

Looking back, looking forward.

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[0 : 00] Let me read from Philippians chapter 3 verses 1 to 14. They're not on the screen but I'll read them from the New International Version.!

For it is we who are circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus and who put no confidence in the flesh, though I myself have reasons for such confidence.

If someone else thinks that they have a reason to put confidence in the flesh, I have more. For it is a law, circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, in regards to the law of Pharisee, as for zeal, persecuting the church, as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

But whatever were gained to me, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things.

I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ.

[1 : 34] The righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ, yes, to know the power of his resurrection and the participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.

And so somehow attaining the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or I have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

Brethren, I do not consider myself yet having to take hold of it. For one thing I do, forgetting what is behind and straining to what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Well-known words, pressing on towards the goal. I just want to think for a fairly short time now about looking back and looking forward as we are here in the beginning of a new year.

It's only, what is it, the 5th of January? December. That went quickly, didn't it? Sorry? All right. It's all in numbers.

[2 : 49] 4th of December. Looking at what's past. January. Shall I start again?

It's good that the past look backwards to recognise God's wonderful goodness to us.

Okay? And it's important that we do. And it's important that we celebrate the wonders of the mercy and kindness in our lives.

And just there we'll pause for a moment and say, just allow yourself in your head to think of the great things that have happened over the last 12 months.

The lovely stuff. The family stuff. The individual stuff. The very personal, private stuff that not many know about.

[3 : 51] Those moments where you felt so close to God, you could almost feel him. You could almost feel his hand in yours.

His arms around you. Those moments of preciousness. Those things where you can be joyful and celebrate.

Good stuff. Good stuff. Fun stuff. Nice stuff. Happy stuff. And it's good that we spend time recognising God's wonderful kindness and mercy in our lives.

The generosity and goodness that he demonstrates to each of us as we go through our lives following Jesus.

Be with Jesus. Become like Jesus. And do what Jesus did. It's also important as we look to the past to recognise the things in our lives that haven't pleased him.

[5 : 09] And put that right in the words of the Anglican General Confession. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done. And we have done those things which we ought not to have done.

In thought and word and deed. That little confession there is one that's very important. Because it speaks to both the extroverts in the room and the introverts in the room.

The extroverts have done those things which we ought not to have done. The introverts have left undone those things which we ought to have done.

A bit of a simplistic analysis. But we can't get away from the fact that in thought and word and deed as we look back.

As I look back. There are things which haven't gone well. That have not been who God wants me to be. That's not about condemnation by the way.

[6 : 20] You know it's so important that we recognise as we think about the things that haven't gone well. That we remind ourselves all the time. God doesn't peddle condemnation.

The devil does. God peddles justice. And forgiveness. And love. And mercy.

So if you're thinking, goodness, that year, last year wasn't my deal. There are things that I have done or not done. Said and not said. Fought and not thought. That really weren't perfect.

Go to God and confess. Go to God this morning before we take communion and confess. And he will forgive you. So looking back at the beginning of a year is really important.

Doing some sort of audit. Some sort of analysis of how it's gone. Is really important. But we mustn't get stuck in the past.

[7 : 21] Next slide please. We can focus on today. Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed.

For his compassions never fail. They're new every morning. Great is your faithfulness. We've just sung that. We've just sung that. Great is your faithfulness.

All I have needed. Your hand has provided. Every day that you wake up. You are the beneficiaries from heaven.

Of new mercy. I'm not a great. I don't always enjoy waking up. Sometimes I don't mind waking up. But normally I'm not altogether pleased.

As the alarm goes off. And it's dark. And it's cold. And it's miserable. Or maybe I'm dark, cold and miserable. Well that's what it is. But I try to remind myself.

[8 : 24] I try to remind myself. As soon as I can. Upon waking. I am the beneficiary of heaven. Of new mercies today.

Allow that to sink in. Allow that to be part of your thinking. What an extraordinary thing. That you as an individual.

lying in your bed. Lying in your bed. Opening your eyes. Are the beneficiary. From heaven. Of new mercies.

Today. And tomorrow. And tomorrow. After tomorrow. And all our tomorrows. until we find ourselves in heaven.

Hebrews 3 has this lovely injunction. Encourage one another daily as long as it is called today. I think the point that Paul's making here is just do it.

[9 : 30] Just do it. Encourage each other every day. As long as it's called today, encourage one another. And so as we focus on today, not only do we need to be mindful of the fact that God blesses us, but also the encouragement that we give to each other needs to be a routine, standard part of our lives.

The spiritual gift of encouragement, the injunction we have to build each other up, the injunction we have to ensure that we are as a fellowship together, as a family together, and we encourage each other.

And so we don't lose sight of the fact that part of my job, not as an elder or not as a whatever, but part of my job as a brother and sister, a brother of Christ to you, is that I need to encourage you.

That needs to be part of our daily routine, our daily ritual. And again, a little encouragement to you, and maybe some homework. Allow God to prompt you to encourage somebody today.

Who is it that you should nudge, smile at, send a text, send a WhatsApp, send a Instagram?

[11 : 11] Can you send Instagram? No? You can? You can. Got away with it. Got away with it. Sometimes simply walk down the street and smile at people.

Terrifies them. But just encourage them. Just encourage them. And those who need your encouragement will be blessed by you and blessed by God. And then there's this part about don't worry about tomorrow. Each day has enough troubles of its own.

