

Remember His Wondrous Works

- I am glad we have the meet and greet time every week. I heard about one church where the announcement is something like, "Ok, this is the time in the service when you turn around and take a selfie with someone you don't know!"
- Some of you know that this is the 5th year I have preached a sermon either at the end of the year or right at the beginning of a new year in which I look back at some of the things I learned that year. I do so for several reasons but chief among them is because I want to encourage you in your faith and in looking back yourself to see what the Lord has done in your own life. There's much value in surveying where we have been and what God has taught us along the way, not the least of which is that it makes us a more thankful people. And as Ann Voskamp said, "When you're looking for joy, you will always find it hiding in your gratitude."
- As you have just heard, David wrote a song after bringing the ark to Jerusalem and placing it in a tent. It was a song of rejoicing because the ark represented the presence of God and it had been in the home of one Obed-edom for three months, "and the Lord blessed the household of Obed-edom and all that he had." (1 Chron. 13:14). God's presence has been with us these past 12 months, hasn't it, and He has blessed us greatly. One of the lines of David's song says, "Remember the wondrous works that He has done, his miracles and the judgments He uttered." (1 Chron. 16:12) So, here are a few of the wondrous works He did in my life this past year.
- **Lesson #1: The times are changing, but the root problem remains the same.**
- Cindy and I had the opportunity to hear Al Mohler speak at a conference in Cincinnati in January. Among other things, I learned that Peter Berger, a sociologist, said that the #1 most religious country in the world is India. And the least religious country is Sweden. When he was asked, "What's America?" he replied, "It's a country of Indians ruled over by Swedes." This conference was obviously held before the Supreme Court ruling in late June that changed the definition of marriage, but the seeds for that change were in place for years before that.
- Dr. Mohler also quoted a man named Theo Hobson, a British theologian who wrote several years ago that a cultural revolution takes place when 3 things happen, and we are seeing that unfold before our eyes. #1. Something that was condemned is normalized. #2. That which is normalized is now celebrated. #3. Those who don't celebrate it are condemned.
- It was a few weeks after that conference when I was reading in Isaiah and wrote this in my journal. "In Isaiah 47:10, God is speaking to Babylon, but He may as well have been speaking to 21st century America, I'm afraid." Here's the verse: "You felt secure in your wickedness, you said, 'No one sees me'; your wisdom and your knowledge led you astray, and you said in your heart, 'I am, and there is no one besides me.' The problem is sin and sin either likes to hide ('No one sees me'), or it likes to parade as enlightenment ('I am, and there is no one besides me.')
- In March, I went to a panel discussion at Elon entitled, "Being Good Without God." When one of the panelists who identified himself as an atheist was talking about the Four Horsemen, famous atheists Dawkins, Dennett, Harris and Hitchens, when he mentioned Hitchens, who is dead, he said, "May he rest." Not to be disrespectful by any means, but if you are an atheist, and therefore do not believe in God or in anything after death, why would you say "May he rest?" That's a decidedly Christian expression, a desire that the deceased will experience eternal rest and peace in the next life. It makes no sense if there IS no next life. But see? Ecclesiastes 3:11 says, "He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart," and this professor was expressing, I believe, the yearning in his own heart for something beyond what he can touch and feel and experience in this life. CS Lewis said, "If I can find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world."

