In God We Trust - Part 1

# Trusting God

## (Acts 8:3-8)

As we go to the Word of God today, we are beginning a new message series entitled In God We Trust, and this is going to be our focus through Independence Day. I want to invite each one of you to join with me, praying for a spiritual awakening in the United States, for a great move of God, and an increase of faith in the Church. In fact, if someone would pass these out, I have a pamphlet entitled “Pray for America” which is a prayer guide for each one of you.

This is a reminder, a focused, targeted, prayer guide to bring clarity to the body of Christ as we come together and pray for America. I believe this is so important today because so many of us find it difficult to trust God in this season. You believe in God, you want to trust him, but you still feel uneasy about the current climate because of COVID, the economy, politics, or whatever it may be for you.

Maybe like me, you often find yourself playing the “what if” game in your head. It can begin harmlessly, helping you to prepare, making life a little bit easier, like asking yourself “what if it rains today?” And so, that’s a great thought, but you’ve got to filter those “what if” thoughts, because once you begin playing, once you begin entertaining fearful, anxious, worrisome thoughts, you will always lose, because there are infinite number of “what-ifs”.

You know, what if such and such happens? What if I can’t afford groceries? What if so-and-so gets into office? What if I get sick or someone that I love gets sick? And there are hundreds and thousands of scenarios you can come up with and it’s easy to fall into the trap of playing the game, but you don’t want to, because you will be outnumbered.

And so, you just want to ignore it and walk away because you can’t win. The moment a thought like that enters your mind, don’t entertain it but determine to be positive, to think about good things. You see, what we really want to do is be as confident as the psalmist who said,

“My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (Psalms 73:26).

And so, we want to remain confident, trusting God, having our minds fixed on things above, but it’s not easy to do in every moment. It’s difficult because you feel the tension every time you read or watch anything in the news. There are constant reminders of the threat of war, prices skyrocketing, and the continued COVID craziness everywhere. And life is just so complicated, which is why we’re starting this new message series to go along with the daily guide “Pray for America”.

The title of today’s message is Trusting God and I want to assure you that we absolutely can trust God even when the world is turned upside down. We’re going to need God’s help, but I believe that with his Word and his Spirit he’s going to build our trust in these next few weeks. In fact, one of the things I love about Jesus is that he’s so straightforward, speaking to us right where we are, just like he does in Matthew chapter 6, verse 34 saying,

“Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself” (Matthew 6:34).

In the same way, he reveals the most intimate moments in the lives of those men and women recorded in Scripture, and things don’t always turn out like they expected.

Last week we celebrated the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the church at Pentecost and it was so exciting because thousands of believers were coming to faith in Jesus Christ. Those first disciples that Jesus called apostles would become the foundation of the church, but as we turn to Acts chapter 8, it’s so anti-climactic, because verse one tells us,

“On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison” (Acts 8:1-3).

I wonder if your experience was anything like mine, that when you put your trust in Jesus Christ and were filled with the Holy Spirit, that all hell broke loose in your life? Luke tells us, “On that day a great persecution broke out against the church.”

Maybe you’ve noticed that when God invites you to put your trust in him, walking by faith and not by sight, it can make you feel really stupid? You know, like when you’re among your coworkers or your unbelieving friends, just like one day when Jesus told Peter,

“Put out into deep water and let down your nets for a catch" (Luke 5:4).

Maybe you’ve noticed how oftentimes God will ask you to do something that doesn’t make any sense at all? Well, Simon Peter answered,

“Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything" (Luke 5:5).

You know, it’s that command, that Word that you read, that gentle conviction of the Holy Spirit that just feels unreasonable. You want to trust God, but when you’re going through it, when you think about it, when it’s with the people you work with, and he’s asking you to do it, it feels really stupid in the moment. But notice Peter’s response,

“Because you say so, I will let down the nets" (Luke 5:5).

In our own lives, when it comes to trusting God, we often think about the big things, you know like moving to a new city, starting a new career, but when it comes to growing our faith and trusting God, I want you to notice that it often starts by trusting him in the little things.

“Because you say so,” and the Bible says that when Simon Peter’s crew had let down their nets once again,

“They caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break” and their “boats were so full that they began to sink” (Luke 5:6-7).

