

Looking Back

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[0 : 00] Well, let me begin with a question, and I want you all to follow and connect with the question.

I'll tell you ahead of time, I won't call on you, but I do want you to be tracking what I ask. And I really, if you're here this morning and you know Christ, what I'm going to ask is pertinent to you. Here's the question. Should every believer, right now, be filled with the Spirit? Should every believer be filled with the Spirit?

And the obvious answer from the Scriptures is, I mean, it's a command. It's what He says, correct? Well, how do you know if you're filled with the Spirit? By what comes out? Thank you, Steve. Can anybody text that for me? I mean, you know, Galatians chapter 5 would be one passage that certainly has bearing on it. Let's back up a little bit because I really think this is fairly important to our time together.

[1 : 20] Some of you came this morning because it's kind of habit. Some of you came this morning because you are desperate for the Spirit of God to do a work in your life.

Some of you came this morning and you have no idea what God is going to do, but I pray that the outcome of your time here is that you're affected by the truth of God and you're changed by it. Do we all need to be changed? What's the answer? Is there anybody here that doesn't need to be changed? We all need to be changed. Many of you, and I included, need to grow in grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And in order for that to take place, I need the enabling of the Spirit of God. We would all say yes to that, wouldn't we? I can't pull it off by my own.

And the Word of God says that I ought to be a Spirit-filled individual. I'm thinking in particular, having just finished preaching on it, of what it says in Ephesians chapter 5 verse 18 where it says, Be filled with the Spirit.

[2 : 34] And then in the verses that follow, it says, Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, making melody in your heart and being thankful always for everything.

So, if you're here this morning as a believer, is it proper? Is it appropriate? Is it what God expects and encourages from you for you to choose volitionally to be a Spirit-filled person?

The answer is yes. You've got a part to play in that. You have a part to play in that. And I would plead with you at the outset this morning to be conscious and deliberate in humbly asking Him to work in your life that you would be a Spirit-filled person as we sing, as we study the Scriptures together, that the outcome of the work of the Spirit of God would be that you grow to be more like Christ.

and that your profiting, your benefit, the outcome of that, would be something that is evident to all and recognized.

How many of you remember an old song in which the line went something like this, Here I raise my ebenezer? How many of you? Raise your hands high.

[4 : 07] This is kind of an identifier of our age bracketing. Some of you are sitting here saying, What is Ebenezer? Does anybody know what Ebenezer is? Does anybody know?

Can anybody tell me the Bible story in less than 10 seconds? I can do that. Okay, here's what happened. Remember? Israel was in a horrible mess, and they thought that certain things would help them, blah, blah, blah, and it didn't.

And then, however, God stepped in, and He blessed them and helped them, and they won a great victory over their traditional enemies who were the Philistines, right?

And after that, Samuel the prophet says, He sets up stones of memorial, and he says, Here I raise my ebenezer.

It means, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us. This is how far God's brought us. And so when we sing that song, Here I raise my ebenezer, by the way, John, could we sing that, Your Love Never Quits again at the end?

[5 : 13] It'll work perfectly. I'm sitting here just loving it, and I thought, change that for me, please. Okay, we're going to sing that again, and here's the deal. I want all of you to be spirit-filled when you sing that and blow the roof off, okay?

The only person, only people who have exemptions are those who have an attitude towards God and those who don't know God. Do you follow me? The rest of us sing because you're filled with the Spirit.

Okay, enough said. Some of you are going to say, I'm not going to do it anyway. But I know the heart. I know the heart. But I want you to follow with me as we come to the end of the year and think carefully about the benefit of looking back and tracking what God has done for us.

Now, there are illustrations in the Bible where looking back is not a good career path. One in particular stands out. Does anybody remember someone who did look back and never got to do it more than at that moment?

What was it? Who was it? Lot's wife looked back and God had said, don't be doing that and she paid a price for that, right? But we find in the Bible many illustrations of looking back and looking back can have benefit and blessing.

[6 : 26] When the nation of Israel celebrated, every year they celebrated the Passover, what in particular were they doing? They were looking back. They were remembering when they had been slaves in Egypt and they were remembering when God had delivered them from that affliction.

And as we think this morning of the conclusion of the year, I think it's appropriate for us to take a moment and do some looking back to think about what God has done in our lives personally and what God has done in our lives as a body of believers.

And every one of you here have the substance with which to do that. But we want to govern that in particular by the scriptures themselves. And so we want to look at a couple different illustrations in the Bible where people looking back received a certain blessing and an outcome from it.

First of all, I want us to look back and mark the fact that when we look back, we track His care and His power. When we look back, we track His care and His power. I want you to turn in your Bible, if you will, to Exodus chapter 14.

