

Our Future in His Hands

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“But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:19

Some years ago a visitor came to one of our churches and shared an experience during Sabbath School. He told us how he came to a point in his experience where he was out of work, his accommodation arrangements had expired, he had nothing to tie him to any area and he was not sure what path he should take in life. He had a car and sufficient money for fuel, so he got in his car, but was not sure where he should go. Eventually he prayed, ‘Lord, I need work, accommodation, church fellowship – a ‘new life’, please direct me where I should go! After praying, he started to drive and felt he should head in a certain direction. Eventually, after a long drive and some nights of sleeping in the car, he found work, accommodation, and fellowship at church. Perhaps in our history, we have never found ourselves in such a situation. Perhaps we have had all of these needs provided for us. Perhaps we feel that we have planned better for the future than to end up in such a situation.

As we look at the world today, it is much more common to be out of work due to the lockdowns and mandates given by the governments than in the past. Looking at the future, many people are worried of what lies ahead, how to survive financially or what state or country will give more opportunity to lead a normal life. When we look at the situations occurring in the world today, we may ask the question, is this financial insecurity, job insecurity, and unknown future really something new? Let’s spend a little time to contemplate the lives of just a few individuals from the pages of history, the trials they faced and their reaction to such insecurity in their lives.

God Sustains in Time of Dire Poverty

Halfway between the busy ports of Tyre and Sidon is the town Zarephath, or Sarepta, which means “the smelting place.” Anciently it was a town of metal industries, pottery production, olive oil production and purple dye manufacture. It was a good place for business and employment opportunities.

Living in this town was a widow who had faced grief and uncertainty in her life, as her husband had passed away, leaving her to cope and bring up a young child by herself. We don’t know much of the life of the widow of Zarephath as just a little of her story is recorded in the Scriptures. What we do know is a wonderful story of survival and God working in a miraculous way, as this woman steps out to obey a promise of God by faith.

As the country continues in serious drought and this widow’s food supplies get less, she sees no hope of survival for herself and her son. At this time God tells his prophet to go to Zarephath: “I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee” (1 Kings 17:8).

Was this widow in a position to sustain Elijah? As he comes to the city, she is collecting two sticks, in order to make a little fire and to bake a small bit of bread to eat with her son. After that she could see no future, no possibility of survival for herself or her son. Yet even in this situation Elijah asks her, “but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me and after make for thee and for thy son.” Then he assures her the meal and the oil will not fail until it rains again.

Facing an uncertain future, this widow steps forward in faith in God’s promise, a promise similar to what Jesus has given to all His children (Luke 12:28-3). She trusts her entire future in God’s hands, and forgetting her own need, she turns her remaining energy to work, to serve the need of another. As she does this, the wonderful Creator of all sustains her and her son through the terrible years of drought. Later, when her son

dies of sickness, God works through Elijah and brings her son back to life! What a wonderful reward of her faith!

“Our compassionate Redeemer is watching you with love and sympathy, ready to hear your prayers, and to render you the assistance which you need. He knows the burdens of every mother's heart, and is her best friend in every emergency. His everlasting arms support the God-fearing, faithful mother. **When upon earth, He had a mother that struggled with poverty, having many anxious cares and perplexities, and He sympathizes with every Christian mother in her cares and anxieties.** That Saviour who took a long journey for the purpose of relieving the anxious heart of a woman whose daughter was possessed by an evil spirit will hear the mother's prayers, and will bless her children.

“He who gave back to the widow her only son as he was carried to the **burial is touched today by the woe of the bereaved mother.** He who wept tears of sympathy at the grave of Lazarus, and gave back to Martha and Mary their buried brother; who pardoned Mary Magdalene; who remembered His mother when He was hanging in agony upon the cross; who appeared to the weeping women, and made them His messengers to spread the first glad tidings of a risen Saviour—He is woman's best friend today, and is ready to aid her in all the relations of life.” *Reflecting Christ*, p. 170.

