

## **My Times are in Your Hands**

### **Psalm 31:1-16**

We seldom think much about time except when we're running late.

Time is a lot like a river and it's carrying all of us downstream.

Where is it taking you?

What are you doing while you're on the trip?

Time is a precious commodity.

Someone put it this way:

This is the age of the half-read page  
and the quick hash and the mad dash  
and the brain strain and the heart pain,  
and the cat naps till the spring snaps

If there is anything we truly need in this New Year, it is to get closer to God, to grow in the love of our Savior, and to carry out His will for our lives.

That will carry us through no matter what the river of time may bring our way.

Psalm 31 is almost entirely a prayer, but you can tell that it's not the kind of prayer that you pray out loud or even with folded hands.

No, it appears to be the kind of prayer Paul had in mind when he told us to PRAY CONSTANTLY.

It's the kind of prayer that you pray while working or driving or when you're under a lot of stress, as David was here.

David was pursued as an enemy by armies led by his father-in-law Saul.

At times his situation seemed hopeless and David was gripped by a despair that he expresses in verses 9-12.

Notice that he does not minimize his troubles.

He describes the trouble in all of its sorrowful details.

Then comes the turning point in verses 14-16

In verse 3 David pictures God as his fortress...

Now he found grace to say, 'I trust in You', and 'My times are in Your hands'.

This is perhaps the greatest challenge we face when hard-pressed.

We want relief now.

We don't want to wait.

We hate the pressure of our present need.

Yet our times are in his hands.

Until God acts we must find grace to wait, holding tight to God as our refuge.

After all, it isn't what happens to us that determines whether we will be sad, mad, or glad.

It is shaped by our understanding of God and his ways.

There may be times in this coming new year when you too might feel cut off from God's sight.

You may wonder if God has forgotten you.

So here is the good news for you.

The Psalm says: Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your unfailing love.

When God's face is shining upon His people, it means that he is SMILING upon them.

What more could you ask from God in the New Year than that?

We have a God who came here personally to smile upon us while He walked and talked with us.

Jesus endured the Father's anger over our sins so that we could see His face smiling upon us forever.

God was forsaken by God so that we would not have to fear the time when our lives will pass in review before Him.

Jesus was identified with us in the defeat and humiliation of sin as He suffered for us, so, we can be identified with him in his victory.

You and I actually live by the life and victories of Jesus.

That doesn't imply the absence of trouble, but the transformation of trouble into good when we place it into the hands of God.

Our times are in the hands of an almighty God!

Put your trust in him.

## Wise Words for the New Year

### Proverbs 3:1-12

Last year at this time, some of you were saying, "This year, things are going to be different!

I'm going to change!

I'm going to be a better spouse.

I'm going to spend more time with my family.

I'm going to spend more time reading my Bible. More time praying to God. More time serving others.

Just by a simple show of hands, who has stuck to their new years resolutions?

You know what they say about New Year's resolutions?

They usually go in one year and out the other!

I came across an article that listed the five most popular resolutions made almost every year.

The 5th was to take up a new hobby.

The 4th was to make more money.

The 3rd most popular resolution was to improve relationships.

The 2nd was to stop smoking.

The most popular New Years resolution, you guessed it, losing weight.

A new year gives us an opportunity to start fresh and better ourselves.

Come the middle of January we somehow forget our resolutions and go back to our old ways.

Is there anything like New Years resolutions in the Bible?

Not really, but there is plenty of great advice on living for the Lord.

This 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Proverbs gives some great resolutions on living.

I am just going to point out a couple of them.

Solomon starts off this 3rd chapter with a very matter of fact statement.

1 My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, 2 for they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity.

Then he lays out principles to gain these things.

**Resolution 1.** Let love and faithfulness never leave you v 3-4

Love and Faithfulness...

Let these two qualities be the guiding lights in our lives...  
in everything we do.

These must be foundational to all we do.

Love, for us, is defined as a man with nails in his hands.

Love is an action, an attitude...more than it is a feeling.  
Faithfulness is defined as maintaining allegiance, constant loyalty, reliable, conscientious.

God is faithful, despite our failings.

**Resolution 2.** Trust in the lord with all of your heart. V 5-6

Trust is that firm belief or confidence in another person. It also has to do with confident expectation or anticipation in someone or something.

We are called to put our trust in the Lord...and with all our heart.

We are called to acknowledge him...

This has to do with recognising the authority or claims of God on our lives, done with an expression of thanks.

**Resolution 3.** Do not be wise in your own eyes V 7-8

Do you seek God's guidance for all areas of your life...

Or do you know it all already?

**Resolution 4.** Honour the lord with your wealth V 9-10

What does that look like for you?

Lastly,

**Resolution 5.** Do not despise the Lord's discipline V 11-12

This is a hard thing to accept...

But the Lord disciplines those he loves.

God teaches through the good and bad.

We have a lot to do...How do your resolutions line up with Solomon's advice?

They are steep. But there is loads of practical application from every one of those resolutions.

