

Have you noticed the large amount of dystopian plots in books, television shows, and movies in the last decade? You know what I mean: a virus has been loosed and most of the world dies and the few remaining people struggle to survive in a world without technology, running water and stores. Or the one where everyone gets blown up by a war of catastrophic proportions, and THEN the few remaining people struggle to survive --with new magical powers, or special gifts, or animal guides. YOU know. Dystopia: paradise lost.

Why do you suppose there are so many books and shows about this today?

Maybe it's because the world is just a bit *overwhelming* these days. Each news story brings us a new disaster. Politics aside: the world seems to be in a state of flux. Water tables are rising. Weather patterns are just weird. Technology is making things both easier and more complicated. Alexa runs our homes, turns our lights on and off, gives us advice, and – we've heard--spies on us.

Then there's the *Ring Alarm* system. Even though *Pew Research* has verified statistically that violent crime has fallen sharply over the last 25 years, *Ring Alarms by Amazon* has convinced millions of people to watch their property through doorbell cameras, and *Ring's Neighbors* – another app--provides a forum where people can go online to discuss threats—both real and imagined—in their communities, heightening people's paranoia and need for security and protection.

It's no wonder we sometimes feel like life is spiraling out of control. The world is wearing us out. It's like we are bombarded with an emotional storm of anxiety and fear and people just want to seek shelter.

But what do we mean by shelter? A place of protection and safety from whatever might harm us? This week we are looking at Jesus, and the shelter he offers.

Of the 5 words we've looked at for this sermon series, I wanted this one. I needed this one, really—because lately I've been craving shelter: craving a place of safety from all the things that make me anxious, angry or sad.

There has to be a place to go when we feel overwhelmed, don't you think?

For me it wouldn't even need to be elaborate: I want to go home. Some of us want the home we live in, some want the home we remember.

But I bet that sounds good to most of us.

Think about it: we leave our homes in the morning- we go to work, or appointments. We try and get our lists of things *done*.

News, problems, busyness, chaos—happens. Always.

Even if we have a great day and meet lots of fascinating people, excel at every part of our jobs—I'll bet we are just glad when we get home.

Home, the place we are wrapped in safety, where we can get out of our work clothes, have a bite, and kiss a loved one --or pat a

pet-- where we can just be ourselves. We don't have to be something. Or do something.

It's the place we are glad to get back to—even after a vacation. The only place we really relax. Home is our shelter in the storm of life.

The problem with being inundated with dystopian versions of the future is that we can find ourselves focusing on the problems in the world, rather than noticing the wonder. We read about unresolvable divisions among people, but become afraid to take a stab at listening to each other. We fear technology as the enemy, and like anything in life—it can be used that way—but we forget that because of it we are connected worldwide, and have huge amounts of information at our fingertips, and can respond to worldwide need instantly.

Instead, we so often find ourselves standing in the whirlwind. Sometimes we feel that it might be a sign of failure if we stop battling the storm around us, and force ourselves to stay there, being buffeted by the wind until the storm stops.

You know what—sometimes it's wiser to find shelter during a storm: to regroup, dry off, get something to drink.

Jesus knows that we feel tossed around by the world—sees us trying to find enough hours in the day to accomplish what we are told we need to accomplish.

And Jesus says: enough. *You* are enough.

And he opens a door with light and warmth streaming out, and offers us his hand.

Security and safety are not things you can buy at a store. They are things we need to develop inside ourselves. That place we are longing for – it exists. It's God. We live in it, and it lives in us. It's our home. And the door is open.

The Lord is my shelter. I shall not want for protection and safety.

He makes me remember the places of stillness within me. He walks with me among the trees and under the stars, showing me a paradise which is bigger than any of our paradises lost .

He restores my soul.

He keeps bringing me back to the path of love and mercy. For myself. For others. For his name's sake.

Even though we walk in the shadow of a dystopian future, I won't give in to my feelings of despair.

God is with me.

He protects me, props me up, calms me.

Indeed, God's kingdom is being built everywhere, and it will surround me—whether I can see it or not—all the days of my life:

And I will dwell in the shelter of the LORD for ever. Amen.

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