

The New Year, Looking Forward.

Scripture:

Scripture Reading:

INTRO:

Well we have come to the last day of 2023, and the last Sunday of the year. And it is often in this time of year that we look back at all that things that have transpired in our lives over the past 12 months. Of the things we have done, places we have been and how things have changed from a year ago. Some of them bring happy memories, some of them sad. Some things we would like to do again, and some we wish would have never happened.

But as the old sayings of time go, time marches on and time waits for no one. And just like that it pushes us along out of one year and into the next.

And in knowing that, we know, we cannot change the past, we cannot go back and erase the bad things, nor relive the good ones, we can only look forward to another day, another week, another month, and starting tomorrow we have to look forward to another year.

Because before us lies the next 366 days of 2024... its leap year remember?

And in looking forward to that new year we may have the thoughts of what we will all want to achieve this year, of the New Year's resolutions we will make and probably not keep, of the holidays we will be planning once the summer months come, the places we will visit.

For some it will be the beginning of a new life that will be brought into this world, for others there is always the chance of letting one go.

For some it may be some new start in whatever they are working forward to in their life, and for some it may just be another year of mundane routine.

But in all these things, no matter where we are or what we are doing or what our outlook looks like, tomorrow will be here. And as the age old childhood game of hide and seek goes... 2024 says 'ready or not, here I come', and another year begins.

And as it comes, there is always one thing that should come to the minds of every Christian, and that is... will this be the year that the Lord will return?

Will this be the year that Jesus will come and take us up in the rapture? To change us from all of this corruption and from our mortal bodies, and transform us into His incorruption, and clothe us with His immortality and with that be caught up in the clouds, to meet Him in the air and be with Him always as Paul tells us in his letters.

Will this be the year that the promise of the rapture will be fulfilled, a year which the entire church age has been looking forward to for over 2000 years already?

We know we have to look forward to some of the unpleasant the earthly things of this life that come in the new year, such things as the Christmas credit card bills that will be arriving here shortly. Or maybe mortgage renewals that will need to be renewed with some new raised interest rates, or at the continued rise in the cost of living that has become a little ridiculous over the past few years. Or perhaps even the problems of life that just roll over from one year to the next, never being resolved or taken care of.

And even though all of these earthly things of the New Year can perhaps bring us low, and cause us to look down... there should be that one thing that should always keep us looking up. Looking to the heavens in thinking... Lord is this the year you are coming to take your church home?

Is this the year that we will hear the trumpet of God will sound out all over the world and that in a twinkling of an eye, as I said earlier, we will be caught up into the clouds to meet our Lord. I hope it is something you are looking forward too.

I hope that no matter what great and expectant things that you looking forward to in this coming year, I hope that this is one event that trumps all of them, to be taken out of this sinful wicked world and be with the Lord.

And also, if you are look forward to 2024 with dread, of the heavy things you will have to face, of the hardships that you know will come, and I don't just mean credit card bills, but real hardship things that are coming, are you also anticipating that perhaps this year will be that year where all your hardships could end? That this year will be the year of the rapture, that year of release, that year of jubilee, that it is the one and only great thing that you are hoping for in the coming year?

I hope you are, I hope that no matter if you are expecting that this year may be the best year of your life, or if you are expecting that this year may be the worst year of your life, I hope that as a Christian you are looking and longing that this year is the year that the Lord would return to take His children home.

Because as Christians we do have the most blessed future to look forward too.

Not only do we look forward to a new day tomorrow, at the start of a new year with all its possibilities of the good and bad things to come, but we are looking forward to something much better and more meaningful, and that is looking forward to the kingdom of God that is coming. And it begins with looking forward in hope to the rapture for the Christian.

We have such a great hope that is before us that Paul says in Romans 8:18;

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

And why is this present life not even worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed in us? Well, the previous verses of verses 16 and 17 of the same chapter say;

16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,

17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

And that glory will be such a great and wonderful and awesome glory that as Paul says an entire lifetime of suffering is not even worthy to be compared to it. Think of it, if you put all your earthly sufferings on one end of a scale, and the glory which shall be revealed in us on the other end, listen Paul says it is not worthy to compare. He's implying you can't even put them on the same scale.

Are you looking up, or are you hanging your head low and comparing the sufferings of this world to what is to come, because you think this promise seem too far away from you right now, too out of reach? Listen they are not far away, and they are not out of reach... when we look at the world and compare it to the scriptures, listen that glory of Jesus could be here in the very next minute, in fact the very next second Jesus could come, and the rapture could be here!

