

“BOLDLY GOING WHERE NO ONE HAS GONE BEFORE”

(Philippians 3:4b-14)

12.29.19

INTRODUCTION

Listen [“Jaws” theme clip]. Just two notes — and a shark was created. Just two notes — and a whole movie starts replying in our minds, a movie that came out 44 years ago!

Some years are like that: one or two events that seem to define everything by the indelible memories they create. All we have to do is mention very few words, and all the memories come rushing back. A whole year defined by a couple of words — that’s crazy!

This also seems crazy because it doesn’t seem that long ago: In September 1987 (32 years ago), in a follow-up series to the original *Star Trek*, a new show, *Star Trek: The Next Generation* began to air. Every one of their ultimately 178 episodes started with these words, spoken by actor Patrick Stewart:

“Space: the final frontier. These are the voyages of the starship Enterprise. Its continuing mission: to explore strange new worlds. To seek out new life and new civilizations. To boldly go where no one has gone before!”

Why bring that up? Well, we’re sitting on the cusp of a new year — a year where no one has gone before. Now, contrary to boldly going, which suggests moving forward, it always seems to be the practice that, when a new year arrives, we look back — on all that has happened the previous year. And that makes sense; there were certainly some things worth remembering that occurred over these last 12 months. And the fact of the matter is, coaches and teams do this all the time — looking back — reviewing the previous game to learn from whatever mistakes were made — so they can move forward — making plans for the next game.

But there’s a huge difference between sports and life. In sports, as you look ahead, you generally know who you are playing. You know (or have the opportunity to learn) the coming opponent’s strengths and weaknesses. That’s why coaches spend so much time looking at film of their coming opponent’s previous games — to figure out what those strengths and weaknesses might be so they can design a game plan that attacks the other team’s weaknesses and contains that team’s strengths. Bottom line: The future opponent is something that can be known.

But life is different. I can make all the plans and have all the ideas I want about what’s ahead. And certainly, to a point, I do that. I plan sermon series, and develop ministry ideas, all with an eye toward the future. But the fact is that I don’t have a clue what the future is going to be. We all assume, but none of us know, even what the next five minutes are going to be.

What will be the challenges? What will be the triumphs? What will be the tragedies or heartbreaks, the joys or disappointments? What life changes are on their way? None of us know.

But Christians have a way to confront the future: Not by their own efforts, but by the presence of the One who already knows the future because He wrote it. God, our wonderful Heavenly Father, knows the future, and he knows what part each one of us will play in it. He knows what each one of our parts looks like as surely as He knows how He has made us.

So, as we look at a New Year, I thought it might be useful to look at it through the filter of what we can know — by focusing on what the Bible has given us to know, that will indeed allow us to

“boldly go where no one has gone before” — into an unknown year with a very known and loving God.

TEXT

If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless. But whatever were gains 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 is through faith in Christ—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 participation in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus — Paul, Philippians 3:4b-14.

There are three (3) basic ideas that Paul brings out in this passage:

- 1) First of all, Paul makes the point that “the best is yet to come.” He does this by looking back on what his life was like before Christ and realizes that, apart from Jesus, his life meant nothing. While it might have meant earthly honors and glory, in eternal God-terms, it meant nothing; in fact, Paul refers to that past life with whatever honors and glory as “garbage.” Another translation uses the word “dung” (yes, as in manure) for comparing his life before Christ and after. His life before created nothing but a false righteousness based on himself that came from the law — his words, his works, his strength, his efforts. But his life now once Jesus became his foundation? *[T]he righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith — Paul, Philippians 3:9b.* That is the life that matters — the genuine righteousness found only in Jesus. That is a truth and reality that has meaning far beyond the coming of a new year. Look back on what your life was like before your life was surrendered to Christ. What brought meaning then? What brings meaning now? It’s your life in Christ that matters — the opportunities for growth in His image, the opportunities for ministry in His kingdom, the moments for outreach and evangelism in His name. That is something we have to look forward to.
- 2) Second, what drives Paul’s life is one thing: *I want to know Christ — Paul, Philippians 3:10a.* What a magnificent testimony! He has been in ministry for years — evangelizing, planting churches, discipling new Christians. And yet, after all that experience and all that accomplishment, he is still energized by one overriding desire: knowing Christ — as Peter said, *grow[ing] in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ — II Peter 3:18.* You can hear Paul’s passion as he writes: *I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me — Paul, Philippians 3:12b.* I love it in the Greek: Literally, “I am continuing my pursuit to capture Christ as Christ has captured me.” Now Paul was a brilliant academic mind, but it is not scholarship that is Paul’s desire. It’s intimate relationship — the kind of relationship that comes from being completely, totally,

helplessly in love. Jesus Christ is the greatest love of Paul's life, and he wants to keep falling. What an amazing idea! How about us? No matter how much we know about Christ, are we driven to know more? Not academically, but from a burning desire in our hearts — driven by love, driven by absolutely wanting to know all we can about our Master because the more we find, and the more we learn, the more we love. And the more we love, the more we want to love. Isn't that what we have found with our spouses? How much more shouldn't our hearts be turned to the eternal relationship we can know with our wonderful Lord? That is also something we have to look forward to.

