

## AT THE OPENING GATES OF THE NEW YEAR

### Introduction

This is the time of year that men think about the coming of a new year. Many make resolutions that they promptly break, others manage to set new standards of behavior and stick with them, others are like the Garfield cartoon that I saw earlier this week. My son's favorite cartoon cat did not plan to make any New Year's resolutions because he said you can't improve on perfection. He was perfectly happy with himself just as he was. In the realm of spiritual well being that is a dangerous attitude but that is another subject for another day. When we face a new year there are a number of things that we should think about, and not just at the new year but other times as well.

#### **New experiences await us:**

Each year will bring new things, new times, new experiences to add to that which we have gained from years prior. When Israel came to Jordan to cross over into Canaan they had been wandering in the wilderness of Sinai for an entire generation. Their elders had rebelled against God at Kadesh in the wilderness of Paran and God punished them for their disobedience by allowing that entire generation to die before bringing them into Canaan. But when they did; it was an entirely new experience for them. They are prepared to cross the Jordan River and the ark of the covenant is to lead them:

**Joshua 3:4** "YET THERE SHALL BE A SPACE BETWEEN YOU AND IT, ABOUT TWO THOUSAND CUBITS BY MEASURE: COME NOT NEAR UNTO IT, THAT YE MAY KNOW THE WAY BY WHICH YE MUST GO: FOR YE HAVE NOT PASSED *this* WAY HERETOFORE."

And such is true of the new year to come. We have not passed this way before and we will see and experience new things. And there are some things that we need to remember. First of all the future is uncertain:

**James 4:14** "WHEREAS YE KNOW NOT WHAT *shall be* ON THE MORROW. FOR WHAT IS YOUR LIFE? IT IS EVEN A VAPOUR, THAT APPEARETH FOR A LITTLE TIME, AND THEN VANISHETH AWAY."

But we know that God is in our future because God is everlasting:

**Psalm 90:2** "BEFORE THE MOUNTAINS WERE BROUGHT FORTH, OR EVER THOU HADST FORMED THE EARTH AND THE WORLD, EVEN FROM EVERLASTING TO EVERLASTING, THOU *art* GOD."

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And we know through the words of inspiration given to the wise king Solomon that there will come a time for us to leave this earth.

“THEN SHALL THE DUST RETURN TO THE EARTH AS IT WAS; AND THE SPIRIT SHALL RETURN UNTO GOD WHO GAVE IT.” **Ecclesiastes 12:7**

And then that day will come in which we will be judged:

**Hebrews 9:27** “AND AS IT IS APPOINTED UNTO MEN ONCE TO DIE, BUT AFTER THIS THE JUDGMENT.”

And if that is one of the things that we experience during this new year, or if the time comes that God has run out of patience with the wicked world and brings it to an end we need to be prepared for whatever the year brings.

### **We are impressed with the thought of time.**

Men think that they have time. But what does the wisdom of the Holy Spirit tell us about our time?

**I Chronicles 29:15** “FOR WE ARE STRANGERS BEFORE THEE, AND SOJOURNERS, AS *were* ALL OUR FATHERS: OUR DAYS ON THE EARTH ARE AS A SHADOW, AND *there is* NONE ABIDING.”

Time means nothing to God because he invented it with the twenty-four hour day at the beginning of earth. So the Apostle can tell us truthfully:

**II Peter 3:8** "BUT, BELOVED, BE NOT IGNORANT OF THIS ONE THING, THAT ONE DAY *is* WITH THE LORD AS A THOUSAND YEARS, AND A THOUSAND YEARS AS ONE DAY."

But time is precious to us because we know that we have so little of it. The wisdom of the God tells us:

**Job 14:1-2** “MAN *that is* BORN OF A WOMAN IS OF FEW DAYS AND FULL OF TROUBLE. HE COMETH FORTH LIKE A FLOWER, AND IS CUT DOWN: HE FLEETH ALSO AS A SHADOW, AND CONTINUETH NOT.”

God even tells us how much time we might have, might have, not will have, some are given more and some are given less. In a psalm of Moses we're told:

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**Psalm 90:10** "THE DAYS OF OUR YEARS *are* THREESCORE YEARS AND TEN; AND IF BY REASON OF STRENGTH *they be* FOURSCORE YEARS, YET IS THEIR STRENGTH LABOUR AND SORROW; FOR IT IS SOON CUT OFF, AND WE FLY AWAY. So the Moses prays to God **v.12** "SO TEACH *us* TO NUMBER OUR DAYS, THAT WE MAY APPLY OUR HEARTS UNTO WISDOM."

We are to apply our hearts unto wisdom; wisdom that will cause us to prepare ourselves for when our time ends.

