

2000 arrived without the world collapsing...

The year 2000 had an unusual beginning, don't you think? The hoopla of entering a new millennium was expected to be overshadowed by Y2K computer glitches, but.....there we were on January 1, with flushing toilets and instant cash machines intact. So, what's next?

One of our church leaders works for a media company that helps produce television news. When he asked one of the executives there if he knew the millennium didn't really begin until January 2001, the man replied, "We know that, but our watchers and listeners didn't want to hear that." Our friend replied, "Is that how you report all the news?" "Well....yes," he replied. "Sort of..."

So, it seems we'll need sources of information other than the media to know what's next!

What's next for you? As you look past the year 2000, what do you see for yourself?

Sometime ago, I realized I had no vision for life after the year 2000. Somehow, in my childhood, I came to believe the world would probably end by then. I think it was a combination of preachers' predictions and my own evaluation that the world was falling apart.

I lived through several prophetic episodes, in which a well-meaning spiritual leader predicted the time of the return of Christ, or the beginning of the tribulation, or the fall of America. I guess even well-meaning Christians can be wrong.

Why hasn't the end come...?

However, I never scoff at these things, not even the dire predictions of Y2K. Thank the Lord for people who can fix such things and prevent much trouble! And I certainly do not scoff at the seeming delay in Christ's return. I got that settled a while ago as I came to understand the Father's heart for people, and the significance of these words in II Peter 3:

"...you must understand this, that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and indulging their own lusts and saying, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since our ancestors died, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation! ...The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance."

There's a work yet unfinished...

One thing delays the coming of Jesus: the Father loves people and wants them in heaven, not hell. If that is true, only one thing will hasten His coming: bringing people to salvation. If we long for His appearing, we will preach the gospel to the world. As Jesus said in Matthew 24:14,

“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

God has determined the “end” to be at the finishing of the preaching of the gospel to the whole world.

Don’t get me wrong. Only the Father knows the hour when it will happen. Only He knows when the task is finished. We must live as if Jesus could come today. What do you want to be found doing when He arrives? ...Then do it.

We must also live as if He might not return in our generation. This means we need to invest our lives in that which counts, not only for ourselves, but for our children and grandchildren. It is not a Christian view to abandon the world to evil, thinking...”oh, its a sign of the end”, then hunker down in our corner and wait for it. Jesus said, *“Occupy until I come.”* He is not coming for a church hiding in caves. He is coming for a church invading the darkness of the world and shouting the good news from the housetops...regardless of the cost.

So, I now have a vision for the year 2000 and beyond. How about you? Are you seeing and dreaming and hoping and planning and determining and expecting and moving ahead with God?

Some of us are older now, and that can add to our thinking that the “end is near”. I know people in their fifties whose main preoccupation is preparing for the “declining years”. I know someone in their fifties who went out to purchase a rocking chair for retirement!

Don’t get old on the inside!

No way! Go spend that money on some knee pads for extended prayer. Get fresh marching orders from God. Buy a pair of jungle boots and go bring the good news to someone who doesn’t know about God’s love. Stay there until your money runs out, so you’ve got nothing left for that rocking chair. Then watch God take care of you. You’ll find your youth renewed. You won’t want that rocking chair for a long time.

Psalms 103 says *“He renews our youth like the eagle...”* I don’t like the sagging in my 57 year old face. I’d like to look like my wedding picture. (50 lbs. lighter too!) But renewing my youthful face isn’t my greatest need. (Or yours.) The greatest need is to be young on the inside. The greatest tragedy is to get old in your heart.

Young people generally have the ability to dream, to hope, to prepare to do something wonderful with their lives. Not all those dreams may come to pass, but what a tragedy it is when a young person has no dreams, no vision, and no goals.

To get old inside is to stop having dreams and visions, to shut down the sense of adventure and live just “hanging on ‘till the end”. Hey, face it! If that’s you, you’re already dead....you’re just taking up space waiting to be buried!

No way! Stick close to Jesus...you’ll get younger!

Get ready to climb the next mountain...!

Jackie’s dad was a pioneer missionary in the jungle mountains of South East Asia. They called him “the mountain man”. He was no longer an American on the inside after 30 years in the mountains trekking for Jesus. Hundreds of churches now exist in the mountains where he carried the gospel to head hunting tribes.

He contracted a mysterious disease in his latter years, and while in the USA the doctors tried to get him to stay in the USA. He knew the mission would probably put him behind a desk. He would have none of that. They finally released him back to his mountains. Four months later he died in those mountains of that mysterious disease -- with his boots on, as they say. He had “finished the course and kept the faith”. He never stopped dreaming about the unreached people over the next mountain. He never stopped trekking to bring the gospel to them, until his body gave out and he went to “glory”, as the old saints called heaven.

Keep your boots on...

