

Tomorrow and Today - Week 83

This week we have heard of the appalling destruction of a Malaysian airliner over eastern Ukraine, which at the time of writing appears to have been caused by a surface-to-air missile.

Unfortunately this is just the latest example of atrocities involving civilian air traffic that have taken place over the years. Attacking an aircraft, either from within or from on the ground, is comparatively cheap and easy; the results can be spectacular, and can bring a global impact for the cause of the perpetrators. We can think of the hijackings in the 1970s, the USSR's shooting down of a Korean aircraft that had strayed into Russian airspace in 1983, the Lockerbie disaster in 1988, the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington in 2001, and the mysterious disappearance of the Malaysian flight in March of this year. In each case, a horrifying, violent death suddenly came to the hundreds of people on board the aircraft.

In a wholly different context, exactly the same thing is happening in so many parts of the world where there are wars and conflicts - notably at this time for the residents of Gaza; the list of other such places is long, and all-too-familiar.

Terrible events such as these demonstrate that our lives are more uncertain, more precarious, than we often care to realise. How are we to react, as those seeking to be Christ's "faithful sheep", in these possibly-dangerous days?

One reaction is to do nothing at all! - beyond saying that everything is in the Lord's hands and that "what will be, will be". This is fine as far as it goes, and is of course absolutely true, but falls short when it comes to our taking sensible steps with an eye on future possibilities.

This applies especially to those of us entrusted with God-given family responsibilities. For Christian parents with a young family to breeze cheerfully along without a thought for the "What-ifs ...?" can actually come down to a culpable lack of concern for their dependents - with nothing very Christian about such an approach.

A second reaction is to go far too far the other way. TV programmes - usually American it must be said! - introduce us to people who are preparing for "Armageddon". They are building ingenious dwellings, concealed underground or surrounded by intricate defences - moats, fences, tripwires, ditches, searchlights, hooters and all the rest. They are gathering vast stockpiles of food, drink, fuel, guns, ammunition, clothing, medicines, gold etc, etc. Fearsome women are seen down on the rifle range, learning to fire anything from pistols to full-blown machine guns, while chunky Dads are seen constructing their latest cunning traps to disable any would-be attackers.

Such folk clearly mean it, reckoning that if sudden death really does threaten to come their way via a breakdown of society into anarchy, they at least will be alright. Here the emphasis is wholly on self-help and self-preparedness.

The balanced Christian response, as is so often the case, is surely to keep an eye on both those reactions.

Some self-help and preparedness is only sensible. This can mean having wills drawn up and safely stored; having reasonable life insurance policies in place and up-to-date; living within our means; avoiding debt as much as possible; accepting responsibility for our own circumstances; keeping homes and appliances and vehicles in good condition; having a general awareness of risk in whatever forms it might come; taking sensible steps to avoid undue risk.

Equally, we are of course always in the Lord's hands. Daily dependence, worship, gratitude, service, all play their part in demonstrating our Christian discipleship, as members of the New Covenant through the grace of God and the shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Such behaviour helps us keep a fair balance between dependence, and, within that dependence, a rightly-understood independence, in the sense that we acknowledge we are grown-ups in the Lord's service, who do carry accountability before Him for who and what we are.

So we live each day we are given as effectively and as cheerfully as we can within the Lord. Such faith and such lives mean that when death does finally come our way, as it will unless the Lord returns for his own beforehand, be that death long foreseen or horribly sudden, in Christ there is nothing, nothing, nothing, to fear.

© 2014 Faithful Sheep Ministries - www.fsmins.org