

Trembling Trust in Uncertainty

The President of the United States told the American people to brace themselves for one of the most difficult weeks of their lives this week. His reasoning is based upon an expected spike in Coronavirus related sickness, suffering, and death. I want to encourage you to face this week with a trembling trust in the one true Lord who suffered and died, was raised from the dead, and who rules over all for his glory and the good of his church.

God's sovereign rule is the foundation for our joy and the fuel of our participation in life while uncertainty and suffering continue. The poet who penned the book of Ecclesiastes wrote,

"I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil-this is God's gift to man. I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before him." - Ecclesiastes 3:12-14

Participation in this life is drudgery and a drag or its privilege and joy. God is telling us through his poet that he rules over all and his rule is forever. Therefore, his people can fear him and enjoy him while they participate in life, in the responsibilities he's given us. God's sovereign rule provides for our joyful privileged participation.

God's sovereign rule in Jesus Christ restores us in our relationship to his creation. We no longer worship the creation and the creature in the position of God bringing down his wrath on us (Rom.1:18-23). "There is therefore now no condemnation for those in who are in Christ Jesus." (Rom.8:1) We worship the Creator and Savior who is Lord, and this puts us in the place of a privileged participation in his new creation. Paul writes, "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross." - Colossians 1:19-20

Our privileged participation as the reconciled body of Jesus Christ is one of responsibility in his powerful kingdom as our King reconciles all things on earth or in heaven.

Our privileged participation is in time. It is in this uneasy, uncomfortable, uncertain, suffering, difficult time that we're living. If God is sovereignly working in time as we know it, then we can make the best use of the time as we participate in his unfolding purposes. Paul says to the church at Ephesus, Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. - Ephesians 5:15-17 Our privileged participation in time is to "make the best use of the time" by "understanding" and doing "the will of the Lord." And this includes making plans in the best use of the time. We don't just wait for things to happen. We participate in what is happening by making plans knowing that God is sovereign, and if he wills we will do "this or that" as James says,

"Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"- yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." - James 4:13-15

God's sovereign rule restores us to a privileged participation in work. Work is for your joy in doing good to others. In God's sovereign plan we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for his good works (Eph.2:10). Because he is good and does good our privileged participation in his goodness toward us is to do good toward others. Our identity is not in our works. Our identity is in our union with Christ and this is what makes our work a privileged participation because we don't need it to make something of ourselves. Therefore our privileged

participation in work is for his glory as we enjoy him and others good as we work for their joy in him. If you knew you were going to contract the Coronavirus tomorrow what would you do today? - plant a tree, fulfill a responsibility, take a walk with a neighbor or a loved one... God's sovereign rule restores our privileged participation in work filled with love and without fear.

It also restores us to a privileged participation in pleasures. God is no kill joy, but a giver of delight in the ordinary. Eating, drinking and everything, everyday is a participation in his sovereign joy. He delights to give life to the Cardinal in my backyard who delights to bathe herself in my dog's water bowl, and his joy is my whole being's participation in that spectacle. The same is true for the delicious hamburger I enjoy off my grill or the amazing homemade peanut butter and mint eggs my wife will provide her family with on Easter Sunday. A privileged participation in God's sovereign rule allows us to receive and participate in every good and perfect gift that comes to us with thanksgiving by faith in love toward others.

Finally, God's sovereign rule restores us to a privileged participation with a trembling trust when things are uncertain. "God has done it so that people fear before him."(3:14). The poet says the whole duty of our lives is a trembling trust in him, "The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." - Ecclesiastes 12:13

It's not a far off trembling trust but one that draws near in relationship. God is the *Mysterium tremendum* - the consuming fire; yet he is the One who in his beauty calls us in to himself to participate, to draw near, to enjoy his face, to dance with him. We are to be before him like children who trust their Father who knows. Parents live toward their children with purposes and goals, seeing the big picture and painting with brush strokes the colors of the picture in leading their children. The children live in the rhythm of those strokes. They know- when to rise...go to bed - what to eat...and not and when - what to study and not and when. They know where they're leading their children and the child trusts them for what is best. The kingdom belongs to children who climb up into his arms with a trembling trust.

But just as sometimes children are frustrated by their parents, the children of God can be frustrated by God's sovereign rule, his knowing and his doing or not doing. Zach Eswine writes, "Many of our frustrations rise from our blindness to the change of season or to the pain or joy of them, and we struggle to adjust our expectations." God is different, he is other. He is not constrained to the limits of time. He knows the end from the beginning. He's not frustrated or unhappy. What he does endures forever and he makes everything beautiful in its time. We have a limited access to the big picture. God sees the beautiful when we don't. This demands a trembling trust, a learning to grow small. We can trust that, Mr. Eswine also writes, "Time is in God's hands, as he graciously apprentices us." What does our apprenticeship look like as we participate with a trembling trust?

We do not have to be in control. It says there is a season for everything, even this time of my need of help, my frailty, my weakness. Even times when I don't know or understand. It doesn't let go and let God. It trusts him in a well timed need of help, in plenty and in want. A trembling trust doesn't have to be in control, but lives by faith.

We actively embrace the seasons of change in advance. It's not trying to seek control by bringing back what once was. There are new people to understand and love. There are new ways and systems, there are new difficulties to embrace, new realities. God is not new, his truth is not new, but the seasons he carries us through are new or will be.

A trembling trust receives satisfaction as a gift. Satisfaction is a gift that God gives in himself in his time. Satisfaction is not something we achieve in the time we control by what we do. We are not called to use our time to seek satisfaction, pleasure, fulfillment, fullness. A trembling trust lives in the time God gives, with what he gives in that time receiving satisfaction as a gift.

A trembling trust recognizes a time for judgement. There is a time for everyone of us to return to the dust. Fear him, as Jesus said, who rules that day, who can destroy both body and soul in hell. Run to him with a trembling trust, under the shadow of his wings. Why? Because he died in our place and was raised to new life in our place. His death is the death of our death, and his resurrection is the sanctification of our graves and our assured new and everlasting life. This week we can look upon both of these realities, these truths, as we approach Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Let us do so with a privileged participation in a trembling trust.