

Call Upon Me in the Day of Trouble
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Ok, I said just a few minutes ago it's gonna be a little bit of a different service, and that's because pastorally, as we start the new year, it is really important to me that we establish, we start, a certain pattern right here at the very beginning of the year. And we start that pattern personally and we start it congregationally. It's so important—it's not one of those things that I just wanna mention and hope that we all go out and do it. It's so important, it's so essential, that it's somethin' that I wanna make sure we do here together at the very start of the year—we set this pattern for the whole new year ahead of us.

What we're gonna do is we're going to be giving you a verse card, and it's printed up here on the PowerPoint. And you'll be given one of these cards this morning. It's a verse that we looked at earlier this year...uh, last year, excuse me. We looked at it at Thanksgiving. I introduced it at Thanksgiving, and we taught the passage, we reviewed it. And then after that I came back to the staff in the month of December, at the very start of the month of December, and I gave them this verse on a verse card. And I said, "We need this verse; it's gonna be really important to us. We need to be practicing this." And I gave that to them at the beginning of December. And little did I know what all was going to happen in December.

And then, my desire now is to take us back to it as a congregation for application. This isn't so much about explanation and instruction; we've already been through that with this verse. I wanna focus on application with it today. And what we're gonna do is we're gonna take this card, and it's not very complicated...it's not very hard. If you look at it, it's basically a simple instruction given to a people that had become very careless in their walk with God, a people that had become very independent and self-reliant; they figured they could handle life and every once in a while they would help God out if God wanted some help and needed it. And God takes issue with them. He says, 'That isn't the type of relationship I have with My people.'

And He calls them to the pattern He wants with His people. Number one—that we will call upon Him in the day of trouble; that it isn't all about us handling every problem on our own with our own wisdom, and strength, and power, helping each other. It's about calling upon God in the day of trouble. And not only that, He comes back and He says, 'You call upon Me in the day of trouble,' He says, 'I will rescue you.' It isn't about us helping God; it's about Him helping us. He doesn't need our help. Prayer acknowledges that, and turns to Him and says, "Help us."

And then His final statement He says this—"You call upon Me, I will rescue you, and you will honor Me." The question is, well, how do you do that? How do you show God the proper respect when He has come to you with help and assistance and a rescue? That psalm answers that at the very end of it. It says this; it says

"He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honors Me."

It's when we slow down and we say, "Thank You," to God that we honor Him, we show Him the respect due Him. That's the basic pattern God calls His people to—"Call on Me in the day of trouble, I will rescue you, you will honor Me. You will be a people of gratitude and thanksgiving in a world of grumbling and complaining." That's God's pattern; that's God's way.

We're gonna take that verse card today and we're gonna give it to you. And what we're gonna ask you to do, and encourage you to do, is on the back of that card we're gonna ask you to put today's date. Just write down today's date. And then we're gonna encourage you to, looking at the year ahead, identify one of the areas of trouble in your life...one of the areas that's a little bit beyond you, maybe a whole lot beyond you, one of those areas that's a struggle right now or it's uncertain, or you're anxious, or you're worried as you go into this new year. And we're gonna encourage you to pray and bring that to the Father and say, "Lord, please answer me in this area. Rescue me in this area." And then take that card with you and put it in your wallet; put it on your mantelpiece, or on your bed stand, or at your desk. Keep that card with you.

And then, as you go on through the year, when God answers and when He responds, and you recognize "God's responded to my prayer," you'll put the date in there and you identify what He did in response. It's a very simple thing. We've done it before, and we've experienced the grace that is released when we, as a people, do this.

When we went through the fire and they take your office and they just start throwing things in boxes...all your drawers, all your files, everything just gets thrown in boxes and taken out; and then sorted, and cleaned, and salvaged, and all that; and you're just kinda sittin' there and you're seein' all your stuff just thrown in a big box. And you're kinda...you start wondering about what things you hoped to be able to save. And one of the first things that came to my mind was a tiny little card like one of these. It was one we did years ago in this type of service, and it was a prayer promise from the book of Psalms, about God turning our mourning into dancing, our sorrow into joy. And it was a time when a number of us, my family included, was going through a time of sorrow. And we just cried out to the Lord, and we said, "We trust in You. We believe in You. We look for that day when You'll turn our sorrow into joy." And so we came up and we all had those little cards. And throughout the time that followed we just had you put it on the back—the date, and then we told you write in the date when God answers, and just give that card to somebody and say, "God did this for me."