You see, sometimes the smallest act of obedience leads to the biggest results, the biggest blessing, and the biggest miracles.

Like on the day of Pentecost, when the crowds heard the disciples speaking in their own languages, amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What can this mean?” Simon Peter, fisherman Peter, trembling at the accusations of a servant girl Peter, denying Jesus Peter, that same Peter stood up and preached the gospel to the crowd. He said,

"Listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs … This man was handed over to you … and you with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death” (Acts 2:22-24).

Peter trusted God and preached the resurrection, he preached repentance, and he preached with the power of God. He pleaded with the people,

“Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day” (Acts 2:40-41).

You see, it was just the smallest, most minute act of obedience, “Lord, because you say so, I will let down the nets” and even though he was fearful, even though he didn’t understand completely, his one act of obedience resulted in 3,000 men putting their trust in Jesus Christ.

And so it was that from the humblest of beginnings that Peter and the other apostles, filled with the Holy Spirit began to evangelize the city. They healed the sick and cast out demons, doing the kinds of things that made them look like gods; but the Bible is careful to give us glimpses of their humanity to remind us as the apostle Paul said,

“We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us” (2 Corinthians 4:7).

And so, while the ministry of the apostles was so incredible, we’re able to make a distinction between the men and the anointing, because the Bible gives us glimpses into their lives allowing us to see both their assets and their liabilities.

I love that about the Word of God because it reveals the complexity of what it means to be human, living in the natural, but trusting in the supernatural. And so, the Scriptures give us an honest view of the lives of the men and women making history, illustrating the benefits of trusting God, and it’s not just the apostles, but so many others like Rahab the prostitute or the giant killing David. You know, consider David, that mighty man of valor, the king of Israel who got so caught up in private lust that he slept with his neighbor and killed her husband to cover up his duplicity. Or that preacher Jonah, that racist who ran from God before preaching to the people of Nineveh and the whole nation repented. But then, instead of celebrating this great victory for the kingdom of God, Jonah got mad at God for saving the people he hated.

I love that about the Bible, because God shows us both men and women, wavering and inconsistent, full of contradictions and complexities, and we understand that people are fickle. At one moment they will say Hosanna and in the next moment shout crucify him, crucify him. And I think that most of us recognize that sometimes it’s hard to tell your friends from your enemies, because your friends act like enemies, and your enemies act like friends. And yet, we can trust God not to weigh us on the scales of the past or to judge us through one moment or period of our lives, and even though we may not be living up to our highest potential he still wants to use us.

In fact, there are some of you that don’t have the slightest inclination of what you are capable of in the hands of God, but God has a way of stirring things up, stretching us and moving us into new areas of life and ministry. Today, if you will trust him, he still wants to use you, he still wants to use that gift that he gave you to teach that class, to serve those kids, or to minister to those people. And so, we begin with faith as the Scripture says,

“Trusting the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight” (Proverbs 3:5-6).

And I’m not in any way trying to justify your failures or your mistakes in the past, but I do want to affirm that God still has a plan for your life, and if you’ll trust him, he will make your paths straight.

In other words, God’s grace is so much bigger than our mistakes, our failures, and our flaws. None of that stops you from being a candidate for the grace of God, none of that stops him from using you, because he sees you differently from the way you see yourself. In fact, he says,

“You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household …with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together …and in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” (Ephesians 2:19-22).

And so, in Christ you are being built up and joined together to become the dwelling place of God by his Spirit. And what that means is that when the Father looks at you, he knows you, but he doesn’t see Julia, or Andrew, or Dawn, when he looks at you, he doesn’t see you as that individual, because you are covered with his Son Jesus Christ.

You see, the truth of the matter is that Jesus covered you so completely, so sufficiently, that he took all of your sin upon himself. And so, when Jesus was on the cross covered with the sins of the world, God the Father didn’t see his Son, but instead he saw your sin. In other words, when Jesus took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, when Jesus was stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted, God the Father pulled back (Isaiah 53:4). He reacted to what he saw and in that moment of darkness the Bible says, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, confused and alone,

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46).

In other words, there are some things that God the Father knows that God the Son doesn’t and his Father turned away because his holiness demanded it.

