

A NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE

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I was reminded of a story I heard of a Sunday school teacher who spoke to her class and recounted the entire Christmas story. When she had finished, she looked at the class and said, "So, who do you think is the most important woman in the Bible?" A little boy raised his hand and said, "Eve." She looked at him and thought, "My Goodness! What did he hear?" But curious, she asked, "Why do you say Eve?" He said, Well, they name two days of the year after Eve – Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve."

But it is an important day. We stand on a year-end that has mixed feelings. Some of us may be ready for it; some may still be hoping that we'll get a few more minutes than the 24 minutes that we have left. Some may have fear, trepidation of the unknown. Some may be wondering whether the good things of the year 2019 will repeat for the year 2020, or whether that was just a flash in the pan. But wherever we are, a good place to be is always in the Lord's house and in His presence.

I am so glad to see so many new faces, who have chosen to come here, and we want to welcome you. We are so glad that you are here and worshipping with us, and getting ready to usher in a year that the Lord has placed before us.

The one word that God placed upon my heart as I was preparing for this particular service was the word TRUST. One can look at the word trust from various angles and come up with all kinds of different permutations and combinations of that word as you plug it into different stories in the Bible. But as I looked at it, waited on the Lord, I felt that God was inviting us to trust Him more. We are all here because we have trust. We trust Him! But the degree of our trust in Him is what I believe God has a contention with. God is hoping that we will trust Him much, much more than we did in this past year, that we would be able to take greater steps of faith, that we would be able to trust Him implicitly in order to inherit every blessing that He has for us. As I began to pray into this whole idea of trust, the Lord brought back to me three episodes in the Bible that I want to share with you.

1. EXODUS 14

This chapter talked about the children of Israel coming out of Egypt, how, as they came out, they were so overjoyed. Then God didn't take them straight; He made them turn a little to avoid the land of the Philistines. For He said, "If I take them through, and they are in a battle, they may not have the confidence that I can help them through it." So, He took them away towards the wilderness and the Red Sea. When they came to the Red Sea, He said, "Now if I bring the children of Israel to Pharaoh's mind, and he realizes where they are, he's going to think that he can catch up with them because they have nowhere to go."

And God said, "I will harden Pharaoh's heart that he will come after the children of Israel." And that's what happened! Pharaoh got up and said, "Let's chase these Israelites. Why on earth did we let them go?" He gets 600 chariots and all the soldiers that he can muster, and they chase the children of Israel. They are getting close to the children of Israel who see this huge army coming. And they look at Moses and say, "Were there not enough graves in Egypt that you brought us to the wilderness to bury us?"

If it wasn't so grave it would be humorous! Yet, God speaks to Moses and says, "I am going to show the children of Israel My power and how much I care for them and will look after them." He told Moses, "Raise your staff and hold it over the Red Sea and it will part, and then tell the children of Israel to go through." And Moses does that. He holds up his staff and the waters just climb up and stay like two walls. (Those of you who have seen The Ten Commandments know what a grand scene that is). And the children of Israel begin to walk on dry land. Then Pharaoh's army comes and they begin to chase. Then God tells Moses, "Now turn around and hold up your hand again, and the waters

will come back and it will cover the entire army of Pharaoh. You will never see them again.” And again, that’s what happened.

Trust was huge for Moses at this point. He has a group of people who were reluctant even in following him. Then he is caught between the Egyptians and the Red Sea, and God tells him, “Hold up your staff,” and Moses did. He listened to the Lord and he was able to see the glory of God’s power before him.

Here’s the question I want to pose for you through this first reading. Do you see the glory of God’s power in your life? have you seen the glory of His power through the year 2019? Have you seen this majestic power of His at work in your life? I wonder whether we need to trust Him more, whether we’ve been middling our way through trusting God and we’ve seen little things, but never the power and glory that He can bring to our lives.