Well, throughout the months that followed people would come up to me. And I remember one man coming up to me in the foyer of the church, just shaking my hand, and he was choked up. He couldn't even talk. He just shook my hand, and I felt something, and he walked away. And I looked down, and here was this card. He couldn't even talk about it. But I looked at that card and I knew that there was a...that he had stood up there and he had grabbed one of those cards, and he'd said, "God, turn my sorrow into joy." And God had done it.

I saved my card from that when God, after a number of...a long stretch of time, answered in our situation, and we rejoiced! But the card I wanna get back is one that arrived in the mail years later. I mean, years later. It had this envelope that came from Florida. It had a name on the return address that I kinda recognized, but I couldn't identify that person. It was a woman's name, and I just couldn't picture who it was. It was vaguely familiar, but that's all there was, was her name and the address from Florida. And I opened the envelope and out fluttered one piece of paper. It was one of those cards, with the date when she had prayed with us. And now, far away in Florida, years later, her sorrow had turned to joy. I've always wanted to trace that person down and say, "What's the story?" 'Cause all I got is the dates. But the card is somewhere in my pile of stuff. But it's one of those things that really matters to me.

There is a release of grace when we pray like this. And it goes on, and on, and on. It isn't just because we've had a good experience with this when we've done it in the past. There's more to it than that. It is consistent with what we call our Core Commitments as a church. We have five of those, and we say, "You know what? This is what we are about." If anybody asks us what we are about as a church, these are the five core things. These are our heartbeat. And I was so encouraged when...last fall we had all the reporters kinda flooded us, and that first Sunday especially, when we were just...we had reporters all over us and they were trying to get interviews in the back of the room, and everything else that first Sunday that Sarah Palin's candidacy had been announced, and we were just overwhelmed with reporters. And I was so encouraged about...there was one reporter in particular, kept running from one person to the next and she kept saying, "Ok, what's this church about?" And our people just kept pointing at our banners with the five core commitments. And they just said, "That's what we're about." Now, none of the reporters reported that. They had to go get Nathan's quote about us bein' Valley trash, or somethin' like that, you know...somethin' that really made Newsweek, ok? But I was so...so encouraged that yes, that was what we're about.

And right in the middle of those, right in the middle of those is this one—the priority of prayer. The way we put it in our more articulated statement of these core commitments is that the first thing we will do *for* God is *ask* God. The first thing we will do *for* God is *ask* God. See, it's not about us doing some great work of service for God, some great ministry for God, some great goal accomplished for God. It's about us stopping and asking God to work in us and through us. The first thing we will do for God is ask God. That's a priority with us. Jesus is central to us; we understand Him by the authority of scripture; and a people that have Jesus as center in their life, and they understand Him by the authority of the scriptures—the first thing, the priority thing they will do is be a people of prayer.

And it isn't just that it's our core commitments and we think it's a catchy way to list what we're about as a church. This is a biblical priority. The Apostle Paul, writing to the church, to a younger pastor in the church at Ephesus, in 1Timothy, he describes to Timothy how he should conduct the church. Paul says, 'I can't be there right away. I'm writing this letter so you will know how to conduct things in the church, the household of God, the pillar and the foundation of the truth.' And he writes this letter, and he gives directions—this is what a church ought to be doing. This is what a church is about. And the first thing he lists, and he underscores it, and he introduces it with the statement "First of all..." 'First of all that, I urge, I press, I exhort you,' he says, 'that entreaties, prayers, and petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for all people, all men.' That's a biblical priority.

