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“From the Pastor’s Desk”

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WHAT SHALL THE NEW YEAR BRING

According to the Centers for Disease Control we as a nation are growing sickness and disease conditions at a faster pace than the growth of the population. It is therefore obvious that this does not make for a sustainable process. This does not present to us that 2020 will be a very positive year. Along with this comes the news that our nation is divided when it comes to the selection of leadership...which proves that politically we will again be facing much turmoil and division as we have in the past three years since our President was elected to lead our nation.

It is in the light of these two major problems, as well as other factors which I could bring us that could depress you as well by the mere mention of what seems to appear upon the horizon as we proceed into the future. So I hasten to say please continue reading; it is not all bad news if you are a true believer in Jesus Christ. Prior to our Lord’s return back to the Father after His death and resurrection, He foretold some things which would take place prior to His return, but He also left them with some good news as well; Of course, I want to do the same.

Pain and suffering are things that all of us detest. It is good to know that we have One who has both experienced and understands “human suffering”. As the writer of Hebrews has told us we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with “*the feelings of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.*” (Heb. 4:15,16) Therefore, we can come boldly unto throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace in the time of need.”

Yours truly, of late, has found this to be true on a personal level...ever since Thanksgiving I have been suffering with acute pain. At first I tried to endure it. Then I decided at my wife’s and daughter’s urging to contact my busy doctor. He was kind enough to recommend some medicine to at least calm the pain...unfortunately...it didn’t. Then things began to deteriorate so much that the pain became seemingly unbearable. So my Doctor of 26 years suggested I go to ER at Los Alamitos Hospital immediately...I did. They diagnosed what they thought it was and sent me home. But through the night I experienced not only more pain, but this time at the sight of blood I decided to call my Doctor again. It was then that he ordered me to call an ambulance and get to ER as soon as possible...At the time of this writing I am still experiencing some recovery....and trust the pain will soon completely subside.

For the better part of my 80 years of life I have been relatively free from pain even though I have had three surgeries (removal of appendix, correction of an hernia, and a four-way by-pass following a heart attack), otherwise it has been pretty good for me. I’m not complaining or bragging or seeking sympathy. But we humans sooner or later find that life is not going to always be without pain....there are days when we would prefer to stay in bed than to get up and fulfill our life’s calling. So when I write about the prospects of a new year I am not unaware as to what can happen along the way. There indeed may be some unexpected surprises along the way both good and bad. But we do serve One who does know what is ahead....and we know....we can be at peace with Him through the reality of that uncertainty.

When we have these times of suffering there is always that question as to how much can the human body endure? How much mental testing can we handle? Naturally we want solace, relief, sympathy, as well as empathy. *The Holy Scriptures reveal that Jesus knows how not only to sympathize with us but also He knows how to have empathy.* Dr. David Jeremiah, in one of his devotional books wrote that speakers of English often confuse two sounding words such as sympathy and empathy. But their meanings are significantly different. Sympathy is the feeling of pity or sorrow because of someone else’s suffering. Empathy on the other hand is the ability to identify with, understand, and share another’s feelings. Sympathy can only imagine another’s personal suffering, while empathy knows exactly how the sufferer feels because of having suffered the same way.

Christ not only can understand our suffering, but he knows how much we can endure. We may feel that we at times have reached that point of endurance, but if we are going to trust Him as we have implied in our testimony of belonging to Him in regards to our Salvation from our sins, we are going to need to trust Him with our endurance to suffer as well. When Jesus asked Simon Peter: "*Lovest thou me?*" He basically was asking Peter if he loved Christ enough to endure the temptation of suffering.

Peter's answer was rather quick without much forethought. It was an assumption that he could endure whatever he was going to face....even to the point he said that he was willing to die for the Master. But when the time of testing came.....he caved like a whipped puppy. His strength to endure was not as strong as he had supposed. It didn't take much to break him. So it is true about human nature. None of us are as strong as we profess. We are weaklings with human tendencies to fail. *Most of us have what we may call "dirty feet"*.

CHRIST KNOWS HOW TO WASH DIRTY FEET

Remember at the last supper when Christ met with his disciples? (John 13) Jesus knew "his hour had come." He looked his disciples over at that table and knew Judas was about to run out and betray him. He looked at Peter and knew that he was about to deny him. So our Lord decided to take on the role of a servant and began to wash each of the disciple's feet. When our Lord came to Peter with the bowl of water in his hand, Peter immediately objected to what our Lord was about to do to him.

You see Peter did not know how dirty his feet were and were going to get. I am not talking about physically, but spiritually. You cannot associate with this worldly crowd without getting dirty feet of some kind. So Jesus said to Peter, "You do not realize, now what I am doing, but later you will understand." (John 13:7) Even though Christ said this....Peter still objected by saying, "You will never wash my feet." To which Jesus replied, "Unless I wash you, you will have no part with me." What was Jesus saying?

I believe what Jesus was saying is this. Peter you cannot cleanse yourself. You cannot save yourself. You cannot heal yourself. You cannot perfect yourself. If you don't let me do the washing, the cleaning, the perfecting you are not going to be cleansed. As this is true in regards to the redemptive work of Christ for the salvation of all humanity it is also true in regards to the coming of the New Year. We do not know what we are facing. But we serve One who does. He knows how to wash away the dirt and grime in our life. He knows how to present us to the Father, in spite of our fallen nature. He knows how to recover the bad years and make good ones. He knows how to restore our soul.

Your body may not be healed today. Suffering and hardships may still be in the works. Life may have left a bitter taste in your mouth and you may feel that you are dealing with a hopeless situation. But our Lord knows how to make dead men live again. He knows how to restore limbs. He knows how to bring life back into the bones of a leper. The Psalmist said, "*He restoreth my soul*" Psalms 23:3

CHRIST KNOWS HOW TO HEAL THE BROKEN HEARTED

Much of the lyrics of song writers these days seem to address people who suffer with broken hearts. I had a popular relative by marriage (Ferlin Husky) who made a million over a song he featured on one of his records entitled "*Dear John.*" It was a love song written for those who had received one of the "Dear John letters." It must have touched a lot of hearts because his song is still being played long after he died. The problem with sad songs; they only bring up bad memories and tears.

But Christ has a better solution for the broken in heart. He can not only soothe the soul from its misery. He can restore the soul and make it new again. He can reach down and make all things new again. There is a phrase called a "catch-22." This happens when a job seeker is denied a job because he lacks the experience. Or if you lose your flashlight in the dark...you can't find it because you need the light from the flashlight to find it. To many people problems are a "Catc-22" without Christ. But in the Kingdom of God, while what you are looking for in this world, the answer is found outside this world....it is found only in Christ. The world does not have the answer you are looking for....it is only found in Him. On Christ alone I stand, all else is sinking sand. So make sure as you approach the New Year....to let Christ into your life, into your day and world. Start that by attending God's House and see the difference this will make in your New Year. Amen.