

This Sunday March 22nd we were due to have our great friends Roy and Dorothy Wheeler with us from the UK. Unfortunately that trip has fallen foul of the current travel advice, but Roy being Roy is not one to miss out on getting his message across!

He sent over his notes and I'm glad to include it here as it speaks directly into the current situation. It came out of a prophetic word God gave him, and that was confirmed by someone else in a prayer meeting in their church in England. I've included the word first, followed by what he was planning to preach, which explores the word in more depth. Enjoy, and be blessed.

Robert

Prophetic word given 13th March 2020

I believe the Lord wants to speak to us concerning the present coronavirus pandemic, through the occasion of the storm on the Lake, recorded in **Mark 4 v.35 – 41**

Like the coronavirus "storm", the storm on the Sea of Galilee was a serious crisis which came without warning (Matt.8 v.24) and Jesus' disciples were overwhelmed and nearly swamped by it (Mark 4 v.37), but the Lord was with them (in the boat) and today He is with us in our situation – His promise is never will I leave you nor forsake you.

Jesus had given His disciples a specific word in advance of this crisis. He had told them: "Let us go **over** ..." but when the crisis hit them, their belief was: "we're going **under**!" They had let fear into their hearts (Mark 4 v.40) and seemingly forgotten God's specific word to them.

In a crisis, whether it be the coronavirus scare or an unexpected personal or family situation, beware that it can negatively affect your whole perspective. In the midst of the storm, Jesus' disciples began to doubt that the Lord really cared for them, saying "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" There is absolutely no doubt that despite how our circumstances look, our Lord truly cares for each one of us and His word to us for situations such as we are facing is:

"... do not fear, for I am with you; ..." (Is.41 v.10)

"... my peace I give to you. ... Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." (John 14 v.27)

"Cast all your anxiety on Him for He does care for you." (1 Peter 5 v.7)

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And (then) the peace of God, which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4 v.6-7)

Let's be wise and follow government and the health experts' advice, but now is not a time for fear, but a time for faith in our God and His promises and an opportunity to be a witness to friends and neighbours in the way we respond to this crisis.

Responding to the Storm

The Psalmist confidently asserts (in **Psalm. 46**): *v.1 God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. V.2 Therefore we will not fear, ... v.10 Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth. V.11 The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.* Selah – pause and ponder on that! The Amplified Version says God is a very present and **well-proved** help in trouble and the New King James Spirit-filled Life Study Bible explains that the Hebrew words translated in a number of translations as *a very present help in trouble*, literally mean that God is an *abundantly available help*. And in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic this is so reassuring to know. We have no need to panic or be fearful, for God is with us despite how bad things may look; He is still ruling on heaven's throne and bringing about His purposes in and through this worldwide crisis.

What however, can we find of practical help in God's Word for such a time as this? Let's read **Mark 4 v.35 -41**, for I believe the Lord wants to speak to us through a crisis which Jesus' early disciples encountered when they were caught up in an unexpected storm on the Sea of Galilee.

Mark 4 v.35 – 41

35 That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, 'Let us go over to the other side.' 36 Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. 37 A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. 38 Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, 'Teacher, don't you care if we drown?'

39 He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, 'Quiet! Be still!' Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

40 He said to his disciples, 'Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?'

41 They were terrified and asked each other, 'Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!'

Firstly, I want you to notice that this crisis wasn't due to anything which Jesus' disciples had done wrong. They were following the Lord's guidance in crossing over the Lake and He was with them in their situation. In fact Jesus was totally at peace with the course they were on, for, until they woke him, He was sleeping peacefully, knowing that they were not out of God's will, for we know that Jesus only ever did what His Father showed Him (**John 5 v.19**). Jesus was confident and at peace that His Father would bring them through this storm. In a similar way, we can be confident that the Lord will bring us through the present worldwide crisis.

