

Trusting God's Sovereignty in an Uncertain World

By Carl Mazzola

Talk given at the Christian Nuclear Fellowship Prayer Breakfast in Reno, NV, June 18, 2014

We live 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and 365 days a year in an uncertain world; both the physical and metaphysical. This world is not only uncertain, but it is extremely dangerous with a plethora of both physical and spiritual forces available to harm us and our loved ones even to the point of death. The news media report on wars among nations and civil wars, airline and automobile accidents, natural phenomena such as earthquakes, tsunamis, floods, tornadoes, extreme winds, volcanism, wildfires, etc. that kill as many as 260,000 people. In April 2014, more than 30 lost their lives in Oso, WA in an "unexpected" mudslide. Last year, Russia was struck by a meteor. Beyond these deadly forces are additional uncertainties in the health of our economy, our political stability, the maintenance of personal freedoms, and when local violence may flare up. In the nuclear industry that we work in, there are uncertainties in many areas, whether it is uranium supply, prices of various competing energy sources, Federal policies and regulations, Congressional funding, future interest rates, public perception, and many other variables; which for the most part are essentially out of our control. Defense-in-depth gives us a small hedge on nuclear safety uncertainties, but there is no assurance that beyond design basis events, although of very low probability of occurrence, would not indeed happen one day. What about the shifting in Congressional budgeting priorities or changing regulatory climates that sometimes overnight can convert a vibrant career into a voluntary or involuntary separation? Do we really believe that we possess the resources and wisdom to protect ourselves from all of these uncertainties for the rest of our lives?

Donald Rumsfeld, former Secretary of Defense under the Bush Administration, quoted the following statement: "There are known knowns and these are the things we know that we know. There are known unknowns, and these are the things we know that we do not know, and then there are unknown unknowns, these are the things we do not know that we do not know". Looking at the macrocosm of the complex Universe and the microcosm of the nano-world, 42 orders of magnitude in breath, which God is still continually revealing to us, we can conclude that the number of unknown unknowns far outnumber the number of known knowns and known unknowns. It is clear to the sober and vigilant thinker that we know precious little about our Universe and have virtually no control over the enormous physical forces embedded within. What makes our situation even worse is that we live in a world that has been spiritually-contaminated prior to the creation of Adam and Eve (Isaiah 14:12), and separated from God and His wisdom due to their sin in the Garden of Eden (Romans 5:12). The toxic combination of adverse spiritual forces (Ephesians 6:11) and physical forces that surround us and our families is nothing short of overwhelming which results in the human response of anxiety, generally followed by worry.

So what do we worry about? Here is a short list. We worry about yesterday, today, and tomorrow; our children's health and their future, the moral problems our family unit will encounter, the economic uncertainties of whether we can earn enough to eat, purchase clothing and secure reasonable shelter. We worry about our family's safety, their health, their choice of friends and their concomitant influence on them. We worry about money, whether we could lose our job, whether we can continue paying our bills, whether the stock market will crash again, and whether we could outlive our savings and become an unbearable burden to our children. We also worry about the seemingly unresolvable complex issues associated with our relationships; with our

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spouses, children, in-laws, extended family, co-workers, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances. Most importantly, we worry as to whether we can achieve the purposes that the Lord created us for.

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So why do we worry? We worry because we turned from trusting everything to our Sovereign God; relying instead on the counterfeit and totally impotent idols that Satan offers us (Romans 1:21-23; Hosea 4:11). All of these substitutes are powerless and offer no protection from the spiritual and physical risks we are constantly subject to. What is even worse, by trusting in these dead useless idols, we actually cut ourselves off from God's grace, as Jonah realized within the bowels of the great fish (Jonah 2:8). In seeking relief from life's overwhelming issues, we often lose sight of the only source of comfort and protection from everything adverse in our lives... our sovereign Living God (Matthew 11:28).

