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 Church of
GOD, THE ETERNAL

Do We Have Faith in God's Promise to Preserve Us in Times of Trouble?

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Dear Brethren:

Greetings, brethren, from all of us here in Tennessee who are privileged to meet together every Sabbath. The fellowship we enjoy plays a very important part in our salvation process, especially in these troubled times of uncertainty. The faltering economy, not only of the United States, but of the world; the rising unemployment and home foreclosures; the volcano in Iceland; the Afghanistan war, which seems un-fixable; the Haitian earthquake on January 12, where survivors still languish in the aftermath of 230,000 dead and 1.3 million still homeless; and now closer to home, America's attention is focused on a car bomb discovered in New York's Time Square, and the uncontrollable amount of oil continuing to spill into the Gulf of Mexico.

In the recent flooding of Nashville, Tennessee, the Cumberland River, overwhelmed by unrelenting rainstorms, overflowed its banks and even after the skies cleared, the river kept rising reported *Time* magazine. It washed away trees, and it rushed into businesses. It killed over thirty people throughout the region. Homes and businesses were flooded with over ten feet, or three meters, of water. While helicopters rescued people from rooftops, farm animals sought out the high ground and huddled on the hillsides. The stage of the Grand Ole Opry, the home of country music, once graced by legends such as Hank Williams and Patsy Cline, is now waterlogged by the worst flood in eighty years. It was not a terrorist bomb, or an army, a hurricane or a tornado that destroyed the city: just a continual downpour that lasted two days delivering over thirteen inches of rain to the area. Over two thousand homes were destroyed, and over twenty counties were declared disaster areas with many water supplies polluted.

In the wake of all these troubles in the world and in our nation, we in God's church may begin to ask the same question as did the Israelites of old: Has God called us out of Egypt—out of sin—only to destroy us in the wilderness?

And the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses, and said, "Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" (Exodus 17:3)

These Israelites—symbolic of the church in these troubled times—who were first called and delivered out of Egypt, failed to trust God to supply all their needs in their salvation process. They thirsted for water, but failed to trust God to supply that living water (symbolic of God's Spirit). They lacked the faith to believe God who never changes. They suffered death in the wilderness because they failed to trust God who can deliver us out of all our troubles (Psalm 34:17). Because they failed to exercise faith in troubled times, many today likewise have been shipwrecked on the rocks of doubt and uncertainty.

Some Have Suffered Shipwreck

When we fail to love and hold fast to the truth we received in the beginning, we will suffer shipwreck.

This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them [or because of these prophecies] you may wage the good warfare, having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck (1Timothy 1:18–19).

What charge is Paul talking about in verse 18? The charge in verses 3 and 4: ". . . that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith." They cause disputes and create questions which in turn undermine and weaken our faith, the faith we received in the beginning when God called us to the truth.

In verse 19, Paul says that faith and a good conscience will protect us from shipwreck. A good conscience is the awareness of right and wrong with a compunction or conviction to do right based on the faith once delivered. Some in Paul's day had rejected a good conscience concerning the faith, and had suffered shipwreck because they lost the faith that would have given them direction. They were like a foolish sailor who throws his compass overboard—the compass which would help him stay on course when the sea becomes turbulent.

The same has happened today with many of God's true believers who simply did not maintain that faith with a good conscience and have lost their direction and become shipwrecked. False ministers of the faith took away their spiritual compass, or source of direction, and they became lost at sea—that great sea of humanity from which we were all called (Matthew 13:47). Their Christian lives started out like a gallant ship putting out to sea, but instead of holding fast to the correct course, they foundered on the rocks of doubt—generated by a turbulent sea of false prophets and worldly friends. They brought shame on themselves and on their testimony of a life in Christ apart from this world. They

suffered shipwreck and lost all their cargo—that revealed truth, that way of life to which they were called—and it sank to the bottom of the sea, taking many with it.

How Can We Prevent Shipwreck?

Our ship, of course, is God's true church, which we enter at baptism. This true church is a spiritual church led by the Spirit of God. Our captain is Christ, who is the author or captain of our salvation (Hebrews 2:10). Each of us represents a part of that ship—that is, if we remain intact, if we remain at one together with Christ when the storms of life arise. If Christ is the captain of our ship, then we have nothing to fear when storms arise. Why?

Christ Controls the Weather

Have you ever complained or been fearful of the weather? I have, but my fears went away when I realized that Christ controls the weather.