(pause)

...ok maybe God has given me enough time to finish the message.

But the thinking is that no matter what we may face in life it doesn't even count with what is coming, rather, that we would join in with the words of Job as he says;

For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth;

26 And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God,

27 Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!

No matter if we are looking forward to the New Year with excitement and joy, or with doom and gloom, there is still something we can look forward to something that is better than all the good we see around us and it is way better than any of this bad we may be going through. And that is looking forward in the coming of Jesus, in waiting for the rapture but not only for the rapture but also looking forward to the coming kingdom of God.

Yes I will cover some parts of this kingdom when I conclude the first half of the 'works of the flesh and fruits of the Spirit' series.

But today's message is one, that is to remind us to keep looking forward, keep looking to the heavens, keep looking to the day that we

will be caught up into the clouds to be with the Lord, keep looking and longing for that long awaited kingdom that is mentioned all over scripture and not be weighed down with the cares of this life.

Yes in the past months, I have been telling you to look into your heart, in exposing the seeds of sin and the beginnings of the works of the flesh that are in there. And that is often difficult, unpleasant, and even discouraging to what we may find. But for today for this new year's message I want to fill your hearts with the encouragement, of not looking down, and not looking into our hearts, which Jeremiah says is 'desperately wicked' anyway, and not to look to our surroundings of this life.

But that today, you would look up, look up and know that there is someone coming who will take away all our sorrow and take away all of our suffering. All our pain and all of the hard things we are facing in this life. And that it will be so good that as Paul says, that the sufferings of this present time are not even worthy to be compared to the glory that Jesus will reveal in us.

Remember He is coming not only to take us out of this corrupted and sinful world but to a home, and to a kingdom, a kingdom that this world has never seen or experienced and will be unlike anything mankind has ever known or imagined.

And perhaps this year will be that year, the year that Christians of the entire church age has waited and longed for.

Because not only are we as Paul says in Titus 2:13 that we are;

...looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,

But also as John says in Revelation 20:6;

but that we shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

Reign with Him in that perfect Kingdom of God as priests and rulers with Jesus Christ.

And so I want to encourage you in this New Year message with the hope that lies before us, a hope that could be fulfilled at any moment, and a kingdom that could be here within 7 years of today.

And in knowing that, and believing the word of God, we would then be as Peter says in 1 Peter 1:13 to;

...gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

Peter says we are to pull up the bootstraps of our minds, tighten the belt of your thinking, and be sober about the hope that is in you, about the glory that is to be revealed in you when Jesus comes. To rest your hope fully on the grace that is coming to us, and listen, you can't do that by looking down, you can't do that if your mind is being occupied with the cares of this world... no you have to look up.

We are not to be as those of whom Paul talks about in 1

Thessalonians 4:13 where he says;

But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.

Because we have a hope, we have a promise, we have a promise that is far better, and greater than anything we could ever imagine or think of in this lifetime. And why do we have such hope, why do we have such an outlook that keeps us looking up, such a wonderful promise that keeps us looking forward, it is because we have the word of God. Even if we come to a place in life where we may feel that there is no purpose or reason in life to go forward. That the worries and cares of this life have become too great for us to bear, listen, the promises and hope God gives us in His word is sure and steady as God Himself.

Just as Jesus says in Matthew 24 verse 35;

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

And as 1 Peter 1:25 says;

the word of the LORD endures forever."

Yes there are things in our life and in this world that can make us sad, and have us look down, but there are more things in God's word that should give us joy and have us look up no matter what sadness this world may bring.

So instead of looking at your surroundings of life, or to the darkness of your hearts, I want you to look up, look up, not just to another year, or a new beginning of something in our life, but to look up because we have one of the greatest reasons in this entire world to be looking up and that is because of who our God is and what He has promised.

And I says that because our hope and outlook into the future is not just some pipe dream or some imaginary wish, no it is solely based on God's Word, if we believe it. And I'm not only saying these things to give you a message that makes you feel good about your future and the hope we are looking forward to.

But that I also show you why we are look forward to the future and why we have the hope we are looking forward to.

If you only want to feel good, they make pills for that, if you want to know why you can and should feel good about your future, well that comes in the form of learning and believing and trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ and His word.

Because it is His word that is to be the foundation of our hope, the root of our joy, our blessed outlook to the future in believing the promises of God as our guide and His word as our rock.

