

Call to Obedience #294
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Is it 9/11 or 8/28? By Reimar Schultze

I Just Can't Take It Anymore!

A few days ago, I ran across a little gospel tract by the Canadian Revival Fellowship entitled *Living above Our Circumstances*. It gave me inspiration for this article.

Let me begin by asking if you have ever used any of these phrases?

"Under the present circumstances..."

"The circumstances being as they are, we have no choice but to..."

"I am getting along fairly well, considering the circumstances..."

I believe that most, if not all, of us have employed one or several of these phrases. But should we ever have done so? Should any of your circumstances ever set the stage for your emotional feelings or control your life? Is that what God wants? Is that his prescription?

I believe that the mind-set, attitudes, and countenances we see on people entering the church sanctuary on Sundays have the word "circumstance" written all over them. You can just about read whether people, as they settle down in the pews, have been in circumstances or in the work and will of God throughout the week. You can tell whether their smiles and praises are plastic and hollow or real. So many Christians bring their circumstances to church with them. They worship with them. They pray with them. They sing with them. They tithe with them. They listen to the sermon with their circumstances written all over their hearts and minds. Indeed, it is not too far-fetched to say: circumstance goes to church with most of us each Sunday. It goes with us into the choir, it goes with us into the Sunday school, it gets into the board meeting, and it definitely gets into our conversations with one another after the church service is over. *Unfortunately, the main subject of most after-church conversations is about circumstances rather than the Word that was just preached.*

Circumstances steal the show over and over again. Circumstance is a thief. It robs us of fellowship with the Holy Spirit and with one another, and it robs us of the power of God working in us and through us effectually. It prevents us from edifying one another in the Lord.

If you have circumstances on your mind, you may hear with your physical ears, but your spiritual ears are closed. You may sing God's praises with your physical lips, but your spiritual lips are silent. If you have circumstances on your mind you are earthly-minded. The earth, earthly people, and carnal Christians operate by circumstance, ever looking at circumstance, ever judging by it, projecting by it, planning by it, operating by it. People whose minds are captured and imprisoned by circumstance shut out all the promises of God, the omniscience and the omnipotence of God.

We cannot walk with God with circumstances controlling our lives. As you read the Bible, you find the Lord saying:

"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before

you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off" (Is. 55:9–13).

It takes my breath away to read this. It makes me think of all the pain, discouragement, anxiety, worry and depression that burden people living in and with their circumstances, while God promises a higher and a better way.

God does not want us to be a prisoner of our circumstances. He provided a highway of joy, peace and fellowship. He invites us to sit with him in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph. 1:3; 2:6). Jesus came to make heavenly things our real circumstances, and not the things of the earth.

All of God's ways are above circumstance. All his thoughts are above our thoughts until we get in fellowship with him. If we believe in God, in his promises, in his sovereignty, we shall see God send refreshing rain on our circumstances. He can bring water out of the rock, he can make bread fall out of the sky, he can put a pillar of holy love into the midst of our camp, he can still storms, raise the dead, multiply bread and fishes, open prison doors, and turn sadness into joy. He can! He wants to take over your circumstance and BE your circumstance, and he will, if you just take your eyes off your self and your situations and look to him. Look and live! What are you looking at—God or circumstances? Are you looking at your marriage problems, your problems with your children, your finances, your health, or are you looking to him? The mood in most every church service is greatly influenced by what people are looking at and have been looking at all week.

Don't let circumstance determine your destiny, mold your future, regulate your behavior, or govern your conduct toward your husband, your wife, your children, your boss, your pastor or your church people. I have heard it said, "Pastor, you just don't understand my circumstances..." Indeed, often, we pastors don't understand your circumstances. Neither do you understand our circumstances, do you? Is it really that important that we understand each other's circumstances? Is it not more important that we know God, that we surrender to him, that we claim his promises and keep our eyes upon him, and that we love each other in spite of anyone's circumstances?

If you listen to two true saints of God as they meet, you will notice that circumstances are barely in the discussion, except to glorify God as he has overcome them in their lives. When you listen to carnal Christians, their focus is on their circumstances and trials, and God is seldom mentioned.

"Lord, I want to follow you, I want to be sanctified, but under the circumstances, I just can't get there because I just bought some land and I want to go see it. I just bought some oxen and I want to try them. I just got married and we have plans to go on a honeymoon, therefore I cannot come. My father is about to die, so therefore have me excused." (See Luke 14:16ff; 9:59–60.)

God has never let anybody excuse himself because of circumstances—never! He wants us to step out of our circumstances into his perfect and acceptable will, into his highway that has been predestined for us to walk on since even before the foundation of the world.

