

"To Everything There is a Season"

Call to Worship: John 16:33

Hymn # - *To God be the Glory*

1st Scripture: Matthew 27:11-26

Hymn # - *Great is Thy Faithfulness*

2nd Scripture: 1 Samuel 18:6-16

Hymn #- *The Sands of Time are Sinking*

Introduction:

"To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; A time to plant, and a time to pluck what is planted; A time to kill, and a time to heal; A time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; A time to mourn, and a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones; A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; A time to gain, and a time to lose; A time to keep, and a time to throw away; A time to tear, and a time to sew; A time to keep silence, and a time to speak; A time to love, and a time to hate; A time of war, and a time of peace" (Ecc. 3:1-8).

Indeed brethren, the winds of providence carry us about to and fro, and all of it is just beyond our control. What was the year 2012 like for you? Reflecting back, what expected and unexpected events have occurred, bringing you to the present day? Did it begin with joy and end in sadness? Did it begin with sadness and end in joy? Are you, today, right where you expected to be, looking forward from the beginning of last year? Perhaps, the year was somewhat full of consistency and regularity for several of you? Perhaps, the year was full of many ups and downs for others? Perhaps, the year was one big incline or decline for others? Some have bid farewell to precious loved ones and friends this year. Others have welcomed new children or family members into the home, by birth and/or marriage. Some have received promotions; others have lost jobs. Some have entertained great marital progress and family growth. Others have suffered some of the most difficult and trying times in the home. *All* of us can certainly agree with Solomon here, when he states that life is full of different seasons, calling for different responses at different times. We have laughed our hardest and we have wept our loudest; we have felt as if we could conquer the world, and we have felt hopeless, ready to throw in the towel. Indeed, life

is full of many uncertainties, and every step taken is liable to cast you into the fierce winds of change, at any moment. [The Shelby family, from LA---Pastor Rob's diving accident on July 3rd, which left him paralyzed---9 children]

Well brethren, as we look forward to a New Year; a year that may be full of all kinds of surprises for all of us; individually, corporately as a church, and as a country that is destined for a great fall at some point in the future, it behooves us to ensure that we are standing on solid ground, at all times. We don't know what a day will bring, but God has given us enough to hold onto, so that we are capable of facing, whatever providence brings our way; and that, in such a way, that we will benefit from every gain and/or loss, brought upon us.

I. Looking back with David

It wasn't that long ago, when David seemed to be at the top of the world. Standing over the dead body of the giant, Goliath, holding his head in his hand, David was filled with joy unspeakable, as God had clearly delivered the uncircumcised Philistine into David's hand. And then the Israelites charged in and destroyed their enemies! And everyone loved and respected David then; the king, the high officers and officials, the soldiers....all of Israel!

But now, that is all in the past. The King wants to kill him, and some of the very people who admired David, are now hunting him down. David, who once played sweet music before the king, in order to alleviate his torment and agony, is now a fugitive, running for his life, hunted down even in other cities. He has been forced to leave his wife, Michal (the king's daughter) behind, who, we will later find out, is given over to another man in marriage. And he has done nothing wrong. But, perhaps Jonathan will come through again, as he gauges his father's demeanor at the feast of the New Moon. For now, David is forced into the very uncomfortable and dreadful position of waiting, for a maximum of three days. He will think, he will pray, he will grieve, he will weep, and by the grace of God, he will be stretched unto great growth. He will learn, the hard way, that he must operate and function according to God's timetable. He waits for an arrow; for an arrow, shot by the hand of Jonathan, indicating whether or not he can return to his wife and home, in the presence of King Saul.

One day passes, and no sign of Jonathan yet. He must not have been able to observe anything telling, on the first day of the feast. And so, David must wait further, to know the will of God here. We know, brethren; we have been invited to look upon that first evening of the feast (and right into the heart and thought life of Saul), and we know, that the King kept silent, because he had assumed that David had somehow become unclean, forbidding him from coming, that first evening. And so, Saul held his peace. But David didn't know, did he? And brethren, isn't that one of the most difficult aspects of the trials that we face...the *unknown* aspect? If we only knew where this was going; if we only knew how much longer; if we only knew if it would get worse before it gets better...if we could only see where this was going...we'd feel much better, wouldn't we? But God often keeps us in the unknown, doesn't He? He doesn't invite us into the realm of His omniscience, does He? Keeping us in the unknown is one of the most effective ways of increasing our faith and trust in God. And as our faith is increased, we grow in great ways, and we access great power, for serving Christ.

