

138th Anniversary Message - Psalm 11 and Hebrews 8

Introduction

Well thank you Rejoice for your wonderful ministry of music today – we look forward with anticipation to your full concert this afternoon as part of our anniversary celebrations.

As we all well know anniversaries are remembrances of time passing within a relationship. And while there is no one here this morning who was here at the first anniversary of what was begun as Forest Baptist Church, the input of those first members and certainly hundreds of people along the way is both part of what we celebrate and also part of who we are and what we are about even with a 100 per cent turnover of members.

History is not held in high regard by many in our society who are caught in the tyranny of the present. But history is important.

Now the Christian view of history is not as many would see it. John Benton wrote: “The biblical view of history is not cyclical, it is linear. It has a definite beginning, with God’s creation of the universe, and it is building to a final climax.” We who are believers in Christ should understand that the Sovereign God has purposes which He will accomplish over time and history is moving from its beginning point to the climax which God has already set out to take place.

Thus the tying together of where we have come from and what we have experienced certainly intersects with what is happening at the moment and should impact upon the decisions we make regarding how we should approach tomorrow. This is especially true if we desire to make sure that we are positioned as closely to God’s will for us in the times in which we live and we will be moving into in what for us will be the foreseeable future.

The danger with church anniversaries in some churches can be this. Anniversaries are often sentimental times that tend to look

back to some 'golden era' which has predated present experience and see that as the ideal that needs to be restored.

Roger C Palms was the editor of Decision magazine for years. He wrote this pithy little statement: "learning from history and basking in nostalgia are two different things."

Now it appears to me that as the Christian church in Canada has basically become marginalized during my lifetime that we must recognize that if we are to make any kind of a dent into the community's attitude that we are irrelevant that we need to be wise about understanding our history as God's people, wise as regards understanding the times in which we now find ourselves and wise about our commitments to our priorities, programmes and plans that we intend to embark upon in the days to come.

But I also think that we find ourselves wondering if all the foundations of life that we thought were 'normal' [whether they were all biblical is another question] are like so many of the things being rebuilt under the infrastructure renewal programmes coming out of our government recession-busting strategy – they are crumbling either from neglect or the weight of the load or purely from age.

And the Psalm that was read asks the question – what do the righteous do when the foundations are crumbling?

Well, what I would like to do with you today then is to grapple with our responsibility to be faithful disciples of Christ – joined together in a local fellowship/witness in the early part of the 21st century.

This morning I want to begin by doing a little analysis of the crumbling nature of the culture in which we find ourselves and the faltering way in which the church has been dealing with that.

Then I want to look back to what the foundations are that we should be building upon that are long-lasting, secure and certain to produce the results that God intends.

And we will do this under two heads – Diagnosis and Solution.

1. Diagnosis

If you have been listening at all to Breakpoint with Charles Colson the last little while [I don't but I get the transcripts by email each day] you will know that he has just set up the Colson Center for Christian Worldview. It is a direct support base for the foundations failure of both the world and the church.

Now I'm not going to bore you nor attempt to shock you with the kind of statistical analysis that I am certain that I could bring that would show the crumbling nature of the solid values that we counted on to build this society.

We all have anecdotal evidence of the shakiness of marriage, of the drug control of our youth, of corruption both in politics and in business – see both the elections of Afghanistan and the Mr Jones episode in Quebec and the Alberta Ponzi scheme unearthed recently, as well as the basis of the entire meltdown of the financial sector these past couple of years.

However, in attempting to answer some of those things, feeling that the church is historically out of touch with the times - the philosophy of ministry was then set for many a church by the world or by the critics of our beliefs who influenced those who have led the church.

According to sociologist Christian Smith of the University of North Carolina in his book SOUL SEARCHING: The Religious and Spiritual life of American Teenagers – the 'de facto dominant religion' among American teenagers is what he calls 'moral therapeutic deism'

Now hang in here with me. I'm not trying to lose you!

According to this 'religion' God created and watches over the world but otherwise is only to be called upon to solve problems. All He requires is that people be nice and fair to each other, 'as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.'

So, not surprisingly, 'the central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.'

Smith goes on to say that 'moral therapeutic deism' is 'more than a little visible' among conservative protestant teenagers.

Theologian Albert Mohler says that what Smith describes is a belief 'held by a large percentage of Americans' – and I would suggest an even higher level of Canadians.

I think that where this has impacted the average church is that in many ways we have lost confidence in the message that we have been given and have as a result looked to methodology changes as being that which will bring us relevance and a future in our communities.

Now I am not for one moment suggesting that we should be irrelevant nor stuck in antiquated methodologies – certainly I wouldn't want to move back to a Gestetner machine instead of a photocopier, nor an overhead instead of PowerPoint projection.

But when our trust is in how 'we' accomplish the task instead of what God has given to us as how He will accomplish the task we will most certainly be working in the power of the flesh instead of the power of the Holy Spirit.

So with that, from our text what solution does God's Word give us when the foundations are crumbling?

2. Solution

First let me suggest that there is continuity between the solution given by David in Psalm 1 and the writer to the Hebrews in chapter 8 even though one occurs under the Old Covenant and one under the New.

a. The common thread is that God knows what He is doing and we need to take our refuge in Him.

