

186 "Are you sitting comfortably?"

Those of us of more advanced years may remember "Listen With Mother", a daily radio programme for young children which always began with the presenter saying, in a Joyce Grenfell-type voice, "Are you sitting comfortably? Then I'll begin".

Unfortunately, few people are sitting comfortably today, and a brief survey of the past three weeks can tell us why. The "Brexit" result has shaken this country to the core - with a widespread mood of shock, disbelief and second thoughts. Messrs Cameron, Osborne, Johnson, Gove and Farage have been knocked off their pedestals. The Labour party is in meltdown. The future of the United Kingdom is back on the agenda. The next Prime Minister is now a choice between Theresa May, a Brexit Remainer, or Andrea Leadsom, a Brexit Leaver. The members of the EU elite are smarting and angry, while our fellow EU nations and other allies are surprised, disappointed and wondering, with the rest of us, where this is all going to end.

Elsewhere, race riots are breaking out in the United States over the shooting dead of African-Americans by white policemen; the US Presidential election looks likely to be fought out between two highly controversial candidates; Islamic suicide bombers do their foul work on an almost daily basis; Syria and Libya remain in crisis, causing misery to millions of people; and, hardly getting a mention in the news, Nato troops are being sent to the Baltic States to deter Russian aggression. In view of this quick sample of recent news items, if we are sitting comfortably right now, perhaps we are residents of "cloud-cuckoo land"!

Yet thank God that He is God! As we turn to the Holy Bible, "God's Word written", we find there that unique, reassuring drumbeat of perspective, truth, promise and hope. Who would have guessed, just four weeks ago, at all the changes that have suddenly come to pass? From our perspective, these changes suggest that things are wildly out of control, lurching violently this way and that, with stability a thing of the past, and unwelcome surprises popping up at every new turn of the road.

But the Lord is not surprised - He is never surprised. It is simply impossible that He ever could be surprised, for in His divine omniscience, all is foreknown, all is under His gaze, and all that happens is either by His allowance or by His direct intervention. We need never be in the slightest doubt that the Lord really is in charge, He knows precisely what He is doing, He will bring His will to pass - the will that He has graciously revealed to us - down to the most minute detail and at a time exactly of His choosing. (See for example: II Chronicles 16.9a / Psalm 33.13 / Proverbs 3.19 / Ecclesiastes 3.11 / Isaiah 42.9 ; 46.9-10 ; 48.5 / Jeremiah

1.5 / Daniel 2.28-29 / Matthew 6.8 ; 24.36 / Acts 2.23 ; Acts 15.18 / Romans 8.28 ; 11.2 ; 11.33 / I Corinthians 2.7 / II Timothy 2.19 / I Peter 1.2; etc!).

We are to allow these God-revealed truths to make a difference in how we think, speak and act. For the Lord is very obviously shaking the trees of the human complacency that has become so deep-seated and so widespread, especially in the western nations. It is a complacency based on that ancient, false notion that Man is in charge, free, and capable of achieving all he cares to dream about.

With such a notion prevailing in so many walks of life these days, any "God-talk" is arrogantly dismissed. We see for example Andrea Leadsom, in expressing doubts about the wisdom of introducing so-called "same-sex marriage", being instantly howled down: the Daily Mirror has exhorted its readers to be "afraid, very afraid" that a woman with such appalling views might end up as the next Prime Minister. This would be funny if it were not so serious, but we clearly see the resolve and power of the forces arrayed against any Bible-based utterance in the public arena. So much for tolerance and free speech, two of the much-vaunted "British values"! How we need to uphold in prayer our fellow Christians who have the courage to work in public life.

Yes, the Lord is shaking the trees. While this is hardly a time for our sitting comfortably, Christ's faithful sheep can at least stand calmly amid the turmoil - watching, praying, explaining and warning. We point always to Jesus Christ, "the Way, the Truth, and the Life", God's single, all-sufficient answer for us all.

Thanks be to God indeed.

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