As David watched a thunderstorm sweep down over Israel, he was inspired to write Psalm 29. Read it and be inspired as to how the voice of God controls the weather:

Give unto the LORD, O you mighty ones, give unto the LORD glory and strength. [What mighty ones is David referring to? Well, it is the mighty forces that make up the weather: the thunder, lightning, wind, rain, hail, floods and the earthquakes.]

Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness. [He says that these forces give God glory and worship Him in the beauty of holiness. These mighty ones can also be symbolic of people whom God controls with His voice, people who need to give glory and honor to God. What we can understand from this psalm is that God can control people and nations just like He does the weather.]

The *voice* of the LORD is over the *waters*; the God of glory thunders; the LORD is over *many waters*. [In Revelation 17:15 God uses the word "waters" to symbolize peoples, multitudes, nations and tongues. God's voice thunders over the waters (peoples or nations) to stir them up with His loud voice.] (Emphasis mine throughout)

The *voice* of the LORD is powerful; the *voice* of the LORD is full of majesty. [God's voice is powerful like the wind of a hurricane or thunder through the sky.]

The *voice* of the LORD breaks the cedars [or proud leaders], Yes, the LORD splinters the cedars of Lebanon. [The Lord's powerful voice splinters the cedars of Lebanon like lightning and wind splits tall trees, symbolic of tall, proud leaders in the land.]

He makes them also skip like a calf, Lebanon and Sirion like a young wild ox [symbolic of powerful leaders who will not be controlled or tamed, but God will bring them into subjection].

The *voice* of the LORD divides [or stirs up] the flames of fire [like lightning through the skies].

The *voice* of the LORD shakes the wilderness [like an earthquake]; the LORD shakes the Wilderness of Kadesh. [Remember, Kadesh was the area where the giants of the descendants of Anak lived. This made the people of Israel afraid to enter into the promised land (Numbers 13:26–33). Only Joshua and Caleb really believed God could cause these people to surrender to Israel. After all, did not God just destroy Egypt with all manner of plagues? God can and will make our enemies powerless.]

The *voice* of the LORD makes the deer give birth [How? By bringing colder weather which starts the mating season.], and strips the forests bare [with hail, sleet and freezing weather]; and in His temple everyone says, "Glory!" [Because those in His temple, those who know the Lord, realize the benefit of those being convulsed by God like a storm, the arrows of lightning, the peals of thunder, the winds of gale velocity, the effect it has on the forest and wilderness; all join in telling the power of God over mankind and all things, because the voice of the Lord, mentioned here seven times, makes it happen.]

The LORD sat enthroned at the Flood [symbolic of many peoples or armies], and the LORD sits as King forever [not over a flood of water, but as King over many peoples].

The LORD will give strength to His people; the LORD will bless His people with peace.

Yes, when the storms of life surround us and there is trouble on every side, the Lord is able to give strength and peace to His people, those who have faith in the knowledge of His truth.

On the other hand, those who refuse God's counsel will perish beneath the waves stirred up by a whirlwind from Him.

Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded, Because you disdained all my counsel, and would have none of my rebuke, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your terror comes, When your terror comes like a storm, and your destruction comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. "Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently, but they will not find me. Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD, They would have none of my counsel and despised my every rebuke. Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled to the full with their own fancies. For the turning away of the simple will slay them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them; But whoever listens to me will dwell safely, and will be secure, without fear of evil" (Proverbs 1:24–33).

Why can we feel secure without fear of evil? Because even the wind and the sea obey Christ.

Now when He got into a boat, His disciples followed Him. And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves. But He was asleep. Then His disciples came to Him and awoke Him, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" But He said to them, "Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?" Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. So the men marveled, saying, "Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" (Matthew 8:23–27)

Why was Christ able to sleep during the storm while His disciples thought they were about to perish? It was because Christ controlled the wind and the waves of the sea just as Christ also controls the sea of humanity all around us that is getting more turbulent every day—that sea which threatens to sink our ship by breaking us up as a church. If we believe that Christ is our captain and that He has the power to control all things, we have nothing to fear in the presence of our Lord. Christ's voice commands the wind and the water to obey Him.

Now it happened, on a certain day, that He got into a boat with His disciples. And He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side of the lake." And they launched out. But as they sailed He fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water, and were in jeopardy. And they came to Him and awoke Him, saying, "Master, Master, we [perish or] are perishing!" Then He arose and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water. And they ceased, and there was a calm. But He said to them, "Where is your faith?" And they were afraid, and marveled, saying to one another, "Who can this be? For He commands even the winds and water, and they obey Him!" (Luke 8:22–25)

If Christ controls the winds and the waters (symbolic of the nations and peoples around us), why do we fear unless we lack the faith in Christ to save us?

