

Title where is God?
Rev 1:4-18

As we are coming to the close of the church year, scripture guides us to the coming of Christ. On Dec 1 the season of Advent starts, when we celebrate the coming of Christ, both his birth at Bethlehem 2000 years ago, and his coming in glory on Judgement Day. In the Revelation to John, Jesus tells us...

"Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. ¹⁸ I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades. Do not be afraid! amen.

A pastor was visiting people in a convalescent home. He sat with one woman, talking about her past. She enjoyed talking about her children and her family. They were the joy of her life. Suddenly, she looked away and her face became sad. When he asked her "why?" She said. "Pastor, I'm all alone. My son doesn't call anymore. My daughter is too busy to speak to me. It's like I don't matter any more. I used to have a great relationship with my daughter, we'd talk every day. Now I never hear from her. My friends used to sent letters to me. Now I get none. Many of them are no longer living, but even the ones who are still around, still don't call me anymore. My body is getting weaker. I need a nurse to take care of me. I feel so alone sometimes. Is this what life is supposed to be like? Pastor, where is God in all this? Is this the life that He wants me to live, or has he forgotten me?" Here was a woman in need of hope. In the midst of her suffering she asks. Is this the life that God wants me to live, or has he forgotten me?"
Where is God?"

It's a scary question to ask. But many people, deep down inside, are asking that very question, "Where is God?" Anyone who is suffering, especially for no apparent reason asks that. People in financial crisis, who have lost jobs, or cannot find jobs... people struggling with illness. People suffering because of their faith... Christians living in a non-Christian cultures, who are daily being persecuted for their faith, All these people, some time or another, ask the question Where is God? Amidst their suffering they ask Lord, is this the life that YOU want me to live, or have you forgotten me?"

It's a hard question to ask because there are hidden questions behind our question - "Where is God?" "Why are you letting me suffer?" "Why don't you fix things?" "Don't you care that I am suffering?" "Where is God?" "Where is God?" When I struggle with this question,... when I look at the bad things which are happening to me, or the bad things which have happened to others, it can be

scary. It can be demoralizing. It can be depressing. But how can I keep hope? Especially when I may feel like there is not light at the end of the tunnel. when it feels like my sufferings will be with me not only for this coming year but the next and the next and the next after that. What word of hope can we share with those whose lives have been defined by the sufferings they have endured. The answer to that... The answer is that WE bring nothing, but Jesus brings everything. Jesus brings us a message of hope. Our lives are not defined by our suffering. Our lives are not defined by our suffering, because we have a hope, In answer to the question... Where is God??? (pause) Right where he has always been.... Right there with us. Giving us hope.

Our Epistle reading for today Revelation 1:4-18, is precisely that... a message of hope to a people who were asking “where is God?” The full name of the book of the bible is The Revelation to John. It was revealed to and written by the Apostle John about 95 AD. He was about eighty years old. During this time the Apostle John, himself, was also wondering “Where is God?” You see, during this time, the church was experiencing tremendous persecution. Sixty years of hardship had passed since Jesus’ resurrection. It was true that the Church had grown tremendously but it had done so at a cost. Jesus’ original disciples had been martyred one by one for their faith. John’s brother, James, was beheaded by Herod Agrippa just ten years after Jesus’ resurrection. Twenty years later Peter was crucified upside down by the emperor Nero. John was now the last of the original Twelve. He had been exiled to the island of Patmos because of his refusal to worship the image of the Emperor Domitian. The congregations he had left behind in Asia Minor (what we now call Turkey) were suffering too. The pastor at the church in Pergamum, Antipas, had been martyred, also because he refused to worship Caesar as god, He was placed inside of a brass bull and was heated with fire until he roasted to death. Christians were in a battle against the world... and the world seemed to be winning. Christians at the time were asking the question “Where is God?” “is this the life He wants us to be living as Christians? John and the early church in their suffering were in danger of losing hope.