Or in old money, sufficient unto the day are the troubles therein. there's something very important about living in the present.

There's something about not worrying about what's going to happen tomorrow. There's something very important about focusing on your relationship and your walk with Jesus and your life as a follower and disciple of Jesus for today.

[12 : 27] Concentrating on the here and now is really, really important. and concentrating on the here and now is part of what living in the day means.

And being part of the Jesus revolution, if I can use that concept, is each of us being Jesus in our community, in our lives today.

Mark Twain, next slide please. That's Mark Twain. He had the most magnificent moustache. I've never seen a picture of Mark Twain before.

They are. Magnificent moustache. He looks a little bit like Groucho Marx, but he didn't. Give every day the chance to be the best day of your life. I like that. I like that.

Give every day the chance to be the best day of your life. Turn that into a prayer. God, make the day great.

[13 : 29] Because I've got you and I surrender to you. But then we need to think, Josh, thank you, about looking forward to the future.

Look to the future. Forget the former things. Don't dwell on the past.

See, I'm doing a new thing. Now it springs up. Do you not perceive it? I'm making a way in the wilderness and streamed in the wastelands.

I think I must have got a little bit old-fashioned because I put in here because I liked it. Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old. You can have whichever translation you like there.

See, I'm doing a new thing. Forget about the past. This isn't a contradiction in Scripture, by the way. They all hang together in balance and in perfect balance.

[14 : 37] Remember what's gone. Give thanks for what's gone. Live for the present, but look to the new things.

And I suppose that this time of year is always worth thinking. I wonder what's going to happen. I wonder what God's got for 2026.

New Year's Eve and New Year's Day is simply a passage of time. They're just two days. They happen to be numbers. One's 31 and one's one. But that's how it works. That's how we split up the year.

But there's no significance there in terms of God's plan for you. He has a wonderful plan for you every day.

But it is worth thinking at the beginning of the year, I wonder what this year is going to be like. I wonder what God wants for me this year. And this passage from Isaiah demands us to be open to what God has for us.

[15 : 40] It requires us to be open to the things of God. Because he has great things for you as you look into the new year.

But we need to perceive this. We need to understand this. We need to be able to recognise it. And that takes time and that takes being attuned to the Spirit and allowing for the Spirit to speak to us as individuals.

To you in your times of quiet with God. God, help me understand what it is that you've got for me to do this year.

As we do the covenant prayer, say the covenant prayer next week in our covenant service. We'll be committing ourselves to the service of God in the context of local church for the next 12 months.

And as we do that, it's a daring promise because we're saying to God, put me to what you will. Put me to what you will.

[16 : 52] Goodness me. But what an exciting adventure that is if we really mean it. What an exciting adventure that is if we really allow ourselves to mean that before God.

So what are the new things? It's all about relationship with God and it's most simple and straightforward. It's about relationship with God.

And that real commitment and real willingness to be in relationship with Jesus. And we can't be in relationship with Jesus if we spend no time with him.

And so we need to redouble our efforts, recommit ourselves, re-whatever else it is that we need to re- to spend time with God, to be in relationship with God.

One of the things I always feel at Christmas card time is that I look at the list of cards that we send and the cards that we receive and think, oh goodness, we're out of contact with them, aren't we?

[18 : 11] I've got a friend who I went to school with and we exchange Christmas cards every year and each year we say, must catch up in 2025, 2026, 2027, 2029.

Must do that. Whether we ever will or not, I don't know. But we can't do that with God. We can't say to God, yeah, we really must catch up this year.

let's try and make time to have a meal together sometime. No, no. All about our relationship with God and our focus on that.

Be with Jesus. Become like Jesus. Do what Jesus did. And that will be different for each one of us. don't look over your shoulder at others. Focus on God. It's one of the real risks of church life that we have a look at other people and think, if only I were more like them.

[19 : 23] If only I were that sort of person. if only I was an introvert rather than extrovert. If only I was this or good at that or able to do this.

God, why didn't you make me like somebody else? That God looks at you and says, I've made you precious and perfect as you are.

I want you to be you. So the new things for you, they're unique to you. It's only you. There's only you that can be like you.

So don't look for somebody else's new things. Look for your own new things. But be expectant. God will do new things in your life this year.

That's what he says he will do. God will do new things in your life this year. What are they? No idea. But be hopeful. There'll be good things.

[20 : 29] There'll be good things. And you can look back at the end of another 12 months and give thanks for the good things that God has done in your life.

And be watchful. Be watchful because we need to perceive it. do you not perceive this? We need to recognise God's work in our lives.

God doesn't deal in coincidence nor does he deal in luck. Oh, that was lucky. What a coincidence. No, no, no. We have a much cleverer God than that.

do you not perceive it? Have you not seen? Be expectant, be hopeful and be watchful.

And then, of course, it'll be rates. All right? Because ultimately, we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him, who've been called according to his purpose.

[21 : 46] I've got two coasters that say it'll be rates because it's very important to me because it's true. It's true. What's going on?

Chaos. What's going on? It's all bonkers. What's going on? I'm confused or scared or worried or whatever. Be rate.

Why? Because in all things, God works for the good of those who love him, who've been called according to his purpose.

If you love him, you've been called according to his purpose. It'll be rates. Bless you. Thank you.