

Trust God's Power

By: Tom Schoenherr

February 8, 2015. Do we trust our power? Do we trust God's power? Tom Schoenherr preaches on Isaiah 40 today. God promises comfort and strength to his people, but can we hear and believe those words in light of all of the terrible things that seem to go on in life sometimes these days?

*** Transcript ***

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Last week was the Super Bowl. Many of you may have watched the game. Many may have watched the commercials. It was an exciting game, and it was an exciting close to the game. There were so many commercials, some of which were controversial I guess. But I was reminded about a commercial not from this Super Bowl, but from last year's Super Bowl. It was a Duracell commercial that featured Derrick Coleman, who is a football player with the Seattle Seahawks. You know him. And Derek became deaf when he was really quite young, and in that short little minute-long commercial it told about how he was bullied in school. He was not picked until the very end to be on a team. He was harassed by coaches. He was not chosen to be drafted by the NFL. And many people -- and this is a very important line -- he says everybody, everybody told me that it was over for me. My dream was gone. But I lost my hearing when I was three, and so I didn't listen to them. And then it goes on as he is pictured walking into the Super Bowl stadium. And he says, and all of these people, all of these fans are here cheering me on. And I can hear every one of them. And then there is the tagline that goes across the screen saying, "Duracell. Trust your power."

Do we trust our power? Do we trust God's power? At the beginning of this chapter, we're focusing upon the Old Testament reading from Isaiah chapter 40. At the beginning of that chapter we hear those words during Christmastime: Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. In other words, your sins are taken care of. Your sins are forgiven, people. Comfort, that's what I come to bring to you. But what were the sins of the people? Those sins were that they trusted in arms. They trusted in weaponry. They trusted in alliances that they made with other nations in order to keep themselves safe from attacks from other countries. They chose to put their faith in weapons and forces of arms, and they did not trust God. And they went against the will of God. And so they were taken into captivity and they went into exile, and lived in Babylon for 50 years. Now God is saying, now it's time to come home. And there are people who have never seen home, because they were born in Babylon. There are other people who have died in Babylon. There are others who have grown quite old, and think of going back to the Promised Land as being something that they just can't do. They don't have the strength. They've become faint and weary.

I am aware that for myself, and maybe for you too, when I see the atrocities that are done by the people of ISIS in other parts of the world, when I see the horrible things that happen to others in the name of religion, when I hear about break-ins in homes and I see people who are struggling with illness and aging, when I am aware that there are cyber criminals who get into all kinds of computers and be able to take the social security numbers and addresses of people throughout the country, then maybe I too struggle with believing that God is there to give me comfort and strength. I don't have faith, and I look for other ways in which I can get that strength. And maybe I too think boy, if we just had enough weapons, we could take care of all of those people who are threatening us throughout the world.

So now, all of those people in the Old Testament reading are thinking at the end of this 50 years they have a lot of questions. They are wondering about many things in relation to returning to the Promised Land. What questions do you think they might have? I'm really asking. What questions might you have if you were one of those people? Would you have some questions of God? What might you ask? What will it be like? What is your plan for me? And for our whole community? Is my house still there? Probably, maybe not. Are you going to let this happen again? What if I don't trust him again? Will this happen once more? Is God powerful enough? Is God faithful to his people any longer? Are we the children of God, and what does that mean? Can there be peace in this world? What is the role of the community of faith in this kind of world, where it seems like there's a lot of scariness going on and people are wondering? So can the people of God hear those words: Comfort, O comfort my people?

I am also confessing that I have trouble hearing and believing those words, in light of all of the terrible things that seem to go on in life sometimes these days. And I'm wondering what does that mean for my faith? If I put all of my emphasis and put all of my trust in gathering together weapons and arms, if I am focused on just trying to hold on to what is mine, then I draw more and more into myself. And there is no comfort and no hope. I am lost.

But Isaiah doesn't want to give up on the people, and God doesn't want to give up on his people either. We hear those questions in this Old Testament reading: have you not known, have you not heard that I said comfort, comfort my people? Remember? And in the Old Testament reading it continues to go through all of the things that God has done and continues to do for his people. And God enters into the hopelessness, God enters into the struggle of his people with a promise. And that promise continues to be Emmanuel, God with us. And in the lesson it says that God gives power to the faint and strength to the powerless. He continues to reach out to his people, to gather them together and say: I am not faint. I am not weary. I am with you still. In the midst of all of the struggle, in the midst of all of the questions that you may have, I am still there. And he takes all of our fear, and all of our death, all of our struggle, all of our pain on himself, on the cross. And in Christ we know, we hear and trust a promise: that he is bringing life out of death. He is bringing hope out of hopelessness.

And so these people of God, who are there in Babylon after 50 years, and also Peter's mother-in-law whom he heals, and all of those people who are gathered at the door for healing that Jesus reaches out to -- we are gathered with them. And Jesus comes among us and draws us again to himself at the table. And he invites us to bring all of our sin, all of our fear, all of our distrust of God to him. And he returns to us what we so desperately need: his forgiving love, his forgiveness, his power, his love for us in the gift of his own body and blood. And he invites us and calls us to be his people in the world. And he says we've got to go to other neighboring towns. Remember in the gospel where the disciples come looking for him, and Jesus says we need to go to the neighboring town so that I can proclaim the gospel there.

We are invited and called as God's people, sent out in order that we might proclaim that message of life and hope to people who are struggling with hope and fear and loneliness and illness and aging, who have all kinds of things that are drawing them into themselves. And we are there, sent to be that promise. Because we live in the promised land -- this world that God loves so desperately and loves so much is the place of God's promise. And we are part of God's promised future as we stand before all people. And there are many who would say that life is cheap and life is meaningless. But we have a mission in this world, in order to say to all of the world: life is a gift from God and each life is precious. So we don't get our power from Duracell. We trust the power of God to give us strength, hope, and new life. And the tagline across our lives could be, "Jesus Lives. Trust God's power."

In Christ's name, amen.

*** Keywords ***

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