

Uncertainties

*“For Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties.
For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:12).*

Some things in Scripture are not explicit, or only barely clear, yet they are profoundly important. They’re there, but they’re between the lines, so to speak. We need to reflect deeply on Scripture to understand what it’s really saying, because Scripture must be read theologically and relationally. So, something that’s all through the Bible, front to back, but that doesn’t anywhere jump off the page at us, is today’s lesson. It’s this: God has deliberately made the world we live in loaded with uncertainties, not to provoke anxiety and/or fear in us (though they can do that) but to drive us to faith (or deeper faith) in Him.

Life is over-loaded with uncertainties. If we woke up each day and thought about all the bad things that could happen to us that day, we’d roll over and stay in bed. We could get cancer, or a heart attack, or a stroke. We could get into a terrible car crash. Or fall and break a hip. Or a tree could fall on our head. Or get bitten by a rabid fox. Or a fire could destroy all we have. All these things have actually happened to people, and any of these or a long list of other bad things, could also happen to us. So, how do we deal with this?

Many of us seek wealth, not so much for the pleasures and the power that money can buy, but for the ability to buy (or so we suppose) security. We want to live in a nice neighborhood for the security of it. We want to stay healthy by eating well and taking vitamins and other supplements for the security we suppose they bring. But all these are in vain. God determines what we’ll face in life. And He has lots of options.

Paul went thru life knowing that he’d have to suffer, and he surely was conscious of the uncertainties of each day. But he delighted in the adversities that he faced. They were painful to experience, of course. Yet he says, truthfully, that he delighted in them! That’s because Christ manifested His power and His will thru Paul in all those difficult experiences. Each day presented Paul with a fresh new list of uncertainties. And Paul knew how to deal with them.

Going back into the Hebrew Scriptures, most of the narrative texts involve facing the uncertainties of a difficult life. That’s why Hebrews Chapter 11 is there, to teach us that O.T. saints, facing grave uncertainties, grew in faith by going thru them. The children of Israel got just enough manna for each day. If they took too much than they needed to avoid the uncertainty that there’d be no manna the next day, God caused that surplus to rot. They had to learn to trust God. God threw David out of Jerusalem during the Absalom rebellion so that David could experience the uncertainty even of his life let alone his rule. David had to trust God for the outcome. Israel was thrown out of the Land into Exile so that they could face all the uncertainties of life among hostile Gentiles. The Books of Daniel and Esther narrate how certain of those exiles dealt with the adverse situations that arose.

Adversities test us. Adversities cause us to discard all that’s irrelevant or distracting. Adversities are God’s way of growing us, of blessing us. So we can and should face the uncertainties of life with the awareness that God is in control and doing whatever it is for our good. And so, unlike unbelievers who fear the adverse circumstances in life, we can rejoice as we anticipate each new day. God’s hand is always controlling everything in this creation, and that includes everything in our life. And His presence is always lovingly with us not necessarily to get us through whatever comes, but that we know that He’s with us.

But we need to be prepared for these uncertainties. Most people thoughtlessly say, “I’ll just take my chances and wait till the situation arises, if any ever do, and then I’ll deal with it.” That strategy is OK if a URI is all that’s involved. But those people are not going to be able to deal with something unexpected and consequential. When something really major hits, most people will be devastated. We need to be prepared. Paul was walking with Christ in intimate fellowship, and it was that relationship that gave him the ability to deal with the unknowables of each day.

To walk with God means facing with trust the unknowns that are always there ahead of us in this present evil world. We need to be in a loving and trusting relationship with Him, one that’s only possible by knowing Him and spending time in prayer with Him. We need to know God and His will and His ways, in short, His Word. That takes commitment or it doesn’t happen. It also requires something else: A will to obey Him regardless the risk and/or loss that obedience causes. The believer who’s deepening his or her fellowship with Christ by obeying His revealed will and spending time in prayer will be prepared for the uncertainties of life. That’s because such a person already knows to trust God’s wisdom and goodness.

