage.

Do not fear, do not be afraid of them. For the Lord your God, he is the one who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.

Then Moses called Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, be strong and of good courage. For you must go before this people to the land which the Lord has sworn to their fathers to give them and you shall cause them to inherit it. And the Lord, he is the one who goes before you.

He will be with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you. Do not fear and do not be dismayed.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that in times of anxiety and fear, we can come to the timeless word of God. Thank you that you do not change, that you are certain and sure in all circumstances. And so we pray that you would minister your word to our hearts just now because we ask it in Jesus' precious name, amen.

As I say, a believer in times of crisis has the word of God to come to. And you know, what happens is that when things are going good, we have a tendency because of our human fallenness and old human nature to turn away from God and to forget all the benefits and blessings that he has given. And Moses is reminding God's people that when they go through a time of crisis to possess that which God has given to them, he is reminding them of how they need to be close to the Lord who will indeed be close to them.

And so I would begin today by asking you, how is your walk with the Lord? Are you walking closely with him? If not, my dear friend, this is a great opportunity in Awakened 2020 to turn once again to the Lord. Moses said, I set blessing and curse, life and death before you. That's a human choice that we have to make.

And I pray that throughout this Awakened series, you will make that choice to turn to God and to seek him afresh and anew. It might be that years ago you walked with him, but things have grown somewhat cold. And maybe some things have happened and you have felt, oh, what's the point? But my dear friend, God is reaching out to you through this COVID-19 crisis.

And he's saying, you come to me and I will teach you the depth of my love and the strength of my goodness and the gift of my salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. I'll teach you what it is to know the touch of revival and to be lifted and filled once again with the Spirit of the living God. So as we think about times of crisis, Moses knew that God's people were going to face many and strong enemies.

They were going to face physical challenges, spiritual challenges, economic challenges, perhaps health challenges as they moved into the Promised Land. But there are some things that he gave to them through Moses here in this passage. And I would just cause us to think upon especially four things that you and I have as a gift from God.

First of all, we have his promises. You think about verse eight, the Lord, he is the one who goes before you. You might be worried today about the next step that you can take, but you need not worry if you are in Christ.

You can allow him to lead you and to guide you. He promised he is the one who goes before you. He promised he'll be with you.

He promised he'll not leave you nor forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed. These are the promises of God.

You remember in Exodus chapter 33, when the people had done something wrong, they had begun to worship an idol, and God through Moses calls them to make a choice, choose. He says, choose who you'll serve and choose to follow me, and that's exactly what they did. But God said to Moses in the 33rd chapter, I will send an angel before you into the land.

And Moses said, no, Lord, unless you go with us, do not send us up there, because Moses knew that if they were going without the Lord, they were going to fail and fall. I will go with you. In Exodus 33, 14, God says, all right, I will go with you.

And here again in Deuteronomy 31, eight, he says, I will be with you. And as you think about that this day, may God strongly encourage you. You and I are not in this thing on our own.

The Lord is here with us. He is our comfort. You think about when you come to him for salvation.

He does not say, if you come and say, Lord, I know I'm a sinner, I need to be saved. He does not say, listen, I'm a little busy just now. Could you come back tomorrow? He does not say, oh, when you get that piece of your life straightened out, you come back and see me.

No, no, he takes you at your word and he comes to dwell in your heart just as you repent of your sin and turn to him. The comfort that we have is that God keeps his promises. You'll find that all the way through Scripture.

And they are there. They are meant to give us courage and confidence. As you consider those promises and remember that God keeps them all, does that not lift your heart today? And to focus on the goodness of God, who really will keep every promise that he makes to you just as he keeps his promises to the children of Israel and all through Scripture.

Years ago when I was beginning a new church in a community, I asked the Lord, Lord, would you give me one soul a month so that I might have time to disciple that person and help that person to grow in you. And you know, after seven years when God called me to go to another ministry and I looked back, that's exactly what the Lord had done. He gave at least one soul every month because you see, he keeps his promises.

He is so faithful. He is the faithful God. In Lamentations 3 and verse 55 through 58, we find these words.

