

An Assurance of Hope for Troubled Times

We've been talking the past couple of Sundays about what we are to do during troubled times. Two weeks ago I said we were to cast our cares, commit our ways, chill out and know that he is God. Last Sunday we talked about the fact that an ox cart won't work in troubled times. Doing things our way instead of God's way will only get us into more trouble. We need to be obedient to God and do things his way above all else. Obedience is the key to God's blessing and his help in times of trouble.

This morning I want to look at an assurance of hope for troubled times. As we begin however, I want to take a moment to express some thoughts about Tuesday's election. It was an historic moment and certainly for people of color in our nation it was perhaps the first time in their lives that they felt the words of our founding documents truly coming to life. It was inspiring to me to hear young African-American boys and girls saying that for the first time what their parents had said to them – "that maybe someday in America you could grow up to be president" – for the first time that dream was fleshed out for them. It became real and not just a fairy tale. And to see the faces of the elders as they wept with joy, realizing that they had lived to witness another fulfillment of Dr. King's dream. Politics aside, it was an historic night.

Last Sunday I read part of the statement written by our General Superintendent, Dr. George Wood. He had called the Assemblies of God to prayer as we prepared for the election. After the election he released another statement to encourage us to be faithful Christians and citizens. Let me share with you the five things Dr. Wood had to say. These five things are the same things the apostles told the first century Christians to do as followers of Christ and his word.

First of all, realize that **"God is the sovereign Lord over human history and government."** The apostle Paul wrote, **"Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God."** **Romans 13:1.** What does that mean? It means that God raises up leaders and nations according to his plans and his purposes. We need to rest in the knowledge that God is never surprised by the outcome of any election.

Daniel told king Nebuchadnezzar, **"The Most High is sovereign over the**

kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men.” **Daniel 4:17.** Jesus told Pilate, the unrighteous governor of Judea, **“You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.”** **John 19:11.** God is in control and nothing happens apart from his permissive will.

Jesus is the Lord of all history, lord of every nation, lord of every ruler. Trust him. Dr. Wood wrote, “If the early Christians could flourish under a persecuting totalitarian government, then in America we Christians have even more reason to flourish because of the democratic system that gives us the freedom of speech, assembly and worship.”

The second thing the apostles taught the early church had to do with the reason and purpose for human/civil government. **“Government is designed to restrain and punish those who do evil.”** The apostle Paul wrote, **“For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God’s servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.”** **Romans 13:3-5** You may not think of government – our governor, our president or the president-elect - as God’s servant, but that is what the bible says. He has instituted government for our good and our protection. If you don’t believe what the bible is saying about the importance of government, try removing it from our city or state or nation for a week and see what happens.

Consider what Peter wrote. **“Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.”** **1 Peter 2:13-17.** We need to recognize our government and our elected officials as servants and instruments of God to fulfill his purposes.

The third thing the apostles taught the early Christians was: **“If you owe taxes, pay taxes!”** Paul wrote, **“This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.” Romans 13:6-7.** I know we all hate paying taxes, but folks have been paying them since bible days. Let’s fulfill our obligation to our country and obey the Lord in the process as we pay our taxes.

The fourth thing they taught us concerning our government is to **“Pray!”** Paul wrote to Timothy, **“I urge then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone – the kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.” 1 Timothy 2:1-2.** Notice that we are to pray and intercede but we are also to give thanks for those elected to office. If you aren’t happy with some of the results of the election, I suggest you begin to pray for those who have been elected and take time to give thanks for them as well. See what God will do.

Finally, **“We are to show respect for those who hold office.”** The passage from Romans 13:7 we just read tells us to give to everyone whatever we owe them. If it is respect or honor, then show them respect and honor. Even if your candidates didn’t win, let’s be respectful, prayerful and thankful for those willing to serve in elected office. Let’s pray for our new president and vice president, for the members of his cabinet, for the members of the legislative and judicial branches of government as well. Paul told Timothy, **“This is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” 1 Timothy 2:3.**

Dr. Wood wrote, “As believers, we can help set a better tone for the national discussion. We can hold to our views without being unkind, without rancorous voices, without becoming filled with anger or hatred toward those with opposing views. Our ultimate goal as Christians is not to win an election, but to win people to Jesus.” I trust you will take these words to heart and pray for our newly elected president. Pray that God will give him wisdom as he makes choices for his cabinet. Pray that he will seek out godly counsel and have godly wisdom in all of his decisions. Pray that the divisions in our nation will be healed and that we will see a new and better day in America. With

God, all things are possible.

