

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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December 31, 2023

Volume 44, # 01

Into the New Year

Will you have any trouble remembering to write "2024" instead of "2023" when you write the current date?

It reminds us that we have begun a new year. 2023 is behind us. Now we look ahead wondering what 2024 will bring to our lives.

Some still use a wall calendar. Others use a digital calendar on their electronic devices. Let's think about 2024 and our calendars.

2023 is gone. We can't undo anything that was done. We need to remember some things and take note of lessons learned. Some things we need to forget. The Apostle Paul wrote: "Brothers and sisters, I do not regard myself as having taken hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13-14, NASB). Joe Barnett has written, "It's too late to change your past but not your future."

We can plan events ahead of time. We set a date and time for appointments, events, and get-togethers for family and friends. What kinds of things have you been marking on your calendar? What we plan for often reflects our priorities. What are some things we need to schedule that would reflect our better priorities?

We can mark dates that are special to us. Birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, and special events are things we want to remember and celebrate.

Our calendars are waiting to be filled. You may have already planned many things for 2024. Some events, like doctor's appointments, may be scheduled for us. But we all have the opportunity to look ahead and plan ahead.

But here's one thing we all need to remember: a whole new year is not guaranteed. We are not even guaranteed a tomorrow. "Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.' As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil" (James 4:13-16, NIV).

So as we look at our 2024 calendars, let's focus on today. We have today; what are we going to do with it? How are we going to make the most of it?

The greatest thing we can do today is to make sure our lives are right with God. Sin separates us from God and puts us on the path to destruction (Isaiah 59:1-2; Matthew 7:13-14). But God loves us so much that He gave His one and only Son to die on the cross for our sins so that we can be reconciled to Him and receive the gift of eternal life (2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Romans 6:23).

God will save and give eternal life to those who place their faith and trust in Jesus (Acts 16:30-31), turn from their sins in repentance (Acts 17:30-31), confess Jesus before men (Romans 10:9-10), and are baptized (immersed) into Christ for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). He will continue to cleanse from sin those who continue to walk in the light of His Word (1 John 1:7-9).

Let's plan ahead for some significant events for 2024, but let's also recognize that TODAY is the most important day of all. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2, NKJV). May we make the most of today by making sure our lives are right with God.

- David A. Sargent [slightly edited – GFS]

A LIVING GOD

A defendant was on trial for murder. There was strong evidence indicating guilt, but there was no corpse. In the defense's closing statement, the lawyer knowing that his client would probably be convicted, resorted to a trick: "Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I have a surprise for you all," the lawyer said as he looked at his watch. "Within one minute, the person presumed dead in this case will walk into this courtroom."

He looked toward the courtroom door. The jurors, somewhat stunned, all looked on eagerly. A minute passed. Nothing happened.

Finally the lawyer said, "Actually, I made up the previous statement. But you all looked on with anticipation. I therefore put it to you that there is reasonable doubt in this case as to whether anyone was killed and insist that you return a verdict of not guilty."

The jury, clearly confused, retired to deliberate. A few minutes later, the jury returned and pronounced a verdict of guilty.

"But how?" inquired the lawyer. "You must have had some doubt; I saw all of you stare at the door."

The jury foreman replied: "Oh, we did look, but your client didn't."

Oops! It was evident from the way he acted that the defendant didn't really believe the victim was still alive. Let me ask you a question: As the world looks at our lives, is it evident to them that we believe in a living God?

Oh, I know we've made the case, we've argued the evidence, we've proclaimed the truth that "Our God, He is Alive!" But the world may be looking not so much at the evidence we present, as our demeanor, to see if it matches what we say we believe.

"For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe. These things command and teach. Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity." (1 Timothy 4:10-12).

May it be evident to the people around us by the way we act that we serve a LIVING God!

- Alan Smith

Whole-hearted Devotion

To every Christian who takes very seriously his pledge to serve the Lord Jesus Christ, we undoubtedly identify with the statement made by the would-be follower of Christ in Luke 9:57, "As they were going along the road, someone said to Him, 'I will follow You wherever You go.'"

By this point in our reading we have learned that the road Jesus is travelling leads directly to the "holy city" (Matthew 4:5), where our Lord would be denounced, opposed, betrayed, captured, persecuted extremely, and nailed to a criminal's cross, all of course with advanced knowledge that a true sacrifice was required to forgive the sins of the world.

Will this person from the crowd truly follow the Lord wherever He goes? More importantly, WILL YOU AND I?

As we continue to read the remaining verses of Luke 9, we have the perception that the Lord Jesus, knowing the hearts of all men (John 2:24-25) and seeing their weaknesses and vulnerability, provides the divinely prescribed medicine for each individual. It is as if He takes each of them, beyond the excitement and band-wagon of the moment to the crossroad of critical decision, where the failure of weak, conditional commitment will become apparent: "Do I really want to do this?" "Is this really what I intend to sign up for?" It is as if you can hear them say upon returning to their normal lifestyle, after bringing disillusionment upon themselves, "Following Jesus was not what I expected."

The Lord Jesus is always about: "count the cost before you commit to following!" (cf. Luke 14:26-33). There were never any false pretenses. Look at His unwavering determination to accomplish the task assigned to Him, whatever the cost! It is exactly this that serves as the example to all His followers! We get the impression that the Lord is saying, "You should think long and hard about becoming a disciple of Mine, because the hardships you will take on are exacting and difficult!" "And He was saying to them all, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.'" (Luke 9:23-24). This is the price required to walk the same road as the Savior: death to self and self-interests! Please pause to meditate upon how extremely exacting is true discipleship.

These considerations bring to mind the first parable in the previous chapter of Luke: "Those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away." (Luke 8:13). Such results from a flippant, frivolous decision to follow Him, based on good intentions. We do other potential converts to Christ a grave injustice when we encourage them to follow Christ for any of the wrong reasons or with any of the self-detrimental expectations.

We should be able to answer: what will avail the true result, the WHOLE-HEARTED commitment to follow Christ? He demands unqualified commitment (not, "I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to ..."). Nothing else, nothing, must be first! There is no way for the Lord to make the demands any higher!

Recall that the true sons of Abraham are "strangers and exiles on the earth." (Hebrews 11:13). Our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20), not here. Friend, if you are to be

"fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62), you must first count the cost and then decide if you are whole-heartedly committed to paying it, come what may!

Dear penitent believer who has found the courage to confess Christ before men, may I assist you by baptizing you into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins? And may I continue to serve you in the ministry of Christ by encouraging you, helping you, and building you up in the Faith? May God bless you and help you today is my earnest prayer.

- Gary Smalley

* "Without God, America is one nation under!"

* "You can preach a better sermon with your life than with your lips!"

* "When was the last time you told the Lord God you love Him?"

* "We do not change the message, the message changes us!"

* "Wouldn't it be nice if grudges lasted as long as New Year's resolutions?"

What Must I Do To Be Saved?

HEAR THE GOSPEL

(Romans 10:14-17; John 20:30-31; Romans 1:15-17)

BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST

(Acts 8:37; John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6)

REPENT OF PAST SINS

(Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30)

CONFESS CHRIST

(Romans 10:9-10; Acts 8:37)

BE BAPTIZED

(Romans 6:3-4; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:36-39; 1 Peter 3:21)

LIVE A FAITHFUL LIFE

(Revelation 2:10; 2 Peter 1:5-11; John 15:1-8; Hebrews 10:23-25)