

Trusting God

Somewhere around fifteen to twenty years ago I began to think that if I reached the age of 80, which I will do on Wednesday, God willing, I would preach on trusting God, from the experience of over sixty years of being a Christian. I praise God I am able to do so today.

Trust is one of the great themes of the Bible. (We have sung about trust today, and we will sing more about trust when I have spoken.)

We often express our trust in God in the words of a creed, or respond to a question about our faith with the words “We believe and trust in him.” We are saying both that we believe that God exists, and we have entire confidence that he will provide all our needs.

When sharing the good news about Jesus with someone I sometimes use the illustration of getting on a bus. We see the bus coming, and we believe it will take us where we wish to go; we have faith that it will. But only when we get onto the bus do we put our trust in it and its driver to take us to our destination. Likewise we need not only to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, who died that we might be forgiven: we need to put our trust in him for our forgiveness.

Today we are going to look in the Bible at some of the encouragements to trust God.

Today I wish us to ask ourselves ‘Am I trusting God for everything?’ and to find joy and peace in trusting him.

Firstly, an example of trust from way back in the beginning of the Old Testament. We are reminded in the New Testament of how the Old Testament patriarch Abraham had trusted God. “By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.” (Heb. 11.8) Abraham trusted God. That is just one of many examples of trust mentioned in the 11th chapter of the New Testament letter to the Hebrews.

On the other hand, after the Lord had rescued his people from slavery in Egypt, they were too frightened to enter the Promised Land. So their leader Moses wrote of them “You did not trust in the Lord your God, who went ahead of you on your journey.” (Deut. 1.32-33). The Lord said that that generation had to die off, while living for forty years in the wilderness, and so it would be the next generation who would enter the Promised Land.

Fast forward hundreds of years, to the reign of King Asa of Judah. We are told that he began his reign well. “He commanded Judah to seek the Lord, the God of their fathers, and to obey his laws and commands.” (2 Chron.14.4). At first the land was at peace. But then Asa was faced by a vast army and 300 chariots of an enemy, the Cushites. Nevertheless, we read in the second book of Chronicles, Asa trusted God and he “Called to the Lord his God and said ‘Lord, there is no one like you to help the powerless against the mighty. Help us, O Lord our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this vast army. Lord, you are our God; do not let man prevail against you’. The Lord struck down the Cushites ... And Asa and his army pursued them” (2 Chron. 14.11-13).

Sadly, at the other end of his reign, when attacked by another enemy, Asa “took the silver and gold out of the treasuries of the Lord’s Temple ...” and sent it to the King of Syria, asking him to support him. God sent a prophet to remind Asa how God had delivered him previously, and to rebuke him for failing to trust in the Lord’s help on this occasion. (16.1-9).

Some centuries later, when the Jews had been exiled to Babylon, a young Jewish man named Daniel was among those who “were to be trained for three years, and after that ... enter the king’s service.” (Dan. 1.5.) “The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king’s table ... But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food, which must have included foods that God had forbidden the Jews to eat, and so Daniel asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself. (1.8) At the end of a ten day test of “eating nothing but vegetables” (1.12), Daniel and his three colleagues “looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food”. (1.15) They had trusted God, and God had protected the four of them.

Sometime later successive kings of Babylon decided to let the Jews return to their homeland. One group of exiles returned under the leadership of the priest Ezra. He wrote “I proclaimed a fast, so we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions. I was ashamed (Ezra continued), to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to protect us from enemies on the road, because we had told the king ‘The gracious hand of our God is on everyone who looks to him ...’ So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer.”(Ezra 8.21-23). So they made the long journey without the travel insurance of soldiers and horsemen that might have been offered. After their arrival Ezra wrote “The hand of our God was on us, and he protected us from enemies and bandits along the way.” (Ezra 8.31).

The writers of about thirty of the psalms encouraged God’s people to trust him, particularly King David; for example David wrote in Psalm 27 “The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid?” (Ps. 27.1). He trusted the almighty Lord to give him light to guide him, and protection at all times.

Psalm 91 is all about God’s protection in response to our trust. It begins “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.’” (Ps. 91.1-2) And, after many more words about God’s protection, the Psalm concludes “‘Because he loves me,’ says the Lord, ‘I will rescue him; I will protect him ... He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation.’” (Ps. 91.14-16) I humbly thank God for long life and for his salvation.

Psalm 118 contains this encouragement to trust the Lord: “The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? The Lord is with me; he is my helper. ... It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man.” (6-8).

The book of Proverbs contains these words, the latter of which are engraved on a stone outside our church door – “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight”. (Pr. 3.5-6) If we trust in the Lord, he will guide us.

The prophet Isaiah also encourages us to trust God. “You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you. ...Trust in the Lord for ever, for the Lord, the Lord is the rock eternal.” (Is.26.3-4). Trust in the Lord, and he will give you peace of mind.

Later Isaiah wrote of those who trust in the protection of earthly insurance, rather than trusting in the Lord: “Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses, who trust in the multitude of their chariots and in the great strength of their horsemen, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel, or seek help from the Lord.” (31.1).