With that said, turn with me to Isaiah 41:10 and I want to share a message of hope for troubled times. Whatever is happening in your life, whatever we face in the future, here is God's assurance of hope for each of us. Times are troubled, the future is uncertain, the economy is failing, **“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” Isaiah 41:10**

“Do not fear.” Literally God says “don't be terrified or demoralized.” I like the fact that God doesn't beat around the bush with us. He gets right to the point. Don't be fearful, in spite of the times, in spite of the circumstances, in spite of the heartbreak and the trouble, don't be fearful or demoralized. Why? Because “I am with you.” What a confidence builder! It doesn't matter what is coming towards us – if God is with us, we don't have to be afraid. There are a lot of scary things out there, but if God is with us, we can be at peace.

Think how often as children we wanted our father or mother to be with us. We wouldn't be afraid because Daddy was with us or Mom was holding our hand. Well, someone greater than mom and dad is with us. God is with us and has promised to be with us forever. God doesn't always have to do anything. It is enough that he is with us. If a child is afraid in the dark, you don't always have to be turning on the lights and searching for monsters – all you have to do is be there with them.

“Do not be afraid for I am with you. Do not be dismayed.” NASB reads, “Do not anxiously look about you.” One commentary says the meaning here is “to dart glances this way and that as if not knowing where to look for safety.” When we fear we begin to look for something secure to trust in. We start to panic and we look desperately for an answer, for help, for a solution. We look for something that will bring immediate relief. Unfortunately, too often we look to anything and everything but God. The passage says “Do not be dismayed for I am your God.” You don't have to look everywhere. You don't have to search any further than this truth: He is our God and we are safe and secure in him.

There is no one else to look to. There is no one else in whom to hope and trust because there is no one else like him. There is no greater one than the God we love

and serve, the God who is with us. He is enough. So don't be looking anxiously about you. Don't be searching here and there trying to find a way out. He is your God. He is your deliverer. He is your Savior. Don't give in to fear. Instead, trust in the Lord. "Do not be dismayed for I am your God."

"I will strengthen you and help you." "I will strengthen you" can literally be translated "I make you strong." We don't have to be alarmed or afraid wondering if we will be able to make it through the trouble and storms because God said he makes us strong. Whatever the situation, there is strength enough. You will be strong enough.

The word carries the idea "to fortify, to harden, to increase, to prevail." Through his faithfulness, through the lessons we learn in life as we trust him and grow in him, he makes us strong. By building our life upon the integrity of his word, he makes us strong. We are fortified against the attacks of the enemy.

The word also carries the idea of readiness. He makes us strong by causing us to be alert, ready for the battle. Part of our strength in difficult times comes from the fact that he has warned us. We aren't surprised when the days grow more difficult or when persecution comes. The bible says, **"The end of all things is near...do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed...if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name."** 1 Peter 4:7, 12-13, 16.

He has made us strong and alert, giving us opportunity to prepare ourselves for battle. We know that the enemy of our souls is battling against us. We know we are Christians in a world and a culture that is growing openly hostile to our faith and our values and our principles. It has always been that way. But we aren't afraid at what may come to pass, instead, we turn to the one who has promised to fortify us and make us steadfast and strong. We are more than able to face the difficulties of the day because the word of God says "...in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."