Day two arrives, and David sees Jonathan coming out with a young lad, armed with bow and arrows. The moment of truth has arrived for David. And what is the verdict? [Read verses 35-40]. And so, what is the verdict? "David, you have to get out of here, and fast!" "My father is anxious to kill you!" Indeed, "To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven." For David, it was a time to run! It was a season for grief, for sorrow and for weeping. [Read verses 41-42]. David and Jonathan reaffirm their covenant with one another, and then off David goes...and it isn't going to get any easier, anytime soon.

Conclusive Thoughts

Brethren, where have the winds of God's providence carried you, over the last year? Do you find yourself presently standing over the giant, Goliath, having a felt sense of prosperity and victory in your walk with the Lord? Are you soaring in grace, caught up in a healthy pattern of sitting at the feet of Christ, drinking in the Word of God, like the Israelites, when they were led to an abundance of well water in the wilderness? Or, are you hiding out in the field, awaiting God's direction and guidance, in the midst of a very difficult time of suffering and trial? Have you entered a dry spell in the wilderness of life, longing for a taste of God's presence, fighting off strong urges to complain against God (and/or sin) with the Israelites? Is it a time for weeping and sorrow, or a time of elation and joy for you?

Like David, we will find ourselves being carried about by the ever changing winds of God's providence. But brethren, the good news is that there is solid ground on which we can stand, at all times, wherever the winds of God's providence carry us! Amid the unexpected whirlwinds of providence, which toss around and destroy all that is temporary in this life, there is an unshakable, unshifting, unchanging plane, upon which we can rest our souls. There is a Rock, upon which we can stand, at all times, during all seasons, bearing all of our griefs and sorrows, our joys and comforts, our pains and our losses...a place where we can even face death itself. It is a place that assures us of all profitable, spiritual blessing in this life, and eternal, unending, peace and joy in the next.

The gateway to that place takes us first to a garden, namely, the Garden of Gethsemane. It is there, brethren, that our Lord agonized, and sweat drops of blood, as He had anticipated soon bearing the sins of His people, on the cross. Our Lord faced the most inconceivable "unknown," right there in the Garden. From the perspective of man, on this side of the grave, what would it be like to bear the sins of the world, while incurring the wrath of God in full measure? An unknown that our Lord alone had to face. The agony was so heart wrenching and painful, that, on a cold day, our Lord sweat drops of blood, and angels had to come and strengthen Him, just so He could face the cross itself. Indeed, our Lord was anxious to complete His rescue mission; to deliver His people from the power and penalty of their sins, but what kept Him going? Where did *He* find a place of stability and rest for His soul, while anticipating the hell that He was about to bear in His own soul, on the cross?

Read Hebrews 12:1-2.

1- We are running a race, surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses (Heb. 11), who ran the race before us, who have paved a way by their example, and who have finished!

2- We ought to lay aside every weight (every worldly hindrance) *and* the sin, which so easily ensnares/traps us.

3- We must run with endurance...thinking big picture, long term, and not immediate gratification and short lived, worldly comfort. We must persevere! We must press on, taking the kingdom violently, by force. How?

4- Fixing our eyes on Jesus, who is the Author and finisher/perfector of our faith. We must keep our eyes fixed on the One who began this, anticipating that He who began the good work, will complete it. We must recognize our union with Him, and press forward at all costs.

5- We must also consider how He made it! He endured the cross; He despised (looked right through) the shame and agony of the cross, by focusing on the joy that was set before Him. He concentrated on the prize; on the glory and joy that lay just beyond the agony! By faith, He reached to the end, and carried it with Him, and endured all of the hardship, grief and agony, laid up in the cross. And He made it! And He attained! He has brought about the deliverance of His people; He has been raised universal King, receiving all authority in heaven and on earth; and He has ascended to the right hand of God, with all power and glory?

Brethren, let us likewise persevere, fixing our eyes on Christ, our sure hope, keeping the big, eternal picture in mind. For that is the only way to endure every season that we face in this life, while remaining faithful to God. If we are clinging to any other temporal hope in this world; if we are building our houses on sand, rather than on the Rock of Christ, the heavy winds and the rains and the trials and sufferings of life will tear us down, and our fall will be great!

Brethren, as we face a New Year, let us run the race that is providentially set before us with endurance; let us plow into heaven, investing every fiber of this life, in bringing glory to our great and worthy Savior, who endured the incarnation and the cross, for us!

Amen!!!

Benediction: 2 Timothy 2:3-13