

It's been a pretty difficult year so far. I don't think anybody would really disagree with that. And it's been difficult for lots of different reasons, not the least of which is perhaps the worst drought that we've experienced in recent memory. And everything, as a result, is struggling pretty badly. Crops aren't nearly what they should be. And I'm sure the haying is also going pretty badly too. Because what kind of yield are you getting this year? A bale to the acre? Half? Less? Maybe you're doing a little better than that, but it's certainly not what it used to be. We're certainly struggling in that way. As a result, I'm sure that many of you, and many people for that matter, are contemplating selling some of your cattle. It's better to have fewer that you can actually feed this winter than to have so many that you wouldn't be able to take care of them, right? And in Montana at least and in the western part of this state, there's so many grasshoppers this year that they're like a carpet across the land. A cloud, as it were. It's terrible. I've seen it with my own eyes. All of this together is enough to make us wonder: "What's going to happen? What is the rest of this year going to be like? Are we going to be able to make it through?" Now, we'll say, of course, that God is going to take care of us, that God will lead us through all of these things. But yet we still wonder. What is going to happen in the days ahead?

This year's been difficult in other ways, too, unfortunately. It's not been a very good economy. There's shortages across the board, so prices have been jacked up very, very high. Gas is the highest that it's been in a while. Lumber might actually finally be getting better, but it might be going up again later in the year once demand increases. And I know when I went into the store the other day to pick up some electrical wire, it turns out that copper is in a shortage too. And so I ended up paying twice as much as I wanted to for that wire. Everything is messed up, and we're all feeling that economic pinch and wondering, is it ever going to finally get better? Of course, there's other reasons too, right? There's political problems that haven't gotten any better. The election's over, but things are still messed up. Or maybe you're struggling with some family problems, something going on that you wonder, is this ever to come to an end? Or maybe you're dealing with health problems, wondering, are you ever going to get better? Whatever it may be, this has been a very difficult year, one that makes us wonder what will happen in the days ahead.

But Christians, why? Why do we wonder? Why do we worry about what might happen? We tell ourselves that God is going to help us, right? That God is going to deliver us from all of our troubles. So why do we still worry? I think the reason why we worry, Christians, is because even if we think the right things and even if we say the right things, too often we only think of them in general kind of ways. In ways that are true for kind of everybody in some sense, but it leaves us wondering: "Is it true for me?" God can help us, we say. God is quite capable of helping us. But is he going to help me? God can give us all good things, we say, and we know that he can do it. But will he give those good things to me? God can save us, we say. God is our Savior. But will he save me from the midst of all of my troubles? That's the reason why I think we get so worried, why we wonder as much as we do. Because we think of these things generally and leave it at that.

But Christians, God is not just God. God is your God. You personally. You individually. He is your God. And God is going to take care of you in your own situation, whatever that situation might be. Because God is your helper in all things. That's what we learn today from our Old Testament reading from 2 Samuel chapter 22, which is actually the very middle of a very long psalm written by King David. And we hear the reason why he wrote this psalm in verse 1, when

he says, "And David spoke to the Lord the words of this song on the day when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul." So in other words, David was singing this song after getting through a very difficult time in his life. And he was looking back on that time, and he realized that the only reason he got through it was not because he was so clever. It was not because he just lucked out. It was because God helped him. Him personally. Not just in a general way as if he was just helping Israel. But he helped David to get through all of these things.

And so that's what we hear, then, as we go through our reading, beginning at verse 26: "With the merciful, you show yourself merciful. With the blameless man, you show yourself blameless. With the purified, you deal purely. And with the crooked, you make yourself seem torturous. You save a humble people, but your eyes are on the haughty to bring them down." And what these verses show us, Christians, is that God does not deal with us in some kind of generic way, as if he did something for all of us and just kind of left it at that. He deals with you personally, as you are in your situation. With the merciful, he is merciful. With the blameless, he is blameless. With the pure, he is pure. And with the crooked, he is torturous. In all of these things, God speaks to your situation and helps you to get through your troubles.

Now, pay attention as we go through the rest of this passage how many times David will use words like "I" or "my" or "me," especially in verse 29: "For you are my lamp, O Lord, and my God lightens my darkness." God shines into your darkness, however dark it may seem to be, and gives you a light which cannot be put out. God will lead you through everything that you are going through, because he is your God, leading you out of your darkness into his marvelous light.

Verse 30: "For by you, I can run against a troop, and by my God, I can leap over a wall." If we know that God is with us, if we know that he is our light in the midst of every trouble, we have a sure confidence. We don't have to be afraid. We don't have to worry. We can run head on into our troubles, because what are they going to do to us? How can they possibly hurt us, if God is indeed on our side? We can run against that troop that threatens us and leap over the wall that blocks us, because God is with you in the midst of your troubles.

Verse 31: "This God, his way is perfect. The word of the Lord proves true. He is a shield for all those who take refuge in him." And David in this verse gives us three reasons why we can trust God. First of all, because his way is perfect. He's not going to deceive you. He's not going to lead you astray. He is with you in the midst of everything, and so we can trust him for that reason. His word proves true. The image that David uses here is like refining metal in a furnace. The Word of the Lord is like silver or gold which has been refined over and over again, through the fire as it were. So we can know that it's trustworthy, because it has proven itself time and time again. God's Word speaks to you and gives you that confidence which you need. And he is also a shield for all those who trust in him. You can rely on him, because he will defend you in the midst of all of your troubles. He is your shield, the one which cannot be broken.

Verses 32 and 33: "For who is God, but the Lord? And who is a rock, except our God? This God is my strong refuge and has made my way blameless." There's nothing else, Christians, in heaven, on earth, or under the earth that can help you the way that God does. There is nothing.

Money cannot help you. The government cannot help you. Other people cannot help you. But God will help you, because he is your God in the midst of every trouble, a sure refuge that has made your way blameless.

And finally David says: "He made my feet like the feet of a deer and set me secure on the heights." In other words, he's saying he has made my feet so that they will not slip, the way that a deer's does not slip so it always has a sure footing. In other words, even when we are in dangerous situations, we're not going to stumble and fall. We're not going to trip, because God is supporting us. God is lifting you up, so that you can have a sure refuge away from all of your enemies up on top of God's holy mountain. God is with you, Christians, and this is what he wants to show us through all of these things.

And we know this especially through Jesus Christ. Because Jesus did not do all the things that he did just in a generic way, as if he was just doing something for the world and leaving it at that. Jesus did what he did for you, as if you were the only one that he was speaking to, as if you were the only one that he did all of these things for. Jesus died for you so that you might live. Jesus rose for you so that you would be with him forever. Jesus has given you the Holy Spirit so that you would be a new creation in him. Jesus calls you by your own personal name. And Jesus is with you, even to the end of the age. He hears you when you call to him, and he answers you when you pray to him. And like David, he will help you and deliver you from all of your troubles. Not generically, not generally, but specifically you, so that he will take care of you in all things.

So yes, Christians, this year has been a hard one. We can admit that. It has made us wonder what's going to happen. But God is with you and will take care of you, so that nothing can hurt you. The drought will not overwhelm you. The economic situation will not destroy you. All the troubles that you are going through will not bring you to an end. God is with you, you personally. Not generally, but individually, giving you that promise that because you belong to him, he will be with you always. So turn to him, Christians. Turn to him and call on him in every trouble, for he is your refuge. And being confident because he is with you, we can face all of our troubles, knowing that the world cannot hurt us. Because God is faithful, and he will never fail you, because God is with you always.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, by which you show us that you are with us even to the end of the age. Help us always to trust in you, for you are our sure fortress and our strong refuge in every trouble. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.