2. DANIEL IN THE LION’S DEN.

There was Daniel in the lion’s den because he was caught praying. He spends that night there, yet none of the lions had him for dinner. He was alive and well till the next morning. Again, the faith and trust that Daniel had was incredible. Somebody said, “Daniel didn’t go around jumping in front of the lions, saying: Hey! You can’t get me! He just sat quietly and trusted the Lord to see Him through, even this situation.”

Maybe today the situations that you have faced through the year 2019 haven’t gone anywhere; they are still with you. They are going to meet you when you leave this place. But maybe God is asking and inviting you to handle it differently, to be able to trust Him even in an adverse situation. Sometimes, our default in an adverse situation is to say, “Okay, I’m Your child. You take care of me. I’m just going to sit and pout.” That’s pretty much the way we go through. We are upset that we are going through difficult times.

Yet, I believe the Bible reminds us that even when we go through difficult times, we ought to rejoice. “Rejoice in the Lord, I say, rejoice,” says Paul writing from the prison in shackles. Maybe today, God is saying that the situation that you brought into this sanctuary, and will take with you again when you leave will change if you will change the way that you look at it. Are you willing to say: “Lord, I trust You even through this situation? I know that something good is going to happen in my life, and if You’ve allowed it in my life, then Lord, I will embrace it.”

3. SHADRACH, MESHACH AND ABEDNEGO IN THE FIERY FURNACE.

The story is well-known. They wouldn’t bow down to the huge idol that Nebuchadnezzar had put up. It must have been easy to spot them. Everybody else is bowing down, and three guys are standing up. You don’t have to look very far to see them. But that’s what they did, because what was being asked of them was wrong. What always grabs me when I look at this particular passage is this: Before they are put into the furnace, they say to Nebuchadnezzar, “Our God is able to help us to go through this. But Nebuchadnezzar, O King, even if He doesn’t, we still will not bow down and worship you.”

I wonder whether some of us need to hear that word today, when it is difficult and we are saying, “Lord, I am trusting You to take me through, but it is getting really hot in here.” Do we let God go and just say, “Okay, I’m just going to see how best I can handle this.” Or do we stay the course and say, “I am fully committed to this decision that I have taken. Whatever the situation, whatever the circumstance, I’m going through with it.”

Peter gives us many examples of both faithfulness and faithlessness. The one that I wanted to touch on what his walking on water. He sees Jesus walking on the water and he says, “Lord, if it is you, tell me to come to you on the water.” And Jesus says, “Come!” Peter’s out of the boat and he is walking on the water to Jesus. Then, all of a sudden, he takes his eyes off Jesus and looks at the waves, looks

at the storm and he begins to sink. Immediately, Jesus, when he shouts out to Him, picks him up and pulls him out of the water.

Sometimes, we too have this half-baked commitment – we start trusting Him and then, halfway down, when nothing has changed, we begin to get a bit antsy and say, “Okay, I need to start thinking and see how best I can handle this situation.” And the Lord is saying, “Stay the course. Don’t give up now. You will still see what I can do out of this situation.”

Psalms 9:10 says, *“Those who know Your name trust in You, for You, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek You.”* That’s God’s promise for you and me as we head into a new year, that He doesn’t forsake His own. Even when we walk through valleys and go through dark shadows, He is with us. He may not take us out of that situation, but He is there with us saying, “I will be with you. I will ever leave you. I will never forsake you.”

So, as we look at the last few minutes in 2019, I want us to see how we can trust Him more. Whether we can take that kind of stand and say, “Lord, I’m really going to commit to trusting You in 2020 completely. I’m not going to pull back, even in adverse situations, even if things don’t change – I will trust You.

- Firstly, maybe, what you need to trust God with today is an addiction that has crept into your life and is sapping the joy and peace out of it. Maybe it’s affecting the people connected with you. It could be anything – gambling, alcohol, drugs, or even lying, pornography, angry behavior, negative thinking. You’ve got so used to thinking like that, it’s become your default mode. I wonder if you need to say, “Lord, I want to trust You with this. I want You to help me overcome. I want You to help me be victorious.”