Do you have your “boots on” for Jesus? Some Christians I know have a certain blank look in their eyes when asked what their hopes and dreams are. There was never a question what the dreams of Jackie’s dad were. He kept following that dream until he died, and he kept giving that dream away to the younger missionaries. “Now don’t get too comfortable here,” he would say to them. “Just over that mountain there are villages who have never heard the gospel. You must go to them also.”

I’d like to have my “boots on” for Jesus until it’s time to go to “glory”. I’d like to keep dreaming and planning and doing and going with Jesus wherever He goes.

Some folks say, “Oh, I just want to be like Jesus.” “That’s my goal”, they say. Well, that is a good goal. We are destined to become like Him. But what is it to be like Him? I think we need to read the gospels again so we can see Jesus clearly. What do you find Jesus doing? Up on the mountain to pray all night, and out in the world all day bringing good news and healing to every one around Him. I’d like to be just like Jesus also.

Press on for the prize...

Paul said it this way...

“I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is

behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.” Phil. 4:12-14

God has taken hold of your life for a purpose. Do you know what that purpose is? Press towards it. Forget what is behind. Push forward to what lies ahead.

It is an art to forget what lies behind. In the last few weeks I have been asking God to take all the emotional baggage out of me from 28 years of ministry. I was feeling “old” on the inside, cluttered up with memories bad and good, feeling too tied to the past to get a clear look at the future. Maybe you need to ask Him to do the same thing for you.

If you are up in years, God wants to renew your youth on the inside, so that you keep hoping and looking ahead and dreaming and planning and doing with Jesus what He has chosen you for. Then you can spend your remaining time on the earth in those things which matter for eternity, and you can impart hope and vision to those who are younger than you.

Psalms 71 is a prayer of an old man. Here is how he prayed:

“ I will come and proclaim your mighty acts, O Sovereign LORD; I will proclaim your righteousness, yours alone. Since my youth, O God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvellous deeds. Even when I am old and grey, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come.”

You can flourish in old age...!

“The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, “The LORD is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him.”

Psalms 92:12-

15

I like the word “flourish”. It means something more than surviving. It means to prosper, to do very well, or to thrive. It means to be at the peak of success or development; to be in the prime. I noticed once that the Bible doesn’t really have a plan for survival, for just barely making it. The promises speak more of flourishing. Overcoming is the word. As it is written in Romans 8: we are more than conquerors!

I also like the part about still bearing fruit in old age. To some of you, being fifty-something seems ancient. To others, it is still young! What it seems to us in our late fifties is that old age is near. Old age may seem scary and depressing to many, but in the Bible, old age is pictured as a time of fulfillment and blessing. Jackie and I are claiming such promises with urgency and expectancy!

Such as Psalms 37:25,26:

“I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread. They are always generous and lend freely; their children will be blessed.”

We do not yet see pensions and bank accounts stored up for our old age. But we do see Jesus who never forsakes us. We don't yet have a great monetary blessing in store to leave for our children. But we do have a great promise that says our children will be blessed!

The best is yet to come...

So, to be old and righteous is a good thing. In fact, in the Word it just gets better and better! Thank God the promises have no age limit! Thank God that the Word says that *“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me ALL the days of my life...”*

Jackie and I are realizing that this is our plan for old age. It is a plan based on God's promises. It is a plan to continue to bear fruit for God. It is to stay fresh and very green. It is a plan to be satisfied with the Lord's good things so that our youth is renewed like the eagle (Psalms 103:5). It is a plan to have the spirit of Caleb, who asked for a mountain full of giants as His inheritance at age eighty-five. (Joshua 14:6-15)

Stay on the frontlines...

Some look forward to the rocking chair. We look forward to new adventures with God. Some look forward to the joy of relaxing at the beach and let the younger generation take up the mantle. We look forward to standing beside the younger generation on the front lines of battle and cheering them on, trusting God to keep renewing our strength. Yes, we know that our bodies grow old, but the inner man is being renewed day by day! It seems to us that the best way to grow old is to stay young on the inside. The best way to stay young on the inside is to stay on the front lines of faith in God and loving others — serving this generation in the greatest harvest of souls the world has ever known!

Where will you be when God unleashes the harvest that is yet to come? It could be a hundred times as large as what we presently see! We want to be in the middle of it, gathering in the harvest of souls, binding up their wounds, feeding them with the Word, and sending them out into the harvest as reapers!

Let's plan to do this until Jesus comes, or until our bodies are laid to rest in the ground! Let's come to the end of our life on earth saying that we “fought the good fight, finished the course, kept the faith”. And let's let God renew us on the inside, help us to stay *young on the inside*. Let's have our “boots on for Jesus” until we go to heaven, so that we can impart vision and direction to those growing up around us, so that we can point them to the next mountain to climb!