It seems that 21st Century America has forgotten the Living God, the sovereign Lord of the universe, and seeks answers by alternate means. This attitude, similar to choices made in ancient Israel and Judah, is an enormously dangerous choice that is laced with many unforeseen and undesirable consequences. For without Him, we face everything with our own futile power. It is interesting that life is predictable enough to make some sense out of it, but disruptive enough to cause deep concern. God has precisely designed this into our life experience so we might reach out to Him (Matthew 11:28). When we reach out to Him, we learn of His strength and assurance and achieve meaning and purpose in everything we do. Without Him, our walk is lonely, purposeless, and meaningless; filled with seemingly endless anxiety (Ecclesiastes 2:11).

The choice to forget our Creator and turn to lifeless idols leads to upheaval at the personal level and national level, as God has purposely designed the world so that in the midst of certainty and uncertainty we reach out to Him for guidance and assurance (Acts 17:26-27). Jesus makes this abundantly clear in John 15:5 and Matthew 6:24-34, that He is in control and we are not.

Matthew 6:24-34: "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Isn't there more to life than food and more to the body than clothing? Look at the birds of the sky: they do not sow, or reap, or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you more valuable than they are? And which of you by worrying can add even one hour to his life? Why do you worry about clothing? Think about how the flowers of the field grow; they do not work or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his glory was clothed like one of these! And if this is how God clothes the wild grass, which is here today and tomorrow is tossed into the fire to heat the oven, won't he clothe you even more, you people of little faith? So then, don't worry saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For the unconverted pursue these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But above all pursue his kingdom and righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So then, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Today has enough trouble of its own."

Jesus is telling us that life consists in trusting our heavenly Father, who provides for all of our needs (Romans 8:32); drawing us, through Christ, into his Kingdom to actively participate in his presence, peace and power (Matthew 6:33; Romans 3:22-26). When we trust in our Father's providential care for us, by faith (Hebrews 11:6), all of our anxieties will end (Matthew 11:28).

The many truths about how our great God cares for us have been revealed to us in His special revelation. The Lord promises to continually provide His infinite grace and resources and our simple responsibility is to merely trust and obey him; continually expressing confidence that his grace is

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always sufficient to carry us through anything (Philippians 1:6). The following Scripture tells us about the limitlessness of God's sovereignty. It is not an all-inclusive list:

God is sovereign over His entire creation

Psalm 103:19: The LORD has established his throne in heaven; his kingdom extends over everything.

Daniel 4:34: But at the end of the appointed time I, Nebuchadnezzar, looked up toward heaven, and my sanity returned to me. I blessed the Most High, and I praised and glorified the one who lives forever, for his rule is an everlasting rule, and his kingdom extends from one generation to the next.

Ephesians 1:11: In Christ we too have been claimed as God's own possession, since we were predestined according to the one purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will.

God is sovereign over the physical world

Psalm 135:6: He does whatever he pleases in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all the ocean depths.

Matthew 5:44: But I say to you, love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you, 5:45 so that you may be like your Father in heaven, since he causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

God is sovereign over the brute creation

Psalm 104:27-29: All of your creatures wait for you to provide them with food on a regular basis. You give food to them and they receive it; you open your hand and they are filled with food. When you ignore them, they panic. When you take away their life's breath, they die and return to dust.

Psalm 138:7: Even when I must walk in the midst of danger, you revive me. You oppose my angry enemies, and your right hand delivers me.

Matthew 10:29-30: Aren't two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. Even all the hairs on your head are numbered. 10:31 So do not be afraid; you are more valuable than many sparrows.

God is sovereign over all nations and its affairs

Job 12:23: He makes nations great, and destroys them; he extends the boundaries of nations and disperses them.

Psalm 22:28: For the LORD is king and rules over the nations.

Psalm 66:7: He rules by his power forever; he watches the nations. Stubborn rebels should not exalt themselves.

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Acts 17:26: From one man he made every nation of the human race to inhabit the entire earth, determining their set times and the fixed limits of the places where they would live,

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God is sovereign over man's birth and life situation

I Samuel 16:1: The LORD said to Samuel, "How long do you intend to mourn for Saul? I have rejected him as king over Israel. Fill your horn with olive oil and go. I am sending you to Jesse in Bethlehem, for I have selected a king for myself from among his sons."

