

God in the Crisis!

Overview

Are you in a crisis, if you're not, brace yourself, you're going to.

You may have just come out of a crisis. And that doesn't mean it's going to be clear sailing going forward. It just means you've got a nice quiet time to get ready for your next crisis. Because life really does hand out a lot of crises. It just does. And so this line came to me, just these words, God in the crisis. How God shows up in the crisis.

It's only a few weeks ago, I think, that I spoke about how God is moved by our cry. And when God moves, so He's moved emotionally, He's moved by our cries. And when He's moved by our cries, He begins moving. He does things. I referenced at that time how God spoke to Moses at the burning bush. And God said, I've heard the cries of my people. And I'm going to do something about it, and I'm going to use you. I do recall Moses replying to the Lord, that's just great. Have you met my brother Aaron? Call on him. He didn't really feel that he was adequate. And had a sense of inadequacy is not a failure. Hopefully we all feel inadequate now and again.

Otherwise, if we always think we're adequate, it's more likely we're always arrogant. We need to sense our inadequacies. And when a crisis comes, it's okay to say, I can take this, I can take this. But at times the crisis is greater than we are. I just referenced quickly again how my wife was in the hospital. She had cancer, she was dying. I was not equal to the moment. I was not equal to it at all. I had cried, I had done all I could do.

I even searched my own heart, cried out to the Lord. Is there something that I've done wrong? And it was not something that I had done. It was a crisis time, and the Lord met us in that crisis. And she was supposed to die from that. But she cheated heaven and she cheated hell. She's here. She's here today, and she's very much alive. So we've been through our crises. And quite frankly, we're still going through them.

And I've got a challenge this morning. I've got to get an emergency appointment with a doctor tomorrow morning because something has gone really wacky with my left eye. And I don't understand it. I see lightning flashing. And you've heard about the little thing floating around in your eye. How about when it's a flying saucer that's floating around? So you've got little things coming on your head and it's not tongues of fire. So we go through crises and we're going to make it.

So I wanted to read with you this morning a story out of First Kings. And for my helper up in the higher echelons of technicalities, I want to jump down ... Lucas to verse 8. You're too fast. That's incredible. So why don't we, you can read it up there. I'm going to read it right from my copy of the word right here. And the word of the Lord came unto the prophet saying, arise, get thee to zarephath, which belongs to Zydon and dwell there. We hold, I've commanded a widow woman there to sustain you.

So he arose and he went to zeraphath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering sticks. And he called out to her and said, fetch me, I pray you a little water and a vessel that I may drink. As she was going to fetch it, he called out to her and said, bring me, I pray you, am more so a bread in your hand, and she said, as the Lord God lives, I have not a cake. I've only got a handful of meal in a barrel and a little oil in a cruise. I'm gathering two sticks that I go in and dress for me and my son, that we may eat it and die.

The lady is in a crisis. The man, the prophet, was also in a crisis because there was a famine in the land due to a drought. The drought was happening because he prophesied it's not going to rain for a good season of time because God had commanded him to do so. So food was hard to find. He himself was hungry. The Lord had sent him to a brook and said, you stay there. And the Lord actually sent a raven to feed him morning and night. But the time came when the Lord spoke to him and said, okay, you're finished here at McDonald's.

I want you to move on to Wendy's. Wendy lives in Zera Fath. I am working on a widow's heart and she is going to prepare for you. So when he got there, he met a woman who was in a crisis. When he asked her simply, first of all, for a little drink of water and as she responded positively, he said, and oh, by the way, I'd like a little bread. She said, my son and I are getting ready to die. We're starving here. And you'll like to say, don't fear because God is going to invade your crisis. Go and do as you have said, but make me there of a little cake first. Put God first. In your crisis, don't shut out God. Put him first.

Some of you have been there, haven't you? You know what it's like to be in a crisis. And obviously from the A-men's that I just heard, they couldn't hear that over the internet, but from the A-men's I heard, there's a number of people who've been in the crisis. You put God first and you're here this morning as a living testimonial, what God does in the middle of the crisis. Make me a cake first and bring it to me.

