

New Year's Eve Meditations

December 31, 2022

1 Corinthians 10:11 *These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.*

"Those who fail to learn from history are condemned to repeat it." Thus wrote a scholar over a century ago. Winston Churchill made the statement famous when he quoted it in a speech. History teachers like the reminder. There is truth to it as many younger siblings in families have effectively applied what they observed from the missteps of the older ones in the family. Today the Apostle Paul is also telling us

LEARN FROM THE PAST

He had been discussing events from Israel's history, noting earlier in the chapter, "Their bodies were scattered over the desert." The nation of God's chosen people had received numerous blessings. The Lord delivered them from slavery in Egypt, preserved them from annihilation with the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, provided water in the desert and manna for food. Yet when they stood at the threshold of Canaan, the land he had promised them, they were afraid to enter. He condemned them to wander for forty years while all the adults at the time died, except for Joshua and Caleb, the two faithful spies. The wilderness became a huge graveyard during those decades.

During that time there were major incidents involving the loss of life. The people complained about the leadership of Moses, and ultimately of God. The earth opened up and swallowed many of them, which brought yet more complaint and additional deaths. Moabite women lured the Israelite men into idolatrous worship which included sexual immorality and thousands more were killed. Another bout of grumbling led the Lord to send poisonous snakes into the camp. We could go on with examples of unfaithfulness such as the worship of the golden calf while Moses was on the mountain receiving the commandments from God.

As we view our past year there is plenty of sinfulness as well. I won't ask for public statements, but I know it well from my own life. Other things took importance over God—personal comforts, pleasures, ideas and activities. We grumbled about our situation in life. We resisted leadership, expressing dissatisfaction with government officials. We showed similar attitudes in the church, which was easy to do as the vacancy lingered with the repeated declining of calls to serve as pastor. We

harbored impure thoughts, spoke unkind words and performed sinful deeds. We exhibited pride and selfishness.

All of those sins raised their ugly head day after day. Our review of the year past shows the need for confession of sins. That is good for us or we would remain in them, separated from God. So even in our times of remorse the Lord is our God, our help in ages past, confronting our guilt. He does more than issue warnings. He fully forgives all those sins. Hymn 303 will serve as our confession of sins, concluding with words of absolution in the final verse.

Romans 15:4-6 Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and one mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As we learn from history we turn from our sinful past to God's actions.

SEE GOD IN YOUR PAST

Paul had been discussing concern for weak Christians regarding customs and practices about foods to eat and days to observe. He said to watch out for giving offense to those with a tender conscience. There is more to faith than outward observances.

God has such a concern for us. We were weak and even dead in sin. Our plight was why Jesus came to this earth. He was here to rescue us lost sinners. He did not wash his hands of the matter, saying, "You blew it. You will just have to deal with the consequences." No, he entered our existence as we just celebrated. He became human to be our substitute. Both his life and his death were involved. His sinless behavior was credited to us and his innocent death removed our sins from the record.

He cares for each of us individually. He sought you with his gospel. The Spirit led you to repentance and faith. You enjoy his full and free forgiveness. Eternal life awaits.

He has daily interaction seeking your return when you lapse into sin or stray from his side. That message was yours daily in 2022. He surrounded you with fellow Christians who called you back or who comforted and encouraged you when you were down.

A review of the past year also shows material blessings from our faithful God. Inflation increased costs but wages also rose. Job openings abounded. Supply chain issues eased for many products. You could meet your needs. We have warm homes, food on our tables and clothes on our back, with plenty more in the closet. We enjoy an abundance beyond the necessities as conveniences and comforts surround us. We don't need to go out and chop wood or shovel coal to stoke the furnace or fetch water from a nearby stream and then warm it over the fire. We just program the thermostat, turn on the faucet or flip the switch on our appliances. It is true that not everything went our way, but the sun still rises each day and life continues.

God has also been protecting us. There were health issues for some, but you received care. People close to us died but that meant heaven for fellow believers. Travel occurred for many. There were beautiful sights, memorable experiences or the opportunity to connect with distant relatives and friends.

A response is natural. We praise God in unity. "With one heart and one mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." We give thanks for personal blessings and for God's goodness to others. Joint praise shows concern for others and fosters oneness. We reach out to others to build unity as we welcome visitors and help new people to grow through the Word. Our whole setting then gives glory to God.

There is much to recall as we see God's history of goodness, our help in ages past.

Psalm 33:20-22 We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust his holy name. May your unfailing love rest upon us, O Lord, even as we put our hope in you.

In the closing hours of 2022 we do not just review the past but we peer into the future.

WE LOOK AHEAD WITH HOPE AND TRUST

With a host of calendar pages to turn over lots of questions and concerns, even fears, may arise. Will we enter a recession? Will the stock market plummet or inflation erode our income? Perhaps a major breakdown will occur that hits us with unplanned expenses. Or we wonder whether sickness will strike us or a loved one in the months ahead.

If we focus on potential problems we might duck under our covers tonight and refuse to get up in the morning to face 2023.

Knowing God, our help in ages past, changes everything. One aspect of God to keep in mind is his quality of unchangeableness. As he has been in the past, so he will be in the future. So read of the Bible events and see what he did for his people of old. Look at your own life as well. As he has showered blessings on us, so he will continue to do.

That confident attitude was reflected in these psalm verses. "He is our help and our shield." Our divine helper is ever at our side. He is all-powerful so can handle whatever comes. He is our shield, our protector. He assigns his mighty angels to watch over us. They keep us safe or redirect troubles that do strike us to serve a good purpose in our lives.

"We wait in hope for the Lord," filled with upbeat, positive anticipation. We do not dread the future but ask, "What good things does God have in store for me?" The reason for this attitude is God's unfailing love. It is always there and is unlimited. The gospel message reassures us. If he loved me enough to send Jesus, he will surely take care of my daily life.

There is an effect from our knowledge of the Lord. "We trust his holy name." It is a confident reliance. It does not look to ourselves and our abilities or accomplishments, for then it would be iffy indeed. We trust his holy name, that name "LORD." It is his covenant name, a reminder of his promises and the actions he takes to fulfill them, especially his love. The hope that fills our hearts is more than a wish. It is a sure confidence. Filled with it, "In him our hearts rejoice." We approach 2023 with thankfulness. We praise him each day.

With such reassurance from our God and confidence in him, we have reason to wish you a Happy New Year. In the Lord, our hope for years to come, it will be!