Such things as joy and peace I will cover more in depth when we go through the fruits of the Spirit messages. But every day of our life there is to be a joy and peace and hope that we have in living for Jesus, no matter what we encounter in our life or what circumstances we find ourselves in.

No matter what the devil may tempt us with, or hinder us with, we should know that we have such truth in our hands, in the word of God that we should never let the cares of this world or the tactics of the devil cause us to stumble or look down.

Yes we can have sadness in this life, and there are things that cause us to look down but we should always remember as God's word says they can't even be compared to what is coming.

If we could take instruction from Isaiah chapter 35 verses 3 and 4 it says;

Strengthen the weak hands, And make firm the feeble knees.

4 Say to those who are fearful-hearted, "Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, With the recompense of God; He will come and save you."

We have such a tremendous and wonderful words of God right here in our hands, that it should carry any believer through anything this world can throw at us. To know that my faith, my hope, my joy can never be shaken by the bad things of this world because of what we find in the word of God.

As Hebrews chapter 11 starting in verse 35 it says;

...do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward.

36 For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:

37 "For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry.

38 Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him."

39 But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.

We are not of those who draw back, we are not of those who think that this next year will be too hard for me... too hard for God, no, we live by faith, God tells us to strengthen our hands and knees, be strong and do not fear, no matter what this world has in store for you. You are to look forward, not of your own strength but through faith lay hold of the strength of Christ and be steadfast in your walk.

Now you may say to me, pastor you just don't know what I am going through, you don't know how hard it is for me to live in this thing I'm going through. You have no idea what it feels like to be where I am in my life, to which I would say, you are right, you may be absolutely right, I don't know, I probably have no idea or clue what you are facing in your life right now, but you know what, I know someone who does.

I know someone who does know and I know that He knows exactly what you are going through, he knows all the pain you are feeling, and he knows all of the suffering you have now and even all that is coming to you on your horizon.

And He is telling you, not suggesting you, listen he is telling you; do not cast away your confidence in the Lord, but that you are to strengthen the weak hands, make firm the feeble knees, for He knows you have need of endurance and you are to live by faith.

There is nothing in your life that the Lord Jesus Christ does not know about right now, He is there with you this very moment, and every moment you feel alone. And not only that but as a Christian you have the Holy Spirit is living inside of you, guiding you, directing you by His word in all things. Remember Jesus said in John chapter 14;

16 "And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—

17 "the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.

18 "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.

this

26 ...Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

27 "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

Are those not words that should lift up any believer who is looking down? Any believer who is troubled with the cares of this life? Jesus knows everything you are going through right now, and wants you to trust in Him, why else are the scriptures filled with the questions about the believer saying;

Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me?

"Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?"

why are you anxious

why are you weeping?

It asks these things because the Lord knows why you are cast down, the Lord knows why you are fearful, why you are anxious and weeping. He knows all of these things even before you come to them, and He wants us to know that he knows, for He tells us Let not your

heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. If you are looking forward to this New Year with doom and gloom, then take your eyes of this world and look to Jesus, look to the one who knows all the things you are going through, and not only knows all of them, but has all the words to comfort you and heal you.

Oswald Chambers who wrote during the First World War writes this in his book 'Baffled to Fight Better' and remember he is writing in a time when many had already lost loved ones and this world was in one of the darkest times of human history. He writes this;

There are people today who are going through an onslaught of destruction that paralyses all our platitudes and preaching; the only thing that will bring relief is the consolations of Christ, it is a good thing to feel our own powerlessness in the face of destruction, it makes us know how much we depend upon God. In these days the outstanding marvel is the way mothers and wives have gone through sorrow, not callously, but with an extraordinary sense of hopefulness. On thing the way has done is to knock on the heads of all such shallow optimism as telling people to 'look in the brighter side of things' or that 'every cloud has a silver lining' there are some clouds that are black all through.

Still quoting he says

The bible reveals that the basis of things is not reasonable, but tragic. When a man is driven to the bottom, he gets to the tragedy, not to the reason; he is alone with God and if God does not see him through, despair is the only place for him.

EOQ

Listen if we do not allow God to take control of our life, if we do not put our faith in to His hands, and allow Him to lead and guide allow the love of Jesus to comfort us, then despair is the only place we will come to.

As Oswald Chambers speaks of Job, about the sufferings Job endured, and about trusting God he says in the same book;

If God does not see Job through, Satan has won his wager; if God does not come on the scene somewhere, it is a forlorn hope and Satan will have proved that no one loves God for His own sake.