## **Rocks of Remembrance**

### **Joshua 3:9-4:7**

Many years ago, God wanted his people to remember a special miracle.  
They didn't have photo albums or video cameras.

Here were the Israelites, the people of God.  
He had brought them out of Egypt, out of slavery.  
He had provided them for 40 years as they walked through the desert.  
He had disciplined them because of unbelief...  
But still he cared for them as they learnt to trust him in all situations.

Now God was ready to take them into the Promised Land.  
But first there was a river to cross...

The Jordan River.  
A river in flood at harvest time we are told.  
This was not just a creek, but a raging torrent flushed by the summer rains that fell on the mountains.  
This was going to be impossible...except that God was in control.

God told all the people to line up behind the priests who carried the Ark of the Covenant on their shoulders.  
That special chest that held the 10 commandments.

When the priests got to the river's edge and their toes touched the water...  
God miraculously stopped the flow of the water.  
It piled up in a heap, creating a dry path for them to walk across to the other side.

It was amazing!  
This would have been what the parents of these people experienced 40 years earlier as they made good their flight from Pharaoh's army.

Now God wanted the people to remember this miracle.  
He wanted them to remember his provision, his blessing, his care.

He wanted them to know that he would always take care of them.

So how do you help the people to remember?  
With no photo records and no videos?

He told the leaders of the 12 tribes of Israel to select people to go back to the dry path in the middle of the river and each find one rock to bring back with them.

That's exactly what they did.  
They got a rock and brought it to the Promised Land side of the river.  
These were then stacked into a pile of rocks.

From that time on those 12 rocks were a memorial for the people of Israel about God's miracle at the Jordan River.

The word 'memorial' was technical term for a thing, place or repeated event intended to serve as a vivid reminder of some act of God on behalf of His people.

The Passover was a memorial.

At the shared meal the people relived the experience of the Exodus generation.

Each family sharing that meal realized that God had delivered them too...

Not just their ancestors.

The heap Joshua formed was to be a symbol for the future generations.

In fact, every time a family travelled by that place, the children would say, 'Mum, dad, why are those rocks piled up like that?'

And the parents would tell their children the story of God's miracle.

They would tell how God caused the river to stop flowing.

Touching and feeling the stones would help to make history...and God...

Real to future generations.

The Lord's Supper is our 'memorial'

It reminds us and future generations about the grace of God...

His miracle in saving us through the death and resurrection of his son.

But I am also going to give you a rock today...

To help remember this story.

I have been carrying around a rock in my pocket for most of the year...

just in with the small change.

Each time I pull it out I am reminded that I can trust God to take care of me today, and in whatever situation I find myself in...

Because he has always taken care of his people.

Chapter 4:24 sums it up for the people and for us...

"He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the Lord is powerful, and so that you might always fear the Lord your God."

## **Challenge for the New Year**

### **Philippians 3:7-14**

What drives you? What is it that you are really passionate about? What really gets you going?

All of us have things that really get us excited.

We are passionate about some things and apathetic about other things.

And those things can be different for each individual.

Some people, mostly men, are passionate about sports.

Every person is interested in some things more than other things, and that's OK.

But what do our passions move us toward?

Do they move us toward some worthy goal for our lives?

The apostle Paul had one goal in life. His goal was Christ.

Everything else in his life revolved around reaching that goal.

Is Christ your goal?

If he is, then we can learn from Paul the qualities he had that we need.

Paul showed a complete dedication to Christ.

Paul had impressive credentials...

He had the right race, religion, reputation, ritual and rules.

He could have put his trust and confidence in his own achievements and personal position.

But he saw that none of that was enough.

None of that brought him to know Christ.

Paul was saying that nothing is as important as Christ.

To him he was totally committed.

That brings us to an important question to honestly ask yourself.

Do you love Christ more than anything the world has to offer?

Paul was not content to just simply know about Christ.

His passion and desire was to know him personally...

To know all there was to know about Christ.

Is that unquenchable desire a mark of you?

Paul was also committed to do whatever was needed in order to fully follow Christ.

That comes out in verses 12-14.

His goal and focus was Christ

Don't get the idea that the Christian life is passive.

We do stop trying...trying to save ourselves.

That work is done, finished, completed in Christ.

But we do not stop pressing on.

What we put behind us is self-effort, the notion that anything we can do in ourselves can possibly please or be of service to the Lord.

What we hold out before us is the fact that here on earth we are Christ's hands and feet...we are his body.

The presence he keeps in this world.

Remember that Christ Jesus took hold of you!

And we express that in being his hands and feet etc.

It is not that we will do that perfectly...

There is no way we can perfectly express Christ to others.

But as we rely on him to work through us and

And as we commit ourselves to do his will.

We will experience the joy and power of Jesus in us.

We can't touch or redo the things of the year that comes to an end.

But as we face another New Year,

it is good to look back and learn from our mistakes;

be encouraged by our successes;

and determine that the New Year facing us is going to be the best Year that we can make it – with God's help!

We focus our lives on God by focusing our lives on Jesus Christ.