

## "I Will Trust, and Not Be Afraid"

Isaiah 12:1-6, Sunday after Christmas

December 31, 2006

Beloved of the Lord....It is in our nature to fear the future. We are often afraid of what might or might not happen. We fear what we cannot see. Here we are on the eve of a New Year, and yet in our hearts there is fear. Though the Christmas season is a time of rejoicing for the believer, sometimes we find ourselves depressed. Often if we have had a bad year, we fear what the new year might bring. Sometimes we are afraid of death. Sometimes we are afraid of loved one dying. Sometimes we worry when we see our loved ones suffering. We fear the future because we have no control over it. We are not God. We cannot call the shots. When we realize there are just some things beyond our control, fear grips our hearts. Sometimes our fears are so strong that we fail to find calm and rest. We fail to find peace.

But when we experience fear as Christians, we should remember two important words that God has told us. God says FEAR NOT. God has used these two words, FEAR NOT, time and time again to comfort His children who struggle with fear. To fearful Abraham God said, "Fear not, Abram: I *am* thy shield, *and* thy exceeding great reward." To fearful Isaac God said, "Fear not, for I *am* with thee, and will bless thee." When God sent angels to Zacharias, Joseph and Mary, the angels first said, "Fear not." When God sent an angel to appear to the fearful shepherds of Bethlehem the angel said, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." We too, like the shepherds, need not fear. When we trust in God we need not be afraid or fearful, because God's own Son has become our Savior! When we struggle with fear, we should remember Jesus who said, "Fear not little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." There is no reason to fear when God is in control.

Sometimes we experience sadness when we see our loved ones suffering from sickness. Because we care for them so, it hurts us to see them suffer. But Jesus Himself experienced such sadness at the death of Lazarus. When Jesus saw Mary and Martha weeping, Jesus "groaned in the spirit, and was troubled." And then "Jesus wept". As a True Man, as our True Brother, Jesus knew and experienced sadness in heart. There was no sin in this. However, unlike us, Jesus never lacked faith, nor was He fearful as we so often are. After Jesus wept tears of sadness He prayed to His heavenly Father. Therefore, when we see our loved ones suffering, we should first be moved to pray as Jesus did. We ask God to grant them relief, or heal them, or whatever else we think is best for them. But after this we must remember to place our trust in God and His Word. "I will trust and not be afraid." Casting out all fear, we place all our confidence in our

good and gracious heavenly Father. He hears our cries and listens to our prayers. He grants us relief. And sooner or later God also grants relief to our loved ones who suffer. He may raise them from the deathbed of sickness, or He may completely take away all their suffering by taking them up to heaven. One way or the other, God brings an end to the suffering of His children. Therefore FEAR NOT. Trust in Him and do not be afraid.

I. When there is trust in God, fear disappears. How good it is to know that the believer through Christ always has God's constant grace, love, and mercy. Heaven is the eternal home of all believers though we often suffer here on earth. But let us ask ourselves the question, what comfort do the unbelievers have? When the unbeliever suffers from sickness, famine, war, or disaster, what comfort do they have? Indeed the unbeliever has no real comfort. When the peace of Christ does not live in the heart by faith, that heart without faith knows only anger, hatred, impenitence, and a guilty conscience. Instead of repenting of sin, the unbelieving heart accuses God of sin. The unbeliever says, "God is the source of all my problems. It is not me. I have done nothing wrong."

Truly God's anger abides upon such people. God will punish evil, and God does punish evil. In Isaiah 13:11 God says, "I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogance of the proud to cease." God punishes the world for its evil every day with diseases like AIDS or with deadly plagues or with war or natural disasters. Just read the Old Testament. God sent bears to devour rebellious children. God opened the earth up and swallowed Korah alive, because he spoke against the prophet Moses. God sent poisonous serpents among His own people, the Israelites, and God sent plague after plague upon stubborn Pharaoh. God still punishes evil today. Just yesterday we heard that Saddam Hussein was hanged. God punished this brutal dictator with death. Hussein's torments continue even now after death. And so we should fear God's wrath and not act contrary to His commandments.

In all of this however we should never be tempted to think that God takes some sort of cruel pleasure in punishing people. "As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." Eze. 33 God's purpose behind punishing wicked people is that wicked people might repent of their sins before it is too late. God desires "all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of truth." I Tim. 2:4 We often hear people say that God must be cruel, because He allows all this suffering in the world. This argument is faulty. Second Corinthians 5:15 says, Christ "died for all". Would a cruel God become flesh and blood and then die bleeding on a cross for all those people who hated Him? Would a cruel God die for the sins of all men? God is not cruel, but good. Men are cruel, but God is not.