Like the coronavirus "storm", this storm on the Sea of Galilee was a serious crisis, even for the experienced sailors amongst Jesus' disciples, and, like the coronavirus crisis, the storm on the Lake came, according to Matthew's account (**Matthew 8 v.24**) without warning and affected everyone who was on the Lake; Mark 4 v.36 tells us that there were many boats hit by this serious storm. In a similar, but even bigger way, the coronavirus "storm" has hit country after country in what has become a worldwide pandemic. And, like Jesus' disciples, many, even followers of Jesus, have become overwhelmed by the crisis which we are facing. Mark 4 v.37 tells how Jesus' disciples were close to being completely swamped by the storm and their reactions would suggest that they weren't just being swamped practically but also in danger of becoming overwhelmed emotionally. Hopefully, the similarities with peoples' responses to the coronavirus crisis will be evident to you. I believe however, that the Lord wants to reassure us, that just as He was with the disciples in their crisis, so He is with us in the coronavirus crisis, for He has promised us - His followers - that He will never leave us nor forsake us.

Now I want to draw your attention to something of significance that can so easily be missed, concerning the timing of the storm on the Lake. We know that it was evening time or later and thus they could well have been battling in darkness in their attempts to stay afloat and in a similar way when a crisis hits us personally it can often be "a dark time" as we battle with negative thoughts and emotions to "stay afloat and on an even keel". However, I want to draw your attention to the words: "That day..." in v.35 of Mark 4. Mark says that this crisis occurred later on a specific day and to see the significance you need to look back at the events of that day and you will find, from Mark's account, that earlier that same day, Jesus had told the crowd who had gathered to hear Him, the parable that has come to be known as the 'Parable of the Sower'. Later, when the disciples were alone with Jesus, Mark tells us (**Mark 4 v.10**) that they asked Him to explain to them the meaning of the parable; which He did, saying that it was important to understand that parable to be able to understand other parables.

I suspect that the parable will be familiar to most of you but In summary, Jesus told a story of how a farmer went out to sow seed in his field, which he would have done by scattering seed by hand to the left and the right as he walked the length and breadth of his field. And some of the seed fell along the path at the side of the field and the birds immediately came and ate up the seed. Other seed fell in rocky places where it sprung up quickly but, because the topsoil was shallow, the plants

were unable to establish good roots and the plants were thus scorched by the hot sun and withered and died. Some other seed fell in patches of ground which were over-run by thorn bushes which choked the farmer's plants and thus they produced no grain. However, other seed did fall into good soil and healthy plants grew up and produced a good crop of grain with yields of up to a hundredfold return.

In explaining the parable to his disciples, Jesus said that the seed sown by the farmer in the story, represented God's word. In **1 Peter 1 v.23** Bible God's word is described as imperishable seed; it is good life-giving seed which does not perish like natural seed can. There is nothing wrong with the seed of God's word; what is all important to it producing good fruit in our lives, is the condition of our heart; not the organ which pumps blood round our bodies but our inner being spoken of in the Scriptures as our spirit or heart – the core of our being and affections – we say I love you with all of my heart. Jesus explained that in the story, the different soil conditions into which the farmer sowed the seed, represent the different conditions of people's hearts.

Jesus explained to His disciples that some people are hard-hearted, like the trodden down path at the side of a field. When God speaks to them, His words to them cannot take root in their heart and just as in the natural the birds lose no time in eating the seed, so in a similar way, Satan comes and steals God's word from such people's hearts.

The hearts of other people, Jesus explained, are like rocky shallow soil; what is sown initially springs up quickly but with the heat of the sun the plants wither and die and thus they don't produce any fruit. Jesus explained that such people are the kind of people who initially receive God's word enthusiastically and joyfully, but because God's word doesn't have a deep root in their life, then when troubles come into their lives, sadly, they fall away – they stop believing.

Jesus further explained, that some people's lives can be like a patch of ground that gets over-run with thorn bushes; such people's lives become dominated with: the worries of this life; or with the deceitfulness of pursuing wealth; and the desire for more and more material things. Luke says the thorn bushes represent life's worries; riches and the pursuit of pleasures, all of which can so easily take over your life and crowd-out and choke God's word in your heart, so that His word becomes unfruitful in your life.

