

01/01/12

## Celebrating the New Year Well

- Happy New Year...it's very unusual to have a year like this one, where Christmas and New Year's Day fall on Sundays...I realize that if one does, then the other does too...but with leap years and how that affects the calendar...I suppose there's only a handful of times in a pastor's entire ministry that I have the privilege of speaking on New Year's Day...and honestly there's a lot about that that I like...
  - for at least two reasons...
    1. God is the one who invented the concept of "new"...and so it's not surprising that we see this theme woven intimately into what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ...and a day like this gives us a special opportunity to think about that theme...
    2. This is a great time of year to do strategic planning...and I'm sure there will be some folks here who will say under their breath – Steve, you think every day is a great day to do strategic, and there's probably some truth in that...but today is an especially good day to do strategic planning... (unusually so...an extraordinary opportunity really...)
- so we're talking this morning about **Celebrating the New Year Well**...
- this morning we want to talk about **3 ways to benefit from New Year's Day coinciding with the Lord's Day**...
- for starters, let me invite you to open your Bible to Psalm chapter 40...page 409 of the front section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...
- we're going to be looking at a number of passages of Scripture this morning and for simplicity we'll have many of them on the screen...but this is one of our favorites when it comes to the topic of newness for sure...
- The Psalm is written by King David and like many of the Psalms, we're not entirely sure of the historical background...
  - but sometimes we can make educated guesses...
  - and we can almost always relate to the themes that the Psalmist discusses and make practical applications to where we're living today...
- read Psalm 40:1-3...
- so, three ways to benefit from New Year's Day coinciding with the Lord's Day...

### I. Reflect on the Newness that is Ours in Christ

#### A. We have a new foundation.

- David begins this discussion by talking about how God brought him out of the pit of destruction...out of the miry clay...and set his feet upon a rock and established His goings...
  - **Psalm 40:2 - He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay, And He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm.**
  - we can all relate to that, can't we...where we felt like we were mired down...or sinking fast...
    - but as soon as you trust Christ as Savior and Lord...you receive something new...
    - a foundation that is solid and reliable...
    - that theme is sprinkled all over the New Testament in places like...
- **Matthew 7:24-29 - Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and**

**yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall. When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.**

- when's the last time you thanked God for the new foundation you received when you came to Christ?...
- New Year's Day would be a great opportunity to do that...we could say with the Psalmist...
- **Psalm 95:1 - O come, let us sing for joy to the LORD, Let us shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation.**
- or, **Psalm 18:2 - The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.**
- I hope there's been a definite time in your life when you trusted Christ as your Savior and Lord...because there's nothing more important than having a foundation that's new...
- did you see what else David emphasized in this Psalm?...perhaps we could summarize it like this...

#### **B. We have a new outlook.**

- **Psalm 40:3 - He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God; Many will see and fear and will trust in the LORD.**
- and you understand that the emphasis here isn't that he learned some new lyrics or a new tune...this isn't speaking about a literal song...
- it's a new way of thinking about life...a fresh perspective...a new set of eyes...
- and many people who will hear this message today would say...you know, living for myself got old...really old...
  - and then when I trusted Christ – and I started looking at life through the lens of loving and serving others---it turned my life around...
  - I have a new song in my mouth – not praise to me and organizing my life around my wants and goals – but praise to God and organizing my life around His desires...
- think about how many people in our church family will be able to say this Christmas season – before I would have never thought about taking my hard earned money and buying Christmas gifts for complete strangers...or people I'll never even meet in this life – but after coming to Christ I have a new outlook...
- or I would have never been willing to give up a weekend during my busy Christmas season to work in an outside outreach like the Living Nativity...but I did it this year, and I loved it...
  - and as a result of that new outlook, the last part of the verse literally came true for some in our church family...
  - many saw it (not because people were trying to draw attention to themselves...but people can't help but noticing), so many saw it, and feared and trusted in the Lord...
  - and that means that some folks will be starting the new year with the joy and satisfaction that their new outlook on life was used by the Lord to draw someone else to Himself...how cool is that?
- today can also cause us to rejoice because...

#### **C. We have access to new mercy.**

- when I began talking about things that are new, many of you probably thought of this particular verse...

**- Lamentations 3:22-23 - It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.**

- can you imagine how old it would get to try to make life work apart from a personal relationship with God?...
- where you're trying to handle the struggles and trials of life with your own wisdom?...
- or trying to please God and earn His favor in your own strength...
- that would be absolutely exhausting...
- but in Christ we can have a fresh batch of mercy every morning...a fresh batch of compassion and faithfulness...
- the older we get, the more we understand the first part of that passage...
  - it's because of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed...if it's up to us, and our perfection and our power, we're in big trouble...
  - that's why we need mercy that is new...every morning...