This is where the story of the Revelation to John comes in. God sent a revelation to the Apostle John, to encourage His people. There is one overall theme throughout revelation. That theme is that there is an ongoing spiritual battle between Satan and the forces of God. All the bad things that we see here on Earth are reflections of that battle. The message which God presented to John, and to the Christians of the first century the message, in fact, which God wished to present to the woman in my first story who was wondering “where is God” in fact, the message of hope to us is... “Do not be afraid... Stay strong and faithful to God.

The war is already won, Jesus is coming.” In Verse 17 of the revelation to John it says "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades. Jesus appeared in a vision to John to assure him that God had not forgotten His people. When His people were starting to despair, when His people were starting to wonder whether “His promises that He would return for them” were true.... God replied back... Do not be afraid your faith is not in vain. we are coming... hold on... Where WAS God?... He was right there offering them hope Where IS God? He is right here! He is right here offering us hope.

In a world which believes that you suffer because you deserve it. that believes that you suffer because God is angry at you and punishing us In a world which believes that God doesn't care. that Loneliness. Fear, the weakening of the body, the weakening of relationships. will always be a part of your life. In a world which believes “You have no hope for the future. for nothing will improve.” In a world where in fact, suffering is the normal punishment for sin. Into this hopeless world Jesus brings a message of hope. For behold God loves us. God loves us dearly. God loves us so much that he sent his only Son to suffer and die for us. For since the beginning of time, the wages of sin has been death. when Christ died on the cross He paid the debt of death and suffering which sin bequeathed to us. Though we may suffering here on Earth... God says you are no longer defined by your suffering. There will be a time of redemption. There will be a time of no tears, no suffering when all will be made right again, a time when all that we have suffered will be incomparable with the glory which awaits us. We are no longer defined by our suffering. The Christian church is not defined by its persecution. For all this will be temporary.

This is God's answer to the question Where was God? Where WAS God? He was there 2000 years ago, procuring our hope and salvation. Where IS God? He is here today offering that same hope to us. This is what we celebrated on Easter. When He rose again from the dead, Jesus proved that our sins were paid for. The ultimate suffering which was rightly ours has been taken away. Easter is the promise we place against those who would steal our hope. God brings hope because He has the ability to bring good out of an evil situation. This is the way God has always worked since the beginning of Man. When Mankind was worthy of destruction, God had Noah build an ark. When the Jews were enslaved by Pharaoh, God sent Moses. When Man was worthy of damnation because of his sin God sent a savior God sent his son as a baby in Bethlehem. The God who brought good out of evil situations, who brought you eternal life, even though you didn't deserve it, who did so only because he loved you,... that God will bring you hope. Where is God? He

is right here offering hope. Because of Jesus... we can be assured that God already has brought good for us out of our evil situation. We are no longer doomed to eternal damnation. God has given us the hope of Heaven. And it is precisely because He brings good out of evil situations, that we have a hope, even for today's suffering.

So, what word of Hope can we bring to those who are suffering? We bring the hope... that God will bring good out of an evil situation. Your life is not defined by your suffering. This is the word of hope we can share with all those who have suffered for Christ. All that you have suffered is not the last word. All that you have suffered does not define you. To the first century Christians, Our Lord Jesus Christ died on a cross so that the persecution you endure might not be the last word in your life. To the lonely, God says, "you are not alone" I am with you..." God says you are my child, you are part of a family, the family of God Claim that right! To the those who think their life has no purpose or meaning. Our Lord Jesus Christ died on a cross so that your life would not be meaningless, so that your life would not be valueless, so that no matter "what you have lost" "what you have suffered" it will never be a waste of time to try again. God values your life so much that no matter what happens in your life, God will use it. God, the creator of the universe, will bring good even out of a bad situation. He will give meaning where there once was none. He will give value, where there was none. He will heal all that we have suffered and lost, if not in this life, then in the next. Where is God? He is here!

When we see all kinds of bad things happening in this world, we do not despair. Because of Jesus, all that you have suffered is not the last word, all that you have suffered does not define you. God is in control. The Battle is already won. Because of Jesus we have been freed from the ultimate suffering. Our baptism says that in the end all things will work for our good as those who love God.

Where is God?

He is here!