Jesus Walks on the Sea

Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there. But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. Now in the fourth watch of the night [3:00 A.M. to 6:00 A.M.] Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid." And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Matthew 14:22–31)

We doubt when we forget that the waves (or the nations) around us that cause us to fear are under Christ's feet or His command.

When Peter started walking on the water, he had faith that Christ could sustain him as he walked on the sea, but when he saw that the wind was boisterous in stirring up the waves, he became afraid and began to sink, forgetting the fact that Christ controls all things, even the sea that was under his feet.

Christ even controls the nations in turmoil all around us that seek to destroy us as a remnant of God's church. We are often storm-tossed, perplexed and in despair. The Savior seems far away at times. But in reality Christ is always there, patiently waiting for us to put our faith in Him for deliverance. When the night seems darkest, He is near at hand and He is always in control, so we have no need to fear.

"Listen to Me, you who know righteousness, you people in whose heart is My law: Do not fear the reproach of men, nor be afraid of their insults. . . . I, even I, am He who comforts you. Who are you that you should be afraid of a man who will die, and of the son of a man who will be made like grass? . . . But I am the LORD your God, who divided the sea whose waves roared—the LORD of hosts is His name" (Isaiah 51:7, 12, 15).

So, just as God parted the sea for ancient Israel, He will divide the nations to let us pass as we depart from sin and progress to the Promised Land.

In Psalm 91, David spoke of the safety he experienced in the abiding presence of our Lord. David, being a man of war, a man who saw much bloodshed, was inspired to write what has become known as the "Serviceman's Psalm," because it was so comforting to hear in the heat of battle and in times of trouble.

He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust." Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence. He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler. You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day, Nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday. A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you. Only with your eyes shall you look, and see the reward of the wicked. Because you have made the LORD, who is my refuge, even the Most High, your dwelling place, No evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling; For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone. You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, the young lion and the serpent you shall trample underfoot. "Because he [David] has set his love upon Me [the Lord], therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name. He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him, and show him My salvation" (Psalm 91).

Some who have entered into God's salvation process have been led to believe that time and chance happen to all men as it says in Ecclesiastes 9:11. But remember that this verse must be understood in the light of verse 1 which says: ". . . the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God." That means time and chance are in God's control, and everything that happens to us has a purpose in God's plan of salvation for us. The race is not always to the swift if God has anything to say about it, nor is the battle to the strong because the Lord decides who wins battles. Also, the men of understanding are not always rich because God gives us the power to get wealth (Deuteronomy 8:18). Nor does the credit always go to the men of skill, but time and chance are in God's control to make it happen to all according to His will. If we believe this, then we need to be content in whatever state we find ourselves at the present as Paul said in Philippians 4:11.

Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we may boldly say: "The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" (Hebrews 13:5–6)

God did not promise us a life without pain; nor laughter without tears or sorrow; nor sunlight without storms, but He did promise us strength for the day, comfort for the tears of sorrow, and light for the way that leads to life everlasting.

In closing, remember Proverbs 3:5–6: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."

In the near future we will see a great twisted serpent of the sea; the Leviathan—symbolic of Satan's powerful political system or government—rise up out of the sea and will cause the whole earth to tremble (Revelation 13:1). I believe this system will be as powerful as the Leviathan Job talked about in Job 41, a multi-headed beast that no one will be able to subdue. A beast that God created to play about in the sea among the ships (Psalm 104:26), until God decides to break the heads of this beast in pieces (Psalm 74:14).

Only God has the power to slay this twisted serpent of the sea (Isaiah 27:1), and He will do it in that Day of the Lord's vengeance. Why? Because this beast power has made war against the saints and caused many of them to be martyred, and has caused the whole earth to tremble saying: "Who is able to make war against him?" All peoples whose names are not written in the Book of Life will worship this beast (Revelation 13:7–8).

This beast will rise up out of a turbulent sea of humanity that God will stir up by a whirlwind in this end time. As the world trembles in fear because of this beast power, will we also tremble in fear thinking God called us only to destroy us?

We will *not*, if we believe in the Lord our God who never changes: that He controls all things in our salvation process in these troubled times.

I pray that this letter will increase your faith and absolute confidence in the promise of Jesus Christ to preserve us in times of trouble.

Much love from your revived servant in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Richard W. Litz". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned centrally below the typed name.

Richard W. Litz