First of all we need to return to our fundamental belief in the all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving, completely just, never-changing and yet always seeking Jehovah God of the universe as our Heavenly Father and the One who has initiated the relationship that He has with those who are indeed His people on earth.

That was true in the Old Testament for David – even when he was being chased around as a disenfranchised young man by Saul and as a disenfranchised king by his son Absalom.

It was true for those believers who were facing persecution for their faith that the writer to the Hebrews is addressing – and whether they were in Rome or in Judea – the temptation to despair and give up is tempered by the appeal to the reality that Jesus is seated ‘at the right hand of the throne of Majesty in heaven.’

And it must be the underlying assumption that our faith is resting upon if we as individual believers and collectively as a church fellowship are not going to on one hand despair or on the other hand develop man made solutions to our problems.

Friends – do you believe that God is sovereign? Then that impacts how you respond to all of life.

Do you believe that God knows what He is doing? Then that impacts on how you respond to all of life’s situations.

Do you believe that God does indeed have an agenda for the direction of this world? That impacts greatly on how we respond.

For if we only believe those things mentally, intellectually, then when pressures arise, we say yes I believe that 'but' this is the solution I think we need to follow because God is not giving direction - or more likely we actually believe He is impotent to do it.

We've been going through how God walked with Abraham, and in every case during Abraham's life, He was increasing Abraham's faith in who God was and is and will be – in order that Abraham's trust would increase dramatically throughout his lifetime and God could entrust Him with the tasks that He had for him.

b. Now, since we are in the times of the New Covenant I would suggest that we are to see that if God was effective in working with His people in the Old Covenant we are to believe that what He is doing in our age in the New Covenant is even better.

“But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant He mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.”

What are these better promises?

The laws of God are in our minds and hearts – not simply on parchment.

Religion is more than ritual. Knowledge is more than intellectual acceptance. The totality of our creation – mind, will and emotions are involved in our knowledge of God.

God is our personal God, who has adopted us as His children and we are His people.

When someone comes to Christ in saving faith it is because God has sought the orphan to take that one into His family. We are brothers and sisters with Jesus Christ and have all the rights that God the Father has granted to Him.

Knowing God is not something mediated through a priest or a minister or even a sacrament – but is real, personal and powerful.

We don't have to do the teaching as if we had to cram information into people's minds – because the Holy Spirit indwells us and He gives us that true knowledge of God.

When Jesus was describing His leaving – He clearly indicated that we would be better off with the Holy Spirit living inside us than having Him in His personal presence beside us.

Today He is at the right hand of the throne of majesty making intercession for us – and the Holy Spirit is doing the will of the Father and the Son on earth bringing people to God through Christ, guiding God's people, restraining evil and ultimately enabling us to do all that we have been called to be and do.

We can live without condemnation and know the mercy of God towards us – and our iniquities – which are our deliberate sins – because in Christ He has remembered our sins no more.

Romans 8 tells us that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus – for the law of the spirit of life has freed us from the law of sin and death.

So our sins have been atoned for – we have a Saviour who has taken our load of sin on Himself and the wrath of God which requires payment for sin – so that we are declared free and righteous. We don't have to work to be accepted – we are justified freely by His grace.

Now those are four representative sets of blessings that arise from the New Covenant in Christ – there are countless more, but they are the ones that are in this passage so we will stop with them.

Notice in verse 9 – God says: “For they did not continue in My Covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord”

This comes on the heels of verse 8: “For He finds fault with them when he says ...”

Now where am I going with this?

It is to ask us, people of Forest Baptist Church – do we really believe in the power of the Word of God to reveal God and His purposes.

Do we really believe in the power of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to take and transform lives that are dead in transgressions and sins and make them alive in Christ and seat them in heavenly places?

Do we really believe that God is in the business of transforming lives and shaping people and churches into the image of His Son the Lord Jesus Christ?

If we truly believe those things – not in our heads but in our whole being, then we will not worry that the foundations around are falling.

We will not worry that we have no future.

And we will keep in focus the foundational truths of God’s Word which need to be lived out incarnationally in each of us and we will continue to put them before ourselves as we come in worship and teaching,

In front of our families as we raise them in the Lord,

And in front of our community as we declare the reason for our existence is not primarily the meeting of humanitarian physical and emotional needs – but indeed the deep rooted spiritual hunger

found in the lostness of people that leads to the society needs that we see around us.

Conclusion:

When I was 10 years of age I was brought to an opportunity that arose on the heels of the teaching of the gospel to an opportunity to trust the Lord Jesus Christ as my Saviour. And that has made all the difference.

In an age when the foundations are eroding all around us, what can the righteous do?

We can declare into every area of life, that God is in control, that He has a plan that He has executed in the Lord Jesus' Christ's life, death, burial and resurrection and that He offers hope for today and tomorrow when we repent and trust in Him and His provision for us.

It is my certain expectation that God always vindicates in time and in real places with fruit that will last, those who take Him at His Word and live by it.

I trust that this may be true of each of us individually and of this congregation collectively as we begin this next year discipleship in the service of our great God and Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.