

Uncertainty as an Asset

Lincoln Park Baptist Church, West Newton, Massachusetts
August 16, 1964

Scripture: Jeremiah 4:23-30

Introduction

- A. Many of us remember the religious best sellers of the decade of the fifties:
Rabbi Liebmann's Peace of Mind
Norman Vincent Peale's The Power of Positive Thinking

Really these two books have the same basic presupposition. By having the right spiritual attitudes and applying the right techniques, you can obtain peace of mind and have happiness within your reach. It takes effort on your part, but if you know the inside track, everything will turn out all right.

- B. The ideology of inevitable progress fostered by the natural sciences had led us to believe that we could establish the Kingdom of God here on earth.
- C. But something strange has happened in our day. The same science that just a few decades ago was proclaiming the inevitability of progress, has now given us the means to destroy all we have created, including the foundations of the earth, which we have not created. We no longer feel so certain about the possibility of achieving the kingdom of God on earth.

Scientists are afraid. All humanity is afraid.

I. We have to face the uncertainty of the human situation.

A. The Biblical witness

Moses and the children of Israel: "Come down, Moses, and lead my people out of captivity. Abandon your ivory tower in the desert. I have heard the cry of my people and I am going to save them."

B. The prophets are the uncertainty of the human situation in cosmic terms.

Isaiah 54:10

*For the mountains shall depart,
and the hills be removed.
But my kindness shall not depart from thee;
Neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed,
Saith the Lord that has mercy on thee!*

Isaiah 24:18-20

*The foundations of the earth do shake;
Earth breaks to pieces,
Earth is split in pieces,
Earth shakes to pieces,
Earth reels like a drunken man,
Earth rocks like a hammock;
Under the weight of its transgressions earth falls down
to rise no more!*

*Lift up your eyes to heaven and look upon the earth beneath;
For the heavens shall vanish away like smoke,
And the earth shall grow old like a robe;
The world itself shall crumble.
But my righteousness shall be forever,
and my salvation knows no end.*

I Peter is very dramatic:

*The heaven will vanish with a crackling roar, and the elements will melt
with fervent heat, the earth also and the works therein shall be burnt up.*

Says Paul Tillich: "This is no longer vision; it has become physics. We know that in the ground of our earth, and in the ground of everything in our world that has force and structure, destructive forces are bound."

C. Our present-day situation: world in revolution and change.

1. I & II World Wars and Korea
2. Vietnam; Congo
3. The problem of the refugees
4. Rootless generation in our nation
 - traditional values have been given up
 - the Negro revolution has shaken and broken the ways of thinking and acting of a whole continent. We do not feel so sure any more.
5. Young people are worried.
Lydia: "Don't turn on the news. They cause me to worry."

This is the human situation and shall always be the human situation. Let us not become immune to the fact of uncertainty and insecurity of human institutions, both political, social and even religious institutions. Even the created universe is insecure.

6. Death and don Miguel de Unamuno.

To recognize the uncertainty of the human situation is always an asset.

II. The prophets spoke of doom, but they were not cynics nor did they become the victims of despair.

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But my kindness shall not depart from thee;
Neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed,
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Isaiah 24:20

*“The world itself shall crumble
But my righteousness shall be for ever,
and my salvation knows no end.”*

Tillich:

“Beyond the sphere of destruction they saw the sphere of salvation. In the doom of the temporal they saw the manifestation of the eternal. It was because they were certain that they belong within two spheres, the changeable and the unchangeable. For only he who is also beyond the changeable, not bound within it, can face the end. How much of our lives consist in nothing but attempts to look away from the end! We often succeed in forgetting the end.”

Conclusion:

The story of the movie San Francisco. A night club owner who always thought that he could manage to win big either in shows or with girls, can only say “God” when his little world has crumbled. And all around him there is destruction because of the San Francisco earthquake of the beginning of the century.

Only when we realize that uncertainty and insecurity of the human situation -- do not get panicky but still trust -- can we really say that we know something about God.

*“The earth shall grow old like a robe;
The world itself shall crumble!...
But my salvation knows no end.”*

Luis Fidel Mercado 8/16/64