

The Lord Almighty is with us

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[0 : 0 0] there are times when the world is seemingly shaken at every turn. Institutions, politics, financial markets and our world is being shaken, not just environmentally but now our health and our economy as well. And as we're aware as Christians we're not immune. We're not immune from that shaking in that sense of our normal routines as we've known this week and everything that we've done has been seemingly blown away. How will we be seen to respond as Christians?

People ask us what do we make of what is going on? I listened on a podcast as I said earlier to Pete Greg and some of you maybe have been following his teaching on prayer and if ever there was a time to pray this is it. It seems that we are in difficult times. We get and when we're in calm seas, when we're in calm seas we can get a little bit complacent. I think that's true for me, I think that's been true for so many and that's been a real highlight for me this week. We take things for granted like shelves being full in shops. I mean I was just thinking that you know toilet rolls, I mean they've taken on a whole new economy. People have been desperate to find what we, things that we have taken for granted and it's a bit too, I think this way like our spiritual life. It seemed calm yet in calm times we take things for granted. We take things, our worship, the opportunity to gather together for prayer and it just seems really strange. This place at 10 30 just being totally empty other than just the three of us. Yet when the storm comes and it has come and the boat is rocked like never before, we cry out and really cry out and we pray to God. My son sent me this great cartoon this week, there's a lot of them flying around and it showed people sat in a plane and the caption read, this is your captain speaking. Just to let you know I'm working from home today. You know in Mark chapter 4 when Jesus is resting in the boat, in the midst of this storm that had whipped up, it came from nowhere, the disciples started to panic and Jesus isn't remote. He's there, he's not elsewhere, he's not working from home, he is there in the midst of them and it's those words he got up and he calmed the storms and said to them, why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith? This is not a time for our faith to be shaken although it may feel like it at the time. Listen to the Lord and trust in him like never before and this week like you I sensed that shaking, I really did and looked to Jesus for reassurance, for safety and stability and that's I think what led me to Psalm 46. As soon as I started reading it was almost like an answer to my shaking to my prayer. God is our refuge and strength and ever-present help in times of trouble. The first says therefore we will not fear. When faith steps out sadly fear steps in and it goes on nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall, he lifts his voice and the earth melts. The Lord Almighty is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress.

And like all Psalms it ends with this great thing of hope that says be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted amongst the nations. I will be exalted in the earth. The Lord Almighty is with us.

The next morning after I've done this an email drops into my inbox with Pete Gregg giving very much this message and I sense at this time if your Bibles are open please read Psalm 46 again and again this week and make it part of your prayer because therefore we will not fear. You see when the world shakes it's good for us to return to the foundations of our faith. We hold fast to him. We stay with him. He's in the boat with us. He's not remote. And when Paul was confined to prison and that may feel pretty much maybe what it's going to feel like in the days in the weeks to come. Similar for some of us locked away perhaps fearful. He wrote letters to a church. A church that was being rocked and shaken. And he spoke of a God that transcends fear and brings hope in the midst of what seems like a hopeless situation.

He gave those early Christians encouragement, direction, strength and purpose that changed lives and it changed generations.

[5 : 32] As tough as it is facing weeks of isolation, financial struggle, uncertainty, ask him how will you use me in this week? How will you use me in this time of shaking? Shaking us back not into old ways but into a new reality where scripture speaks to us, speaks afresh like the psalmist has done for me and maybe for you today and in this week to come. You know I can't wait to get back together physically to be here as one people.

But it may be sometime. But we have the opportunity at this time to make contact with people in ways that we've never contacted people before.

We read in the news that we know that the virus started in China. That's where it was manifest and has made a huge impact since then on the world.

It was in 1949 that Chairman Mao decided that he would remove all the Christian missionaries from China. And the church in China went into isolation.

Families worshipped and prayed in their homes, in their places. God was their refuge in their strength. An ever-present being there in times of trouble.

[7 : 03] And out of that isolation came great hope. Because as the time went on, five decades later in China, the church is now 60 million and growing.

What will come out of our isolation? How will we use it to reach out to others during this time? To speak openly on social media? To share things?

To share prayer? To offer these cards that we've had with people? To give them, maybe, in this great economy, the sacrifice of sharing your last toilet roll?

You know, the one thing is for sure, whatever trials we go through, and I know that those watching may be doing that right now. Financially, in anxiety and isolation, the Lord is with you.

Encourage one another. Love God. Love your neighbour. Push into God. Love God. Don't give in to fear. Love our community in this time like we've never loved our community before, in ways that we can.

[8 : 15] And during this and after this, people will say, see how the Christians behaved? What a great testimony may be for us at this time.

Let's keep in touch with each other. Let's build each other up. Let's encourage one another. Let's pray for one another. And as Peace Podcast reminded me, maybe, just maybe, like the children in Narnia, the wardrobe will take us, his church, and our country into a new place to discover afresh our trust in our need of God and his strength in our lives.

I pray that you'll know that in your life this week. Bless you.