

## **478 First things first - March 2022**

Covid is still around and about; the war in Ukraine continues with daily horrors; millions of refugees are on the roads of Europe; and the cost of living is soon to go “through the roof” so we are told. We are living in times that have become markedly more difficult, more dangerous and more volatile over these past few years.

As the Lord Jesus spoke that day when overlooking the temple, grim times in the last days have long been predicted – “For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled ... Men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken” (Luke 21.5-6,22,26, KJV).

We must remain cautious about linking particular, immediate events of our day to specific prophecies of Scripture, but we can clearly see that, both by God’s allowance, as well as by His specific direction when He so chooses, “things are hotting up”. The present, deeply-divided state of the world; plus man’s awful ability to bring global destruction; plus the existence of Israel as an independent Jewish state after 2,000 years of homelessness - all strengthen our belief that Jesus’ sudden return for His saints cannot be far ahead (I Thessalonians 4.13-18 / I Corinthians 15.51-52). What a comfort is that prospect! - while giving urgency to our “holding forth the word of life” to all those in need of it (Philippians 2.16a / Matthew 28.18-20).

When faced with trials, threats and fears, as we do today, God’s people are given abundant precedents in His Word as to how we are to react: we trust in the Lord, we seek His guidance, we take any practical action that is appropriate under Him, and we support one another along the way. Two examples from the many others in the Psalms make the point - “Mine eyes [are] ever toward the Lord; for he shall pluck my feet out of the net” (Psalm 25.15), and “My help [cometh] from the Lord, which made heaven and earth” (121.2; 124.8).

In II Chronicles 20.10-13 Judah faced invasion from Ammon and Moab, a situation very similar to that of Ukraine today - “ ‘O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes [are] upon thee’. And all Judah stood before the LORD, with their little ones, their wives and their children”. In that instance, God’s response was emphatic! (20.15-19, ff). More often in human conflicts the Lord expects responsible action on our part as well as on His own, hence Cromwell’s

famous words to his troops apply - "Trust in God and keep your powder dry". May this attitude, of faith, prayer and human responsibility, continue among the Ukrainian people day by day, as they maintain their defence and resolve.

In Ephesians 3.14-19 we are given Paul's wonderful prayer for the Christians living in the sinful, idolatrous city of Ephesus (eg., Acts 19.1-20.1). He prayed for them thus: first - "that he (God the Father) would grant you ... to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man"; second, "that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith"; third, "that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what [is] the breadth, and length, and depth, and height"; fourth, "and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge"; and fifth, "that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God". The Holy Spirit's whole emphasis in this prayer is on "first things first" - the primacy of the mighty spiritual blessings bestowed upon us by God the Father, through simple faith in God the Son; hence for example are Paul's blunt words in Philippians 3.7-14.

For Paul knew from tough experience the "first-things-first" truth of his prayer to the Ephesians - "... for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, [therewith] to be content ... I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4.11b.13). To Timothy he writes - "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand" (II Timothy 4.6). Paul's imminent execution was hardly an issue; by God's grace he knew that he had a good record, and wonderful prospects (4.7,8,18)!

We see from the scriptural examples mentioned in this Reflection, drawn from the hundreds more available, our "first-things-first" need for a solid confidence in Almighty God, whatever our circumstances may be. The Lord has never promised to provide us with a feather-bed life from cradle to grave, indeed, the reality will often be rather different! (egs., Matthew 16.24-27 / Luke 9.62 / John 16.33).

Yet the Lord God has never broken a promise, ever. He fulfils each promise, through thick and thin, in His own wisdom, time and manner. Truly, "the One who calls you (us) is faithful, and he will do it" (I Thessalonians 5.24).

Truly, "Thou art worthy, O Lord" (Revelation 4.11a).

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