God Protects His Own

Have You Ever Felt You Were in Danger?

Mary Jo and I have been married for more than forty years, and I have been driving for fifty years. This has been going on since we got married but more often in the last ten years. Mary Jo warns me, when I am driving of brake lights ahead, of cars that are too close to us and of concerns she has about dangers ahead. I have told her before several times that I often don't drive with her and so it seems crazy that I ever survive those instances without her giving me warnings and instructions. She smiles and then continues to diligently fill me in on any potential dangers on the road. Have you ever found yourself in a dangerous situation and wondered how you would survive? We don't often face life and death circumstances, but we do experience situations that are scarry or troubling and it can feel like we are in serious distress at times. How should a father with a mortgage and heavily in debt respond to news of impending layoffs? What should a young mom do when she finds her baby having a seizure? What should students do when they are rejected by the schools they want to attend and the future they dream of having seems destroyed? What should a retiree do when the cost of living keeps climbing? Danger may not just be something that puts us at risk physically. It can be something that creates crippling emotional and psychological distress. Our big idea is an important one. God protects His own.

The Bible gives us plenty of examples of God's people in danger and how God dealt with it and what His people did when they faced it. There is a fascinating account in John's Gospel that often goes overlooked. Shockingly, not everyone was thrilled about Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. The chief priests were not at all happy with how their fellow Jews responded to the miracle. **So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him.** (John 12: 10-11 NIV) We don't know how word got back to Jesus and the disciples of the plot of the religious leaders to have Lazarus as well as Jesus murdered but someone in the group was told. It seems clear the Jews never did kill Lazarus which is odd. It would have been much easier to have taken Lazarus into custody and quietly had him executed than it was to go after Jesus. Lazarus did not have huge crowds supporting him, no band of disciples staying with him, he was not the sort of celebrity whose death would have brought great outrage. Yet, the priests left Lazarus alone. Why is that? Give careful thought to something Jesus stated in His prayer before He was captured and crucified, speaking of those who put their faith in Him. **While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.** (John 17: 12 NIV) Did you catch that? Lazarus was not killed by the Jews because Jesus protected him, he kept him safe. You see, God protects His own. Not only did Jesus protect Lazarus, He kept safe all of His disciples, even the women who followed Him. The destruction of Jesus' little band of followers, including Lazarus, never happened although it would have been the most normal outcome of Jesus dying, because even in death, Jesus protected them.

There is a statement Jesus made that is often taken as mostly theological but is in fact deeply personal for you and that is His promise in John 10. **My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one."** (John 10: 27-30 NIV) Eternal life is just that. It begins when you are born again, when you put your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior and continues forever. It cannot and is not taken from you, even if you fail God, even if all of Satan's fury breaks out against you, even if your life falls apart it seems. You have eternal life because God protects you. Consider this promise the Bible makes regarding your future. **No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.** (Romans 8: 37-39 NIV) God's love for you cannot be stopped by anything you face…not by anything outside you or even within you. Why? Because God protects you.

That does not mean you won't face real hardship and perhaps even now are in it. Evil can come up against you and Satan can too. But Satan can't just do anything that wicked spirit wants to do with you and the fact is Satan can't even approach you without God's permission. Satan, as much as he wanted to wreck Job because of Job's faithfulness, could not touch Job unless the Lord said he could. That is a wonderful thing to know. God is completely in charge of your life. He protects it as a shepherd protects His sheep in his care. In fact. Jesus said He's the type of shepherd

who lays down His life for the sheep in order to protect them. Keep in mind that nothing comes up against you that God has not allowed for a very good reason. It is for your benefit, so that you will grow stronger, more loving and more faithful. This statement of the Bible should be etched into your soul, plastered on your heart and always there for you to ponder, especially when times get tough. **And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.** (Romans 8: 28 NIV) God does not let anything touch you that will not in the end make you better, more Godly, loving and full of the Holy Spirit. You may not be rich, famous or successful but much better than that, you will be perfect and that is a prize too great to measure. God protects His own.

God tells you straight up that He does not think like you or see your circumstances as you do. In a most unsettling declaration our Lord makes it clear. **"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, " declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.** (Isaiah 55: 8-9 NIV) For those who believe they know what they are doing and how their lives should go, God tells them they don't, but He does. He knows what is best for you and will work everything out so you gain the best, not second best. It is because God protects His own

It does take faith to believe this is so. We know that Jesus did not raise all of His friends from the dead. He let John the Baptist die and later James the brother of Jesus and Peter and His mother and all the rest of His disciples. It is not in your best interest to just keep living this life and in fact it is for your benefit to pass from here. Paul expressed this beautifully. **For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.** (Philippians 1: 21 NIV) Jesus said something most crucial for us in understanding God's ways with us and it is rarely considered. **I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.** (Matthew 11: 11 NIV) Notice something of great value to you. No one is greater than John the Baptist yet that very man, that spectacular man of God would be a lesser man than the least in the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven is not the same as the kingdom of God. It is a subset of it. The kingdom of God is all that He rules. The kingdom of heaven is what He has prepared for all of His people, His protected people. And when you are a part of it, which your time will come and many have gone before us are now a part of it, you will be far greater in nobility and honor and Godliness than even the best of all God's people on this side of heaven. Don't put nearly as much thought to what heaven will give you but consider without ceasing what heaven will make of you. Yes, God protects you. That is our big idea. But more than even that, God will transform you and in your passing from this life make you greater than you can imagine. It will be a great ride!