And after that, make something for your son and for yourself. Because this is what the Lord says, the barrel of meal shall not waste. Neither shall the crews of the oil fail until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth. And she went and did according to the saying of the prophet and she and he and her house did eat many days. And the barrel of meal did not waste. It did not empty. Neither did the crews of oil empty according to the word of the Lord which was spoken by Elijah. I want to read on because the lady could have said good, I'm glad that's over. Everything is hunky dory. That's Ukrainian for Hakuna Matata. No that's Hakuna Matata, that's Swahili for it's going to be all right.

She was relieved, the famine is over, it's starting to rain, the grain's going to grow. And I got

enough to take care of me and my son for a good time to come. But it came to pass after these things that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house fell sick. And his sickness was so sore that there was no breath left in him. And she came to Elijah and she is ticked off. What have I to do with you, O you men of God? She's being sarcastic. What are you up to, men of God? Are you come to call to my sin to remembrance? And you're going to slay my son because of my misdemeanor?

He's been obviously guilty of something and she's sort of confessing it now. Don't determine in your mind and in your heart, something's gone wrong. God's upset with me. Don't go there. Don't go there. We're all prone to go to that point. This is judgment. I knew that I'd done something wrong, but I don't know what it's all about. Don't go there. The disciples are in a boat with Jesus. They're going across the lake. It's the middle of the night. A storm comes up. Jesus is asleep in the boat.

And I can hear somebody saying, whose dumb idea was it that we come out here in the middle of the night? Somebody steered us wrong. And somebody else said, you know, as I recall, this was Jesus' idea. He tells you to go left, you go left, and you hit a wall. You must be out of the will of God. Walls are not in indication. You're out of the will of God. Crisis come to every one of us. He said to her, give me your son, who's basically lifeless. His breath has gone out of him. He took him from her and carried him into a loft where he was living at the time. He laid the child on the bed and he cried to the Lord and he said, Lord, my God, have you also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourned by slaying her son? Can I pause for a moment and bring to your attention? He's complaining to God.

I'm going to read it again. Oh, Lord, my God, have you brought evil upon the widow with whom I am staying? Why did you bring up the point that he was staying here? He pointed out that she's been very gracious to me. She's allowed me to stay in her house. That should count for something. You need to know that doing good deeds doesn't always bring you a windfall of chaos. It's not always going to bring you divine health. It's not going to bring you anything. We do good deeds not to receive a reward for the same, but he's complaining to God. He said, okay, when you're praying to complain to God, I think you should.

Oh, I would never do that. It's all right to say to the Lord, I'm a little confused here. I've been there, I've been there when I cried out on one occasion, I screamed at the top of my lungs. Where were you when the crisis came? It was the biggest crisis in our life together as a family to that point in our lives. And I felt that God had dropped the ball. He failed to protect my family from evil. And I was angry and I cried out, where were you? It's okay to argue with God. Joe Bobgared with God. Peter argued with God, and he still got forgiven and he made it. But he stretched himself upon the child, and he did so three times. And he cried unto the Lord and said, oh Lord my God, I pray. Let this child's soul come back to him again.

I want to pause here and tell you a story that I garnered from James Bush. I think I told you this story not too long ago. He told me himself sitting on a picnic bench up in Ottawa Valley. He was a retired missionary. He wanted to tell me this story about how they were building a Christian school in Zimbabwe. A witch doctor had great power. They don't doubt that. And the witch

doctor came and he declared to all the workers, including the man that had been hired, to do the task. The missionary was not himself working with a trowel.

He hired a fellow to oversee the project. But the witch doctor came and said, we don't need a Christian school here. And I'm going to declare death here in this place. And he pointed at the man who was the job boss and he said, you're the guy. And within hours, that man fell deathly sick. Bush came in the morning to check on the project and nobody's working. He went and found one of the fellow workers and said, what's going on? He said, the boss man, he's sick. What's he sick of? Nobody knows, but he's dying. He's dying.

The witch doctor's up to no good. He's found the man laying in the shade of a tree just outside of the town. When he found the man, he was pretty well lifeless. James knelt on beside him, actually went into a sitting posture, lifted this man's torso up so we could hold him like a baby. And he started praying over him. And he cried out, in the name of Jesus, devil be gone and life, divine life, enter into this man and the man sneezed. And moments later, he regained his strength and they walked back into the town declaring the glory and the righteousness of God.

