

Like Sinking Sand It Falls

By PAUL J. SCHARF

That feeling you sense is the unmovable ground—what you thought was unmovable, anyway—shifting beneath your feet.

It will never return to its previous form. It has been, to use a term now in vogue, “transformed.”

Personally, I have never been in an earthquake—until now.

But, you see, this is not merely a terrestrial earthquake, but a medical, economic, political, cultural, societal and spiritual earthquake.

Consider everything you thought you could rely upon in this world as recently as late February. Now, pause, and realize that you can no longer rely upon it. And, what’s more, to quote one of our most loquacious governors, there is no going “back to normal.”

Whatever your view of the coronavirus, or of the shutdowns, the purpose of this piece is not to persuade you of a particular point of view or course of action. I am not a medical, economic or political scientist, and none of us are privy to the information one would need to fully evaluate these things. Like you, I have lots of questions—many, many more questions than answers.

My purpose, then, is not to argue about the seriousness of the illness, or the wisdom of the shutdowns, or even the political, economic or societal path forward.

My point here is rather to state that which is self-evident, even if devastating. Things have changed. In a thousand ways, things have changed forever.

I perceive that there are basically two ways to approach the earthquake and its aftermath. Those who realize its magnitude are terrified. Those who choose not to be cognizant are, to use an old phrase, whistling past the graveyard.

My goal in this piece is simply to accomplish the ancient task of the preacher—to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable. And I believe that I can accomplish both with the exact same precepts.

First, realize that the ground is indeed shaking below, and reach for help from above.

Do not try to deny the obvious. Even if you feel no impact from any aspect of the crisis—which is unlikely, at least for long—realize that many, many other people have had their lives forever turned upside down already, or will very soon.

Businesses that took a lifetime, or perhaps even generations, to build, will be lost. Farms and homes will be taken in foreclosure. Marriages will end in divorce. Students

will quit school. Missionaries will be forced to leave the field. And some churches, schools and other ministries will simply not survive.

To whom do we turn when everything else is shaken? To the One Who is performing the shaking, of course.

Behind the events of time stands the God of eternity, and He is the One who is shaking all things.

In fact, "He has promised" to "shake not only the earth, but also heaven" (Heb. 12:26). To what end? "That the things which cannot be shaken may remain" (Heb. 12:27).

Many of the things that have been shaken out were not ultimately important. Obviously, none of them were permanent. In removing some of them, the Lord God is causing all of us to grasp for Him alone.

I do not know *why* He has performed the shaking at this time, I just know that He has.

Second, mark the loss of cultural comforts and norms, but do not mourn their passing.

History is not static, and the contented life we have known was never promised or permanent. God is moving history toward the end that He has intended for it. Before our eyes, He is setting the stage for the fulfillment of all that is predicted in Bible prophecy.

Like the future observers of the fall of "Babylon the great" (Rev. 18:2), our temptation is to "weep and lament" (Rev. 18:9) over the dissolving of worldly wealth, prestige and power.

But, given the choice, would we really prefer to prolong a season of seeming earthly prosperity, rather than moving on toward the substance of heavenly realities? "Our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20) and "our salvation *is* nearer than when we *first* believed" (Rom. 13:11). This is the time to begin practicing these proclamations.

Third, remember the sand always sinks, so resolve hereafter to build on rock.

We should not be surprised to find that temporal things are, well, temporal after all. Life is fleeting. In light of eternity, its trifles are "built ... on the sand," and "great" will be their "fall" (Matt. 7:26-27).

Christ commanded us, by contrast, to be like "a wise man who built his house on the rock" (Matt. 7:24).

And this is where we start over when the earthquake ends.

Please do not mistake my words to be musings born of mere frustration or a sense of futility.

No! This is the time to jump into the arena and grab hold of spiritual opportunity (Eccl. 9:10; 1 Cor. 10:31; Phil. 3:14; Col. 3:17)! Grow as strong as you can, and "help those who are weak." This occasion should lead us toward spiritual ferocity, not passivity.

Just be conscious of exactly what you are—and are not—setting out to accomplish and build.

For, indeed:

“On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand.”

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