

## Take courage – 17/06/2018

***“These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world. “John 16:33***

Beloved in the Lord,

There is a lot of unrest in the World today and that is nothing new. Unrest has existed since Adam and Eve fell into sin and there by opened the door for Satan to come in and work in the world. Jesus described him as a thief. He said:

***“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” Jn.10:10***

Throughout the centuries, Satan has stolen, killed and destroyed. From time to time he occupies and infuses people with extraordinary propensity to be evil, such as Stalin and Hitler for example.

As a nation, Latvia has suffered at the hands of the Thief. In todays service we commemorate those who were deported on the 14<sup>th</sup> of June 1941. So many were brutally removed from their homes and sent to Siberia, never to return in most cases.

We can all agree with Jesus words that in the world we have tribulation. Not only do we experience tribulation and trouble in a broad sense but also each one of us has our own personal share of trouble in life. That is part of life. No-one is immune to heartaches, troubles, difficulties, problems. Sooner or later bad things happen.

Jesus clearly stated that in the world we have tribulation. He wants us to understand that that is a part of life. When we have trouble, Jesus wants us to understand that we are not unique, but that this is something we all share.

Our natural tendency when faced with difficulties is to ask “Why me?” Why not you? Why should you be exempted from what is a universal problem? Worries, cares, difficulties, tribulation, suffering, sickness and death are all results of the Fall. We live in a fallen world that is under the curse of sin.

The right question is not “Why me?” but indeed what are you doing in the midst of your problems? Are you trying to deal with them on your own? Are you trying to make it under your own steam? Are you seeking to exact revenge? Are you piling up unforgiveness and anger in your heart? That is how many live their lives. Sadly this type of attitude and behaviour is only dragging you down and slowly killing you.

My heart breaks every time I hear of another suicide. I weep that no-one was able to reach out and help that person, or that person didn't reach out for help. There is one who can always help, no matter how severe the pain or trial and no matter how bleak things may look, and that is The Lord Jesus Christ. He said:

***“In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world. “John 16:33b***

Jesus is encouraging us to take heart, take courage, because He has won. With His death and subsequent resurrection on Easter morning, Jesus has broken the power of sin and death. He has conquered. The one who is in Him and believes upon Him has also conquered with Him and through Him. I often remind myself of this wonderful statement made by Jesus, recorded by John in Revelation:

***“Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last,<sup>18</sup> and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.” Rev.1:17b-18***

Jesus has conquered. He has won the victory. He has all power in His hands, both in Heaven and on the earth. If we are believing in Him, trusting in Him, then we are in very safe hands. Ultimately Nothing can overcome us, not even death.

It is so vital, that we remain focused on him at all times and in all places. If we don't, we can so easily sink in our troubles and drown. This is so beautifully illustrated in the Gospels where we read about a time when the disciples were in a boat and the weather had turned bad and dangerous. Their boat is being tossed to and fro in the storm. Suddenly Jesus appears walking on the water towards them in the boat. This is telling us something very powerful about Jesus. He is walking on the water. If we understand the raging sea as a symbol of all of our problems, then we see that Jesus walks above them unaffected by them.

Peter calls out to Jesus as only Peter would and says if it is really you then command me to come out and walk to you. Jesus says “Come.” Peter gets out of the boat and walks on the water toward Jesus. But:

***“seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!”<sup>31</sup> Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and \*said to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?”<sup>32</sup> When they got into the boat, the wind stopped.” Mt.14:30-32***

Lets notice what happened. Peter got scared. He took his eyes off Jesus and started to look at the circumstances, This caused him to lose faith and to sink down into the water. He cries out and of course Jesus saves him.

What this incident teaches us is that we can walk above our problems and trials as long as we are firmly focused upon our Lord Jesus Christ. As long as we live by faith and not fear and doubt we will not be overwhelmed.

The one you submit too will determine the outcome. If you submit to Jesus in faith, you will walk on the water, but if you submit to fear and doubt you will sink. Of course Jesus will save you if you call out, but wouldn't it be better to walk on the water?

You may well say: “Oh, but you don't know the magnitude of my problems.” True, but you don't know mine. There is one who does know and who says: “Do not be afraid!” Over and over again Jesus says Do not be afraid. God says Fear not; worry not.

We read in Isaiah:

***“Do not fear, for I am with you;  
Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God.***

***I will strengthen you, surely I will help you,  
Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.’ Is.41:10***

When I face difficulties and problems, then this is my go to Scripture. I remind myself of this promise that God has made. I also remind myself of what David stated in Psalm 139:

***“O Lord, You have searched me and known me.***

***<sup>2</sup> You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
You understand my thought from afar.***

***<sup>3</sup> You scrutinize my path and my lying down,  
And are intimately acquainted with all my ways.***

***<sup>4</sup> Even before there is a word on my tongue,  
Behold, O Lord, You know it all.***

***<sup>5</sup> You have enclosed me behind and before,  
And laid Your hand upon me.” Ps.139:1-5***

You have laid Your hand upon me. Oh, how we need to memorise these words and inscribe them on our heart. When something bad happens we shouldn't say things like "God has forgotten me." Or "God doesn't care. He doesn't love me." No those are all lies, Satan's lies. The truth is contained here in these words; "You have laid Your hand upon me."

David also put it this way:

***“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I fear no evil, for You are with me;  
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.” Ps.23:4***

"You are with me." Jesus promised this on Ascension Day:

***“lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Mt.28:20***

We heard in our reading today from Psalm 121 that God is always awake, He doesn't slumber nor sleep. We read in Isaiah:

***“But now, thus says the Lord, your Creator, O Jacob,***

***And He who formed you, O Israel,***

***“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;***

***I have called you by name; you are Mine!***

***<sup>2</sup> “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;***

***And through the rivers, they will not overflow you.***

***When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched,***

***Nor will the flame burn you.” Is.43:1-2***

Do you believe that? I do, because God has promised it, and He always keeps His promises.

May we set ourselves to believe. May we keep our focus on Jesus alone at all times. When difficulties visit us, then may we resolve to cling to Jesus even tighter and be comforted in the knowledge that His Hand is upon us.

May we know this truth as recorded by Paul:

***“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those whom He foreknew, He***

*also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;<sup>30</sup> and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.<sup>31</sup> What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?<sup>32</sup> He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?<sup>33</sup> Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies;<sup>34</sup> who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.<sup>35</sup> Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?<sup>36</sup> Just as it is written, "For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered."<sup>37</sup> But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.<sup>38</sup> For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,<sup>39</sup> nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.  
**Romans 8:28-39.***

Therefore let us Take Courage.  
Amen.

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