However, Jesus went on to explain that God's word sown into the soil of a good human heart will produce a crop of good fruit in a person's life, even up to a hundred times what is sown.

In advance of the storm, earlier that same day, Jesus had taught His disciples of the importance of how God's word is received and of the condition of a person's heart to the result of what God's word produces in a person's life. Mark has recorded (**Mark 4 v20**) that Jesus said that the people, represented by good soil in the parable, are those who: truly hear God's word; and who accept the word as true and as a word from God for them, then God's word will produce a crop of good fruit in their life. In Luke's account (**Luke 8**) he has recorded that Jesus not only explained the importance of how we hear what God says to us, but also that we retain it - that we hold on to what God has said - and that we persevere in believing His word to us for it to produce good fruit in our life (**Luke 8 v.15**).

The Scriptures tell us that we cannot live by physical food alone but that we are intended to live by the words which the Lord speaks to us and Jesus had taught His disciples the importance of how they received and held on to God's word and then when the evening came on, the very same day as they had had the teaching, God the Son – Jesus – spoke a specific word to them for what lay ahead. God's word to them, recorded in Mark 4 v.35, was: "Let us go over to the other side." It wasn't a

suggestion but a clear word of direction to them, which they all heard, but seemingly it wasn't received with much faith and as the storm revealed it hadn't taken root in their hearts.

When the crisis came, in the form of a storm, they had Jesus with them (in the boat); and they had had a specific word from Him in advance of the crisis - God the Son had told them: "Let us **go over** ..." but when the crisis hit them, their belief was: "we're going **under**!" From Mark 4 v.40 we know that they had let fear into their hearts and it would seem that they hadn't held on to God's specific word to them.

In a crisis, whether it be the coronavirus scare or an unexpected personal or family situation, beware that it can negatively affect your whole perspective, for in the midst of the storm, Mark 4 v.38 tells us that Jesus' disciples began to doubt that the Lord actually cared for them. They said: "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" Of course, He cared about them! and He also cares for you, no matter how bad your circumstances may look. Our Lord truly cares for each one of us and His word to us for situations such as the coronavirus crisis, which we are all facing, is:

"... do not fear, for I am with you; ..." (Isaiah 41 v.10)

"... my peace I give to you. ... Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." (John 14 v.27)

"Cast all your anxiety on Him for He does care for you." (1 Peter 5 v.7)

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And (then) the peace of God, which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippian 4v.6-7)

Jesus is with us in our situation, just as He was with His disciples on the Lake and in a similar way to them, when we need His help, we need to get His attention. They had to wake him up! Whilst we don't have to wake God up - for He neither slumbers nor sleeps - we do have to get His attention and ask for His help through prayer. We have to call upon Him for His help, in a similar way to how the disciples did in their crisis. And for them, when Jesus rebuked the storm, the situation became completely calm (Mark 4 v.39) and He can still do the same for us today, for it is amazing what our God can do in response to our prayers. **Matthew 8 v.27** says that they were amazed and asked: **Who is this that even the wind and waves obey Him?** We know who that was it was our God, the One who is an ever-present help in times of trouble; the One who is still In control of world affairs, including the coronavirus crisis.

This is not a time for fear, but a time for faith in our God and His promises; a time to call upon him for His mercy and help; and it is an opportunity to be a witness to friends and neighbours in the way in which we respond to this crisis.

Of course, we should be wise and follow the government's and the health experts' advice, but remember no matter what, we have a hope in Christ which the world doesn't have. Even if any of us do become infected by the virus and even if we died as a result, as born-again Christian believers, we will go to a much better place, where there is no more pain or sickness and so, as Jesus urged his followers before He left to go to that place, do not let your hearts become troubled, but instead hold on to His promises and do not let the enemy rob you of God's gift of peace which is part of His salvation package.

Amen – let's be those who 'go over' with Jesus rather than 'going under' what's going on around us. And as we do, we'll give strength and hope to others through the good news of Jesus.