

Thought for the Day 16th April - John Thew

Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. - James 4.13

'Rebecca' (not her real name) is a 'international worker' with an organisation we all know. For the last ten years she has been in Eurasia, on the staff of a commercial business teaching English. The business provides her a visa to stay and work, with the added bonus – the reason for being there – of opportunities to meet with students, be part of the local evangelical church and generally shine the light of the gospel in place that is, essentially, gospel poor.

In early March 2020 Rebecca wrote - "I guess the whole world has been impacted in some way, shape or form by this virus. It is certainly strange to be living at this time and seeing the way the world is shutting down. Some reports [of bad behaviour] from around the world are concerning and make me question our humanity. This should not surprise me as I know we are wretched beings. It is, however, a reminder for me to pray for people. Although people are capable of doing good and moral things, there is only One who purifies the heart.

"My school director wrote to us this week, assuring us that she and our boss are trying to stay on top of the latest news and requirements for our area and are making multiple back-up plans ... She urged us to stay calm and not panic as this is unhealthy and would, in fact, lower our immune system in case of any infection. Good point.



"However, in a time when it seems the world is full of panic and fear, I think there is an even greater reason to stay calm and not panic. As I just wrote this, I smiled to myself, looked up at the postcard on my wall and thought how some truths are always true. We know the One who is in charge. None of this has come as a surprise to Him. Why should we fear a virus when we know the King of the universe?"

"Either He will bring us through this safely and we will continue to serve him for years to come. Or he will bring us through this safely and we will not need to worry about anything ever again.

"That is not to say we will not have difficult times. However, in the very midst of difficult times we need to keep our eyes on Him. We should stay calm and cast our fears, our concerns, our stresses and our burdens on Him.

"As I see the fear in others' lives, I am thankful for His love, strength, wisdom and understanding. And I am thankful that even though I do not know the future, I know that He does. I do not need to panic.

"Let us ask that many will turn to Him at this time, that their fears will drive them to seek comfort in the One who has comfort to give."

Update from Rebecca, mid-March 2020 - "On Friday night I finished class [ready for a Monday return]. I had no idea how my plans would need to change.

On Saturday I received a phone call from my boss in England [with] the difficult decision to close our school. I'm not sure when the shock will wear off. We have had a couple of days of reminiscing, laughing, crying, sitting numbly, speculating about the future and trying to make plans. It is difficult to know what the future holds when all your plans get pulled out from under you.

"Obviously and thankfully, I know my final destination. I look forward to that day. However, the next ten days are a complete mystery to me at this stage. Will I find myself back in Australia? Will I find a way to stay here? At this stage, without a job my visa will run out, and legally I must leave. It is stressful, I won't lie. However, it is also a great blessing to know that He was not surprised by the Saturday phone call. He knows what He is doing, and he will have me where He wills. I can trust Him. That is great encouragement."

Update from Rebecca, late-March 2020 - "It has been a pretty big week, which is not yet over. I am able to stay here until the end of my visa, even though my school is no more. I am very thankful for all your prayers, encouragement and support. I am so thankful for the ways that He has been at work this week – in so many ways – through so many people. I still have some legal things to work out re my accommodation and registration, but this will hopefully finalise tomorrow." Rebecca also said that she has had several unexpected contacts – one with a colleague and two others with women living in her apartment block – that just seem like God-appointments. We watch this space.