Exodus chapter 14 is one of the particular incidents in the Exodus in which God, after He had taken the nation of Israel out of the land of Egypt.

[7 : 45] And incidentally, how had the Egyptians come to the point of being willing to let the nation of Israel go? What had happened? I mean, every one of the firstborn of the Egyptians had died.

Isn't that right? And it was a terrifying event. And it was something that led Pharaoh and all of the Egyptians to say, get out of here. Go, go, go. In fact, here, take some stuff with you.

And they paid them off. Get out of here. Now, as they left, there was a very interesting little thing that happened along with that that was a pretty dramatic indication of the fact that God was leading them.

In the daytime, what was with the nation of Israel as they were on their way? What was following them or over them? A cloud. And at night, what was with them?

A pillar of fire. Do you think they had any doubt that God was the one who was doing this? No, they were very certain of that. But what we have in Exodus chapter 14 is that we have the incident where God says to Moses, and let me read for you there, then the Lord said to Moses, tell the people of Israel to turn back and encamp in front of Piharoth between Migdal and the sea in front of Baal Zephon, and you shall encamp facing it by the sea.

[9 : 07] Now, you understand that the nation of Israel had received this word. You are going to the land of milk and honey. You're going to the land of promise. It's going to be a wonderful place that I'm taking you.

And here we find that instead of going on the direct journey, God then turns around and takes them back into what looks like a corner and a difficulty. And as you look at this, you find that what really takes place is God intends in this event to bring glory to Himself and to show His continuing power over Egypt and His love for the nation of Israel.

But mark what takes place. As a result of hearing, Pharaoh had his spies tracking what was going on with this large group of a million plus people and he knows that, hey, instead of making that

direct passage out of Egypt and towards the place of freedom and deliverance, they had now got themselves in a corner against the Red Sea and he thought to themselves, hey, or he thought to himself, hey, let's take advantage of this and let's go bring them back to become slaves again. Look at what we read in verse 10. When Pharaoh drew near, Pharaoh took out with his army intending to get Israel back into slavery.

When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them and they feared greatly and the people of Israel cried out to the Lord. Now, it would have been nice if their crying out to the Lord had been merely a humble petition that God would do something for them.

[10:43] But what did they actually cry out? As you read here, what did they do? Instead of saying, hey, we're in a real hurt here and we're afraid of what the outcome is going to be and since you have helped us like you have in delivering us from the land of Egypt, why don't you do something else and help us now?

What did they do? They complained, they grumbled, they accused Moses and actually, in accusing Moses, they were also accusing God of really not taking care of them and look at what it says in verse 11.

They said to Moses, is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you've taken us away to die in the wilderness? In other words, you have done this to harm us not for our good. And what takes place is that God speaks to the nation of Israel and he says to Moses, you let them know I'm going to take care of them and he puts a protection between the army of Egypt and the nation of Israel through that night and then he parts the Red Sea and what happens?

What happens? He takes the entire nation of Israel through on dry land. And when the nation of Egypt, when the army of Egypt sees what is happening, guess what they decide?

Hey, there go our slaves. There go the people that are doing all this hard work for us. If they can do it, we can too. And they come right behind the entire group of the Israelites who are going through on dry ground and they try to follow them and as a result, God then brings the sea back upon them and as the sea comes over the Egyptian army, they are entirely destroyed.

[12:30] They're wiped out. And the Israelites standing on the far shore now look down upon all the bodies of these drowned and destroyed soldiers and they are just beside themselves in ebullition in thanksgiving.

Oh, wow, look what God has done. So what happens then? You look there in verse 30. We're in Exodus chapter 14. But look in verse 30. Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore.

So they turned around, they looked back, they'd been scurrying to get across out of the Red Sea on dry land and they looked back and said, wow, look what God has done. He has saved us. Israel saw, verse 31, the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians so the people feared the Lord and they believed in the Lord and his servant Moses.

Now what happens in Exodus chapter 15 is that Moses and all the people sang. And I want you just to listen to some of the opening lines.

I don't happen to know what the chorus was but we can track the words, right? Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the Lord saying, I will sing to the Lord for he has triumphed gloriously.

[13:49] The horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and my song. He has become my salvation. I want to draw several things out as we look at this song that they sang on the other side when they looked back and saw what God had done.

First of all, we recognize here that the victory that Israel enjoyed was really something that God had done. And so we recognize that just as with Israel so it is with all of us that the victories in our life are of his making.

