

Remnant Life Church  
January 3, 2021  
“Off to a Good Start”  
*Isaiah 43:14-19; 44:21-22*

- As we said last Sunday, there are two things that most everyone does this time of year
  - Look back at the year that was
  - Consider making changes as you look forward to the year to come
- Hopefully, you do this in a way that is intended to help you grow
  - And we should look back to recall the good things of the past 12 months
  - We should also look back to identify those things we need to change or perhaps not repeat
- Many people do not look at it that way
  - They focus on those things that did not happen instead of those things that did
  - They fixate on the negative instead of the positive
  - They replay their failures over and over instead of the victories God gave them
- As Christians, we must guard against this

*Because you need to know this truth:* satan wants you to focus on your past, your negative past; but God, through the person of Jesus Christ, wants you to focus on your future!

#### The Prophet Isaiah

- Prophesied from approximately 740-685 BCE
- Writing at a time when the nations of Judah and Israel were enduring God’s punishment for their sins but still not repenting
- Prior to the time of Isaiah
  - From 1051 to 931 - 120 years under the rule of God’s appointed kings - Saul, David, and Solomon
    - At Solomon’s death, the 12 tribes are divided – **I Kings 12-14**
      - 10 northern tribes of Israel, led by Jeroboam, with its capital in Samaria
      - 2 tribes of the southern kingdom of Judah and Benjamin with Jerusalem as its capital led by Rehoboam.
      - From 931 to 722 (when conquered by the Assyrians) there were 19 Kings in Israel (the 10 northern tribes)
      - From 931 to 586 (when conquered by the Babylonians) there were 20 Kings of Judah (2 southern tribes)
    - Of those 39 kings only 8 were characterized as good or followers of God (worshipping only God; tearing down idols)
      - All 8 of them were kings of Judah; the southern kingdom
      - It was why God gave them 136 more years of freedom
- Isaiah is writing during the difficult times of 4 (possibly 5) of those kings who both followed God and denied Him
- The struggles of the people are evident, but God continues to speak words of hope and encouragement to them through the prophets

- Consider an important truth given in these accounts - punishment and consequences of sin is not abandonment by God
- Repentance is always God's desire, and for us to come back into fellowship with Him
- 9 times in the OT we read that God is slow to anger and abounding in love

**READ - Isaiah 43:14-19; 44:21-22**

- The sins of God's people would eventually lead to both tribe's overthrow and capture, but God did not continue to remind them of their past; he kept pointing them toward their future
- **John 10:10** – *I have come to that you may have life and have it to the full*
  - Just prior to saying that, Jesus told them that there is one who is wanting to steal, kill, and destroy
  - Satan is a stealer of life
- What things are you doing in your life that will keep you focused on the future and not allow the enemy to keep you bound in the past?
- Well, this is a good time to START
  - We're going to use that word as a way to map out a path for the coming year
  - What should your focus for the new year be?

**S – Stop Making Excuses**

- I think the slogan of our culture today should be, "Nothing is my fault!"
  - We blame everyone and everything else for our failures
  - Everyone is a victim
    - NFL problems with former players
    - Even those who make horrible choices are given an out by a new diagnosis that claims there are uncontrollable emotional or physical elements that make it impossible for them to do or act otherwise
    - There is even a name for those who become lost in the world of video games
      - A video game issue started with SIMS
      - Alternate Reality Syndrome
    - It seems that every issue in people's lives can be associated with a new disease that absolves them of responsibility
- **Prov 28:13 (LB)** - *A man who refuses to admit his mistakes can never be successful. But if he confesses and forsakes them, he gets another chance.*
- When we refuse to accept responsibility for what we chose to do, we make no effort nor are willing to prepare for what the outcome will be
  - One of the primary reasons that people fail is that they fail to plan for the problems that will come
    - It is said that Edison had nearly 2000 failures to create the incandescent carbon filament
    - When questioned his response was they were not failures, I discovered over 2000 ways not to do it

- **Prov 27:12** - *A sensible man watches for problems ahead and prepares to meet them. The simpleton never looks and suffers the consequences.*
- Noah began to build his ark 120 years before the rain came
  - Why?
  - Because he listened – listened to God
  - God speaks in many ways
  - Pride will keep us from hearing God and taking the sound advice of others
- Perseverance becomes an important component of our lives when we stop making excuses
  - **Prov 24:10** – *If you give up when trouble comes, it just shows that you are weak.*

### T – Take a Regular, Honest Inventory of Your Life

- Remember the events that you have come through and learn from them
- If I know that there is a hole in the sidewalk outside my house I would not continue to walk that same way after falling in the first time
  - Why do we continue to make the same mistakes over and over?
  - Because we are not willing to honestly look at our lives
  - God will use 4 experiences to help shape your life
    1. Personal – your family growing up, friendships, current family
    2. Vocational and educational
    3. Spiritual – church, reading His word, prayer, godly authors and speakers
    4. The painful
  - God uses each and every one of these, and so should we embrace them all

### A – Act in Faith

- Your life and what you receive in it from God will only go as far as the measure of your faith takes you
  - **Matt 9:29** – (speaking to 2 blind men who had come to Jesus for healing)  
... *“According to your faith let it be done to you”*
  - **Matthew 8** – the story of the faith of the centurion
- Real, living faith is active. Not the dead wishes of a weak hope
  - Active by what we do in faith coupled with an attitude of prayer and willingness to surrender my will to Him
  - This faith is one of confidence, not one of self-pity playing the victim
- Learn from the past, act in faith for the future, and look to God at all times for guidance.

### R – Refocus Your Thinking

- **Prov 4:23** - *Above all, be careful what you think because your thoughts control your life*
- The Bible talks a great deal about the mind and what we choose to dwell on in our thinking
  - Thoughts that are contrary to the Word of God are not sinful in and of themselves, but how long we dwell on them and what we do with them can become sin.



- **Rom 12:2** – *be transformed by the renewing of your mind*
- A renewed mind only comes with effort and focus on the right things
- God's Word is the first, best place to focus our minds
  - **Psalm 1** – *blessed are those who meditate on God's word because they will be happy (blessed) and find success in what they do*
  - God's word fulfills even the most basic of the human need – happiness and success

## T – Trust

- To trust means to depend on
  - Not on your own strength
  - Not on your own wisdom or intellect
  - Not on your own resources
  - Not on the ways of the world
- Our dependence (our trust) must be on God and God alone
- **Zech 4:6** - *'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty.*
- Trust in God to be faithful to His word
- Trust Him to see you through the difficult times
- Trust Him to teach, instruct, and help you to grow

Are you interested in making a fresh start this New Year?

S – stop making excuses

T – take a regular, honest inventory of your life

A – act in faith

R – refocus your thinking

T – trust

As always, you have the choice to either commit to living for God by embracing new things or stay exactly where you are and allow the fullest measure of God's blessings to pass you by.

satan wants you to stay locked in your past and focus on your mistakes, failures, and struggles; God wants you to focus on your future

- A future that has been prepared for you by almighty God in His great love
- A future that is unencumbered by your past, because you have been forgiven and cleansed by the shed blood of Jesus Christ at Calvary
- A future that will give you a satisfaction that is unavailable through the world's way of living

All that is needed is for you to willingly surrender your heart, your will, and your mind to Him fully

As we read earlier, God said through the prophet Isaiah, *"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!"*

That new thing is for you, but let the past go and be ready for what God is going to do in and through you in this year to come.