Facing Trying Times

Let us turn our attention to another well-known story where God's people faced a most forbidding future and experienced God's guidance through it all. Around 605 B.C. Jerusalem was invaded by the army of King Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon – a cruel and unreasonable leader who did not respect the civil or religious freedoms of the people. Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were young men living in Jerusalem at that time and were carried off to Babylon as captives.

Let us picture being in the situation of these four young men and others led into captivity at that time. I'm sure that they, being young, had hopes and aspirations for their future. But any vision or possibility of pursuing education, finding a life work, finding a life partner, having a family was now put on hold, if not shattered, by the invasion and captivity of the Babylonians. On arrival in Babylon, they could not choose their course of study or occupation. Not even the identity of their names was respected.

How the captives must have hoped that somehow the situation could change, that they could return to their own land, that they could worship in the temple in Jerusalem again! Yet even in the midst of that situation, a message came to them in the form of a letter written by Jeremiah, who at that time was still in Jerusalem. In His words of counsel to the captives in Babylon, he did not promise an end to the captivity. Instead, his was a message of encouragement to, by God's grace, pray and make the best of their life in this new situation in which they found themselves. Let us read some of the letter written to them:

“Now these are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem unto the residue of the elders which were carried away captives, and to the priests, and to the prophets, and to all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon; (After that Jeconiah the king, and the queen, and the eunuchs, the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, and the carpenters, and the smiths, were departed from Jerusalem;) Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, unto all that are carried away captives, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem unto Babylon; Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; Take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that ye may be increased there, and not diminished. And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.”
Jeremiah 29:1-2, 4-7.

Did the captives want to be in Babylon? Were they attached to this land? Did they really want to settle there and put their effort into building, planting and carrying on their lives in this place? Or was it their heart's desire to be at home in Jerusalem?

As we consider this, we can see a parallel of our stay here in this troubled world. Do we want to stay here, or is our desire to be somewhere else? How wonderful it would be, to be in the New Jerusalem, away from the troubles of this world, in the place we truly belong! However, as the letter came to the Jewish captives, so the words of Jesus come to us in this far away little world. "Occupy till I come." Luke 19:13. "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." John 16:33.

We are here in this world, and we know the end of this captivity will come, but what are we to do while waiting? Jeremiah said to those in Babylon, "plant gardens and build houses. Settle, but be ready to leave for the better land." Planting and building are character building and time-consuming occupations—occupations which require education and patience. Is this counsel also what is needed today? We are counselled to move out on the land and learn these occupations, but as we do so we should not expect it to be an easy life.

"If the poor now crowded into the cities could find homes upon the land, they might not only earn a livelihood, but find health and happiness now unknown to them. **Hard work, simple fare, close economy, often hardship and privation, would be their lot.** But what a blessing would be theirs in leaving the city, with its enticements to evil, its turmoil and crime, misery and foulness, for the country's quiet and peace and purity." *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 190.

It has been interesting to see that in the beginning of the pandemic, seeds, plants and pets sold out in many shops. People realised the need of becoming self-sufficient and growing their own food. However, many people didn't really know how to look after the plants and animals and later when the lockdown ended, they went back to their previous way of living. They continued to rely totally on the water, power and food provided by others. There is a great work to do in educating the community to plant and build.

"Christian farmers can do real missionary work in helping the poor to find homes on the land and in teaching them **how to till the soil and make it productive. Teach them how to use the implements of agriculture, how to cultivate various crops, how to plant and care for orchards.**

"Many who till the soil fail to secure adequate returns because of their neglect. Their orchards are not properly cared for, the crops are not put in at the right time, and a mere surface work is done in cultivating the soil. Their ill success they charge to the unproductiveness of the land.

"Let proper methods be taught to all who are willing to learn. If any do not wish you to speak to them of advanced ideas, let the lessons be given silently. Keep up the culture of your own land. Drop a word to your neighbors when you can, and let the harvest be eloquent in favor of right methods. Demonstrate what can be done with the land when properly worked." *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 193.