God met them at the moment of the crisis. So this story here, as the prophet is praying over a child, is not unlike stories that even can occur even in this day. And so the child revived, the Lord heard the voice of Elijah. God hears your voice and he will respond, and the soul of the light of the child came back again and he revived. And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the chamber into the house and delivered him unto his mother. And Elijah said, see? Your child's alive. He, God, visited us in the crisis. The Lord will visit us in our crisis. This is a strange little story I want to relate to you. You're very familiar with it.

It's in Mark's Gospel chapter 14. Jesus took with him Peter, James and John, verse 33, and it says, and Jesus, as he took these three disciples with him, Jesus was greatly distressed. Is it a sin when you fuss? Is it a sin when you go into stress? Is it a sin when you begin to wring your hands? What is stress? It's a form of doubt, is it not? I'm not trying to be a psychologist here, but I think stress is a feature of doubt. If you had no doubts about the situation, you wouldn't be under stress. I'm not a psychologist.

I just thought of that. If you think I'm right, put an extra offering next to me. No. Stress. Jesus was stressed. Why? It says I am greatly stressed. And he was troubled. When you read on, it tells us in the book of Hebrews chapter 5 verse 7, and there in that garden of crisis, Jesus, it says, offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears. To him, watch this, this is the writer of the Gospel, the book of Hebrews. Jesus cried loudly and with tears to the one, the father, watch this, who was able to save him. So what's the essence of Jesus cry? We know what the essence was. "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me".

Hebrews reminds us, Jesus was crying out to the one who could save him from death. And it says in Hebrews 5, 7, and he was heard because of his reverence. Jesus cried out. Jesus is in a crisis. He cries out to the Father. Now, he came into the world to die. He'd already told us disciples how was going to happen, what was going to happen. He was telling them constantly. But now the hour is there. The reality is setting in. And Jesus is talking to the Father, to the one

who could save him. He did so with loud, loud tears and cries.

So here's what happened in that moment. Did the Father hear him? He did. Did the Father spare him death? He did not spare Jesus. God, hearing, answered Jesus not to take him away from the cross, not to salvage him from the cross, but the salvation was through the cross. God didn't save him from the cross. God the Father used the cross to bring our freedom. Jesus gave up his freedom that we might have our freedom. So our law just saved us also. That when we cry out in crisis and we want God to move in, we're starving. We've only got a little bit left for our son and ourselves and we're preparing ourselves to die.

The Prophet doesn't always show up and turn the oil and the flour into something that's going to last forever. It could last a little bit longer. The trial and the difficulty, the disappointment, can go on. For some people it goes on for years. God delivered me from this. I have to tell you that I have been a pastor by times in churches where somebody was really troubled physically. There was a young fellow in our church who was a teenager back in our days of London. And this fellow experienced a trauma in the process of his birth. Some medical person dropped the ball and he, Paul, was damaged significantly. And so he lost the ability to walk. So as a baby he wasn't able to lose his legs.

He's still alive today. Somewhere I think up in Kingston area, he's married. I don't know a whole lot more. His daddy died here recently so I was in touch with him but ever so briefly. But I can tell you that in those days we would have times at the altar and be praying over the sick. And Paul would come up on his canes. He had the upper part of his body was like the mighty Ursus. He was incredibly strong and vital from here up. But his legs were tantamount to useless.

He would drag himself up to the front. His mom and dad would be weeping and we would pray and we would anoint him with oil. He was in crisis. We were looking for the God who can turn water into wine, who can walk on the water, who can say, peace be still, who can raise the dead, who can open deaf eyes. We were calling on God and Paul still has not experienced his healing. But God has shown up in Paul's life in so many ways. And his disability was one of the means that drew our church together so beautifully and so wonderfully.

The love thing that went on in that church which we started with twenty free people, we were assuming a thousand people. And we were like family. We were so tight it was incredible. And Paul was part of the magnetism as we all cared for him. And there are people in our church here, not necessarily present today. If I were to mention one name, you would all say, yes, because you care about individuals that are going through a struggle. Because we would like to see a miracle. The crisis is something that some people live with for a long time. When the Lord shows up, he doesn't always do as we would hope he would do.

And you know what? There are no answers. This side of glory. Paul cried and said, take this thorn out of my flesh. God said, suck it up buttercup. My grace is sufficient to help you through this. But Lord, couldn't you just, no, I'm not going to do that, Paul. Paul actually put it in writing. I'm so glad he did. He could have covered that up and said, no, no, everything was a bowl of cherries. There were no pits. Everything was beautiful. But Paul puts it in writing for us so that

we will understand God doesn't always come like a butler and deliver a nice warm towel and fix your hair. God doesn't always show up that way.