- **Lesson #2: God loves orphans...and those who love them.**
- Ben Duckett spoke at our men's breakfast in March, and challenged all of us to seek God about adoption. He referred to Psalm 146:9, "The Lord watches over the sojourners; He upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked He brings to ruin." God is faithful to care for the widows and orphans, and Ben said that it is a good thing that God's faithfulness does not depend on our faithfulness. But then he challenged us with this: "Is God calling you to do something? Stop asking Him 'Why?' Ask yourself, 'Why not?'" That's a great word not just on adoption but on obedience to anything the Lord is calling us to do.
- **Lesson #3: We need to hold things, and people, loosely.**
- We all know that coming to Christ means that we hold the things of this world loosely. Back in 1987 on a commuter flight from Portland, Maine, to Boston the pilot, Henry Dempsey, heard an unusual noise near the rear of the plane. Dempsey turned the controls over to the co-pilot and went back to check it out. As he reached the tail section, the plane hit an air pocket, and Dempsey was tossed against the rear door.
He soon discovered that the original noise was caused because the rear door had been improperly latched prior to takeoff. Now the impact of his weight caused it to open. Dempsey was instantly sucked out of the tiny jet.
The co-pilot saw the red light, which indicated an open door. He immediately radioed the nearest airport requesting permission for an emergency landing. He reported that the pilot had fallen out of the plane and wanted a helicopter to search the area.
After the plane landed the ground crew found Dempsey holding on to the outdoor ladder of the aircraft. Somehow he had caught the ladder and held on for ten minutes as the plane flew two hundred mph at an altitude of 4000 feet, and then when landing he kept his head from hitting the runway, which was only twelve inches away.
According to the news reports, it took airport personnel several minutes to pry Dempsey's fingers off of the ladder.
- We know that if we are holding on too tightly to money or influence or possessions, we are in trouble, because that really means they are holding onto us. Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Mt. 6:21) It's true of things, but it is also true of people! I was reminded again this year with people coming and going from the church, that I need to continue to make Christ my treasure, not people.
- **Lesson #4: God will press you beyond your limits, but not His.**
- I love the story of Moses having a fit with God Numbers 11. Read verse 10-15. He was very transparent and honest in his relationship with God, almost to the point that I am cringing as I read this, thinking Moses will be a greasy spot after his prayer. But this is a great place to be, where we are pressed beyond our limits, and we don't know what we are going to do, and we cry out to God. That last part is important. Critical, even. Because so often when we get pressed beyond our limits we scream at other people. Or we crawl into a shell and just want to give up. Or we stomp off; we leave the church or our job or even our spouse. But Moses cries out to God, and God is very patient with Moses. He gives him grace *and* a solution. Moses, you will not be alone. He tells Moses to choose 70 men who will help him with the work of leadership. One interesting point about that. Verse 16, God says Moses should choose men "whom you know to be elders of the people and officers over them." Moses didn't go out and try to convince men to step up and be responsible so he could make them leaders. He chose the men who had already stepped up. They were already doing the work. They were then tasked to bear the burden with Moses. God always has a solution to our problems, but we often don't see them until we get to the end of our ability to try and fix it.
- By the way, on the subject of leadership, one interesting thing I learned this year. I learned that the Levites in the Old Testament had concealed carry permits, and that tabernacle discipline could get real ugly, real fast. OK, maybe they weren't carrying guns, but look at Numbers 1:50-

51. Why put them to death? Read verse 53. Violation of God's commands with regard to the tabernacle, His presence, could lead to divine wrath breaking out and the destruction of many.

- Another example of God's grace when we are pushed beyond our limits. Some of you will remember that on the last Sunday in August, my computer wouldn't boot up. I tried everything I knew to do and got pushed beyond my limits very quickly. I asked for all of you to pray for me and for those at the Apple Store who had my computer, that my files would not be lost. I had all of my talks on there that I was to give at a conference in Kansas, and I had most of the wedding sermon finished as well. So I learned to pray about something that was completely beyond my control. I also learned to back up everything from now until Jesus comes back. The good news was that one week after I took the computer, , and three days before I was to leave for Kansas, I learned that the problem was not my hard drive but my logic board. Which makes no sense to me, but it meant that I didn't lose my files. I learned that God is patient with fools and with the technologically challenged, and sometimes they reside in the same person.
- One final example of God's grace in pushing us beyond our limits. I learned that I could memorize the book of Ephesians. This still amazes me, because some of you know that I am prone to forget names, faces, dates, and nearly everything else. But God is teaching me from His Word in a new way, and I am excited about it. I just wish I had started memorizing books of the Bible 30 years ago.
- **Lesson #5: Marriage is a good thing.**
- I learned that again on September 19, as I walked down the aisle with my daughter, and 30 minutes later she walked back up the aisle on the arm of a Kansas firefighter. I learned that it is a good thing to see your daughter get married to a godly man. I knew that theologically before; I know it experientially now.
- I also was challenged at the men's retreat a month later by Shawn's teaching on how we can pray for our wives in a new way. It has resulted in much blessing in my prayer life and in our marriage. Marriage is a good thing, and I am so blessed to be married to Cindy.