

Topsy Turvy #1

Trust the Promise Maker

Message for Sunday, April 26, 2020
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:8-9, 16-18

With the COVID-19 virus, life has become topsy-turvy. So much has been cancelled, even simple things like going to the playground. Today and over the next few weeks, let's allow the truths in the Bible shine light into our darkness.

1) "What am I going to do!?"

It was late in the afternoon in Pontiac, Illinois, and Frank Beaty was trying to clear the small jobs off his desk. He wanted to be able to go home and spend some time with his family. The church secretary buzzed him on the intercom and said, "Pastor Frank, there's a young man here who is looking for help. He said he would like to talk to the 'priest.' "

Frank opened the door to his study and invited the young man in. He came into the office, and wanted the door closed. He cautiously scrutinized the office and asked, "Will you keep our conversation confidential?" Frank assured him that he would. He immediately had Frank's attention!

He told Frank his name was Jerry Zilac. He said his pregnant wife was sitting in the car. She was expecting twins in a couple of weeks, and they did not know what to do. He pleadingly asked, "Can you help me?" The young man was obviously feeling tremendous tension and struggle.

Frank assured Jerry that he would try to help. Jerry began telling an amazing story of his last two years. He had been in the army, and his wife had been having emotional and mental difficulties. She had been pregnant and about to deliver their first child. He had applied for a medical discharge from the army. Military paperwork moved much slower than her pregnancy. Eventually he felt that neither he nor his wife could take the pressure any longer. In despair, he just walked off the base to go help his wife in this crucial time. He chose to leave the army, to go AWOL — absent without leave! This is a serious offence, and he would go to military prison if he was ever caught.

He gently assisted his wife through the birth of the child but had to be careful where they went so that the Army would not find him. He explained how over the past two years they had crisscrossed the country working under assumed names and fictitious Social Security numbers. Frank began to wonder if his name really was "Jerry" — or if that were just another assumed name. He told how they lived much of the time in their car. He explained how renting an apartment was quite difficult, because he feared the army would find him.

Now he was facing another major trauma! He had come to Frank, a total stranger, for some advice. What should he do? His wife was again on the verge of a nervous breakdown. She would need to go to a hospital for the birth of the twins. He was sure that she could not make it through the delivery without him present to give her emotional support.

They could not contact their family. One set of parents had rejected them, and the other would probably turn them in to the army. He was tired of running. They desperately needed money. He needed a job. They needed an apartment. Most resources were closed to them because of his being AWOL. To turn himself in would mean prison! His wife was having plenty of difficulty taking care of a two-year-old. The thought of two new babies was almost enough to land her in a psychiatric ward. But to continue their present lifestyle was becoming more and more difficult.

What should he do? Turning himself in meant inevitable prison time. If his wife entered a mental ward, what would happen to his children? And she needed medical help for the birth of the twins.

Frank tried to enter into the emotional trauma of his situation. That was difficult. He had never encountered such a complicated situation. Frank explained to Jerry the importance of having a clear conscience and that eventually he would have to deal with his choice to leave the army without permission. Jerry seemed to have the various alternatives correctly analyzed.

What would God want him to do? Frank could not tell him what to do. Jerry and his wife had to make that decision themselves. But Frank could pray for them. Frank urged Jerry to turn his life over to the Lord Jesus Christ. That was his greatest need. Jerry

was very open to the gospel and prayed and invited the Lord Jesus Christ into his life.

As Jerry left, Frank felt bewildered. No alternative was good for him. He was certainly between the proverbial “rock and a hard spot.” No choice in his life seemed to be very attractive. He explained that God had power to enable him to endure prison. He explained that God had grace and power for his wife to not have a nervous breakdown. He explained that God had the ability to make the military look sympathetically upon his situation.

Frank knew God could give him the peace of heart that he needed so intensely and the wisdom and guidance to make it through this maze of confusion. Frank agonized for this young man, knowing that as he left the church, he would probably never see him again. His name was probably fictitious, and he had declined to leave a mailing address.

Wow! What a predicament! Right now you may be thinking how you would have responded in that situation. That would be an interesting exercise, but not very helpful. What I really wanted to talk about today was *how you handle your own situations*.

Many of us ask the same question as Jerry: “What should I do?” It is very easy to give simple answers, especially to other people’s problems! It is also very tempting to take over and solve other people’s problems for them. Neither of these is helpful.

I am not going to attempt today to give answers to all the situations that you and I are faced with. In fact, I’m not even going to give you “5 Rules for Being More Productive,” or something similar that you might pick up at some seminar.

