

CHAPTER 3

A Word to the Fearful

*Man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward. –
Eliphaz (Job 5:7)*

Job was having a tough time. His world had collapsed. His nearest and dearest had died. He had lost all his possessions. He was desperately ill with what must certainly have seemed to him to be a life-threatening illness. He pours out his soul in an agony: 'What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me. I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil' (Job 3:25-6).

His first friend, Eliphaz, steps up and makes a rather fatuous statement: 'Man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward.'

A colourful way of saying: 'Itu takdir Allah yang tidak bisa dirubah.'¹ Tough luck, Job. Life sucks! God's probably angry with you for your sins. Get used to it. Nothing you can do. As if that made Job feel any better! No wonder Job lashed out at Eliphaz and his friends: 'Miserable comforters are you all!' (Job 16:2).

It is only at the end of Job's story as God reveals Himself that Job says of the Lord: 'I know that you can do all things

1. Indonesian: 'It's the will of Allah that cannot be changed!'

... My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes' (Job 42:2, 5-6).

And Eliphaz gets told off when God says to him: 'I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has' (Job 42:7).

So what is the truth about God and His ways that finally brought Job to repentance? What brought him the comfort and healing he so needed when he faced his troubles? What reproved the so-called wise men when they thought they knew how to offer comfort?

We long for comfort. It's very human. We are living in uncomfortable days. Great nations rattle their swords. Ideological warfare, hatred and terror create fear on a global scale. There is much to make us fearful with all the uncertainties. Few, if any of us, can boast to escape those sentiments Job expressed, especially when personal tragedies hit us below the belt. There are also times for most of us when we could echo Job's words, if we are being honest:

'What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me. I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil.'

And just to be told to brush it all off as 'kismet' brings no comfort.

Adèle and I married and had our family of four boys in Java where we lived through the threatening tensions of Soekarno's revolution and all the political turmoil and Communist threat of the early sixties, then on into the eighties, before returning to Scotland. As missionaries in South East Asia and ministry back home in the UK, over a span of more than fifty-five years, life has had its fair share of 'sparks.' Some of those 'sparks' were painful at the time. Some of them are still painful. But how often we found it took

those very 'sparks' to drive us to the Lord and strengthen our faith as we discovered:

There is a hope that lifts my weary head,
A consolation strong against despair,
That when the world has plunged me in its deepest pit,
I find the Saviour there!²

As we find Christ is there in the deepest pits of life, we begin to find strength to face down our anxious fears.

We must avoid joining company with Job's 'miserable comforters,' but let the inevitable 'sparks' from the fires of life drive us back to God and His Word. There we will discover and rediscover that, when we have 'no rest but only turmoil,' peace comes as we rely on God's promises. We need to learn to hold on to the faithfulness of God if we want to find that 'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles ...,' (2 Cor. 1:3-4) proves to be our truest Comforter.

It is vital to grasp that, as a believer, you are 'in Christ.' And that reality has tremendous significance! Those two words 'in Christ' are the way New Testament believers liked to describe themselves. They didn't call themselves 'Christians' – that was a name the outside world used to describe them. It was not always meant kindly. NT believers saw themselves as living in union with Christ – being 'in Christ' and at the same time realising that the Spirit of Christ was living in them. So, with Paul they could say that it was not religion which saved them but Christ. While the outside world came to characterise their faith as being a 'religion' called

2. Stuart Townend & Mark Edwards Copyright © 2007 Thankyou Music (Adm. by CapitolCMGPublishing.com excl. UK & Europe, adm. by Integrity Music, part of the David C Cook family, songs@integritymusic.com).

'Christianity'; for them it was not a religion *about* Christ but a relationship *with* Christ. As Paul expressed it:

'For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!' (Gal. 2:20)

That is the very heart of the gospel in a nutshell. Paul had not found acceptance with God by trying to pull himself up by his religious bootstraps. He knew he was not saved by religion but could say the life he lived was no longer out of his own resources but by faith in the Son of God who lived in him by the Holy Spirit. No wonder he calls the gospel, 'the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory' (Col. 1:27). And it was with that empowerment of the indwelling Spirit of Christ that he could say, 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me' (Phil. 4:13).