Let's recognize the importance of this. God has deliberately changed His physical world to frustrate us. This is not the original "very good" creation of Genesis One. It's a world that God re-made when Adam sinned. It's a world saturated with all manner of bad things that we who dwell in it now have to face. Job had to deal with it, and he only barely was able to do that successfully. Think of Noah's life for a hundred years building a huge boat for . . . he didn't know why! Think of Jacob returning to the land to face his irate and hostile twin brother, Esau, unsure if he'd survive the day. And so on, all thru the Bible. We need to know that life has unknowables waiting for us and be prepared to face them. God has willed that for us.

We can take this principle further. The greatest of all uncertainties involves death. What lies on the other side? No one can know, except by believing God's Word. So Paul writes, "the last enemy to be defeated is death" (1 Corinthians 15:26). The defeat of death, of course, is resurrection. There will be a resurrection of all life (and I suspect that will include the animals). God pronounced death and He can reverse it. He created biological life and He can re-create it. So for the believer, death is a transition to a new kind of existence, one of supernal and eternal blessing. But if we're not fully convinced of this truth, death is a mysterious and fearful "enemy." Professing Christians who fear death, try to avoid it, or are anxious about it, because they're not trusting God or His Word, face an uncertainty for which they are totally unprepared and cannot be prepared. God has made this present existence to be this way. Our attitude towards death and how we approach it indicates our trust in Him, or lack thereof. Do we get this? Jesus asks us to risk our lives for Him, i.e., possibly experience martyrdom. If we're confident of not only a resurrection but also a reward for such a faithful witness, we'll do it with inexpressible joy. And if we're willing to die for Jesus, how can we not be willing to suffer loss of less than life, such as property, friends, reputation, time, etc? If however we're uncertain what lies on the other side of death, we'll do all in our power to avoid risks and suffering, and thus declare our lack of faith.

Consider this: When God created man, He made us so that we do not and cannot know the future. We purposely are not allowed to know that, so we're dependent on God to reveal to us what we need to know. Not knowing the future is an uncertainty deliberately built into humanity to test our love for God, our willingness to honor our Creator by trusting His Word and appropriately acting on it. (This is what faith is!) God warned Adam what would happen if he ate the fruit of a certain tree. Noah dramatically warned his pre-Flood people what was coming and how to escape it. Moses warned the people of Israel what would happen if they disobeyed God's Law. The Church exists to warn our world of people that a far greater judgment is coming and what God has already provided to escape it. As with all prior warnings in Scripture, the Gospel is essentially a warning about the otherwise unknowable future with a very precious promise linked to it; it's a promise that's intimately associated with a Person, Jesus. Jesus is both Judge and Savior.

Eternal security does not come by being proclaimed, whether from a pulpit or by a radio or TV preacher, nor can it validly be printed on a tract or booklet. Eternal security comes only by trusting in the Word of God and the internal witness of the Holy Spirit.

And there's one further thing that we believers can be certain of, and we very much need to be prepared for this. We are going to have to stand before Jesus to give an account of how we lived our Christian life. Jesus has invested His Spirit in us, and He expects a return on His investment. He wants fruit. He expects to see "good works." And that only comes by knowing the Word and obeying it. Only a fool would ignore that certainty, or assume that something else can substitute for it or obviate it. Scripture is explicit that a judgment awaits every one of us. (See 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; also Romans 14:12.) Let's not pretend that it'll be a time of celebration, although there may be rejoicing for some of us. I suspect not for all of us though. We dare not be smug about our future, when such a clear warning is there in Scripture. I am amazed at how many professing Christians are oblivious to this certainty. Let's so live each day, now, that we can look forward to hearing from Jesus, "Well done."

In summary, insecurity is an inherent, inescapable and unrelievable characteristic of human existence. God built it into His sin-cursed world. He did it to drive us to Himself. Our only hope for security is in what God invites us to, fellowship with Himself. And that fellowship is contingent on loving trust, obedience, and serving Him. Apart from that, insecurity becomes a self-fulfilling reality.