

Facebook Article #16

May 15, 2020



Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.

Welcome Brethren to another Fireside Chat,

I am a bit later than intended with this message. Time flies, you know, when you are having fun. Perhaps not so much fun as busy. Sometimes I don't know where the time goes. One of the most troubling features of our lockdown period, now about two months into it, is that at my age it seems like time is running out to do some of the things that I haven't gotten to yet. Now we are stuck at home while time races by. Mostly this, too, is an illusion.

No one ever knows how much time one has. Historically, people on average lived a quarter of a century less than I have lived already. Looking back it seems I haven't accomplished much for all that extra time. Where did I waste it? Should I suppose if I had had a greater sense of the brevity of life, I would have used my time more wisely? If you heed history, you should notice how much people accomplished at a much younger age. Do you suppose that tougher times makes people mature faster and be more attentive to things that matter?

I read a biography of William Clark of Lewis and Clark fame. In a passing note the biographer referred to William Clark's uncle who lived in North Carolina in the early to mid-eighteenth century. He fathered thirty-two children by two wives. Only five survived into adulthood. Life was tough and death was a frequent occurrence. There were no funeral homes in those days. The funeral services sometimes were conducted in churches, but also often in homes. Death was a very common and frequent part of life, but through all of it life went on. There was grief, but it did little to stop the forward progression of life. People grieved, but if they gave into it more death would ensue. Living was a daily battle against

the elements of weather, disease, harsh living conditions, and, sometimes, war. I think throughout history death was day-to-day a much more visible, ever-present reality than in our modern world. It is still always around us, but somehow we are more proficient in postponing it a little and much more effective in hiding it from view.

In the twenty-third Psalm, David, the warrior king, lived under the threat of death most of his life. He defended his father's flocks from the lion and the bear, met the challenge of Goliath, fell under the threat of Saul, and fought against Israel's enemies constantly. Bloodshed was such a part of David's life he was denied the privilege of building a permanent house for the Lord. Hence, when he wrote of walking "through the valley of the shadow of death," he knew full well what that meant. He was an expert in confronting and winning out over death. In spite of his human weakness, David had developed a relationship with the Lord, the Shepherd, which enabled him not to fear. I wonder about that. Was he totally fearless? Did he never feel the angst that this may be the last moment of his life? Did he have no natural instincts of self-preservation? Or was he simply able, upon reflection and prayer, put his trust in God that he was able to overcome the emotion of fear?

Whatever it was, strong faith that never flinched in the face of fearful circumstances or strong faith that strengthened him after he flinched, he was able to write that he feared no evil even when death was upon him. Whatever it was, we want it. Whatever it was, we need it. Whatever it was, it is available to us. We are walking through our own "valley of the shadow of death." Covid 19 is real. As of Saturday morning, there are 88,237 dead people who can attest to the reality of the valley. The cause for concern is real. Oddly though, Covid 19 has simply made death more visible in our minds.

We normally don't think much of death unless something extraordinary draws our attention to it, such as a 9/11 or Covid 19 event. Then we become a bit horrified. These are not ordinary events. They are not supposed to happen. Suddenly the frailty of life becomes evident unlike in "normal" times. Yet, every day we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Statistics show in 2017 the U. S. had approximately 35,000 people die on our highways, 600,000 die from cancer, and 650,000 from heart disease. In 2017 there were over 2,800,000 deaths from all causes and this number does not include the approx. 860,000 abortions that never got listed among the living. In that same year 57,000,000 people (I think a conservative number) died worldwide from all causes. Death is an integral part of life and we walk through its valley every day.

What, then, are we to think of our present distress? Of course, Covid 19 is a real threat. It can kill. It adds to the death rolls. It significantly increases the total threat to our already heavily threatened existence. Yet, death is a daily threat that cannot be ignored or avoided. Possibly postponed, but never escaped. In a godless world the threats against existence can certainly be an unnerving, depressing burden. After all, this is all there is and we would naturally cling to it with every ounce of our being, knowing full well one day, not too far off, our grip will slip. But, for those who follow the Shepherd, it is only "appointed... once to die (Heb. 9:27)," but, thereafter, to live forever.

The Christian can walk through the valley of the shadow of death in full confidence that it is possible the Lord will carry us safely through. On the other hand, if we follow the shepherd and we still die, there is nothing we could have done to escape it. In either case we are granted life: either life continuing in this world or life eternal in the next. His rod and His staff; that is, His providential care, they comfort me, and I fear no evil.

We hope and pray that we can attain to this frame of mind. We must be aware daily of the temporary nature of this world, trust the Shepherd, walk in His path for His names' sake, and, hence, cast our fear by His perfect love (1Jn. 4:18).

Until the next time,

May the Lord bless you and keep you; may His light shine upon you and grant you peace.

Love,

Jim and Sharon