God does always show up. His timing is impeccable. God has other ideas by times. Let this cup pass from me if it's possible. The Lord had a greater plan. You and I struggle with all of this. Did not Jesus know all of this from eternity past? Yes, he did. We can't get it. You're going to get into the weeds trying to figure it all out. How come Jesus was praying this way? Because he was fully man as well as being fully God. And the manhood of him kept on coming forth and we see it right there. Can this cup pass from me?

God showed up at the Red Sea and the waters were divided and the people to this day celebrate what God did. When God showed up at Jericho, the walls came tumbling down and the Jewish people were able to conquer that city. When the glory of God filled the temple on the day of its dedication, at first of all, the priests must have stood there rather frightened and eventually they ran for their lives because the glory of God was so powerful among them.

Some years ago, I was quite taken with a story about how God had been so faithful and done so many wonderful and marvelous things for the people. And they paused and they made a fuss over a stone. And they made it a memorial stone. And they said, this place and this stone shall be called Ebenezer. So that when your children ask, Daddy, grandpa, why do we make a fuss over a rock? It's just a rock. Daddy, why the rock? Why do we make a fuss? We don't know how they fussed over the rock. Many people came and laid flowers. Maybe people made it a place to come and cry out to the Lord. We don't know, but it was very special.

They call it the Ebenezer stone, which interpreted meant so far the Lord has helped us. We don't know what we're going to be doing tomorrow, but today we're celebrating that so far God has helped us. So I preached in the church in London like a storm about the Ebenezer stone. I was encouraged at the time, I remember distinctly, that everybody, every mom, every dad, every grandpa, every uncle, every aunt, you need to have some things, little treasures in your possession in your house that somebody is going to find. Leave it somewhere that can be found. Don't put it under lock and key. Leave it somewhere where a little one can find it, where a teenager can get mischievous and start looking through your things and find something.

Or maybe it'll be an occasion when a teenager or one of your kids is going through a difficult time. They're going through a crisis and you can say, you wait right here. Grandma's got something she wants to show you. I told the congregation, you need to have things in your possession that you can pull that out and say, I kept this for this moment. This is my little Ebenezer stone. You can tell the story of how God met you in the moment of your crisis. Yeah, kids need to know it. Interesting little piece just right here and now. I already told you how God rescued April. I've told it so many times. I hope you never get tired of it. Every time I see her, I'm reminded. She's a walking miracle. Of course I talk about it a lot. But in the day, we didn't talk a lot about it. I was so glad to get her back.

I've got photographs of her from that time in our lives. And the first time I found that photograph a few years ago, I looked at the picture and I thought, now, who is that? I actually saw a

photograph of April. She was standing in front of my mom and dad's house and I looked at her and I thought, that's not April. And then as I focused, that is April within days probably of her being released from the hospital. She weighed down like she was 80 pounds. April was invited to speak on any topic she wanted to at a church called Central at the time on Scott Street in St. Catharines. She decided to take Mimi Jane. That's what I call it our youngest. I still call her Mimi. Everybody calls her Mel. I don't like that. Her name is Truly Melanie Jane and I call her Mimi Jane. She's my Mimi.

April decided to take Mimi with her. And April felt, and this is the first time, I guess, she felt that she ought to share her testimony. So at the ladies meeting midweek at Central Church, April told her story, I believe it was the first time. For sure it was the first time she told it publicly. On the way home, Mimi Jane, this is April's story, Mimi Jane said, Mom, I never heard that story before. You almost died. Cancer. Nobody survives. Cancer.

That was a thought of a teenager. And you survived. God did it. How come I just how come I had to come to a church in St. Catharines to hear the story? We tend to leave the big things out. We need to have a little Ebenezer stone packed away somewhere so that somebody finds and says, Oh, this is a weird thing. Here's all your jewelry. Your little chandeliers are hanging on your ears. That nice necklace that your husband bought for you when he was in Mexico.

