

CAP NEW YEAR'S DAY SERMON 2021

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31st December is an interesting date. We look at it, and think 31st turns into 1st, a Thursday turns into a Friday, or December turns into January. And yet, it's just a day moving. Nothing else. Yet there's this excitement of either moving in from 2020 to a new year, or just looking at 2021 and thinking: This is a brand New Year, time for cautious optimism. It's a new year, and with New Year can come change, whether in circumstances – COVID can get taken out, or we'll be able to overcome it and not get sick. Maybe a new job is around the corner, or I can start meeting friends again. Maybe I can travel freely. And the list goes on.

Along with the New Year, comes the opportunity of excitement that change is possible. It's amazing that this change is possible in spite of it all being so very mundane actually. With a new day just turning the corner, a new date turning the corner, Thursday becoming Friday, or December becoming January. But there's excitement!! There's some amount of anticipation. Even with the most die-hard pessimist, I think we'll be able to say that along with the New Year comes a certain amount of hope, a certain amount of anticipation that something different is just around the corner. New years have always brought that – the ability for us to look for a silver lining, or to just look for something new, something different that can happen in my life.

So, as we look at this time, I want to present to you three areas that I think will be helpful for us as we embrace this New Year that is in front of us. These three areas are:

- Remembering
- Refocusing
- Restarting or re-igniting

1. REMEMBERING

What do I mean by remembering?

Remember how He has sustained you:

Look back over the year and look at the way God has sustained you. Remember what He has done for you; those times when you needed a helping hand; those times when you needed extra energy and stamina and you were at the end of your tether and didn't have any more stamina left in you, and you were just about to give up. Then God came like a second wind and brought sustenance into you.

Just like He did for Elijah. After that wonder victory at Mount Carmel, when Jezebel told him that she would get him, he ran and ran and then finally settled down in exhaustion. Yet, God sustained him, sent an angel, gave him something to eat so that he could be ready for the journey that God had planned for him.

I want to invite you to remember the times that God has sustained you over this year. This sermon is all about just focusing on god and trying to see His hand through all that has happened through the year. Remember how He has sustained you.

Remember how He has protected you:

How He has protected you from danger, protected you from sickness, protected you while maybe, you were in the hospital, or maybe, protected you while you were exposed to an illness that you

could very easily have contracted. You never gave it another thought and just said, “Oh how lucky I am!” But maybe that was God’s protective hand upon you, shielding you as it were, from all harm and danger just like He protected Paul.

You remember in Acts 28, when Paul was on his way to Rome and they were shipwrecked. They came to Malta which was an island, and as they were building a fire, a viper wrapped itself around Paul’s hand. Everybody thought that this man was a murderer and that’s why he was getting justice, and they expected him to die. But Paul just shook his hand and the viper fell off. God’s hand of protection.

I wonder, as you and I look back over the last year, to be able to say, “I can see God’s hand at work. I never thought of it before, but surely that was the hand of God protecting me.”

Remember how He has provided for you:

He’s provided nurture. He’s provided food, He’s provided finances, something that you needed so badly. God has come through, beloved, and that’s the kind of God whom we trust and believe in. that’s the God that we need to bring to our remembrance at this time, to be able to say, “Yes! God has done wonderful things for me. He has sustained me; He has protected me and He has provided for me.”

Remember the widow whose husband had served the Lord. she had two sons and had much debt. The people came to collect the debt and would have taken her children. She ran to the prophet, and he said, “Go, get vessels from your neighbors and pour the only oil that you have into it.” And she poured, and she poured, and she poured, until there were no more vessels left.

Maybe, you’ve experienced something like that this past year, where you thought you had nothing. And God had done something out of the very little that you had, and it sufficed for that moment, for that period of time. So, I want you to remember God who has sustained you, who has protected and provided for you.

2. REFOCUSING

Think about how we can refocus. The moment I say ‘refocus’; it means somehow that we have lost our focus. Maybe you have. Maybe you’re listening to this sermon and thinking: Yeah. I’m just way off-center. I’m here but I’m not here.” And I want to remind you of a couple of things.

Refocus your eyes on God:

Maybe you’ve got taken up by the storm that is around you. It’s brought fear and helplessness, and you’re stuck there. Maybe, you need to just refocus. Think about Peter – how, as long as his eyes were focused on Jesus, he walked on water, walked on the most difficult thing. And maybe you have a difficult thing facing you, and your focus is not on God. It’s on that difficult thing. Maybe this moment, this window of opportunity, as I like to look at New Year’s, it’s time for you to refocus, to turn your gaze again to God and say, “God, I’m looking at you, at Your sovereignty, at Your power, for You to come through for me. I don’t want to focus on the problems and situations and circumstances that surround me. I want to turn my gaze upon you.”

Refocus on the positive:

Maybe you’ve been focusing on what can’t be done, rather than on what can be done. Maybe that’s been a negative part of the way you walked – the first thing is: I can’t do that. and maybe you’ve missed many an opportunity because of that. you remember when Jesus was feeding the five thousand, immediately the disciples said, “How can we do this? It would take so much money to

feed five thousand.” They immediately looked at the problem. But Jesus wasn’t looking there. He knew what could be done with the omnipotent Father that He had, one who could provide.

So, maybe this is a good time to de-focus from the things that can’t be done and look at the potentiality that is in God whom you trust, and the potential that you have in being connected to Him. Or maybe, you focused on the things that have gone wrong, the problems, rather than what’s gone right. Maybe things have been very difficult this year and you’ve just been looking at those things that have gone wrong in your life.

Maybe you’ve missed a couple of things that have gone right – like the disciples who were on the road to Emmaus. They were thinking of all that had happened. The one that they had followed was no longer there. All that they had put their stock into had gone. They didn’t know what to do now. They were dispirited. But they missed everything else that Jesus, the Messiah had come for. They missed the fact that everything, according to what the prophets had said, had happened, and so had missed the entire point of all that had transpired in those last three days.