- so a new foundation, and a new outlook, and new mercy...what else could we add to the list?..

#### **D. We have new potential for change.**

- surely that's one of the major aspects of this theme in Scripture...you can have new life in Christ...
- **2 Corinthians 5:17 - Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.**
- the grammar in this verse indicates that this newness is a perpetual state of fact...
- it's not the kind of new that is eventually going to wear out...it's a perpetual newness...meaning that we can always have hope for change in this life...
- that's why Paul said in Ephesians 4...
- **Ephesians 4:22-24 - that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of God* has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.**
- that's both a state – it occurs positionally the moment you trust Christ...and it's an ongoing process as you identify areas that don't please God and put them to death, and then replace them with thoughts and actions that are more like Christ...
- that's something else I would encourage every person to do today – to take a few moments and review this past year and think about the ways you've changed to become more pleasing to God...I hope you can list specific ways that's true...and then thank the Lord for the new life we can enjoy in Him...
- one of the songs I heard for the first time this year emphasizes that same theme...  
You Make Beautiful Things

- another theme we have to mention, especially in light of that last one and how it actually occurs is...

#### **E. We have a new love for God's Word.**

- the more you come to know and understand your Bible, the more you realize that part of the framework or skeleton on which much of the Scripture hangs is the biblical covenants...
- the Noahic covenant in Genesis 9, and the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 12 and 15 (which was subsequently repeated to Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph), and the Davidic

Covenant in 2 Samuel 7...and then there's...anyone want to guess based on what we're talking about today?...

- the new covenant in Jeremiah 31...
- and part of that promise includes... **Jeremiah 31:31-33** - **“Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.**
- we believe this covenant will be completely fulfilled in the millennial kingdom sometime in the future...however, we also believe we are experiencing and enjoying certain aspects of the covenant now because we are personally related to the King...
- that is why Jesus instructed us to observe the Lord's table in part with the words... **1 Corinthians 11:25** - **In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.”**
- there's all sorts of ways we could tease out that theme – because the new covenant is an important topic in Scripture...but for sake of time – please lock onto what God said in Jeremiah would be one of the essential aspects of the new covenant...that He would write His law on our hearts...
  - giving us the ability and the desire to both understand and apply Scripture...
  - we know now from our vantage as NT believers how that is made possible...through the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit...
  - that's why Paul said earlier in 1 Corinthians that **1 Corinthians 2:12-13** - **Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*.**
  - you may have also noticed that emphasis earlier when we read the “not building your life on sinking sand” verses...
  - what marked a person who was building his life on a rock was **Matthew 7:24-25** - **Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock.**
  - the secret to all of that is the “acts on them” part...the ability to do that is new – it only comes through the power of the Spirit of God...
- now, that's a whirlwind tour of that subject – but the point is – New Year's Day is a great opportunity to reflect on the many aspects of the newness that we enjoy in Christ...and to thank the Lord for those truths...and look at the coming year with enthusiasm and hope...we have special reasons to say in our hearts, Happy New Years...

- now, how else can we benefit from New Year's Day coinciding with the Lord's Day?...

## II. Make Plans Now to Use the New Year Wisely.

- I think I like football as much as the next person, but I've always believed that this time of year is the perfect opportunity to do individual and church strategic planning...
- and please keep this in mind – God is the one who designed us with a linear existence...

- so days and weeks and months and years are all part of His creative design...
- and He knew that this kind of newness in our calendars, whether humans had a literal calendar or not, could be helpful to us...
- so what kind of plans can and perhaps should you be making right now?...

**A. Review and update your personal and family mission statements.**

- when's the last time you thought about that?...
- why did God put you on His earth?...what's His purpose for you and are you living in light of that purpose?...
- and there's not just one way to think about that, but you might want to consider our church's planning documents as a starting place or a guide...
- **The mission of Faith Church is to glorify God by winning people to Jesus Christ and equipping them to be more faithful disciples.**
- by the way, if you've never gone through that exercise before – I or one of the other pastors would be happy to help you write out your own statements – your deacon would be happy to do that as well – we could do that by e-mail or whatever method worked best for you...
- but New Year's is a great time to think about that...

**B. Write out the core values for yourself and your family.**

- it won't be long at all and we'll be busy with all sorts of activities for 2012...who would have ever believed that...
- but how are you going to decide what you should do and what you should avoid?...
- we've said it many times – it's easy to be busy but it's hard to be effective...
- effectiveness comes through identifying your core values and then structuring your schedule in a way that is consistent with what God says should be important to you...
- but if you haven't thought through your values, inadvertently you get busy with things that really aren't going to matter 5 years from now, or 10, or whatever...