Someone has said: look at circumstances as you would look at a bed mattress—if you sleep under the mattress, you will be smothered and suffocated; if you sleep on top of your mattress, you will find rest. So, if you are living under your circumstances, you will be spiritually smothered and suffocated; but if, through God's help, you are living above your circumstances, you will find rest and restoration in Jesus. I would suggest that most all discouragement in the hearts of people is because they are sleeping under the mattress.

Two Bible stories will help us here. First, consider God's call for Israel to enter the Promised Land at Kadesh: Moses sent twelve men to spy out the land (Num. 13). He asked them to bring

back a factual, honest report. They were to discover whether the inhabitants were weak or strong, whether the land was good or bad, fat or lean. After forty days, the spies came back with their report. They told the truth about the good and the bad. They described the circumstances. There is nothing wrong with having an awareness of the circumstances. After all, you need to know how much money is in the bank, whether the roads are icy, whether to plant or to harvest. God does not want us to stick our heads in the sand and be ignorant. But a problem arose when ten of the spies did not continue on from the facts of the land to the facts of heaven, to the facts of the God they served. They tried to crawl under the mattress, ignoring the existence of God and his almighty power, rather than getting on top of it, acknowledging God in what he could do. What was wrong with them was not that they used the word “nevertheless,” but that they used it *against* themselves rather than *for* themselves. After having considered the facts of the obstacles, they put themselves under the mattress by saying, “Nevertheless, the people be too strong that dwell in the land,” rather than climbing up onto the mattress by saying, “Nevertheless, our God who brought us out of Egypt, who took us through the Red Sea on dry ground, who gave us bread from heaven and water out of the rock, is able to give us the victory.” Sad to say, only two spies—Caleb and Joshua—had a vision that God could take them above circumstances; but the people did not listen to them.

Oh, whatever the negative circumstances they found in the land, they had the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who from the beginning of time was never influenced by circumstance. God never bases any plans of his on circumstance, but always on his divine, sovereign will, always on that which he has foreordained for us from before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4–5; 2:10).

Are you getting this? Now look at a gospel story. In Matthew 14, Jesus asked the disciples to feed the multitude, so Philip looked at their resources—at their circumstances—to see what could be done with what was available. Do you see the parallel here with the Old Testament story of the twelve spies? Jesus wanted the same “nevertheless...” from Philip that he received from Caleb at Kadesh. He did not want a “nevertheless...” that would cause Philip to slip under the mattress but a “nevertheless...” that would cause him to rest on top of it.

Oh, my friend, can we get it into our hearts that circumstances don’t matter, but that only God matters? The disciples were tested, the spies were tested, you will be tested over and over. Look at the situations you are in and say, “Nevertheless, God...!” Once you grasp this principle—you can see it all through the Bible—sleeping on top of the mattress can be a way of life.

Now let’s look at something else that happened at Kadesh. After Caleb calmed the people, telling them to ignore the giants and the difficulties, the ten spies became even more adamant in refusing to enter the Promised Land. In their first report, they gave the facts, though only the facts of man. In their second report, they began to exaggerate the facts, the problems. In the first report, there were *some* giants; in the second report, *all* the people of the land were giants, and they saw themselves as grasshoppers compared to them. Leonard Hagstrom said that once we get into the negative, “The devil drops seeds of suspicion in the mind, and immediately, the imagination works overtime.”

If you are a factory worker, how many times in your mind have you lost your job? If you are a housewife, how many times have you buried your husband when he did not show up at the appointed time? If you are a pastor, is it possible that, in your imagination, you have lost more church people than ever walked into the front door of your sanctuary?

Dear ones, looking at circumstances without looking at God is of the devil. It makes us victims of our circumstances. And once a negative seed is allowed to settle into our minds, the devil will water it and cultivate it, and our spiritual life will be suffocated. Paul says that we have weapons by which we can cast “*down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself*

against the knowledge of God, and [cast] into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). Use these weapons.

Perhaps the first thing in that holy conquest is for you to do what Paul and Silas did when they found themselves in a maximum security prison. Humanly speaking, they were in an impossible and hopeless situation. At the midnight hour, they came up with a “nevertheless...” that put them on top of the mattress—they began to praise the Lord, and you know the rest of the story (Acts 16:25ff).

Now, getting to 9/11 and 8/28. 9/11 represents the disaster when two hijacked commercial airliners were flown into the two main towers of the World Trade Center in New York City on September 9, 2001, killing over 3000 people. 8/28 represents Romans 8:28: *“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”*

No matter how many 9/11s there may be ahead of us, if we love God with all our hearts, not a thousand 9/11s can ever destroy our 8/28 insurance policy of the precious fellowship of help and hope in the Lord Jesus. As long as we love God with all of our heart, mind, soul and strength, all will be well with us. So, no matter what, we can always live above circumstance. Remember, everywhere the dark clouds of circumstance look you in the eye, say, “Nevertheless, my God is able,” and sit down in heavenly places, and every 9/11 will become an 8/28. Hallelujah!

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