It is being united with Christ that defines us if we have put our faith and trust in Him as our Saviour and Lord. That has become our identity. Our story is now His story. Our sin became His. It was taken away from us on the cross. His righteousness became ours. It is now our story. His victory is ours; that is why we can trust Him with our lives just as Jesus trusted His father and could say, 'The reason my father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again' (John 10:17).

If we are believers then we are 'in Christ' and Christ is 'in us' by His Holy Spirit, no matter how we feel, no matter what we do, no matter where we go, no matter what we must face. It is not what we do, no matter how zealously religious

we are, but it is what God does for us in Christ. The gospel, the good news, is the fact of 'Christ in you, the hope of glory.' And it is there in His mighty strength, not our feeble efforts at being religious, we have acceptance with God and find strength to face all the 'sparks' that life can throw up at us.

There is neither ground for despair nor room for pride. We must guard against the mind-set of the infamous flea that was in living in the ear of an elephant. We are back to bridges and parables again. When the pair of them crossed a rickety bridge, the elephant was treading so heavily that the bridge creaked and groaned. Once across the flea whispered in the elephant's ear, 'My, didn't we make that bridge shake!' As if! And when, by God's grace and by His power, we come through some trial, we must never give in to the temptation to think or boast as if by our own strength or gifts we had made it through.

Back in the nineteenth century in China, Dr James Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission (now renamed OMF International), was under incredible pressure. He was facing the challenge, anxiety and responsibility for the direction and care of his missionaries, many living in remote primitive areas of Inland China. The burden of care and the need for assurance as he looked to God for all the financial needs of the Mission weighed heavily on his heart. He was fearful. However, he was driven back to the Word of God.

When reading Mark 11:22 in Greek, he was struck with the words, 'Ἐχετε πίστιν θεοῦ.' They seemed strangely new to him.

'Have (or hold) the faithfulness of God': surely it was a passage he had never seen before? Turning to the corresponding words in English he read (Mark 11:22): 'Have faith in God.' Ah, that was familiar enough; and something

within him whispered, 'the old difficulty!' How gladly would he have, and increase in, faith in God, if only he knew how! But this seemed entirely different. It laid the emphasis on another side of the matter in a way he found surprisingly helpful.

It was not 'have' in your own heart and mind, however you can get it, 'faith in God' but simply 'hold fast, count upon, His faithfulness' ... at all times and under all circumstances we are (to be) fully persuaded of this blessed truth. Not my faith but God's faithfulness ... The man who holds God's faithfulness will not be foolhardy or reckless, but he will be ready for every emergency. The man who holds God's faithfulness will dare to obey Him ... Abraham held God's faithfulness and offered up Isaac, 'accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead ...' (Heb. 11:19 KJV).

Want of trust is at the root of almost all our sins and all our weaknesses; and how shall we escape it but by looking to Him and observing His faithfulness? ... How many estimate difficulties in the light of their own resources, and thus attempt little and often fail in the little they attempt!

All God's giants have been weak men, who did great things for God because they reckoned on His being with them ... Oh! beloved friends, if there is a living God, faithful and true, let us hold His faithfulness ...³

So, to 'have faith in God' is to count on the fact that He is faithful and to hold fast to the fact that He can be trusted. As our loving father and as Almighty God, He has both the power and the purpose to work with us as we encounter the inevitable 'sparks' that fly upward in this fallen world. He

3. From Howard Taylor, George, and Howard Taylor, Geraldine, *Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 2009).

works them all together for the good purpose of making us more like His son, Jesus (see Rom. 8:28-29).

You are called to know Him, to love Him and to trust and obey Him. To know, to love, to trust and obey is the very essence of what it means to respect and reverence Him with a godly fear. It is as we learn to fear God we discover that we can count on His faithfulness and understand what Paul meant when he said: 'And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus' (Phil. 4:7).

It is that fear of God in a truly biblical sense that will help us discover, come what may, we have nothing else to fear.

A verse from the old paraphrase of Psalm 34 by Tate and Brady puts it neatly:

Fear Him, ye saints, and you will then
Have nothing else to fear:
Make you his service your delight,
Your wants shall be his care.⁴

4. Tate, Nahum, and Brady, Nicholas, 'Psalm 34', from *New Version of the Psalms of David* (1696).