

How to Deal with a New Year – Acts 1:6-8

I. Introduction:

- A. When I ask someone to read the scriptures during our song service, there is usually a specific thought in that scripture which I plan to emphasize during my message.
1. But, unless the reader has seen the sermon title and made an accurate guess about my intent, he won't know what that theme is.
 2. So one of the brethren gets up to read; it's a scripture which he has privately read a hundred times.
 3. He may see something in that scripture which he thinks is important, and he emphasizes those words.
 4. But chances are, if someone else was reading it would be quite different.
 5. He may pronounce words one way, giving different inflections and perhaps leaving a different impression about what is read.
 6. I have noticed that even if I have publically read a scripture many times, the next time another person gets up to read, it is not with the same emphasis that I consistently gave it.
- B. Take **Acts 1:7** as an example: How do you think the Lord spoke these words?
1. Was it – *"It is not for **YOU** to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power."*
 2. Or was it – *"It is **NOT** for you to know the times or the seasons...."*
 3. Or – *"It is not for you to know the **TIMES** or the **SEASONS**...."*
 4. There may be a several other ways to read that sentence without changing a single word.
 5. I have my idea of which word Christ Jesus emphasized, but your opinion could be different.
- C. **Verse 8** is almost exclusively considered as a text for the preaching of **missions**.
1. *"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be **WITNESSES** unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."*
 2. Without question **missions** is an excellent way to use this statement.
 3. But I think that in bringing these three verses together they have a wider application than just missions.
- D. Next Friday we will start another new year. Let's leave this awful 2020 behind and move on.
1. Perhaps you have already felt the influences of this coming year.
 2. Did you get a new calendar? Did any of you start transferring birthday & anniversary information on to it?
 3. Perhaps you are anticipating some of the major events of the year – I have heard that several are hoping to retire in 2021.
 4. Maybe you've ordered the latest version of TurboTax and started to organize your receipts.
- E. This **"Missions"** text gives us some ideas on how to face 2021.
1. Doesn't it say, *"Don't waste your time on sophomoric future forecastings."*
 2. This seems to be an enjoyable pastime for some people – the tabloids are filled with this garbage.
 - a. *"I predict this; I predict that."*
 - b. Most of it is a waste of good Pacific North West forestry.
 3. Don't waste your time pretending uber wisdom and proving yourself fool by forecasting the future.
 4. Do you remember back twenty years ago to all the talk about Y2K? – the year 2000.
 - a. There were ordinarily sane Christians, saying that the world would implode because a few computers were not equipped to cope with a change of centuries.
 - b. How embarrassed some of those preachers were.
 - c. Some of them staked their reputations on their faulty prognostications, and they should have left the ministry after uttering their utter failures.
 5. While Christians shouldn't waste their time in foolish prognostications, it that doesn't mean that they should deny themselves some wonderful anticipations.
 6. In fact our darkness about the future increases our anticipation.

- F. This scripture says, *“Limit your anxiety about the future to the extent of your actual knowledge of the future.”*
1. If a snarling, growling dog has his fangs facing you, you have cause to be concerned, but you don't have time to imagine pit bulls terriers and rottweillers around every bush.
 2. Solomon condemned the slothful man who says, *“There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the street.”*
 3. But if there really is a lion in the streets, you'd be wise to stay home.
- G. Something else our scripture says is that the best way to cope with the unknown is to dwell on what we **know**.
1. And for the Christian – for the believer – we **know** the Lord – the omnipotent, omniscient God.
 2. I have a little book called *“Twelve New Year Sermons”* – it's part of a set by C.H. Spurgeon.
 3. One of the sermons right in the middle of the book is entitled, *“Jesus Christ, the same yesterday & forever.”*
 4. That is certainly one thing that we can know for sure.
 - a. The Lord has promised to go with us into this next year – and far beyond.
 - b. *“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”*
 5. Someone has said, *“Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a well-known God.”*
- H. And another thing that we are told here is to fill our hands with the work of Christ.
1. Someone else said, *“Hats off to the past, but coats off to the future.”*
 2. Let's think about these things in a little more detail.