The victories in our life are of his making and whether you are a young person or an old person really if you look objectively and you think spiritually you recognize that God has given you victories. He has done things in your life if you are here today and you know Christ as your Savior that you can attribute to nothing other than his hand and his grace. He granted you salvation.

He's lifted you up. He's put a new song in your life. He has changed things beyond your imagination. And as you look at all the things that he has done you look back and you'd have to admit these things are things that God has done not that you've done.

[14 : 59] Now I have to think when we recognize what we find here in this passage that we also probably do need to recognize that we have a tendency even on the day-to-day issues of being more like Israel in complaining than like Israel in rejoicing.

Am I right or wrong? Most of the time when you get trapped in bad traffic what's the first thing that goes through your mind? Huh? How many of you just hey Lord I'm glad you're in charge and I don't know all the details but I guess you've got me up against the Red Sea and good things are happening I can trust you.

Is that what we do? What do we do? I see some of your faces commiserate because of the last experience you had when things didn't go your way. We're like Israel. And so it's good for us to remind ourselves on occasion that really God is the one who's been doing great things for us and the blessings that we've enjoyed when we look in hindsight we recognize that every one of his victories that we've enjoyed are of his making not our own.

Furthermore there's something else that I want us to mark here in this passage that Moses reminds us of. Look there in verse 13. Begin there it says you have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed.

you have led in your steadfast love the people you have redeemed. Now who had led them out of the land of Egypt?

[16 : 26] Who was it? It was God. He had opened the way for them to allow Pharaoh who was their oppressor to deliver he had delivered them from the iron furnace where another passage speaks of Egypt as being the iron furnace he delivered them out of this.

And here is Moses speaking about that deliverance he says listen you have led by your steadfast love. The characteristic of your leading is your steadfast love.

How many of you have ever taken a dog for a walk that was not overly cooperative with you? Have you ever done that? How many of you have relied on the leash to get the dog to come with you? How many of you on occasion have thought to yourself maybe I pulled a little too hard? Okay? Or you've gone along scolding the come on come on you know and the dog your steadfast love has been grossly deficient.

Here is Moses as he considers the way in which God had taken care of the land the nation of Israel and he says listen you have led with your steadfast love.

[17 : 42] Do you recognize that in your life? His agenda and every step he takes us on is governed by his steadfast love. Every step he takes us on is governed by his steadfast love.

You know at this point in my life I have to say that when I look back across so many of the incidents in my life I recognize that the things that I at the moment thought were so terrible and so bad he has intended to be for my good and as I look in retrospect you as well join in recognizing every step has been marked by his steadfast love and his care.

So if you find yourself this morning in a valley you find yourself at a moment where things look a little difficult I want to remind you that what we find here in this passage in Exodus chapter 14 and 15 is a reminder of the fact that God who leads he may put us up against the Red Sea but he is leading in his steadfast love and he will bring it through he will bring us through and it will be an evidence of his unfailing love.

I want you to turn just for a moment over to a passage that reminds us of one of the reasons why God has written the scriptures. keep your finger there in Exodus but go if you would to Romans chapter 15 verse 4 Romans chapter 15 verse 4 it says but whatever was written in former days question is Exodus chapter 14 and 15 something that was written a long time ago what's the answer?

Yes, yes whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction that through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.

[19 : 35] Now listen God has recorded for our blessing the illustration of how he took care of Israel so that we ourselves in the midst of our adversity and difficulties and the challenges that we are facing may find comfort and certainty because we know this the God who took care of the nation of Israel is also taking care of us personally and he is at work and he leads with his steadfast love.

That's one of the reasons why I asked John to sing that song again. His love never quits never gives up never runs out on me but you know I want to ask you a question as you think about those songs the words of that song here's a companion question that goes with me or with it here's the question how many of you when you're singing that song think with me are also tracking passages

of scripture that the words reference?

Do you follow that? Now listen spirit filled people are inclined to think scripturally be filled with the spirit speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs thinking scripturally singing joyfully being thankful and so when we think about the nation of Israel we recognize here is God taking care of an entire group of people and a group of people that are a lot like us frail inclined to be a little discouraged on a moment uncertain of how things are going to work out and yet here is Moses reminding them as we see back in Exodus chapter 15 verse 13 you have led us in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed I want us to look at another illustration of someone who is looking back and I want you to turn in your Bible if you will to Genesis chapter 47 verse 9 we are going to look eventually at Genesis chapter 48 but for the sake of our grasping the overall picture