**C. Establish your personal and family initiatives (specific goals, action steps, and target dates) for 2012.**

- in each of these core value areas, what do you believe God wants you to specifically accomplish?...
- a year from now, how are you going to know whether 2012 was spent productively or not?
- if you'd like some samples of what that might look like...you could go on-line and look at the 2012 initiative for each of our staff members...
- it's a long document (145 pages?), and it's done from a ministry perspective...but it might be helpful as you seek to think through what God wants you and your family to do in the next 12 months...
- and just like I said for the other areas – if you want to talk this through via e-mail or some other method, feel free to ask one of our pastors or deacons—we would be delighted to work on this with you...
- I mentioned at the Christmas Eve service that I had just returned from conducting the memorial service for my great aunt down in Southwest Virginia...
- my grandmother was in a family of 16 brothers and sisters who grew up on a little farm in the mountains...

- my great grandfather used to say that if you didn't have a plan for what you were going to do the next day, you probably weren't going to accomplish what you should...
- it's also interesting that my dad's memory of my great grandpa was him taking the red kerosene lantern up to the church house on Saturday night...
  - I would love to know the relationship between his faith in Christ and his emphasis on productivity and industriousness...
- now, I realize right about now you might be wondering how happy a new year this is really going to be...but let me also encourage you...

#### **D. Review and adjust your long term savings accounts.**

- **Proverbs 6:6-8 - Go to the ant, O sluggard, Observe her ways and be wise, which, having no chief, officer or ruler, prepares her food in the summer *and* gathers her provision in the harvest.**
  - here's some questions to consider...
    - 1. Have you reviewed your retirement plan and communicated with your spouse?**
    - 2. Have you reviewed your college savings fund and communicated with your children?**
    - 3. Have you established savings accounts for other long term purchases?**
    - 4. Have you reviewed your life and disability insurance and discussed it as a couple/family?**
    - 5. Have you updated your family balance sheet?**
      - do you know if you are going forward or backwards financially?
  - and I understand that these steps can be taken at any point in the year – but New Year's is just a logical time to do it...

#### **E. Determine your 2012 budget.**

- one of our missionaries, Al Yoder, had an interesting post on FB the day after Christmas...
- he said... "God forbid that I should be against our God given desire to give gifts to our loved ones... I do hurt, though, as to how many long, long years it takes missionaries to get to the front lines, compared to the amounts spent on people... and I thank God for the wonderful supporters that have enabled us to do so much work for the King that was born so many years ago. May in the new year, we all focus more and more on the kingdom and less and less on the large amount of stuff we leave behind at the rapture.
- does Al have a point?...
- one of the things that keeps us from frivolous spending is having a budget, and asking God the discipline to stick to it...
- and I realize I'm going to sound like a broken record here...but if you would say – my spouse and I just can't discuss money without it turning into a fight...
  - if that's the case, then there's much larger issues involved...but why not get some help?...
  - you also might want to consider taking the next Financial Peace University class

#### **E. Update your gone to heaven file.**

- I realize some people think it's morbid for me to talk about this...but I generally raise this subject once a year...
- and one of these years, you or someone you love is going to be glad I did...because let's face it – we had some funerals in 2011 for people we would have never predicted a year ago...
- and it's just a matter of grace and thoughtfulness to have your house in order for the people who are going to have to come after you...
  - and obviously this should be kept in a safe, secure place...but it's all the information someone would need if you passed away...
  - and, the point here is – it should be updated once a year, and now is a great time to do that...what should it contain?...

**a. Full names (s)**

**b. Will**

- especially if you have children in your home...

**c. Social security number (s)**

**d. Tax information**

- especially if you are self-employed

**e. Family balance sheet**

**f. Budget information**

**g. Bank accounts**

**h. Medical and Life Insurance information**

**i. Retirement plan/funds**

**j. Credit card information**

**k. Decisions/preferences about funeral home, grave plots**

- and I realize you might say – boy, PV—this sounds like a lot of work...it is...but this is part of what it means to be a steward...
  - to rejoice in the newness we have in Christ...
  - and to capitalize on the occasion of this new year to make plans to use 2012 wisely...
- now, let's end with this...it's one of the most frequently discussed topics when the word new is used in the Bible...

### **III. Remember that the Best Newness is Yet to Come**

**Revelation 21:1-2 - Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer *any* sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.**