And then the great apostle to the Gentiles reminds us:

**Ephesians 5:15-16** "SEE THEN THAT YE WALK CIRCUMSPECTLY, NOT AS FOOLS BUT AS WISE, REDEEMING THE TIME, BECAUSE THE DAYS ARE EVIL."

We may have time and we may not; God has not promised us tomorrow, only today and perhaps even no more than this hour.

### **We need to take stock – a personal inventory:**

We can start with our blessings and I think that we will find that they are far more numerous than we may have first thought. How many have just sat down and counted all of the good things that have come our way over the years? And that is only the beginning. The greatest blessings of all are those that come from God. The Apostle Peter writes:

**II Peter 1:2-3** "GRACE AND PEACE BE MULTIPLIED UNTO YOU THROUGH THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD, AND OF JESUS OUR LORD, ACCORDING AS HIS DIVINE POWER HATH GIVEN UNTO US ALL THINGS THAT *pertain* UNTO LIFE AND GODLINESS, THROUGH THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIM THAT HATH CALLED US TO GLORY AND VIRTUE:"

As we continue to count we will find that we can praise God for his goodness just as David did in:

**Psalm 65:11** "THOU CROWNEST THE YEAR WITH THY GOODNESS; AND THY PATHS DROP FATNESS."

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And we have enjoyed the “GOODNESS” and “FATNESS”, the abundance given us by another year.

We need to take stock, a personal inventory of our work for the Lord. Like the old hymn says;

“There is much to do, there’s work on every hand,  
Hark! The cry for help comes ringing through the land  
Jesus calls for reapers, I must active be,  
What wilt thou O Master? Here am I send me.

When we talk about the work of the church we most often talk about personal evangelism, teaching Bible studies, mission work and things of that nature but there is much more that we need to consider. Many of them things that some in this congregation just do without thinking about it being the work of the church. Jesus said:

**Matthew 25:37-40** “THEN SHALL THE RIGHTEOUS ANSWER HIM, SAYING, LORD, WHEN SAW WE THEE AN HUNGRED, AND FED *thee*? OR THIRSTY, AND GAVE *thee* DRINK? WHEN SAW WE THEE A STRANGER, AND TOOK *thee* IN? OR NAKED, AND CLOTHED *thee*? OR WHEN SAW WE THEE SICK, OR IN PRISON, AND CAME UNTO THEE? AND THE KING SHALL ANSWER AND SAY UNTO THEM, VERILY I SAY UNTO YOU, INASMUCH AS YE HAVE DONE *it* UNTO ONE OF THE LEAST OF THESE MY BRETHREN, YE HAVE DONE *it* UNTO ME.”

Yes, we need to take stock, a personal inventory of our opportunities to do good to other men. This is frequently the first step in turning them to thinking about their eternal destiny. When they see our Christianity in action they will be much more likely to consider what we teach with out examples than what we teach with our words. But there seems to be many ways as well where we are failing. Our zeal, our commitment, even to be present in worship to God or to study his word just isn’t there.

### **Things to Lay Aside:**

As we reflect on the past year; there may be some things that we need to lay aside. We need to lay aside sin, its consequences and the troubles that we accumulate and frequently carry with us, even after we have repented of them and been forgiven. Many times these things weigh on us and prevent us from serving God as effectively as we can; just like the runner that is carrying weights on his feet. Following that tremendous chapter on faith the Holy Spirit through the Hebrew writer tells us:

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**Hebrews 12:1** "WHEREFORE SEEING WE ALSO ARE COMPASSED ABOUT WITH SO GREAT A CLOUD OF WITNESSES, LET US LAY ASIDE EVERY WEIGHT, AND THE SIN WHICH DOTHSO EASILY BESET **us**, AND LET US RUN WITH PATIENCE THE RACE THAT IS SET BEFORE US."

We should lay aside all those things that will make us enemies of the God who loves the souls of all mankind just like Peter says:

**I Peter 2:1** "WHEREFORE LAYING ASIDE ALL MALICE, AND ALL GUILE AND HYPOCRISIES, AND ENVIES AND ALL EVIL SPEAKING."

We need to lay aside anything that would make us half-hearted and lacks in our worship and service to God. We can't be like the church at Laodicea, lukewarm and half hearted in our worship and service to God. Jesus told them:

**Revelation 3:15-16** "I KNOW THY WORKS, THAT THOU ART NEITHER COLD NOR HOT: I WOULD THAT WERT COLD OR HOT. SO THEN BECAUSE THOU ART LUKEWARM, AND NEITHER COLD NOR HOT, I WILL SPUE THEE OUT OF MY MOUTH."