- 3) Last, look at how Paul tells us he lives his life: not looking back, but looking forward. Hear again how he says it: ***One thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward ("reaching forth" — KJV) what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus — Paul, Philippians 3:13b-14.*** So, what's Paul saying? Well, the idea of "forgetting" means to literally "lose out of mind," to neglect in our thinking. It doesn't mean that our past life is erased from our memories, but it's proper place is to celebrate what has taken place in our lives since Christ assumed the throne. [COMPARISON WITH SPOUSES AND DATES.]. Those past things are overwhelmed in the presence of Jesus. We remember not from a position of sorrow but from a position of thankfulness and celebration. "Look what Jesus has done in our lives. Look how He has changed me. Look how He has saved me." But that being said, Paul's constant posture is "full speed ahead." What he chooses to do instead is to literally "stretch himself forward upon"; he is eagerly extending himself toward the finish line of his life in Christ. Have you ever seen runners in a race as they stretch their bodies toward the finish line? That's the idea here — the eagerness to complete the race and win the prize. And that is also something we have to look forward to.

APPLICATION

So, going into another New Year, where virtually everything is unknown, what can we know? Three things to celebrate and claim as we move forward; just listen to these words:

- 1) Jesus Christ is ever present with us:
 - a) ***"[S]urely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" — Jesus Christ, Matthew 28:20b.*** We will never be left alone.
 - b) ***"I will not leave you as orphans" — Jesus Christ, John 14:18a.*** We will never be left on our own, to fend for ourselves.
 - c) Regardless of whether we are living in good times or bad: ***Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for You are with me — David, Psalms 23:4a.*** Christ comes alongside us in every time.
- 2) Jesus Christ is ever interceding with us:
 - a) ***"I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. . . . My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message" — John 17:9, 20.*** Jesus prays for us.
 - b) ***Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us — Paul, Romans 8:34b.*** Jesus pleads our case for us.
 - c) ***[B]ecause Jesus lives forever, He has a permanent priesthood. Therefore He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them — Hebrews 7:24-25.*** Jesus never stops advocating for us.

- 3) Jesus Christ is ever loving us:
- a) ***“I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness” — God speaking, Jeremiah 31:3b.*** We have never been unloved.
 - b) ***“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” — Paul, Romans 8:35, 37-39.*** Nothing can get in the way or interfere with that everlasting love.
 - c) That’s why Paul’s greatest prayer for his churches was this: ***I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God — Paul, Ephesians 3:16-19.*** He wanted them, and wants us, to never forget the ever-present, ever-surrounding love of Jesus Christ, that that awareness would mark their every step and every moment of their lives.

CONCLUSION

You know, many times when we talk about somebody’s surrendering to Jesus Christ, we talk about the gift of salvation with the idea that God intends that gift for everybody — “but it’s not yours until you claim it”; otherwise, God’s gift is simply an offer, and no more.

Well, the same applies here, but it applies specifically to Christians: All the wonderful promises God gives us through His word are also meant for us, but we render them likewise meaningless — they are unopened gifts — unless we claim them. That’s why David was inspired to write: ***Taste (perceive, judge) and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in Him — David, Psalms 34:8.*** But the follow-up from the apostle Peter is just as important: ***Like newborn babes, crave (intensely desire, long after) pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted (experienced, proven) that the Lord is good — I Peter 2:2-3.*** As Christians, we don’t have to wonder about the love or blessings or power of God. We have seen and experienced all those things through Jesus Christ to know what He offers us. We have experienced enough to know there is nothing better in this world or in this life. Therefore, why wouldn’t we pursue such a wonderful love with everything we have? Why wouldn’t we chase after Jesus Christ like the greatest prize we could ever know?

Bill Maher: If you don’t do all that Jesus commanded:

- 1) You’re not a Christian; you’re just auditing.
- 2) You’re not a follower; you’re just a fan.

We need to lose the world’s idea that Christianity is just another religion. When we treat biblical promises like just something that we hear on Sunday mornings or maybe read in an encouraging greeting card, we are making all God’s promises to have no more meaning than the messages we find inside fortune cookies.

Think about this. Whatever our dating experiences had been, when the “one” who became our spouse came along, everything changed. And nobody had to tell us, “By the way, you might want to spend more time with this person.” “Hey you, maybe do something to get to know them better.” Spending more time, desiring to get to know them better, that came naturally. We were falling in love and, somehow, we knew what to do. No one had to tell us to love our kids, to hold them close. We knew what to do. When we find the “real thing,” the best thing we’ve ever known in terms of relationships, we know what to do. And everybody else better get out of the way, ‘cause we’re not going to let anything come between us and the people we love.

This is relationship, folks. Christianity, the Bible, God, Jesus, salvation, all of it — this is a relationship — and we should know what to do. This is a love story. This is eternal life. Let’s let our lives act that way — like Jesus Christ is all He said He is, that God is everything He’s promised, that life is a gift to be lived on God’s terms. How else can we expect to “boldly go” into a unknown new year? Let’s not go without Him, but let’s not just take Him along, either. Let Him lead the way. Let this year be His year — and let’s do that boldly! Let’s pray!