Later still Isaiah wrote “But now, this is what the Lord says – he who created you ... ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.” (43.1-3). Praise the Lord! The Lord will protect us from all dangers and trials.

Finally in this series of Old Testament encouragements to trust God here are some words from the prophet Jeremiah: “This is what the Lord says: ‘Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord. He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert ... But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water, that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.’” (Jer. 17.5-8)

So we can trust in the Lord for companionship, for protection, for safe journeys, for guidance, for provision of all our needs. We should do so.

Now we turn to the New Testament, for some of the encouragement in it to trust in God.

The Lord Jesus trusted his heavenly Father.

Outside the cave tomb of his dead friend, Lazarus, “Jesus looked up and said, ‘Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.’ When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, ‘Lazarus come out!’” Lazarus came out of his tomb alive, wrapped in his grave clothes. (John 11.41-44).

On the night before his crucifixion, Jesus foretold that his followers would be scattered, but told them that he trusted in the Father. He said “You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me.” (John 16.32).

Indeed his last words on the Cross were “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” (Luke 23.46).

Finally he was confident that the Father would raise him to life after his crucifixion. He had told his followers “On the third day he will be raised to life!” (Mat.20.19).

Jesus trusted the Father. So it is not surprising that Jesus encouraged his followers to trust their heavenly Father too. We heard in our Bible reading just now an extract from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount.

We heard how he encouraged them not to worry about food or clothing, because their heavenly Father knew their needs. Rather, he told them, “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Mat.6.33).

Later in the same sermon he encouraged trust again, saying “If you ... know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” (7.11).

In the 19th century a number of Christian organisations were formed with a foundation principle of not asking people for money, but only praying and trusting that the Lord would supply their needs. One such was the Muller orphanages in Bristol. There is a delightful story of how one day, when there was no money left, and no food in front of the children on the table, George Muller prayed “Dear Father, we thank thee for what thou art going to give us to eat.” A knock at the door was heard. The baker stood there, and said “Mr Muller I couldn’t sleep last night. Somehow I felt you didn’t have bread for breakfast, and the Lord wanted me to send you some. So I got up at 2 o’clock and baked some fresh bread, and have brought it.”

George Muller thanked the man and praised God for his care, then said “Children, we not only have bread, but the rare treat of fresh bread.” No sooner had he said this than there came a second knock at the door. This time it was the milkman. He announced that his milk cart had broken down right in front of the orphanage and that he would like to give the children his cans of fresh milk, so that he could empty his wagon and repair it.

Another such faith organisation was the China Inland Mission, later called the Overseas Missionary Fellowship, which at one time had over 1000 missionaries in China, before they were expelled by the communists, after which many went to new work in other lands. Their founder, Hudson Taylor, was once asked whether trusting God and not asking for money was rather a hand to mouth existence. He replied “Yes, but it is God’s hand to my mouth.”

Some time later in his ministry Jesus warned his followers of coming persecution. They were to trust God in it. He said “When they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.” (Mat.10.19-20).

On the evening before his death Jesus told his followers “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; ... I am going there to prepare a place for you.” (John 14.1-2). So we too, his followers today, are called to trust him for our place in heaven. Praise God. Is there anyone more trustworthy than our God?

So, we are to trust the Lord for our daily needs, trust the Lord if persecuted, trust the Lord for a place in heaven. What else?

My experience is that Christians find it rather easier to trust God for their future salvation than for their present protection.

I have recently been reading a book called *The Heavenly Man*, the story of Brother Yun, a Chinese house church leader, who suffered four long periods of imprisonment and torture. After he escaped to the West, on the advice of others, he was not impressed with everything he found in Western churches. For example he wrote “You have insurance for everything. In a way, you don’t need God.” (P.299).

Some types of insurance have become compulsory – like car insurance, employer’s liability assurance, and insurance for a flat. For those we have to pay. But other types of insurance are optional - house insurance, contents insurance, travel insurance. We do not have to pay for them. We can trust God to watch over our possessions and our travel.

Some people have told me that they were glad that they were insured when this or that happened to them. But, as we teach our children from their earliest years, God is everywhere, and he knows everything. God knows who is trusting in him, and the message of the Bible, as we have heard, and as has been my humble experience, over many years, has been that, though sometimes the Lord allows us to suffer trials, the Lord protects those who trust in him.

The opposite of trust is fear. It has been said that insurance feeds on fear. It has also been said that the expression “Fear not” occurs 365 times in the Bible. Fear not! Relax and trust the Lord.

So, as we have heard from the Scriptures -

“The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear?”

“I will say of the Lord, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.’”

“It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man.”

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.”

“Trust in the Lord for ever, for the Lord, the Lord is the rock eternal.”

“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.”

He is our heavenly Father who loves us, who is Almighty, and who does not change.

There is joy and peace in trusting him.

We said “We believe and trust in him”. May the Lord himself help us to do so more and more – for protection, for travel, for guidance, for right words, for strength, for peace of mind, and for a place in heaven.