If we have allowed ourselves to become wrapped up in the world, it's pleasures and its allurements, we need to free ourselves from these things that will destroy our fellowship with God. Oh, but Satan makes sin look so good, we encounter things of the world every day that call us to follow them, and it's so easy to just go along. After all the easiest thing in the world to do is NOTHING! But we are warned the brother of our Lord this way:

**James 4:4** "YE ADULTERERS AND ADULTERESSES, KNOW YE NOT THAT THE FRIENDSHIP OF THE WORLD IS ENMITY WITH GOD? WHOSOEVER THEREFORE WILL BE A FRIEND OF THE WORLD IS THE ENEMY OF GOD."

Oh, many people would think that God through the pen of Brother James is being unkind, too harsh, too direct and would chastise us soundly for saying such things today but James is concerned. He doesn't want the world to make us God's enemy. The Apostle that Jesus loved records it this way:

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**I John 2:15-17** "LOVE NOT THE WORLD, NEITHER THE THINGS *that are* IN THE WORLD. IF ANY MAN LOVE THE WORLD, THE LOVE OF THE FATHER IS NOT IN HIM. FOR ALL THAT IS IN THE WORLD, THE LUST OF THE FLESH, AND THE LUST OF THE EYES, AND THE PRIDE OF LIFE, IS NOT OF THE FATHER, BUT IS OF THE WORLD. AND THE WORLD PASSETH AWAY, AND THE LUST THEREOF: BUT HE THAT DOETH THE WILL OF GOD ABIDETH FOR EVER."

We need to lay aside the things of this world that we have allowed to interfere with our spiritual well-being.

We need to lay aside sorrows and troubles. In the most sheltered life, storms and disappointments will come. Should we allow them to rule our lives, to absorb the energy that we should be spending working toward that eternal destiny with God? Oh, it is the nature of man to grieve when they have lost loves ones, or some major catastrophe occurs in their lives. Should we allow these things to permeate our lives and destroy our very being? No, they should be accepted, grieved over as much as is necessary, then put aside and the lessons learned become wings to our feet and not weights. Lay your troubles at the feet of our Lord; for as David wrote:

**Psalm 9:9** "THE **LORD** ALSO WILL BE A REFUGE FOR THE OPPRESSED, A REFUGE IN TIMES OF TROUBLE."

We need to lay aside all those things, anything that absorbs our energy and diverts our attention from that ultimate goal of living in eternity with God in heaven. Our heavenly home should be our focus, or goal, our destination when we leave this world. We should follow that purpose with the same kind of single mindedness that was exhibited by the merchant in:

**Matthew 13:45-46** "AGAIN, THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE UNTO A MERCHANT MAN, SEEKING GOODLY PEARLS: WHO WHEN HE HAD FOUND ONE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE, WENT AND SOLD ALL THAT HE HAD, AND BOUGHT IT."

He had a goal. His goal of owning the "PEARL OF GREAT PRICE" was the most important thing he could do with his life. And this is the object of Jesus parable. He spent all that he had to reach that goal – could heaven be worth anything less?

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### Resolutions:

Yes, we should make resolutions, we should determine purpose, we should set goals. We should make plans and then work to make those plans bear fruit. Good resolutions are necessary to grow and advance both morally and spiritually.

And yes, we will break them. Have we ever seen a baby start to try to walk without falling? But does that discourage them, sometimes, but not for long, they overcome it. It's like breaking our favorite drinking glass or our favorite coffee mug, we don't quit drinking water just because we broke our glass or our coffee just because we broke our mug. When we falter and break a resolution we respond the same way. Like the baby learning to walk, get up and go again.

We can resolve to make this a happy year. How do we do that? Let's look at the psalm of David that was sung as a new song:

**Psalm 144:15** "HAPPY *is that* PEOPLE, THAT IS IN SUCH A CASE: *yea*, HAPPY *is that* PEOPLE, WHOSE GOD IS THE LORD."

If we make the Lord our God, we will be happy.

We can resolve to improve ourselves:

**I Peter 2:2** "AS NEWBORN BABES, DESIRE THE SINCERE MILK OF THE WORD, THAT YE MAY GROW THEREBY:"

Or rather as most of us have already out grown that stage:

**II Timothy 2:15** "STUDY TO SHEW THYSELF APPROVED UNTO GOD, A WORKMAN THAT NEEDETH NOT TO BE ASHAMED, RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH."