II. We see once again the narrow limits of our knowledge of the future.

- A. Jesus said *“It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.”*
1. What do we know for sure about 2021?
 - a. We know that babies will be born and people will die. But for whom will we be in mourning?
 - b. There is a man that I know outside of our church. I was thinking a year ago that he wouldn't be with us today, but I was wrong.
 - c. We think of some elderly folk who might die, but what about the young? They never cross our minds.
 - d. It is appointed unto each human being once to die, and that appointment may come this year.
 - e. **And** that appointment may come very early – to our way of thinking – January instead of November.
 2. We know that 2021 will be a labyrinth of joys and sorrows, because that is always the way it is.
 - a. But wasn't 2020 just a little more problematic than usual.
 - b. There will be times for joy and other times for tears, but this year they may come in rapid succession.
 3. We know that for most us to put food on our tables, we'll have put out a few ergs of energy.
 4. And for most of us life will contain many of the same old monotonous duties of 2020.
- B. But these things are all generalities.
1. More specifically will there still be masks, constant temperature checks and closed fitting rooms in a year?
 2. I can't say for sure, and any more specific prognostications could very well be dangerous.
 3. But we can **praise the Lord** that *“it is NOT for us to know times and seasons...”*
 4. Some people look their pasts, remembering the bad, while forgetting all the good.
 - a. If it were not for the antidote of the grace of God, they'd poison themselves to death.
 - b. If those people could see all the trouble in their futures, they might just die of fright today.
 5. But the Lord has put our futures in the mist of a nice warm fog.
 - a. It doesn't have to be a terrifying, dark, cold, creepy fog either – just a warm mist.
- C. I read of a Belgian travel company growing rich selling **mystery tours**.
1. People are buying expensive travel packages, not knowing where they were going.
 - a. There is an excitement in not knowing where they are headed – if they feel they can trust their guide.
 2. Similarly we are commanded by the Lord to be confident in **Him**, not in what **WE think** we **see** ahead.
 - a. *“Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.”*

- b. Make your boast in the God of tomorrow, but not in tomorrow itself.
 - c. *"Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow."*
 - d. *"For man also knoweth not his time."*
3. Paul said, *"Behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there."*

- D. Some of these verses even hint that **there is sin** in those who are over confident about the future.
- 1. Unless we leave room for the sovereign will of God to move among us, we are living as virtual atheists.
 - 2. No, we do not control our destinies, despite the modern mantra that we do.
 - 3. The Bible's suggested prayer is – *"Not my will, Lord, but thine be done."*
- E. A few years ago there was typing mistake on the wire service weather report.
- 1. It was supposed to say: *"There is a 50% chance of snow tomorrow."*
 - 2. The word *"snow"* had accidentally been omitted: *"There is a 50% chance of tomorrow."*
 - 3. That is just fine if we still have 100% assurance of Jehovah tomorrow.
 - 4. Jesus told us of a rich man who made a contract with a construction company to build him bigger barns.
 - 5. God told him, *"Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee."*
 - 6. He was fit as a fiddle, and totally unprepared to die – but die he did.
- F. The only thing that we can be sure of for 2021, is that we shall eventually stand in judgment for our use of **every minute** of every day that the Lord will give to us in this coming year.
- 1. We shall give account to the Lord for **every idle word** that we speak.
 - 2. And *"every man's work shall be made manifest, for the judgment day shall declare it."*
 - 3. How essential it is to have an advocate with the Father, like Jesus Christ the Righteous.
 - 4. Are you abiding in Him, and He in you?
 - 5. *"As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in (Christ) – John 15:4."*

III. Our scripture then reminds us that very sure hands keep our future.

- A. *"It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power."*
- 1. Oh, how I pity the poor worldling, the humanist, the *"eat-drink-and-be-merry"* kind of person.
 - 2. **It is not fate** whether I contract cancer, or get struck by a car, or inherit a million dollars.
 - 3. I don't depend on chance, the law of averages, tendencies or luck.
 - 4. What a lot of people call *"fate"* is simply the result of their own foolishness – divine judgment for sin.
 - 5. This world is supervised by an omnipotent, holy and thoroughly just God.
 - 6. That is both an awesome – and a terrifying thought – a great big pill to swallow.
- B. But the Christian has this pill coated with cream or some tasty yogurt.
- 1. This judgment is not just the hand of some faraway wrathful deity.
 - 2. It is the Christian's Heavenly Father who governs all things.
 - 3. **Luke 12:29-32** – *"Seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. a. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. b. Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."*
 - 4. Whatever the future brings to the Child of the King – is for the very best.
 - a. The future is one of the many servants of Jehovah.
 - b. Providence is built on God's promises.
 - c. And *"we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."*

5. As our Lord once described the treatment that human fathers give their children...
 - a. He went on to point out that our Father in Heaven is a far better father.
 - b. *“If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?”*

C. Christians don't have to worry over the future, because our gracious Father controls it all.

IV. But that is not all. We have even been given some additional strength to face the coming year.

A. *“Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.”*

1. This is a very important verse, but one that is usually left only in a missionary context.
2. In looking at 2021 we have the promise of the Holy Spirit to see us into it and perhaps through it.
3. The Holy Spirit is truly God; as much a part of the Trinity as the Father or Son.
 - a. The Father has given us the Son, and the Son has revealed the Father.
 - b. The Son and the Spirit have given us the written word, the Bible.
 - c. And now we have the ministry of the Spirit and the Word of God through the Spirit.