I called on your name, O Lord, from the lowest pit. You have heard my voice. Do not hide your ear from my sighing, from my cry for help.

You drew near on the day I called to you and said, do not fear. O Lord, you have pleaded the case for my soul. You have redeemed my life.

Look at that. God stepped in because that person was crying out to him and he has not changed. His word has not changed.

His promise has not changed. If he would do it then, he will still do it now. In 1 John chapter two and verse one, we are told that we have an advocate, Jesus Christ, the righteous one.

You and I don't have to depend on our righteousness. Christ is the righteous one. He is an advocate with the Father for you and me.

So we can have confidence in times of crisis because we have and hold in this dear old book the promises of the living God. Secondly, as we go back to Deuteronomy 31 and verse eight, we see that we have God's provision, his protective hand is to be with them. He will not fail them nor forsake them, he says.

And you know, as you look in Ezra chapter seven, you begin to discover that Ezra, as he took on a time of crisis, went back to the holy land in terrible times. But several times in Ezra chapter seven, it says to us, and the hand of the Lord was upon me. Oh, when we realize that we have his promises and we have his provision.

The hand of the Lord was upon Ezra so that he would know deliverance and he would know that God had provided everything, not just some things, but everything that he would need along the way. Dear friend, I hope that you can say that today. Over my time walking with Christ, I have discovered that he provides all that I need.

He does not take things away for the sake of doing that. He removes some things from your life and mine that he might provide that which is best, that which is necessary. That time with him, that personal dear walk with him.

You think about the early Christians in the Acts of the Apostles and that they went out with nothing and yet they were provided with everything that they needed. God even opened doors for them to go to places that they could never have gone without that sense of his provision. You think about the Apostle Paul in Acts chapter 23 and verse 11.

God is saying, I'll send you to Rome and he opens up the way for Paul to go and to preach the truth of the gospel in the center of the Roman Empire, even in the city of Rome. He provides peace and I might be speaking to someone today and in your heart there is turmoil. All of the what ifs are rising up and choking you.

What if I run out of money? What if there's no place to go? What if this illness comes, this virus, and I die? What if my family is left without someone to help? Dear friend of mine, all of those questions can come and pile in but when you look at the evidence in scripture, you see that God provides peace. Do you have that peace today? That kind of peace that allows you to rest not in what you can do about COVID-19 but because you are in Christ, you know you are safe and you are secure. He provides grace.

How will I face these challenges? He will give you the grace. He has given it to thousands, millions over the years. I've discovered the depth of His grace.

He will give you strength for He promises not to leave, not to forsake, and so on. He will look after the physical needs. There have been times in different places in the world where I wondered what do I do now? Where will I find food and so on? And God has always come through to provide the needs.

A place to lay my head. A friend to walk alongside. You see, He gives us His promises and in times of crisis, they become so precious.

Perhaps that's why Peter in his second letter says that we have these great and precious promises and He provides His own provision for you and for me. Then there is a third thing that we think about as we look in Deuteronomy 31:8. There is His very presence. Now a lot of people here in Canada during COVID-19 have found tremendous help and strength in Psalm 91 because it speaks so clearly about the presence of God.

But you look here again at verse eight. He says He will be with you always. The omnipotent God, the all-powerful One.

You see, as you look in Scripture, you find that all the way through. Daniel is abandoned to the lions, but God is in there. And Daniel says, live forever, O King.

God sent an angel to close the lions' minds. You think about Esther as she faces the possibility of losing her life for going into the king, having not been called for. And yet, God is there and He goes with her and before her.

When we seek Him in times of failure and struggle and crisis, it is His presence that we need. There is a wonderful story told about Hudson Taylor when there was war in China and the mission stations that he had seen God build and was using to reach people were being attacked and burned. And someone came

into Hudson Taylor's office and found that he was sitting with his Bible open singing an old hymn.

O Jesus, I am resting, resting in the joy of who thou art. I am finding out thy goodness of thy loving heart. You see, he had that sense of the presence of God.

