



Worship Guide

MARCH 15, 2020

Good Morning!

Good morning Mercy Hill! Before you get started with this Sunday's message, please check out this week's announcements brought to you courtesy of Tolu Odulesi.¹ Much of what he refers to here can be found on our COVID-19 Updates page online at mercyhillchurch.org.² When you're finished checking these out resources out, you're ready to tune into the message for this Sunday.³

Do Not Be Afraid . . . God Hears!

Genesis 21:8-21 | Nick Weber

Introduction

I am sure you have noticed by now that, given the COVID-19 virus—with the spread of it so vast at this point that it's reached pandemic status—we are a city, and a nation, and a world, even, in many ways gripped by fear and anxiety and panic. I know you've seen it—in the news and in your neighborhoods. I imagine many of us are feeling it a bit ourselves. So what do we do with all of this? How should Christians be handling it? What is the right response?

I wonder if you know what the most repeated command in all the Bible is? What would be your guess? It's not "love your neighbor." It's not "love God" or "praise God" or "worship God." It's not "make disciples." It's not one of the Ten Commandments.

Do you want to know what it is? Are you ready? The most repeated command in all the Bible is: "*Do not be afraid.*" Variations of this command show up hundreds of times in the Scriptures. And in the coming weeks all I want to do is drop into some of these texts and consider them with you. We'll just pick one each week and reflect on it together. My hope is that, even in this virtual format, we can create a sort of sanctuary space for us every Sunday where we know we're going to come together and consider afresh the ways God meets us in our fears and sets us on new footing in Christ.

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VttTfRdoBQ8&feature=youtu.be>

² <https://mercyhillchurch.org/resources/covid-19-updates/>

³ <https://youtu.be/ua9FoPjW63A>

Pause Point #1



When God says, “Do not be afraid” how does that impact you? Does it feel cheap and dismissing of your emotions? Does it feel naively optimistic and out of touch with reality? Does it give you comfort and hope? Does it change anything for you at all? Why do you think these words are repeated so often in the Scriptures? Explain.

How have you processing and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic? Describe ways you’ve seen fear and panic at play in our city, nation, and world. In what ways has it been unsettling for you? What questions would you ask God about it if you could?

(1) The Wilderness (vv. 8-16a)

Hagar and Ishmael are thrust out into the wilderness with nothing but a little bread and water. When even these are gone and dehydration is setting in, Hagar lays her son under a bush, walks a good distance away, and waits for death to come.

Pause Point #2



The New Testament says that Christians are exiles in this world—sojourners passing through. This place is much more like a wilderness than a home. How have you been experiencing the wilderness lately? It might not be as dramatic as Hagar’s and Ishmael’s, but we’re all experiencing it in some way. In what ways have you been tempted to fear in the midst of it?

(2) The Weeping (vv. 16b-18)

Hagar gives herself to wailing and weeping (and who wouldn’t?!). She feels alone, forgotten, forsaken . . . even by God. The lyrics of Demi Lovato’s song “Anyone” seem to me to be a modern expression of this kind of wilderness weeping:

I tried to talk to my piano, / I tried to talk to my guitar. / Talk to my imagination / Confided into alcohol / I tried and tried and tried some more / Told secrets ‘til my voice was sore / Tired of empty conversation / ‘Cause no one hears me anymore / [Chorus] A hundred million stories / And a hundred million songs / I feel stupid when I sing / Nobody’s listening to me / Nobody’s listening / I talk to shooting stars / But they always get it wrong / I feel stupid when I pray / So, why am I praying anyway? / If nobody’s listening / Anyone, please send me anyone / Lord, is there anyone? / I need someone / Anyone, please send me anyone / Lord, is there anyone? / I need someone.

But everything in this narrative and in our trials hinges on v. 17: “[A]nd the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, ‘What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard . . .’” This

word makes all the difference. We are not alone. We do not need to be afraid. Why? Because God hears. And He acts . . .

Pause Point #3



Read through the lyrics of Demi Lovato’s song once more. What stands out to you? How would you try to help her? Have you ever felt like this? Tell the story.

How does knowing that God hears your cries change your experience of the wilderness? Why would this mean we no longer need to be afraid? How might this apply to your own personal struggles lately?

(3) The Well (vv. 19-21)

I think this is so powerful. Did you notice? It is not so much that the external situation dramatically changes for Hagar and Ishmael, right? They’re not immediately removed from the wilderness. Instead, God opens their eyes to see the well that’s right there for them in the middle of the wilderness. He doesn’t take them somewhere else. He opens them up to something of His abundance right there in the midst of it. And that is what God would do for us through Jesus and Spirit right now!

Pause Point #4



Have you ever experienced something like Hagar and Ishmael here—where God opens up for you a well in the midst of the wilderness? In what ways is He doing that for you right now? Read Psalm 23. Meditate on David’s words and ask God to weave them into your own heart and mind.

How has your prayer life been lately? How has the COVID-19 situation affected it. Have you been praying more? Have you been praying less? Why? Though we may be called to socially distance ourselves from one another, we can use this time to draw near in prayer to the God who hears. How might you pursue more of this even this week?

Call to Response

Sing

You might consider singing along with these songs this week:

- *Sovereign Over Us* (Shane and Shane)⁴

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dl9a7sE4bcM>

- I Am Held (Pat Barret)⁵
- He Will Hold Me Fast (Shand and Shane)⁶

Pray

If you need prayer in any way, please either: (1) post your request to our Mercy Hill Community Facebook Group;⁷ or (2) email us at info@mercyhillchurch.org. We'd love to be lifting you up and caring for you in this time!

Give

If you'd like to give an offering this morning, please navigate to our give page on mercyhillchurch.org.⁸

Have a Wonderful Week!

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UWJb5wxvo-Y>

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nkRiQMJNuTU>

⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/135865930270704/?ref=bookmarks>

⁸ <https://mercyhillchurch.org/mission/give/>