The scripture verse that I offer you is from Philippians 4:13 – *“I can do all things through Him who gives me strength.”* I can do all things including breaking this addiction and overcoming it and being victorious through His strength that works in and through you.

- Secondly, to trust God with your fears about the past. Maybe there are failures that have dotted 2019 or fears that have accompanied you.

Isaiah 43:19 says, *“See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.”*

Isaiah 41:10 *“So, do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”*

Philippians 1:6 *“Being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you, will carry it on to its completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”*

Trust Him with those fears that you may have carried twelve months all through this past year. Or maybe a failure that has been hounding you. Would you apply these scriptures, trust His Word and say, “Lord, would You help me to trust You even more?”

- Or maybe what you’ve brought with you into this sanctuary is rejection and loneliness. You know what it is to be alone in a crowd – to have people all around you and yet, be alone.
- Or maybe, you’ve been rejected once, twice, many times, and you’ve carried the pain of that rejection. Would you listen to these scriptures that tell us how valuable we are to God? He never rejects us. He never thinks of us as something less than worthy.

Matthew 10:31 *“So don’t be afraid; you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows.”* More valuable than birds!

Psalm 139:14 “*We are fearfully and wonderfully made.*”

John 3:16 “*He loved us so much that He gave His Son for you and for me.*”

Psalm 136 keeps telling us, “*His love for us endures forever.*”

John 14 and Romans, “*We are no longer orphans, but have been adopted into His kingdom as His children.*” Not orphans, not unloved, but loved and cherished by the Almighty God. He chose us as His special possession.

- Or maybe this evening, you’re in a place where you are ready to quit. You are saying, “This is not working for me. I’m going to bail.” Remember the scripture I quoted a few moments ago – *the work that He starts in You, He will carry on to completion.* Stay the course.
- Maybe you need to trust Him for getting past wounds and hurts that have been inflicted upon you. Psalm 147, “*He heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds.*” He heals you if you are broken-hearted this evening, and He will bind up those wounds.

Trust! For us to enjoy this place, of the Word becoming true in our lives, I believe God is saying, “Will you trust Me more than you trusted Me in the year that has gone by? Will you trust Me more?”

We have a few minutes before 12. And I normally don’t do this, but I felt today, to open it up to you. Maybe today you want to come to the altar and kneel and say, “Lord, I need something that will change. I need something to happen. I need Your grace, I need Your joy, Your peace.” You are perfectly free to sit where you are, but feel free to come to the altar if you want to. Let’s be in prayer as we move from 2019 into 2020.

Our heavenly Father, as this year moves away into history, we come into Your presence, Lord. you know our hearts and we pray that those things that we have spoken to You, those things that we desperately need a touch from You to bring some change in this new year – maybe in attitude, maybe just something to happen, maybe a heart to be touched or changed. Lord, whether it is in a job or a relationship or just a mindset, Lord, maybe we have trusted You only a little. Lord we want to trust You more. Would You increase our faith, Master? Would You lead us into new paths where our eyes are fixed upon You? Lord, I pray on every person here, a quiet confidence into this new year that we have entered upon, that we would be able to face it knowing that You are with us, You will never leave us, You will never forsake us. We pray that Your hand of blessing would be upon us. Lord, we pray that we would walk in the footsteps that You have already placed before us – Your footsteps, Master.

Lord, we pray for a greater anointing of Your Spirit upon us, that will show us Your glory and Your power in incredible ways, Master. We pray that we would enjoy You like we’ve never enjoyed before, that we would see the miracles that You can do in our lives that we have never experienced or seen before. Lord, we pray that You would just pour out Your Spirit upon us, that we would yield more and more of ourselves to You so that You would have more and more sway in our lives. O Lord God, how wonderful it is to be able to enter this New Year hand in hand with the Almighty God. Lord, we pray that You will never let us go and we know that. So, we pray that we will never take our hand away from Yours, that You would hold us tight and lead us every moment of every day. We ask and invite Your blessing upon each one of us. Help us to be reflectors of Your goodness to the world around us. We ask all of this in the precious, majestic, beautiful name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.