Do you have that? Do you have that presence in your life today? You can. You can indeed awaken here in 2020, awaken to spiritual reality, turn to Christ and discover His presence, so marvelous, so strong, so amazing. When we seek Him, even in times where we have failed, we discover just how good He is.

Listen to the words of God in Isaiah 55 and verses six and seven. Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near.

Let the wicked forsake His way and the unrighteous man his thoughts and let him return to the Lord for He will have mercy on him and to our God for He will abundantly pardon. You see, when we turn to God and ask Him for His presence, He does not drive us away. We begin to discover the depth of His compassion.

And oh, how often I have spoken with someone wrestling with spiritual issues, and yet when we simply admit our failure and our sin and we turn to Christ, we discover that He wipes it away and gives new life and gives us a fresh touch of His Holy Spirit as we seek Him. You know, we are not to be driven by fear or by anxiety or by crisis, but we are to walk by faith, faith in an unchanging, victorious, risen, living Savior. There is freedom and victory and assurance that is found nowhere else but in a close and intimate relationship with Jesus.

I spoke with someone yesterday who was sharing with me all the troubles in their life. And I said, have you forgiven that person that brought so much of this anguish into your heart? Well, well, well. But you know, when we did forgive in prayer, it was amazing to see the change as this person I was speaking to over the phone began to say, oh, oh, it's lifting, it's lifting.

Oh, we need the presence of God, my friends. I must hasten along. There is a fourth thing that we see here in these verses.

God not only gives us His promises and His provision and His very presence, but His power is manifest in the life of His people. He'll not leave you nor forsake you. Do not fear, do not be dismayed.

You see, God said in verses three through five in this chapter that He would deal with the enemies. All the what ifs, you can trust Him to deal with them one by one. His powerful love removes that fear, that anxiety, that crisis.

For 1 John 4 and verse 18 says, perfect love casts out fear because fear has torment. Don't be tormented. Turn instead to the living Christ and let Him deal with that fear.

Power enough to forgive sin, to redeem us, and to equip us to live in this world without being of this world. Oh, that is mighty power, is it not? Power enough to overcome death. Peter, as he preached on the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter two and verses 23 and 24, says that death could not hold him.

And the Bible promises that Jesus said, because I live, you shall live also. Are you in Christ? You will live an eternity with Him, if that is true. But without Christ, there is a lost eternity, a place that the Bible calls hell.

Oh, dear friend, don't go there. Turn today to Christ instead. Let Him bring forgiveness and let Him bring new life.

There is power enough to quiet the storms. Oh, those storms within the family, those storms within the workplace, those storms within the nation and the area, those storms that go on on the inside. Jesus has enough power to overcome them all.

Power enough that you need today, that I need today. And it is there, it is available. But my friends, we have to understand, obedience is necessary.

We must obey the Word of God. I love what a friend of mine from Ireland, where I grew up, wrote to me a little while ago. He is a cancer survivor.

He is under threat because of COVID-19 and all kinds of things. But he wrote this, I will not allow my life to be governed by fear. And I trust that today, you would say the same thing.

So I'm going to wrap up these few thoughts with just a short prayer. And I encourage you, seek the Lord in prayer. Turn to Him today.

Moses said, life and death, blessing and cursing. Choose life, choose blessing. Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for the Word of God.

Thank You that it is timeless. Thank You that regardless of the crisis, the anxieties, the fears that can come, You can bring a stillness deep in the human heart. Lord, we want to turn to You today.

And for those who do not know You, would You cry out to Him from where You are and simply say, God, be merciful to me, a sinner, and come and live in my heart. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit. Teach me how to walk with You.

Let me be born again according to Your Word. And for those who are already believers, but things have gotten cold or distant, cry out to Him today. Oh Lord, awaken my soul.

Draw me near to You again. For Your Word promises, Lord, that if I will draw near to You, You will draw near to me. So dear Lord, revive me again.

Fill my life with Your holy presence. Give me a passion for Your Word and for Your love. Teach me again how to walk with You daily in the Scriptures.

In Jesus' strong name we pray, amen. May God bless you as you follow Him.

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