

A man with glasses and a red polo shirt is speaking at a podium. A large white speech bubble graphic is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the text 'table talk' in a white, lowercase, serif font. The background is dark with some blue lighting.

table talk

3/22/26

How to Cross Fox River

Tim Dilena, pastor of Times Square Church, recently related one of my favorite stories about Abraham Lincoln and his journey to his first inauguration in D.C. The journey by train took several days, and the closer he got to Washington, the more it seemed the topic on everyone's mind was the possibility of Civil War. Would it really happen? Who would engage, and where would the campaigns be? How long would it last?

Lincoln did not want war - most American's didn't - but the political climate made hostilities a real possibility. His answer during one stop along the way is recorded as follows:

"Many years ago when I was a young lawyer and Illinois was little settled, excepting her southern border; I, with other lawyers, used to ride the circuit journeying with the judge from county-seat to county-seat in quest of business. Once, after a long spell of pouring rain, which had flooded the whole country transforming small creeks into rivers, we were often stopped by these swollen streams which we with difficulty crossed. Still ahead of us was Fox River, larger than all the rest, and we could not help saying to each other: 'If these streams give us so much trouble, how shall we get over Fox River?'"

Darkness fell before we had reached that stream, and we all stopped at a log tavern, had our horses put out, and resolved to pass the night. Here we were right glad to fall in with the Methodist Presiding Elder of the circuit, who rode it in all weather, knew all its ways, and could tell us all about Fox River. So, we all gathered around him and asked him if he knew about the crossing of Fox River. 'Oh, yes,' he replied, 'I know all about Fox River. I have crossed it often, and understand it well; but I have one fixed rule with regard to Fox River: I never cross it till I reach it.'

"I NEVER CROSS FOX RIVER UNTIL I REACH IT."

What a magnificent lesson - but also a lesson I have struggled with most of my life — "WHAT IF...?"

Thankfully, when I struggle with the "what ifs", I invariably wind up at Matthew 6:31-34:

"So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' These things dominate the thoughts of

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table talk

unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. "So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today.

Many times, I have shriveled my own faith by saying, "But what if this or that happens or something doesn't happen?" I end up being shamed by my own doubt, and I fail to enjoy everything God wants to do for me during the wait.

Both Zechariah the Priest and Mary of Nazareth were promised a child to bless their homes, and both births would be miraculous in nature. While God did what He had promised for both Joseph and Mary as well as Zechariah and Elizabeth, Mary accepted the promise, knowing that "no word of God is without the power to come true!" While she waited, she gave us one of the most beautiful songs in all of Scripture.

Zechariah doubted, and during his wait time he gave us...NOTHING. He was not even allowed to speak until his miracle son was born. I know from hard personal experience that waiting and having faith in the midst of impossibilities or even improbabilities is extremely difficult. Abraham and Sarah made a mega-mess of their lives by getting impatient and trying to do God's work for Him. We are still working through their mess today!

But what I have found in my meager and flawed existence is that God can be trusted. He is good, and everything He does is good (Psalm 107,118,119). He is faithful, even if I fail to be (2 Timothy 2:13).

So, what do we do now that we are becoming convinced of His faithfulness? We wait - and we do not dwell on the "if."

A disclaimer. There is nothing wrong with preparing for possibilities (insurance, savings, wise precautions, etc). When Jesus said "take no thought about these things (KJV)," we know the better translation is "do not worry unnecessarily." In the days of King James, people were known to have died from "taking thought." It meant they worried themselves into stroke, heart attack or early death from stress related causes. Don't cross the Fox River until you get to it! Today's trouble is enough for today.

I love you,
Pastor Stephen