

August 2017

Dear neighbours,

The uncertainty of life seems to be the defining factor of 2017. Political uncertainty for sure and the financial uncertainty it brings with it. The possibility of being the victim of a random attack will not keep us indoors but the threat is real. A fire breaking out while we sleep seems more stark than a daytime conflagration.

These things will worry some more than others but there is a place for sober thinking. As the hymnwriter observed, "Change and decay in all around I see."

It is a commonplace observation, but certainly true, that if there is one thing certain in life it is death. More certain still, and certainly more encouraging, is the permanent Being that is God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. He is the one great certainty in all the complexities of life with their uncertain fallout. Death is in His hands, its time and place is of His appointment for each one of us. The Saviour is described as a rock-solid foundation.

"Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer. From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I" (Psalm 61.2). That rock is Christ.

We need such a Saviour who has authority over all things and is greater than our hearts. We may apply to Him. Our heavenly Father will lead us to Him. By His atoning blood our sins may be blotted out and we may come without sin to the Father, perfect though He is, by Him. "The Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God" (John 16.27), the Saviour Himself said.

If you wish to know inward security among life's uncertainties then it is the Saviour you need to trust. He Himself pleads with you. "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it" (Matthew 7.24-27).

The Saviour describes two people. Their purpose is identical, their abilities are similar. The only discernible difference is that one builds on sand and the other on rock. We might well question the sense of building on a flood plain; did he have it in mind to skimp the cost with false economy? Was he simply careless by nature? Did he think extreme situations would never occur?

The Saviour claims that amidst all uncertainty He provides security in the inner sanctuary of our lives. He never changes, being from everlasting to everlasting. The person who builds on Him will be able to withstand life's most terrible storms. It would be catastrophic to leave Biblical faith out of our reasoning. Or, to be carelessly indifferent. Or, to imagine that things which we observe happening to others could never happen to us.

We say, it never rains but it pours. That's not always true. What is of course true, is that in exceptional rains combined with high winds, flash floods occur threatening property and life. There are those times in life when relentless adversities combine with other factors beyond our control to destroy the fabric of our lives, unless our foundation is beyond the reach of such things.

The Saviour's observation, "Great was the fall of it," indicates in picture language the unmitigated disaster of the collapse of life. When all we've worked for, all we value, comes crashing down it is too late for a reappraisal perhaps. It would not have crashed beyond recall, but stood the test of time and events, had our foundation been secure in Christ. Maybe it is not yet too late.

So the hymnwriter not only wrote, "Change and decay in all, around I see", but continued " O Thou who changest not, abide with me."

"He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength: they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint" (Isaiah 40.29-31)

Two tragic, but widely differing, scenarios were reported to the Lord Jesus. "There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13.1-3).

Here was murder. The Galilaeans often revolted against Roman rule, but these individuals had only come to the temple to offer sacrifice when they were cruelly and randomly murdered in church. Unless they had relatives, most of those who knew or heard of these things were not personally involved. Jesus Himself was not unmoved at their plight for He had been brought up in Galilee.

But He raises an issue that involves us all. "Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish." What does Jesus mean by "likewise"? He does not mean that we shall all meet a similar end. He does, however, warn that death may take us by surprise and that we would do well to be prepared.

Then again. "Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13.4-5).

We do not know if gerry building caused the fall and therefore there was corporate accountability. Or natural causes. Or misuse of the premises. But whatever caused the collapse, eighteen died. Random passers by. As we might say, in the wrong place at the wrong time.

But nothing is random with God. All our times are appointed even in the most severe circumstances. As another hymnwriter wrote, "Now the pruning, sharp, unsparing, scattered blossom, bleeding shoot." "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? ...Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Hebrews 12. 6-7,11).

"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3.5-6).

Yours affectionately,