We can resolve to become more like Christ in our ways, and our thinking as the Apostle Peter writes:

**I Peter 2:21** "FOR EVEN HEREUNTO WERE YE CALLED: BECAUSE CHRIST ALSO SUFFERED FOR US, LEAVING US AN EXAMPLE, THAT YE SHOULD FOLLOW HIS STEPS:"

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Oliver Cromwell, who was a British political and military leader, and freed England from the monarchy and created a republican form of government for a period of time wrote "If I cease to become better, I shall cease to be good." How true that is. If we neglect our spiritual wellbeing, if we do not fill our lives with good works, but allow ourselves to become idle then we put ourselves in danger of the judgment. The person who puts worldly things out of his or her life and then leaves it empty is in danger of falling into the trap that Peter speaks of in:

**II Peter 2:20** "FOR IF AFTER THEY HAVE ESCAPED THE POLLUTIONS OF THE WORLD THROUGH THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST, THEY ARE AGAIN ENTANGLED THEREIN, AND OVERCOME, THE LATTER END IS WORSE WITH THEM THAN THE BEGINNING."

Why? Because it will be harder to return to God each time we leave him and the longer we stay away the less likely we will ever return.

### **Resolve to read the Bible:**

The Apostle Paul wrote to his son in the faith:

**I Timothy 4:13** "TILL I COME, GIVE ATTENDANCE TO READING, TO EXHORTATION, TO DOCTRINE."

### **Resolve to pray every day:**

Paul writes to the brethren at Thessalonica simply that they should:

"PRAY WITHOUT CEASING." **I Thessalonians 5:17**

### **Determine to resist the devil:**

We should take great comfort in the words of James the brother of Jesus:

**James 4:7-8** "SUBMIT YOURSELVES THEREFORE TO GOD. RESIST THE DEVIL, AND HE WILL FLEE FROM YOU. DRAW NIGH TO GOD, AND HE WILL DRAW NIGH TO YOU. CLEANSE **your** HANDS, **ye** SINNERS; AND PURIFY **your** HEARTS, **ye** DOUBLE MINDED."



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### **Resolve to keep the peace:**

Keep the peace in your household, in your family, in the church by heeding the direction of the Holy Spirit in Paul's letter to the Romans:

**Romans 14:19** "LET US THEREFORE FOLLOW AFTER THE THINGS WHICH MAKE FOR PEACE, AND THINGS WHEREWITH ONE MAY EDIFY ANOTHER."

Jesus placed a special blessing on those who are peacemakers:

**Matthew 5:9** "BLESSED *are* THE PEACEMAKERS: FOR THEY SHALL BE CALLED THE CHILDREN OF GOD."

We must be peacemakers, because peacemakers are "CALLED THE CHILDREN OF GOD."

The wisdom of God as given to Solomon tells us this and identifies a frequent cause when the peace is broken:

**Proverbs 20:3** "IT IS AN HONOUR FOR A MAN TO CEASE FROM STRIFE: BUT EVERY FOOL WILL BE MEDDLING."

Peace is frequently destroyed by those who meddle.

David writes in his psalm concerning the joy of brotherhood:

"BEHOLD, HOW GOOD AND HOW PLEASANT *it is* FOR BRETHREN TO DWELL TOGETHER IN UNITY!" **Psalm 133:1**

### **Resolve to go forward:**

Our purpose in this life is to serve God:

**Ecclesiastes 12:13** "LET US HEAR THE CONCLUSION OF THE WHOLE MATTER: FEAR GOD, AND KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS: FOR THIS *is* THE WHOLE *duty* OF MAN."

And the next verse tells us why:

**Ecclesiastes 12:14** "FOR GOD SHALL BRING EVERY WORK INTO JUDGMENT, WITH EVERY SECRET THING, WHETHER *it be* GOOD, OR WHETHER *it be* EVIL."

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We must resolve to go forward toward that ultimate goal of heaven in eternity. Sometimes we lose our focus, sometimes we let the troubles and cares of this world interfere with our commitment to God. Sometimes we weaken and think, Oh, what's the use. Heaven is an impossible goal and when we reach that depth of despair we can know that Old Satan has us just where he wants us. Then we must draw up ourselves and continue the march forward pressing forward as Paul did:

**Philippians 3:13-14** "BRETHREN, I COUNT NOT MYSELF TO HAVE APPREHENDED: BUT *this* ONE THING *I do*, FORGETTING THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE BEHIND, AND REACHING FORTH UNTO THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE BEFORE, I PRESS TOWARD THE MARK FOR THE PRIZE OF THE HIGH CALLING OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS."

We can't afford spiritually to be placed among those whom Jesus described in:

**Luke 9:62** "AND JESUS SAID UNTO HIM, NO MAN, HAVING PUT HIS HAND TO THE PLOUGH, AND LOOKING BACK, IS FIT FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

We must never, ever, look back, desiring to return to our prior condition but always look forward toward that eternal goal; keeping ourselves focused on our eternal destination.

Invitation