I want you to know that actually of Abraham Isaac and Jacob we are dealing here in this passage with Jacob who is the third of the patriarchs and if you were given the choice of who you would want to be like I would venture to say that none of us here would prefer that we be like Jacob right why would you not want to be like Jacob why you think with me and you recognize that Jacob's life was one that was marked by hardship and difficulty and most of it was self-inflicted what do I mean by self-inflicted it's a little bit like if you hit yourself with a hammer and you then begin to groan and complain about how bad your thumb feels incidentally I'm not sure you can see it but I have a nice little reminder that thumbs do not react well when struck okay so when you hit yourself with a hammer and you begin to complain a little bit you have to realize that was self-inflicted most of Jacob's life was actually pretty problematic

I want you to look and said we were going to look at 48 first but look at look at 47 chapter 47 verse 9 here is Jacob being brought by his son Joseph into the presence of Pharaoh and so Jacob is giving a summary of his life and Jacob said to Pharaoh the days of the years of my sojourning are 130 years now mark the next sentence where Jacob explains what those 130 years have been like few and evil have been the days of the years of my life well that's a little pessimistic isn't it but it was also pretty realistic and we know when you stop and think about Jacob's life that Jacob's life for the most part is a chronicle or a record of a self-willed manipulative self-focused individual over and over again

[24 : 15] Jacob thought he could handle things himself and the outcome of that was that in his own flesh he just kept on getting himself in trouble and here is Jacob 130 years old in the presence of the Pharaoh and he says let me tell you something I have had a fairly hard life and he was right but now let's look forward to another view of his life and we find it in Genesis chapter 48 verse 15 and 16 this is at the very end of his life and one of the things that Jacob did was that he gave prophetic blessing to all of his children and included in the children that he gave prophetic blessing to were the two children of Joseph Ephraim and Manasseh and I want you to mark if you will verse 15 and 16 he calls in for the two children of Joseph to bless them and as they are placed his eyesight is very very weak and can't see them very well and so

Joseph with the purpose of helping his father he puts the older one on the side where the right hand would naturally set and he puts the younger one where the left hand would set the right hand being the hand of power and the hand of principal blessing and what does Jacob do does anybody know he crosses his hands and Joseph thinking that his poor father you know maybe having a little bit of a problem here brain fade he says dad no no no it's going to be that way incidentally Jacob and Esau who was born first and here is Jacob blessing these two little ones and listen to what he says and he blessed Joseph and said to the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked the

God who has been and I want you to think about this the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day the God who's been my shepherd all my life long to this day I have never cared for sheep but my grandfather did and when I would go visit my grandfather I had brief exposures to the fact that sheep as sweet and as innocent as they seem are very very poor following at following do you follow that they're just they're kind of they're brain dead and the things that seem so intuitively obvious as being for their good they don't do and there is no such thing as a low maintenance flock of sheep you know what I mean by low maintenance

I mean the little dingbat song they'll leave them alone and they will come home dragging their that is pure fantasy if you're going to lead sheep you do that with that little crook and staff you know what they're doing all the time they're steering sheep you know a little peck on this side and have you

ever not sheep dogs you know!

what sheep dogs do sheep to the right place all the time work work work work work and Jacob says listen you have been my shepherd all my life I want you to mark what it says in verse 16 remember in Genesis chapter 47 where Jacob when he spoke about his life he said let me tell you something my life has been short and it's been hard Genesis chapter 48 verse 16 the angel who has redeemed me from all evil bless the lads the angel who has redeemed me from all evil bless the lands

[29 : 12] I have to tell you that there is something noteworthy in the fact that Jacob refers to the one who had blessed as the angel of the Lord because that phrase the angel of the Lord is a reference to the pre-incarnate Christ there are plenty of angels in the Old Testament but it is only the angel of the Lord that justly deserves praise and adoration and worship that is due to God alone and here in verse 15 Jacob says I want you to understand that God has been my shepherd and then in verse 16 he says the angel it's the Lord Jesus Christ who has redeemed me from all evil is that the view you have of your life as you look back over it I thought about this as I was praying earlier in the week and I recognized that our congregation is made up of a wide diversity of people some of you are sitting in here this morning that are in your 80s and in your 90s and your life is way behind you for the!

part some of you are sitting here that are literally not even in your teens yet can a person who is in his teens or even younger still have a view backwards and see that Christ has been at work in his life yes absolutely and this passage has application to every one of us the angel of the Lord who has redeemed me from all evil bless the lads and so as you look back over the life that God has given you to this point and if you look objectively I think what you would have to say is that that he has been your loving shepherd and he has kept you from destruction he's the one that's done this for you he's the one that's cared for you he's the!

