

OUR TIME TO TRUST?

One of my favorite TV preachers last week was speaking to the perilous times in which we live. I must say that these times are unusually distinct in my lifetime. I do not know of a time when so many of my friends have so many diverse threats to their way of life and so many have seen their options disappear from the radar screen. I spent one morning calling around to some who I knew were hurting the most, praying for some ray of sunshine to peak through the dim clouds but the best I could get from any of them was "I'm okay". I flippingly responded that okay is a lot better than not okay.

It seems to me that many of us have been ill prepared for times like these. We have been fed a steady diet for several years of Christian entitlements. That is, as Christians we are entitled to prosperity, health and happiness. While I believe in all of these things, life simply is not that way and to expect blue skies and green lights as a entitlement of the Christian experience is simply not realistic and not true.

It has become extremely unpopular, and taken as an act of unbelief to admit that one is struggling in any area of one's life. There is an untrue belief out there, much like the belief of Job's friends who falsely accused Job of some gross sin as the reason for his problems. I actually heard a popular speaker say recently, "Do you honestly think God wants unhappiness or struggle in your life?" I wasn't sure where he is with the admonition of Jesus to "take up your cross".

I thought of the Apostle Paul who in his sixties, after a life of serving Christ, found himself in prison waiting to go to Rome and what that must have been like for him.

This was no Club Fed like we have today. No ping pong tables, no golf courses, no three squares a day. Paul was put in a cave or hole in the ground with no toilet facilities, no water, no food, no nothing unless someone from the outside brought it to him. Yet in that situation said that he had learned that whether he had everything or he had nothing, he could be content just to be in God's will for his life, whatever that was. **Here my friends, is a quality that our generation has lost.**

The Apostle Peter said, "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you" but that is exactly what many of us have done. We ponder and ask, "Why has this happened" or "Why did I not hear from God that this was coming?" We seem oblivious to the fact that this recession reaches around the world. What is happening in my life and yours is not some isolated incident predicated on our personal sin but something of a much bigger scale. This is a global recession that has reached the just and the unjust. Japan is in the deepest recession since World War II and so is Europe and China and yes, even Saudi Arabia where their precious oil is selling for less than \$35 a barrel.

Humans are naturally narcissistic. We fail to look past what is happening to ourselves personally, to see what God is doing on the larger scale. I have often said, **"Just because something is happening to you doesn't mean that it is about you."** Life is about living in God's big picture of eternity. It is about the

adventure to embrace the next thing that God has for each of us to conquer for His will to be done on earth. This recession is just another of those things.

Recently, I was awakened out of a deep sleep at three in the morning; God likes to wake me at three A.M. for some reason He also has not shared with me. I had the words of the first verse of the Twenty Third Psalm was running over and over in my head, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want". It took a few times hearing it but soon I realized that **I had to own those words;** "THE LORD IS **MY** SHEPHERD, I SHALL NOT WANT." "THE LORD IS **MY** SHEPHERD, I **SHALL** NOT WANT." "**THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD, I SHALL NOT WANT.**"

As the comfort of those words settled in, my mind drifted back to an incident that happened many years ago as a young preacher just getting started in the Phoenix area. My wife and I were driving down Ray Road which today is a six lane highway lined with shopping malls and apartments but in those days was a narrow two lane rural road with open irrigation ditches on both sides. This was a huge agricultural area that harvested 3 or 4 crops year round so the practice was to house great herds of sheep that would graze and fertilize the fields after each crop was harvested.

As we drove down the road that day, we approached such a herd being moved from one field to another on our road. There were perhaps a thousand sheep or more with only one lone shepherd watching over them. He carried a metal shepherd's staff. It was one of those moments when God was about to show me something about life that I desperately need to know. We stopped our car and just sat for over an hour watching.

The sheep got to the new field before the shepherd and when the lead sheep got to the closed gate, he jumped over the fence rails to enter the field. Several other sheep followed. When the shepherd got there, he took down the rails so the rest of the sheep could simply walk into the field but instead, the ensuing sheep continued to jump over a now imaginary barrier mindlessly mimicking the actions of the sheep before. I commented about how we are referred to as sheep in scripture and wondered if we were any smarter than these wooly animals, jumping over imaginary obstacles created by those before us?

With this great herd all pressing forward, the inevitable happened. One of the sheep slipped off the road into the deep running water of the irrigation ditch. Amazingly, despite all the noise from the bleating flock, the shepherd on the opposite side of the road heard that single sheep fall into the water and silently but quickly moved through the herd, reached down with his staff, took the sheep by the neck and pulled him kicking and screaming out to safety. The sheep returned to the herd and disappeared in the din.

We are all part of the global herd after all, being moved from place to place to greener pastures. The Shepherd knows best and His eye is ever on us so that just in case, one of us slips off, He will rescue us. We may not always know where we are going but we do know where we have been and He has been faithful. As the old song says, "Grace has brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home."

The experts are not painting a pretty picture for this coming year; many of them are in despair. I don't have a personal word from the Lord on what is ahead of us

either but I know that God knows which field is best for each of us. We can either be pushed ahead by fear of the unknown or we can move with courage based in our experience with Him as our Shepherd and we shall not want.

Finally, it is not an act of unbelief to communicate honestly as to where we are in life. The church must be a place where we grieve with those who grieve and celebrate with those who celebrate not mindlessly walking around with a forced smile on our faces as if by some miracle life has not touched us. It is not an act of unbelief or a denial of our faith to admit that we have hit a difficult time in our life. It may be an act of unbelief **if we dwell on it** but that is another story for another time.

We pray that this is a great year for you but if God is working on some larger project, we may get the opportunity to show the world that **Christianity is not about escaping life but embracing it** with all of its ups and downs. **There is a time in the life of every believer when his or her faith must advance to trust.** Job said, "Though He slay me, yet will I **trust** Him" If this is our time... Lord, let us be found as true and faithful soldiers in your cause.

My name is Ron Habig. God bless!