Maybe that’s where you are too – you’ve been focusing on everything that’s gone wrong, and thinking: This is a terrible year! Terrible things have happened, and yet, you’re here. You’re alive. You have breath. You have the King of kings and the Lord of lords on your side. And maybe, a refocus is needed to look at the things that He can do in your life, and see the things that He has done, the things that are right. And de-focus from the things that are wrong. This is important as we look at this window of opportunity to bring change into our lives as we look at a new year in front of us.

3. RESTARTING

Restart trusting God:

Maybe you stopped trusting Him after something didn’t go according to plan. Maybe you put all your eggs in one basket and then it failed, and you’re saying to yourself, “That’s the end of it! I’m not going to do it like this again. I thought this was what God wanted me to do, and it didn’t pan out. I’m done.” Maybe you need to restart trusting Him again like you’ve always done. Acknowledge that maybe that wasn’t God’s plan, or even maybe it wasn’t God’s modus operandi – that this was what He wanted for you but He has another way of doing it. But you’ve pulled the plug on it.

Judas was similar in thinking like that. He thought that Jesus had come to bring salvation, to take away the yoke from the children of Israel. And then, when he found that it wasn’t, then he moved into betrayal and all of that, although that was part of the plan that would bring salvation. But the Bible tells us that he thought that Jesus would save Israel at that time. So, maybe you need to also think about restarting trusting God again.

Restart your daily time with God:

Maybe you’ve stopped your quiet times because you were too caught up with everything else that needed to get done. You’ve been so caught up doing other things, got so busy that now you don’t do your quiet times. You don’t have time to pray. You don’t have time to read the bible. It’s been a while since all of that has been done.

Remember Martha and Mary? Martha was busy trying to do stuff, even though we look at it and say that it was necessary stuff. Yet, Jesus looked at them and said, “Mary has it right. That’s where the focus needs to be. That’s where you need to be focused Martha, in devotion, listening to Jesus.” Sometimes we get caught up with all the peripherals.

Restart your ‘heart checks’:

Maybe, you followed your own desires and you're in a far country right now. You gave into your own flesh, your own dreams. Or maybe, you didn't know that this had nothing to do with God, but you followed it, and it's empty. It's like the proverbial pot of gold at the end of the rainbow; it's not there. Now you don't know what to do.

Yet, the prodigal son who was in that very same position, the bible says he came to his senses, and he said, "I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'" If you've read that passage, you know that the second part of that didn't get said, because the father was busy saying, "Get clothes, get sandals, get a ring." All he heard was "I have sinned against heaven and against you. I'm not worthy." Maybe those are words that need to come from you – just to turn to God and say, "I have sinned, God. I'm in a far place, but I'm back. Will you accept me? Will you take me back?"

So, as we start a new year, or think of a Thursday that has become a Friday, or a 31st that has become a 1st, or December that is becoming January, while in the scheme of humanity, of chronology, nothing earth-shattering may happen unless the Lord comes. But, somehow, this moment, more than any of the other 365 days, affords us a chance for introspection, to think deeply about what we've done, where we're headed, what we want to do and achieve. And then to think about realignment – to make a change, a course correction, a U-turn maybe. Or to make a decision that has been long-pending.

I want to invite you as we come to the table of the Lord, to try and let these three areas begin to fill your mind:

- To remember that He is the same unchanging Jesus who says, "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest. The same God who told the Israelites, "You yourselves have seen how I brought you on eagle's wings unto Myself," and the same God whose everlasting arms are always under you. Maybe today, you need to hear those words to know and remember that these are things that God has said in His Word, that they are relevant for you at this moment. "Come unto Me, on eagle's wings I brought you to Myself, and underneath are the everlasting arms." Even if you think you're falling, you won't fall below His hands.
- Then refocus. As the old chorus says:
Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face;
And the things of the earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and His grace.

Turn your eyes unto Jesus, and let everything else lose focus. Let Him be the center of your focus.

- Then finally restart. I will arise and go to my Father, and I will say to Him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against You." Maybe that's what you need to do. Forget the things of the year that has gone by, let them fall, let God just bring healing and cleansing to you. Then mark a fresh line and say, "From henceforth, I'm going to walk with Him. I'm going to allow His will to become my will. I'm going to restart a relationship with Him with zeal and vigor and vitality.

Let me read the Psalm that I read earlier to you, over you this time.

Dearly beloved, you look up to the mountains. Does your help come from there? Your help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth. Beloved, He will not let you stumble. The one who watches over you will not slumber. The Lord Himself watches over you. The Lord stands beside you as your protective shade; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon at night. The Lord keeps you from all harm and watches over your life. the Lord keeps watch over you as you come and go both now and forever. Amen. God bless you.

Shall we pray together?

Our loving heavenly Father. We come to You, eternal God, You who are above all time, You who see us as we move from one year to another, You who see deep into our hearts and know the hearts that are fearful or scared or apprehensive, hearts that are dispirited or lives that are hopeless. And yet, once who have heard Your Word and are saying: I remember how You helped me Lord, and I'm going to let that stand with me as I trust You again. Lord, I remember the many things You've done and I found myself in a far place, but I'm coming back to You. I want to restart a life and a fellowship with you. Lord, ignite us as we pray.

Help us to look with fresh eyes, fresh enthusiasm, fresh zeal, at this year 2021, and may we embrace it knowing that we are not alone, that You walk with us, that You will never leave us and never ever forsake us. We look to You, Abba Father; we lift our hand and invite You to take us and to lead us down the path. In the most precious name of Jesus we pray. Amen.