Thanks be to God, since Jesus died for all, all of God's anger has been turned away from us. Isaiah writes "And in that day thou shalt say, O LORD, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me." It is God's grace and love that comforts us, His mercy clearly seen in Christ Jesus. Therefore when God's children suffer in this world, we know God's love is always behind it - though it never feels like love to our senses. The Bible says, "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous." Truly God does allow His children to suffer, just like He allowed Job to suffer immensely. But it is for our own good. It is for our profit. The Bible says, "He for *our* profit, that *we* might be partakers of his holiness." The believer who suffers not only profits from such suffering, but through suffering God brings His children closer to Him. Their trust in Him increases. In faith the believer knows God means well by this, He will bring about good. "All things work together for good to them that love God." The end result of our afflictions and suffering is the "peaceable fruit of righteousness". "It is through this training of the Lord that our faith is rendered pure, true, precious, that we ourselves are thoroughly prepared, strengthened, founded unto eternal salvation." (Kretzmann)

Knowing that God's love is behind all of this, we trust that God knows what He is doing. We FEAR NOT, because God is in charge and in control. Therefore, when we fear and are afraid, we must trust in God above all things. For God's ways are always perfect. God never makes a mistake like we do. Nor does He ever fail to accomplish what He sets out to do. This is why we should trust in Him above all things. While doctors, medicine, and hospitals have their purpose, truly our Lord Jesus is the Great Physician, who not only heals our bodies according to His will, but more importantly, heals our soul. When we see loved ones suffering, God is in the long run strengthening and preparing that soul so that he or she can die in the faith. When we see our loved ones suffering God is also preparing us, and reminding us that earth is but a temporary home for God's children. God wants our hearts to trust in Him more strongly by faith, so that we can walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Our troubles on earth, move us to look up to heaven with childlike faith and trust. God does all things well. "The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works." Where there is trust in God, fear disappears. Now we can firmly say, "Behold, God *is* my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH *is* my strength and *my* song; he also is become my salvation." Even when our sins trouble us so, we can always count on the mercy of Christ. "Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation."

II. God's name is magnified when we trust Him in the midst of suffering. This joy can stay with us during our

many tribulations in this world. In spite of how we feel, in spite of the trials we suffer, or the burdens we carry, God's mercy never fails us. We need only trust in Him, and our fears will disappear. And so when we suffer, or when our loved ones suffer, we should not fail to glorify God in the midst of our suffering. Trusting in Him in the midst of affliction, causes God's name to be glorified among men. "In that day shall ye say, Praise the LORD, call upon his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted." Though we should praise the Lord and declare His doings daily among the people, it is especially a powerful witness when we glorify God in the midst of our own suffering. For this is just what the saints have done before us. When Job lost all his wealth, and all his children died, Job declared "The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." When Peter and the apostles were beaten for preaching salvation through Christ, they were happy to have suffered for Christ's name. Consider the shameful days of Rome when Christians were persecuted. The Roman soldiers would place the Christians in the center of Coliseum where lions and wild beasts would slay and devour them. Yet even as the beasts were released, these Christians would sing hymns of praise to God. They had Christ. They did not fear death. They glorified God and served as a powerful witness to the heathen. Sometimes the very soldiers which delivered them to death were converted to Christ.

When the unbelievers of the world see believers suffer, they expect Christians to buckle and murmur and complain against the Lord. Sadly sometimes we do. But when we bear witness that God is good and gracious to us even though we suffer so, it causes them to be dumbfounded. For the world of unbelief is shocked when suffering believers cling to Christ as their Savior. It causes them to stop and scratch their head. Our example in the midst of suffering may move their hearts to repentance. For we have something they do not have. We have spiritual peace in Christ. We have salvation. And so in the midst of suffering, let us all boldly say, "Behold, God *is* my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH *is* my strength and *my* song." Therefore FEAR NOT. Don't be afraid of the future. Don't be afraid of the new year. God's grace and love and mercy will sustain you at all times. God will never leave nor forsake you. "Fear not little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Therefore trust, and be not afraid. The future is in God's good and gracious hands. Amen.

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