The first thing we should be doing on the first Sunday of the new year is be a people of prayer. And it isn't just that it fits our core commitments, that it matches with the biblical directive. There's somethin' else goin' on here. This is a practice, this is an application, that is consistent with the mystery of Christ. All the way through the Christmas season we've camped on one basic idea, and it's articulated well by one theologian who speaks of Jesus and His birth, and who He is, and what He did. And it comes this statement. I just love the way it's summarized. He says, "He who remained what He was," speaking of Jesus, "He who remained what he was," God, very God, "became what He was not," very man. He didn't stop being God. He remained what He was—God, and became what He was not—man. That's mystery. I can't explain it. But it's reality. A person unlike any other in the universe, Jesus—fully God, fully man; and fully God, fully man, He died for us. And because of who He is—fully God, fully man—when He died for us He made up for every wrong we could have ever completed, ever done, or will ever do; and He opened wide the gates of grace forever. That's the mystery, that's the wonder, that's the glory of Jesus.

Now, because of that, as the scriptures wrestle with that mystery and that wonder—a fully God/fully man dying for us—what does that mean He is for us? They came up with one word. The Apostle Paul used it in that 1 Timothy passage, and was speaking about Jesus here. He says there's only one God. And then he adds the phrase "...and there is only one mediator between God and man, this man named Christ Jesus who gave His life a ransom for us." He's a mediator. He can stand between us and God, because he is fully us and fully God, and He can bring us together. He can bring us together. No one else can do that. No one else can stand between us and God and bring us together. He can.

Book of Hebrews—the writer of the book of Hebrews puts it a little differently. Instead of speaking of Jesus as a mediator there, he uses a different phrase. He will speak of Him as a high priest who became like us, like His brethren; so we can call Him Brother because He's a human being like us! Fully God, He became fully man. And as a result of that He can be a merciful and faithful—that is reliable—high priest in things pertaining to God. He can stand between us and God, and God and us, and bring us together, be a propitiation to cover the sins we've committed.

That's the mystery of Jesus. That's why, when we talk about starting the new year in prayer, as we come out of Christmas and the Incarnation, Jesus fully God, fully man, the One who died for us, we wanna start with communion and remember that it's because of Him that that verse fits for us. We can put a picture to it like this. It's in Jesus, and Jesus alone, that our sin meets God's grace, and there is forgiveness. It is in Jesus, and Jesus alone—the mediator, the high priest—in Him alone, fully God, fully man, that our past can meet God's grace and we have a future. It's in Jesus, and Jesus alone, that our need meets God's grace, and we have provision. And it's in Jesus, and Jesus alone, that our death—and we will die—meets God's grace, and we have eternal life. It's in Jesus, and Jesus alone.

So as we work with this card we're gonna begin with communion. And in just a moment I'm gonna have the men come forward, and they will take their places up here to serve communion. And I will lead us in serving communion. And as they do so we're gonna encourage you, if you desire to participate, to take of the bread and take of the cup as it's passed. And then it'll be, as the music plays, it'll be a quiet time. It's one of the quiet times in our calendar as a church. We encourage you to take the time to think though the past year, and think of things where Jesus, as a mediator, allowed God's grace to answer your prayers. And then think, as you look to the new year, where you have times and places and situations of trouble ahead, a concern you have that you want God to address with His grace though Jesus. Then, when communion's served, we're gonna encourage you to come up forward and pick up one of these cards. In your seat after communion, just simply say a prayer of thanks, and pray for God's help in your place of trouble, and then come forward and pick up one of these cards. There's pens up here. And as you come up and pick up the card we're gonna encourage you to just turn it over and put today's date, and then beside that just put a simple statement as to what your concern is. This past month mine would be fire recovery, ok. Or something else; put it down there. And then take that card with you. Put it in your wallet, put it at home somewhere, put it in your desk; keep it with you. And in the days...it may happen very quickly, or it may take years. I don't know. But when God answers, make note of it; note when and how He answered. You probably can't imagine what or how He is going to work in your life. But when He does, note it.

Then, as the year goes on, we're going to encourage you. Our pastors and elders that meet up here—we call it the Prayer Zone—after all services, and what we're gonna encourage you, as the year goes forward...bring that card up when God answers. Bring it up and give it to one of the individuals up here that pray with people. And tell them what God did. And they'll give you another one to take with you. That's how we move from one 'Thank You' to the next with our God...by being a people of prayer.