

“Time is Filled with Swift Transition...”

The old hymn, with lyrics penned by Jennie Wilson and the tune supplied by F.L. Eiland, is a favorite of many for its simple but powerful truths of reassurance, hope, and constancy. “Time is filled with swift transition; Naught of earth unmoved can stand. Build your hopes on things eternal; Hold to God’s unchanging hand. Trust in Him who will not leave you, Whatsoever years may bring; If by earthly friends forsaken, Still more closely to Him cling. Covet not this world’s vain riches, That so rapidly decay. Seek to gain the heavenly treasures; They will never pass away. When your journey is completed, If to God you have been true, Fair and bright the home in glory your enraptured soul will view. Hold to God’s unchanging hand! Hold to God’s unchanging hand! Build your hopes on things eternal; Hold to God’s unchanging hand!” (*sic*, Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs, p.312; Sumphonia Productions).

Seemingly written for 2020, actually both the lyrics and the music were written in 1904. Its relevance today may be indicative of the nature of time itself- that since beginning it has always been “filled with swift transition.” Certainly nothing “of earth” can stand unmoved by it. Though I’m sure that these words rang true in 1904, our current world is certainly no exception to them. Everything seems to change dramatically with each evening’s sinking twilight and each dawn’s new day. What was “true” and “normal” yesterday is vanished like vapor and replaced with “new truths” and “new normal” today. Indeed, the “transitions” are “swift” and striking....

- Those who were “earthly friends” (and even relatives) have divided and forsaken one another over ideologies, socio-political views, and what should be done about them.
- We’ve seen the “vain riches” of this world “rapidly decay” as jobs have vanished, careers cancelled, businesses bankrupted and boarded up, and life’s savings lost or looted.

We can mourn and lament these changes, longing for the way things used to be, or we can even be angry and fight to either promote or prevent them. But there are some truths, again revealed within this old hymn, that remain true and steadfast regardless:

- Hope must be built on “things eternal” rather than on people, or relationships with them, Luke 21:16-17; instead, we must “Trust in Him who will not leave you,” Hebrews 13:5;
- Hope must be built on “things eternal” rather than on earthly riches that “so rapidly decay;” instead, we must invest in “heavenly treasures” that “will never pass away,” Matthew 6:19-21; and,
- For our “enraptured soul” to see “fair and bright the home in glory,” we must complete the journey by remaining “true” to God, Hebrews 3:12-14.

With all that is going on in the world, is there a better time to “Hold to God’s unchanging hand” and look forward to that “fair and bright” home in glory? I think not! Please, put hope in “things eternal,” won’t you? (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)