B. Can you look back and see the hand of the Spirit on your life during this year which is now closing?

1. Maybe in the changing of jobs, or a Spirit-led decision about some important matter?
2. Perhaps He has given you special comfort or patience during some special trial.
3. The Spirit of God first imparts love, then hope, and finally liberty.
4. Without Him we are as chariots without horses; cars without gas, and airplanes without wings.

C. *“Ye shall receive power,”* meaning that we can be entirely filled with Him for the upcoming year.

1. Every Christian possesses the Holy Spirit; He indwells each and every heart.
2. *“If any man have not the Spirit of God, he is none of his.”*
3. Just as before the Lord sent the Jerusalem church into the world with the message of the gospel, he filled them with the Person of the Spirit.
4. And before the Lord sends us into 2021, He makes the power of the Spirit available to every Christian.
5. O, but so few know that power, because so few yield to him, trying to strengthen and use their own power.
6. No wonder their passing years are filled with such emptiness – or worse.
7. Take that blessing and gift of God, and use it.

V. And don't forget that you can't expect God's joy if you ignore your God-given duties.

A. The Bible doesn't tell us to look for pleasure, wealth and health in the year to come.

1. That \$600 stimulus check isn't going to last even as long as the last one.
2. But wealth, pleasure and health are exactly what many human beings are seeking – like gold in the creek.
 - a. You may find a sparkle here and a tiny nugget there as you trudge up-stream.
 - b. But most of your time will be wasted and utterly fruitless, if all you are doing is searching for gold.
3. The Bible, on the other hand, tells us to look for ways in which to serve and please the Lord.
4. *“Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.”*
5. The Lord will give us joy unspeakable, when it suits **His will**.
6. Maybe I should say, *“The Lord will give us joy, when **WE** suit His will.”*
7. Our plans and preparations for 2011 must be directed towards serving Him.

B. And what is our proscribed service? Among other things – spreading the Gospel and glorifying the Saviour.

1. One of our tasks is to bring souls to the point of meeting Christ.
 - a. It is not so much to feed them, clothe them, or to teach them to read and write.
 - b. It is not to give them food stamps or condom-miniums.
 - c. It is not to entertain them, but prepare them for eternity.

2. Evangelism is to Christianity what veins are to bodies – cut us anywhere, and you’ll find blood.
 - a. The church which forgets to reach out to the lost has already lost it’s life’s blood.
 3. If you discovered a cure for heart disease, you would be a criminal not tell world.
 - a. If you were **given** that knowledge by someone else, then it would be even be more criminal to not share.
 - b. But in this case we have the cure to a greater malady than heart disease.
 - c. We have been given the solution to sin – redemption through the blood of Jesus Christ.
 - d. You and I are *“debtors, therefore, both to the Greeks and the Barbarians, both to wise and unwise.”*
- C. This gospel must be shared with boldness, for our time is running out.
1. 2021 may be the last year of history as we know it, and it might not be a full year.
 - a. If the souls of Idahoans are eternally lost, let it not be because they were not warned.
 - b. Make those people of Eastern Washington leap over our bodies to get to hell.
 - c. Make them drag us to the edge of the pit with our arms around their knees.
 2. How can we go on without souls coming to Christ – without conversions?

VI. This is how we must approach 2021.

- A. Not with our eyes closed, hoping that everything will work out okay.
1. Nor with worrying and fretting because we are in the dark about next month and next week.
 2. But with a zeal and zest in the service of Christ, believing that God will work all things out to His glory.
- B. O, how some of us need to give yourselves to Christ this morning and for this coming year.
1. Perhaps some of you have given up the struggle against your sins.
 - a. *“Oh, the blood of Christ has covered them, and He knows that I’m so weak.”*
 - b. You coward; you disobedient creature; you disgrace.
 - c. *“Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid.”*
 2. Some have done so little for Christ in 2020, that spiritual buzzards are already flying overhead.
 - a. Will you not dedicate your life to the Lord who redeemed you?
 - b. This is especially important since this is likely to be our last year upon this earth.
 - c. *“Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.”*
 - d. *“For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord’s freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ’s servant” – I Corinthians 7:22.*
- C. Perhaps some of you are facing this last year of earthly existence still in doubt about your soul.
1. I beg of you to turn from your sin and squarely face the person of Christ on cross.
 2. Forget your righteousness; plead your sinfulness.
 3. But also plead Jesus’ shed blood for the cleansing of that sin.
 4. Give yourself over to his control; yield to the Spirit crying within you, *“Come unto me.”*
 5. Is the Lord calling you this morning?
 6. Turn to Him in repentance and faith.