Are difficult days ahead? Yes. Is it because we have a new president or a new political party in power? No. Of course not. We've had difficult days with republicans

and democrats alike. Is it because we are in a recession or facing a depression? No. Understand that the fact we might not be able to buy that big screen tv for Christmas hardly compares to the difficulties most of the world is facing today. The fact that the media makes fun of Christians hardly compares with being imprisoned and tortured for your faith like many are today in places around the world. I read this week about a pastor and his wife in Iran - in their 60's - who were beaten to death by Iranian secret police. Difficult days are ahead because the bible said they would be. We are marching toward the fulfillment of God's plan and purpose for this world. He is going to wrap it all up one of these days. I don't know what the future will hold but I'm not worried or afraid because God said he would strengthen us. He will enable us to stand firm in our faith and that my friends is what truly matters. We face whatever the world can throw at us with the knowledge that "nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Our security is in the Lord and nothing else. Don't be afraid because we are strong and secure in the Lord and in his might. Look at our verse again.

“Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

The Lord said he would strengthen us and he would help us. Whatever difficulties or troubles we are facing, the Lord is there to help us. He is a very present help in a time of trouble. You may feel like you are outnumbered, that the enemy has you surrounded and there is no escape, no way out. I would remind you of what happened in 2 King 6 with Elisha and his servant. The servant saw that the Arameans had surrounded them but Elisha knew a greater spiritual reality. Though the servant was overwhelmed by fear, Elisha told him, "Don't be afraid. Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Elisha then prayed for his eyes to be opened and suddenly the servant could see that the hills were full of horses and chariots of fire. God's provision was there all along, even if the servant couldn't see it.

You may be facing circumstances that seem impossible to change. You are outnumbered and overpowered but you've turned to the God who said he would strengthen you and help you. You are not alone today. There are more that are for you

than that are against you. God is at work in ways you cannot see, so don't be afraid. Trust him and find your security in him. His provision has been there all along, even if you can't see it just yet. Keep on praying and trusting.

God said he would strengthen us, he would help us and he would uphold us. The word uphold here means to grasp securely. What security and comfort there is in knowing that he is holding on to us. He has a firm grasp on you and he is not about to let you go.

I remember when the girls were little and I was carrying them, sometimes they would say "Daddy you're dropping me." It may have felt that way to them, but I knew I was holding them securely and firmly. There was no way I would drop them. May I tell you, Jesus has a firm, secure grip on you today. He isn't about to drop you. The bible says, **"The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."** **Deuteronomy 33:27.** You are safe in the everlasting arms of God. He is holding on to you and he will not let you go. It doesn't matter how bad the circumstances, how fierce the storm, how strong the winds that are blowing against you, rest in the knowledge that his grasp, his grip is always secure.

He said he would strengthen us, help us, and he said "I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." In the bible God's right hand is always seen as the instrument for delivering his people from their enemies. When the Egyptians who were pursuing Moses and the Israelites were drowned in the sea, God's people sang of God's deliverance and power. **"Your right hand, O Lord, was majestic in power. Your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy....You stretched out your right hand and the earth swallowed them."** **Exodus 15.**

God's right hand is the hope and confidence of his people in times of need. His right hand represents all of his might and power at work, intervening in your behalf. His right hand, his power and might will work in your behalf, in the way that is absolutely the best for you. He will deliver you with his right hand. Trust him.

The fact that he said he would uphold us or grasp us securely with his righteous right hand assures us that his right hand of power will always and only respond in ways that are righteous, just, proper and for our good. He is righteous and altogether good. He does not make mistakes and he won't make one now in your situation. When he

delivers us with his right hand it will always be what is best for us because it will be according to his righteousness.

He is with us. He is our God and that sums everything up, doesn't it. He will strengthen us, help us, and hold us securely in the grasp of his powerful and righteous right hand. Look at the next verses in Isaiah 41. **“All who rage against you will surely be ashamed and disgraced; those who oppose you will be as nothing and perish. Though you search for your enemies you will not find them. Those who wage war against you will be as nothing at all. For I am the Lord, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, ‘Do not fear; I will help you.’”** Isaiah 41:11-13

This promise God gave to the nation of Israel in a time of trouble is an assurance of hope for us as well. He takes hold of our hand and whispers to us, “Do not fear. I will help you.” Can you hear him today? Can you rest in his words today? It's going to be all right. Keep trusting in the one who holds you firmly, safely and securely in his loving arms.