

ALTERNATIVE TO FEAR

By

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The entire Christian community today stands in a position somewhat like that of the Apostle Peter when he tried to walk on the water to Jesus but found himself sinking when he realized the power of the fierce winds and waves surrounding him.

In the milieu of violence and evil, while concentrating on the burning issues of the day and working on “church growth,” “unity,” and a hundred other popular efforts, many of us have lost sight of Christ and His purpose, and the power by which He accomplishes it.

We are living in the vortex of a crisis the magnitude of which is almost unimaginable. It is not just that millions are starving, millions are enslaved, millions are being mutilated or killed and millions more displaced, dispossessed, and thrown into refugee camps like animals. It is just that the financial structure of the world is crumbling and the status of nations is being reversed (as an example, the United States and Japan), but the moral order of mankind has been challenged and is being dismantled piece by piece, law by law, and razed to the foundation.

None of this takes God by surprise. He fully expected it (Psa. 2). Neither are Christians to be surprised. Nor are we to be afraid. In the midst of such crisis we are commanded, like Peter, “Come to me” — walking on water, or on the ashes of a burning civilization, or in the midst of fire and brimstone as it falls on 20th century Sodom.

Like Peter many Christians have been terrorized by the storms raging around us, and have been affected by the world’s fears. Rather than boldly calling the world to repentance, they try to fit into it, gain its approval and soon share in all its frustrations.

Western Christians are wallowing in worry — worry over economic failure, war, and a million other possibilities. Such worry belies the faith. Why should Christians worry over the breakdown of what Malcolm Muggeridge called a “world-wide soap opera?”

Christ himself experienced the same thing. He described the destruction of His nation (Matt. 24) then told the disciples to have no fear because in Him the world would be overcome (John 16).

Paul wrote that Christ died that we might be delivered “out of this present evil world” (Gal. 1:4); therefore, we should not be so attached to it that its breakdown impoverishes us. It is in the crisis of change, disaster and disillusionment that the message of eternal truth stands out in bold relief. How can we prove our faith better than to stand fast with joyful peace in the midst of the storm? How better to show our faith in the world to come than to face without fear or worry the collapse of the present one? We already have been told that “The world and all its lust is passing away” (I John 2:17). Let it pass. It means judgment and final eradication of the evil and violence that brings misery to man. “He that does the will of God abides forever” (I John 2:17).

Modern Christians often feel so intimidated by the world that they think they just use the world’s own methods to uphold the kingdom of Heaven. Like the church as Laodicea they measure success by temporal strength. The church has become a vast

network of organizations trying to change society while the majority of its members enjoy all the comforts of that society and resist any change. But change is what repentance is all about. The life of totality in the image of God comes only after death — death of the old man, the old life and even of the old system.

What is needed is recognition of the real purpose of God in transforming lives into His image. This means repentance. It means renouncing former ambitions. It calls for a new set of priorities — priorities quite opposite those of modern humanistic society.

It requires confronting the immorality and the false doctrine of humanism with the truth of God. Above all, it requires that we demonstrate our faith in the life Christ promises by abandoning the idiot hopes of happiness by worldly success and striving for the truth and purpose of God.

All of this may sound as impossible as it was for Peter to walk on water. But as long as he looked to Jesus with faith in Him, he was able to do it. It was when he lost sight of Jesus and filled his mind with fear of the wind and the waves that he began to sink.

Life —life that is real, abundant life — is in Christ. “I am...the life.” Of course, it is to be lived in the world, but with a certain careful detachment from the world, because we are not made for the perishing world but for the eternal kingdom of God which is “not of this world.” The fears and frustrations that go with the temporal world are reduced in ratio to our love for and devotion to the kingdom of Christ.

To concentrate on the dissolution of the world-system is to sink into weakness and defeat. The church builds on the truth and power of a risen, living Christ whose kingdom transcends this world. The Christian hope of resurrection from the dead to a life of immortality in a “new earth wherein dwells righteousness” is probably the greatest impossibility we could think of. But “with God all things are possible.” What He calls on us to do is simply to fix our eyes on Him and walk by faith trusting Him to fulfill His promise.

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