Psalms 139:16: Your eyes saw me when I was an unborn fetus. All the days ordained for me were recorded in your scroll before one of them came into existence.

Galatians 1:14: I [Paul] was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my nation, and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. 1:15 But when the one who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace was pleased 1:16 to reveal his Son in me so that I could preach him among the Gentiles...

God is sovereign over successes and failures of men's lives

Psalms 75:4-7: I say to the proud, "Do not be proud," and to the wicked, "Do not be so confident of victory! Do not be so certain you have won! Do not speak with your head held so high! For victory does not come from the east or west, or from the wilderness. For God is the judge! He brings one down and exalts another.

Luke 1:52: He has brought down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up those of lowly position.

God is sovereign over seemingly random or insignificant things

Proverbs 16:33: The dice are thrown into the lap, but every decision is from the LORD.

Matthew 10:30: Even all the hairs on your head are numbered.

God is sovereign in the protection of the righteous

Psalms 4:8: I will lie down and sleep peacefully, for you, LORD, make me safe and secure.

Psalms 5:12: Certainly you reward the godly, LORD. Like a shield you protect them in your good favor.

Psalms 63:7: For you are my deliverer; under your wings I rejoice. 63:8 My soul pursues you; your right hand upholds me.

Romans 8:28: And we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose

Romans 8:38-39: For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things that are present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

God is sovereign in supplying the needs and wants of God's people

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Deuteronomy 8:3: So he humbled you by making you hungry and feeding you with unfamiliar manna to make you understand that mankind cannot live by food alone, but also by everything that comes from the LORD's mouth

Philippians 4:19: And my God will supply all that you need according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

God is sovereign in giving answers to prayer

I Samuel 1:11, 19-20: She (Hannah) made a vow saying, "O LORD of hosts, if you will look with compassion on the suffering of your female servant, remembering me and not forgetting your servant, and give a male child to your servant, then I will dedicate him to the LORD all the days of his life. His hair will never be cut." ... They got up early the next morning and after worshiping the LORD, they returned to their home at Ramah. Elkanah had marital relations with his wife Hannah, and the LORD remembered her. After some time Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, thinking, "I asked the LORD for him."

II Chronicles 33:12-13: In his pain Manasseh asked the LORD his God for mercy and truly humbled himself before the God of his ancestors. When he prayed to the LORD, the LORD responded to him and answered favorably his cry for mercy. The LORD brought him back to Jerusalem to his kingdom. Then Manasseh realized that the LORD is the true God.

Matthew 7:7-8: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened for you, for everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks the door will be opened."

Philippians 4:6-7: Do not be anxious about anything. Instead, tell your requests to God in your every prayer and petition—with thanksgiving. And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

God is sovereign in the exposure and punishment of the wicked

Psalms 7:11-12: God is a just judge; he executes judgment throughout the day. If a person does not repent, God sharpens his sword and prepares to shoot his bow.

Romans 1:18: For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of people who suppress the truth by their unrighteousness.

Romans 3:19: Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

So, in conclusion, God's special revelation, makes it abundantly clear that the Lord is sovereign over all of His creation and that He is active today, not only in sustaining it (Hebrews 1:3), but directing it toward the final consummation and the realization of his universal, uncontested Lordship (Ephesians 1:10-11). Accordingly, it is expedient to always trust His sovereign, providential goodness (Proverbs 3:5-6); something Eve failed to do in the Garden of Eden. Our commitment by faith to God's promise of sovereign care, purified by testing and the Holy Spirit, will totally remove all anxiety from uncertainties, will give us rest, and will build our hope as we train for Eternity.

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So the choice for the rest of your life comes down to this: Do you put your trust in lifeless, counterfeit, and impotent idols to cope with uncertainties or do you put your trust in the goodness of the living omnipotent, omnibenevolent sovereign God who rules the Universe He created. As for me, my trust is built on nothing less than Jesus and His righteousness.