Eat the Fruit

Jeremiah's command to those in captivity was to eat the fruit of the gardens. Yet Daniel and his friends faced challenges in their effort to follow this command. They risked all in order to stand firm and obey their convictions to eat the fruits of the land rather than what was provided at the king's table. Will we face similar challenges today? There is so much food from the king's table that is not according to God's plan. Not only the animal food, but so many processed foods with so many additives which often result in ill health or allergies. Let us beware of relying on the king's table rather than eating the fruit of the gardens!

Marriage and Family

Though faced with challenges in the captivity and surrounded by many pagan practices involving the marriage relation in ancient Babylon, Jeremiah's letter commands those in captivity to respect the marriage relation. They were to bring up families who would be ready to return to Jerusalem when the time of captivity was over. Though for Daniel and others in the king's court this was not possible, many other captives brought up God-fearing families in Babylon who were ready to return to Jerusalem when the captivity was over.

In today's world we are surrounded with so much confusion and sadness surrounding marriage and family. How important it is to respect marriage and family, so that godly sons and daughters may be ready to return from this foreign land to the New Jerusalem!

"As the Creator joined the hands of the holy pair in wedlock, saying, A man shall 'leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one' (Genesis 2:24), **He enunciated the law of marriage for all the children of Adam to the close of time.** That which the Eternal Father Himself had pronounced good was the law of highest blessing and development for man." *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 63.

Seek Peace and Pray for It

"And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace." Jeremiah 29:7.

As the captives of Babylon prayed for the peace of the city and land they were in, amazing things happened. If we consider the experience of the pagan King Nebuchadnezzar, it is one of the most amazing stories on record. It is a story of pride, arrogance, unreasonable laws, and lack of freedom of worship. How wonderful that through the prayers and example of Daniel and his friends and the workings of Providence, even the most unreasonable pagan ruler was converted and wrote a chapter of the Bible!

"There is more to this than appears on the surface. We are not aware how often we proclaim ourselves heathen. Consider this very apparent distinction between the heathen and the worshiper of the true God: **The heathen is not content without a god that he can see; while the Christian trusts the God who dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen, neither can see.** 1 Timothy 6:16. In short, the heathen cannot trust his god out of sight, while the **Christian has as much confidence in his God when he cannot see Him as when he can.** Now no one would ever complain if he could see all that he desired ready to hand. It is when we cannot see how we are to get on, that we begin to murmur or grow anxious. Yea, it is often a murmur, in that the desponding one says, 'God has forsaken me.' Because he cannot see God, he thinks that He does not exist. We doubt God, because we cannot see Him. We cannot endure that He should work behind a veil. Thus we proclaim ourselves heathen. People may think that it is not a very great thing to believe in God, but really to believe in God is everything. Real belief in God means freedom from all worry, because God cares for us, and tells us to cast all our care on him. 1 Peter 5:7." E. J. Waggoner, *Present Truth* (UK), November 16, 1899.

Brothers and Sisters, we are in a foreign land today. Our future is in God's hands, and He has promised He will come and receive us into His Kingdom. Perhaps we have been caught up with the practices of the land in which we dwell. Maybe our faith has faltered on the path of life. We have a wonderful Saviour who will forgive and cleanse us. Let us turn to His Word. The rulers of this world may set themselves against the Lord and His anointed, but it is our duty to seek peace and pray for it. Let us really pray for peace with God and for the peace of those around us. Let us pray for those who may be relying on the things that can be seen but like Nebuchadnezzar are lacking peace in their lives. God is real, whether we can see Him or not. Looking forward we know that this world will have trouble in the future, but Jesus wants to give perfect peace to troubled souls. As Jeremiah sent a letter to the captives in Babylon, so the Lord has given us His

Word in this world. Let us stand true to the wonderful truths found in that Word. Let us read it more and pray that God will strengthen our faith to stand and be a light in the last moments of this earth's history. Now is no time to be disheartened or step off the foundation of truth we stand on—though we pass through trial, hardship, loss, poverty or the disapproval of the world around us.

Jesus says: "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." John 16:33

"But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." Job 23:10

"Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Luke 12:32

May God be your hope, strength and comfort as your future is in His wonderful hands!