In the 1960s, the quirky, often-beloved American songwriter Bob Dylan famously wrote these lyrics: "the times they are a-changing." And boy, is that ever more true nowadays, both with stark realities and with many fictitious news reports put forth by many, clearly in their own perceived self-interest. The seemingly relentless big-picture stories of wars and economics and crime and climate change and cultural upheaval and technological developments have worked to create a rather semi-permanent sense of stressful uncertainty in the lives of many folks.

But, of course, large uncertainties have always been looming in the human condition, some of which sadly have come true. The 20th century alone was certifiably very violent by any standard, with two world wars around the globe with accompanying atrocities by some parties, but also many millions put to death by their own governments in pursuit of idealized political systems like Communism. And these radical happenings deliberately happened in countries with supposed histories as "civilizations."

As if the macro, big-picture vagaries of life aren't hard enough, the pressure from changes in its seasons for each and every person is often unrelenting, too—and that pressure is often unbidden and sometimes uncontrollable as to whether for it's going to be for better or for worse.

The list here often seems endless: the inevitabilities of the aging of parents or grandparents, perhaps with excruciating diseases or just death itself…significant changes in jobs and even careers…highly-charged emotional threats of skill obsolescence due to technological advances…the blessing of newborn children and the accompanying long-term challenges of raising them in an often-hostile world…often overbearing governments threatening faith and family in stunning new ways…the falling away of close relationships for whatever reasons—indeed, the pressures do often seem without end!

And that's because it's true. As the old saying goes, "life is just one darn thing after another." Except when that was first written in 1909, the author didn't use the word "darn." And the word "darn" hasn't been used very much in saying that since! Even Bill Barr, the Attorney General of the U.S. in President Donald Trump's first term, titled his autobiographical book with the pithy version of that saying.

But as we said earlier, all the vagaries of life in a fallen world have been ebbing and flowing in the human condition since Eden. Wars, deadly illnesses, plagues, slavery, rampant criminality, family strife—you name it, no one today is invulnerable to such things. In fact, a key thing that is simultaneously both enhancing and afflicting our lives is that constant of technological advancement, you know, like AI! Indeed, many today are frightened above all other things as to what that technological change is on the verge of truly bringing to their lives.

Nevertheless, these types of sobering truths did not mean that Jesus wanted us to be naïve—we will have pressures and strife afflicting us all. Here's what Christ taught in a passage understood to be about the end times: "And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet." (Matthew 24:6) Note that this is prophetic in nature, but the not-so-hidden point is that absolutely no one in Jesus's human audience needed Him to define what "wars" were. Nor did they need to have Him explain what fear-inducing rumor-mongering was. His timeless teaching!

Well, then, how about words from about three thousand years ago, when King Solomon gave this counsel in the book of Ecclesiastes…

"Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.

"Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all. For man does not know his time…" (Ecclesiastes 9:9-12a)

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Hey, there's a whole lot of solid truth in Solomon's words for his time and place. Like the phrases "time and chance happen to them all"…and "man does not know his time." Yeah, words good for all of us today to ponder!

But it's quite clear that Solomon offers very little hope in this passage. He bluntly states that there is not work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol"—and that word "Sheol" is largely understood as meaning "grave" or "pit," understood as a dark place, perhaps underground. Talk about bleak, being cut off at the end of life on earth! But wait, there's even more misery from his vantage point—Solomon portrays life as often unfair—at least in affairs of swiftness, strength, wisdom, intelligence, and knowledge.

So, how do we as New Covenant Christians respond to these things? Well, there are at least three promises of God that we can anchor ourselves in—and, just as important, promises that we can use to spur ourselves into fruitful action.

First, *the assurance in the definitive finality of Christ's victory at the Cross*! Jesus said, "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) Add to that His profound words on the Cross: "It is finished." (John 19:30)

Second, *the assurance that God cares about the "dailyness" of our individual lives*. Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." Yes, believers are to align with God's great purposes, yeah, what He cares about!

Third is *the assurance that the work we each do in this life really does matter*—both to bring comfort now and to bear fruit eternally! You see, as believers, every action we take in this life matters to God. In fact, it matters so much that each of us will be judged for all our actions at the Judgment Seat of Christ, for good or for ill, either for His rewards or for His burning up! (1 Corinthians 3:9-16)

The fact is, God wants us so aligned with Him that we specifically work to go forth and make disciples of Christ in all nations (Matthew 28:18-20). That means our trust in the crucified Christ is not to be unilaterally focused on our already attaining heaven by His sacrifice for us on the Cross, but on what He wants us to do each and every day to assist in our roles on behalf of His Kingdom purposes, whether we are a butcher, a baker, or a candlestick maker! Yeah, and a pastor or a stay-at-home parent, too! Yes, representing Christ faithfully, day in and day out, we are to labor with great expectations of bearing fruit!

Along those lines, Paul hits the target directly when he wrote this to the Corinthians: "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." (1 Corinthians 15:58)

That's right…*whatever you do*...in word and deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him"…! (Colossians 3:17) Then, Paul added to that, just a few verses later in Colossians 3:23-24. *"Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ."*

Here's the thing. Every work we do after our salvation by God's grace will be judged by Christ…*and that is really good news!* Our lives have real purpose in every sphere we inhabit: our family, our workplace, our neighborhood, our city, indeed the whole world! As Paul wrote, we are to "work heartily" in each of these spheres, joyfully and full of peace, even as the world's worries and happenings might relentlessly press in.

If you've been around American churches very long, sooner or later you'll hear someone say something like this: "Fred is so heavenly minded that he's no earthly good!" But the truth is, there is no conflict in God's true economy: whatever believers do, *when we work heartily as for the Lord, we will be serving God's purposes as to both heaven and earth!*

Now that's crazy good!

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A&A: Application & Action

1. How about the assurances both that God's already completely victorious on our behalf *and* that whatever we do on earth each day really matters. Do you routinely stand well on those assurances? Discuss.

2. No matter what large, uncontrollable uncertainties and tough seasons of life are encountered, do you find it easily reachable to "work heartily as for the Lord, not for men," as Paul exhorted the Colossians? Discuss.

3. What about yesterday's toil? Did you operate *fully* and *joyfully* as to "whatever you do"…indeed, working heartily as for the Lord? Discuss.

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