EOQ

You see it is by our faith in God, our trust in God, our life in God that gives us victory over the things of this world, and it is the looking forward to our glorious catching up and that holy kingdom that is coming that should keep us looking up to Jesus.

You see it is the Jesus who read from scripture referring to himself in Luke 4 verse 18 when he read the book of Isaiah saying;

"The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed;

And then said;

"Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

He has preached the gospel, He has healed the brokenhearted, He has given liberty to those who are bound in sin, and He has given us sight to see the goodness we can have in Him.

It is the Lord who says in Jeremiah 23 verse 29;

"Is not My word like a fire?"..."And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?"

Is it not Jesus who said in John 8:51;

if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death."

And then also in chapter 14:23

"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.

And then Paul says in Romans chapter 1 verse 16;

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

We have such a treasure in the word of God that any Christian should never be fearful or dreadful of the coming year, Jesus says in John chapter 5 verse 24 and 25;

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.

25 "Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live.

And when we read such verses, we need to ask ourselves why are we cast down, why are we fearful, why are we anxious, why are we weeping, and why are there things in your life that give you fear? And why are there things in your life that have left you powerless? Remember 1 Peter 1:13 says;

...gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

And not only that, listen to Paul's opening verses of 1 Corinthians;

Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,

2 To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:

3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

4 I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus,

5 that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge,

6 even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you,

7 so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

8 who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

God is faithful,

...God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

Listen no matter what you may be facing in life, there is a blessed future coming for those who wait upon the Lord, for those who trust in the Lord, for those who put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and with knowing that, I have to ask myself am I focused on Christ or am I focused on the struggles of my life?

Am I looking to the problems that come from the world, or am I looking to the promise and coming of my God? We all know the verse that says;

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding;

and

that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

Are you allowing our great and powerful God to lift you up? Are you allowing His words to give you strength? Are you looking forward to this new year with the dread of the bad things that will come, or even with the pleasures you are looking forward to, or are you looking forward to this new year knowing that Jesus will be with me through every step of the way not matter what may come, and that you will look for that blessed coming of our Lord. And wait patiently for the kingdom that follows.

Tomorrow there is coming a new day, a new month a new year, and the question is ‘how am I going to start it’. Am I going to be like those of whom Paul talks about in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 where he says;

...lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.

Or am I going to do what Peter tells us when he says;

...gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

And we do this, because we know that God is good, His ways are pure, His promises are everlasting, just as Hebrews 6:16 says;

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Listen if you catch yourself look down and are burdened with a load of cares, look up to Jesus, look to the one who can and will see you through, as Oswald Chambers said; The bible reveals that the basis of things is not reasonable, but tragic. When a man is driven to the bottom, he gets to tragedy, not to the reason; he is alone with God and if God does not see him through, despair is the only place for him.

Listen if you find yourself in that place of despair, look to God, turn to God, all the happy and helpful words of any preacher won't mean anything unless you get alone with God and allow Him to see you through. Strengthen the weak hands, And make firm the feeble knees. "Be strong, do not fear! For behold, your God will come and save you."

Listen if you only want something to make you feel good, they make pills for that, if you want to know why you can and should feel good, go to God's word, go to the bible, and remember that there is nothing Jesus does not know about your life or the things you are going through. Yes some clouds are black through and through but there is someone greater than the clouds, there is someone greater than your sorrow, there is someone greater than all the problems you may face in this world, and He is right next to you, waiting to lead you through all of it... if you let Him, if you look to Him.

As Paul said to the Corinthians in his first letter chapter 1 verse 18;

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

If you find yourself looking down, to the cares of this life at the start of this year, or even if you are anticipating the best year of your life this year, let all of us continue to look up and look for the coming of our Lord in the clouds, continue to look forward to the kingdom that is coming, look to the bible for comfort and direction. And allow our Lord Jesus Christ to lead us.

And so as we conclude, as we enter this new year let us look forward with the question, could this be the year of our rapture, could this be the year of Christ's return, could this year be the year that Christians have been waiting for since the time of the apostles.

As Paul said to the Thessalonians;

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.

16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

And I want to comfort you with these words, that we shall be caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and forever be together with Him from that time onward.

And listen, the suffering you may be experiencing right now even though it may be like that for the rest of your life... it cannot even be compared to the glory we will share with Jesus from that glorious moment onward. Do you believe this... or do you think He is not able? He is able, and since He is able let us continue to look up and look forward in faith to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in the coming New Year.