that has brought you through and the one who redeems you I love the fact that as Jacob blessed those two little boys he made it very clear that his love has never quit he's never left you and he's never forsaken you there's one other thing that I want us to do as we think about this business of looking back at the end of the year and I would like you to turn to a passage in Philippians if you would as we close because looking back should move us upward Philippians chapter 3 the apostle is taking a large view over the broad sweep of his life and there as he comes towards the end of the chapter he makes a comment that is very significant to all of us

Paul in writing the letter to the church at Philippi he had taken the time to speak about what his past was to a certain degree but while he remembered some things of his past he certainly wasn't governed or controlled by it I think sometimes as we get a little older it is a tendency we have of thinking about the past more than we should and not allow the things we remember about our past only to govern our anticipation and ambition for the future let me read the passage to you there in Ephesians chapter 3 verse 13 and 14 brothers I do not consider that I have made it my own but one thing I do forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of in

Christ Jesus as Paul looked back over his past he recognized that there were things that conceivably others would take some credit for or whatever but he says hey listen those things don't count for me I counted all but loss for Christ but then he zeros in and he points out that the things of the past are not the things that govern him the thing that really governs him is that he is driving towards the high call of God in Christ Jesus I want you to think with me just for a moment of what he means when he says there I press towards the goal there is an intentional ambition and desire of the apostle to move forward I gotta tell you there are temptations in all of our lives that's enough we've arrived it's done and that's not the case that's not the case I can tell you this when you stop moving forward you begin drifting backwards do you understand that when you stop moving forward spiritually you begin drifting backwards and there are some of you sitting here this morning the truth of matter is nobody else knows what's happening but the fact is you've settled where you are and you're thinking well

[34 : 34] I'm done it's too hard and you begin to drift backwards spiritually a little bit at a time a little bit at a time but you're drifting backwards Paul says hey listen forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead is that what you're doing you have ambition for your spiritual future you're looking forward to what God is going to do in your life and more importantly you're looking forward to the day that you're going to see Christ Jesus face to face look at that little

statement that Paul makes he says I press towards the goal for the prize of the upward call what is the upward call well actually in the Greek that term upward call was a term a formal term that was actually used to refer to a formal invitation to a banquet something something special and something particular it was a recognition of who you were and a call to be part of something special

I can't help but think of what we read in Revelation chapter 16 verse 9 where we read there blessed are all those who are called what do you know what it says to the wedding supper of the Lamb that's the high call I want to have you recognize this morning that if you're a person who knows the Lord Jesus Christ then your calling is to glory and it is to spend eternity with him in heaven that's the high call and Paul says listen I put the past behind me I'm not going to get all carried!

over and bogged down with what my past is I put that behind me I am pressing forward to the high calling of God in Christ Jesus I wonder this morning as you look back across this year whether a little bit like Moses and the nation of Israel you can look at a Red Sea moment and you can say man that's something God did for me and I don't want to forget it and and and hereby I want to remind myself again and again God's been good and he's brought me through but can you also be like Jacob and and you remind yourself hey listen every step of the way the good shepherd's been there using the cane and picking me up and seeing to it that I get to where I need to be and the angel of the Lord has redeemed me from all evil that's past

I want you to think like Paul forgetting those things that are behind I press towards the high calling of God in Christ Jesus my ambition my affection is set on the things of eternity and that's where I have my heart you know the things we think about make a huge difference in the attitudes of our day isn't that right how many of you learned that and as you have the year behind you I do want you to spend a moment and say wow I can't believe God's done this for me he's blessed me he's helped me but I want you to be like Paul I consciously deliberately and by commitment of my spirit

I say I am pressing towards the high calling of God now you can sit here this morning and just let the words happen and think we're done but if you do it's like consciously choosing to float backwards can I tell you a little something about floating backwards sooner or later if you're a believer you're going to have to dig the paddle in and move upstream and the further downstream you drift the more work there is digging back upstream and so it's appropriate for you this morning to say hey listen I press I choose to press towards the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus that's my choice let's close in prayer father god as we think about this year and we mark what you have done we recognize that that we like

[39 : 39] Israel can track the many many ways in which you have protected us you have cared for us you have delivered us from all difficulties but we don't want to rest on the laurels or the accomplishments of the past we want to have a singular focus and an ambition to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and a longing in our heart that is the work of the!

God to desire to be like Christ and to grow for his glory we want to press towards the goal of the high calling and that's conscious and deliberate choice that we want to make this morning by your spirit's power that in the year to come should you tarry we can look back and track what you've done in helping us grow we're here to make a commitment we recognize that the purpose of opening the word and preaching is drawing people to a point of saying yes or no to God we want to be intentional in our pursuit of godliness we ask this in Jesus name amen