Now, we understand theologically that Jesus felt forsaken because he was covered with our sins, on the cross he was covered with you, so that you could be covered with him. Therefore, the life we live in the body, we live by faith in the Son of God, and so when we pray, when we go to the Father, Jesus said what? He said use my name, right? In other words, don’t use your name, because he can’t see you, but he says,

“My Father will give you whatever you ask in my name” (John 16:23).

That’s why we have confidence to approach the throne of grace, that’s why we pray in Jesus’ name, because he’s got you covered, he is the atoning sacrifice for your sins, and from heaven’s perspective you look just like Jesus.

And so, Jesus’ name is the key, it’s the password, because he is the beloved Son, and you’ve got to remember to use his name because there is no other name but Jesus. And “in him”, the Bible says,

“We live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

And therefore, there isn’t a person in this room that doesn’t have to climb over something that you know about yourself, but you can trust God because even though he knows about your secret, your doubts and your fears, he sees you differently. And he still wants to use you, but are you willing to trust him and come to him right now?

In other words, David said it this way in Psalm chapter 20, he said,

“Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God” (Psalms 20:7).

In our culture, we might say it this way, some trust in the economy, some trust whoever is in the White House, but our hope is not in who is in office, our hope is in who is sitting on the Throne. We trust in the name of the Lord our God.

And so, while the apostles were trying to understand who they were, understanding their purpose, and understanding themselves within the framework of the power of the Holy Spirit, they’re just hanging around in Jerusalem. In other words, they didn’t feel ready yet, they were hesitant to move out, because they didn’t have all the details figured out. And so, they’re just hanging out, doing what was familiar, doing what was safe, until God finally had enough. You see, the problem with fear is that it will cause us to stop moving, it keeps us from walking in faith and trusting God, but he has a way of getting us out of our comfort zone, pushing us away from what is familiar, and forcing us to scatter.

That’s exactly what we see in this text in Acts chapter 8, the church had become a memorial, they were celebrating what happened on Pentecost, when the Bible says,

“Saul began to destroy the church” (Acts 8:3).

And so, it was out of the persecution of Saul that the apostles finally began to fulfill the great commission.

“Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. And Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there” (Acts 8:4-5).

Now, I thought it was interesting that Philip found himself in Samaria, because we know that Jesus had some unfinished business there. In fact, we talked last week about how Luke introduced the book of Acts saying,

“In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven” (Acts 1:1-2).

And so, we know that there were some things that Jesus began to do, that he hadn’t finished, and now the church is going down to Samaria. If you remember, this is where Jesus met the woman at the well, but we haven’t heard anything else out of Samaria since she went back to town telling the people about a man who knew everything about her. All we know is that the Bible says,

“Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony" (John 4:39).

Now, when persecution broke out in Jerusalem causing Philip to go down to Samaria, he didn’t realize that Jesus had unfinished business there, but we know that something had been planted in Samaria. The woman at the well was a seed planted and Philip was going to gather the harvest. The Bible says,

“When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed. So, there was great joy in that city” (Acts 8:6-8).

There was great joy because the enemy had set up a stronghold in that region, but God was doing something greater, he was about to counteract what the enemy was doing. In fact, I don’t think Philip just wandered into Samaria, I believe he was on a mission, because he was sent into the enemy’s camp. And so, God sent Philip to Samaria to proclaim Christ there, he was taking back what the enemy has stolen, just like he wants you to take back your neighborhood, to take back your family, and that’s why I want to encourage you to join the church as we pray for America.

This may be a difficult season, a frustrating day, but it’s not over until it’s over. God is still good, he is still here, he is still in control, and he still has plans for you. God has more for you, he’s still with you, he’s still faithful, and he hears the cries of your heart. And so, don’t grow weary in doing good, hold on to the grace of our God, put your faith and your trust in the goodness of God.

I believe that today God wants to release you, sending you to places that you’ve never gone, so that you experience the anointing and the power of God like never before. God is getting ready to shift things, he’s getting ready to take you somewhere, he’s getting ready to use you somewhere, he’s getting ready to release you and I pray that you will trust him because the Bible says,

"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ” (Revelation 11:15).

And so today God wants to do something bigger than what is just within these four walls, he’s not just taking back the city, he’s taking back the region. He is sending the church out into the world, there is a shift coming, because the glory of God and the love of God is going to flow out of you. You are that dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit, and we know that,

“The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

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