And in the midst of all this beautiful little jewelry that you picked up at Walmart. Hello? Here's a little rock that's kind of a weird looking and a child. You're grandeur to my fine side. Grandma, what's this? Oh, I'm glad you asked, darling. That is my little Ebenezer stone. So I told this church in London, this story about how we need to all have a little treasure that we can pull up by times and say to our youngsters, say to a neighbor, say to someone who's in crisis, I kept this for such an hour as this. Let me tell you what this stone represents. I told that story. The day came when in our church, we were going to put on, this is dating me somewhat. I don't think they do this anymore, but we did the living Christmas tree.

I don't have to describe that, right? You have some idea about the living Christmas tree. You build up the platform with staging and then you go and get trees and you cut the branches. And then the choir is all up in there and there's all lights and everybody feels all warm and happy and whatever. So we were going to do this in our church there and so all the people were there helping and so the word was bring your kids and we'll have babysitters. We'll look after your youngsters. Suddenly somebody burst into the rehearsal or whatever they were doing at the time and yelled, he fell, he fell. A little child had been playing at the top of the stairs. It was a long series of stairs that went into the basement of the church.

That little rascal tumbled all the way down and when he hit the bottom, he hit the concrete floor. I got a crisis called one o'clock in the morning. They don't know if he's going to make it. His head swelling inside, his brain is swelling. It was a crisis. First thing in the morning, I made my way down to the hospital and oh, I got a, I got a, I forgot something. The phones were ringing. We had in those days what we called a prayer chain. Everybody could get on the chain. You've heard about that too. So when there was a crisis, Mary would call Jane and Jane would call five and each of those five would call five more and five more.

We could literally have hundreds of people praying within a half an hour. So people, some of them were praying through the night. God, we were beseeching the Lord not unlike this story saying, Lord, please, please, please, we got to do something here. And so in the morning, I went down to the hospital and I went to the appropriate floor, the children's wing of the hospital in London. And when I got there, I got to the desk and I said, I'm looking for this little fellow. His mother was a brand new Christian. By the way, she hadn't been in church long. Her husband was a doctor. Her name was Kathy. I still have my memory.

Hello. So when I got to the desk, I said, the little fella's first name and last name, the nurse gave me a delightful smile. She said, yeah, just go on down the hall. It'd be the fourth room on the left. And I thought, I thought the child would be in emergency care, you know, like the story I heard about swelling and brain damage and all the rest of it. I went down there and I stepped into the room and I looked and there were four cribs.

These two were asleep and whatever. Here's this little one little guy sitting there with his dumb, dumb in his mouth. You know what that thing is, right? Say yes. Okay. Thank you. I thought you'd all gone to sleep. You're sleep deprived. Okay. So, so I look around and I see this little kid and I see the name on the end of the bed. It's the right name. No, no, no. I went down to the desk again and I said to lay, I'm looking for this little child. I found the name, but something's all mixed up. She said, hold, you haven't heard?

The doctors are saying it's a mirror. Why didn't she tell me when I first came in? She said, we're blown away. We can't believe this. That child was dying in the middle of the night, but you look at him now. There's not a mark on him. It was absolutely magnificent. About three, four years passed. And on a Sunday morning, Kathy was on her way out and I didn't always get to do this. We had two Sunday morning services. I lived a reckless life in those days. I could hardly get my breath, but every once in a while I made sure to go to the door to greet people as they're leaving.

And as Kathy's coming out, I didn't see her at first. All I saw with all these people, she had all these hands. All of a sudden there's a little boy and his little hand is up like this. So, of course, I stooped over and I shook his hand. I didn't see Kathy yet. She's right there. He got away from her. This little guy, I said, and who do we have here? He patted himself in the head and these are the words that came out of his mouth. I, Ebenezer, I was so moved. That wasn't staged. That's how that child probably responded on the first day when he went to the age of five to school. And what's your name, sir? I Ebenezer. Oh, really? Yeah, I Ebenezer. He still got that surely in his vocabulary. Call him Ebenezer.

Mom, that's kind of a weird name. How come I got this nickname, Ebenezer? I've been waiting for this day, darling. Let me tell you the story. You were dying in the middle of the night. Your head had been crushed on concrete. Nobody expected you to live. Hundreds of people called upon the Lord in the middle of the night. And by morning, a miracle had transpired. You are an Ebenezer. And Ebenezer is a story in the Old Testament of a rock. And any time anybody comes by, where can I meet you today? Well, I'll meet you at the Ebenezer stone. That idea will meet at the Ebenezer and will get a cup of mocha. Little Ebenezer.