Instead of that, I’m going to show you something that will give you hope for any problem, strength for every situation.

2) Not just endurance, but eagerness!

I’m not boasting when I make that statement. I’m simply passing on a truth we see in the Bible. When we open the Bible and read about the lives of people who followed Jesus, we are struck with their joy and victory. Christians in the Bible are not wringing their hands in despair. They are much more apt to be clapping them in praise.

Problems? Did they have problems? You bet they did! Listen to what Paul wrote:

2 Corinthians 4:8-9, New Living Translation:

We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed and broken. We are perplexed, but we don’t give up and quit. We are hunted down, but God never abandons us. We get knocked down, but we get up again and keep on going.

(You can read more about their troubles in 2 Corinthians 6:4-10).

Pressed by troubles, perplexed, hunted, knocked down — I don’t think I’d want to trade places with them!

What was their source of strength? What gave them hope? Listen to the end of that chapter:

2 Corinthians 4:16-18, New Living Translation:

This is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. For our present troubles are quite small and won’t last very long. Yet they produce for us an immeasurably great glory that will last forever! So we don’t look at the troubles we can see right now; rather, we look forward to what we have not yet seen. For the troubles we see will soon be over, but the joys to come will last forever.

They had received a promise from God, through Jesus Christ. They trusted Christ as their Lord and Saviour. Therefore, his promise was trustworthy as well.

3) The Bible is God’s “Promise Book”

The Bible is God’s message to us, to reveal to us his plan for our world and for our lives. Here are just a few of the many promises in the Bible:

Promise of strength

Isaiah 40:29-31

He gives strength to the wear and increases the power of the weak.

Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall;

but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles;

they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Promise for people in business

Psalm 1:1-3

Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked,

or stand around with sinners, or join in with scoffers.

But they delight in doing everything the Lord wants;
day and night they think about his law.

They are like trees planted along the riverbank,
bearing fruit each season without fail.

Their leaves never wither,
and in all they do, they prosper.

Promise of Guidance

Psalm 19:7-8

The law of the Lord is perfect,
reviving the soul.

The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.

The precepts of the Lord are right,
giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the Lord are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.

Promises of wisdom

Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the Lord with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make your paths straight.

Promise for material needs

Matthew 6:31-33

[Jesus said,] "So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'"

For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

Promise of an eternal home with God

John 14:2-3

[Jesus said,] "In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."

4) Have you made a promise to Jesus Christ?

Jesus invites us to make our own promise to him. Like any promise, it's not one to take lightly:

Mark 8:34, New Living Translation:

"If any of you wants to be my follower," Jesus told them, "you must put aside your selfish ambition, shoulder your cross, and follow me."

But then he adds to this invitation another promise, a promise of a full and meaningful life:

Mark 8:35, New Living Translation:

"If you try to keep your life for yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will find true life."

If you've never made your own promise to follow Jesus Christ, you can do that today. Maybe you're not sure you'll be able to keep that promise. That's OK. Christians live by grace, not by law (in fact, that's what I'm going to focus on next Sunday: God's grace). God knows what your heart is, and that's what counts.

5) The miracle of a promise believed

Remember I started by talking about Jerry Zilac? Frank Beaty was amazed a few weeks after that strange meeting, when Jerry walked into his office. His appearance was totally different!

The twins were born and were quite healthy. His wife was doing superbly. And the army? They did not comprehend his inquiry. Their records showed he had received a medical discharge the day after he had walked off the military base. They had never missed him, never considered him AWOL.

Yes, Jerry had created much of his own mess. Yet, when he chose to believe that Jesus Christ would make a way out, he discovered freedom. No more fear of being caught. No need for fictitious names and Social Security numbers. No need for fear when renting a place to live.

The miracle in this story is not that everything worked out for Jerry and his wife. The miracle is that they gained strength to face their troubles, and they did this by trusting in Jesus. Even if things had gone badly, they would not be facing their problems alone. And that is the miracle.

Wherever you are in life's ups and downs, I urge you to choose to believe Jesus can make a way out for you! Trust his promises, and trust the Promise-Maker.

Next Steps:

- Pray: Tell God how you're feeling about the present situation: nervous, afraid, and tired; or maybe you're peaceful and relaxed. Wherever you're at, bring it to God in prayer.
- Choose to focus on God and God's promises, rather than on the 24/7 news reports of how bad things are.
- Go ahead, knowing that you are not alone. God is with you.