

Same God / New Year
Pastor Joe Oakley
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Welcome to 2021! I know we are all believing that 2021 will be better than 2020. But what if it's not? I saw this on Facebook the other day – If you think 2020 is bad – wait till it turns 21 and starts drinking!

We are all believing for a better year and we should.
 We're believing for the vaccine to work.
 We're believing for a cure to COVID.
 We're believing and praying and we should continue to do so.
 But none of us know what 2021 will bring.
 But we do know the God who never changes!
 That's why I'm preaching a message called Same God – New Year.

Our main text is Hebrews 10:23, which says:

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful. What I see from this is that no matter what we go through we should hold on to hope.

And that hope had better be in the God who is faithful! Our hope cannot be in a person, a political party or even a pastor. Our hope must be in God and God alone!

I do believe we should have hope that 2021 will be a better year. But more importantly, we must have faith in God who never changes. Yes it's a new year full of uncertainty! But we have the same God who we can trust will absolute certainty.

It's amazing for me as I study to preach how God drops truth bombs on me during the week. This week – I was driving home from working out at the YMCA. And I asked God – What do You want me to say on Sunday? What does our congregation need to hear?"

You see – I know you don't need a word from me! You need a word from God. A word from me is usually a good word. But you need more than a good word – you need a God word!

So – that's my constant prayer – "God, what do You want to say?" As I said – I was driving home from the Y and God just dropped this in my spirit: "Here's what I want to say: **Do not let what you perceive I am or am not doing negatively impact what you believe about who I am!**"

That hit me hard and it's the main thing I want you to take away from today!

Never let what you perceive about what God is or is not doing negatively impact what you believe about who God is!

By all accounts – 2020 was not a good year.
But God is still a good God!

2020 was a year of fear for many people.
But God is still not giving us a spirit of fear!

2020 was a tough year financially for many people.
But God still meets our needs according to His riches in glory!

2020 was a year of separation from friends and family.
But God still never leaves us or forsakes us!

Do you hear what God is saying today? Never let what you perceive about what God is or is not doing negatively impact what you believe about who God is!

2020 taught us many things.

- It taught us that unexpected things happen.
- It taught us that life is fragile and can be gone in an instant.
- It taught us the importance of relationship with God, family and others.
- It taught us to fight fear with faith.
- It taught us that hard times reveal who people really are.

For example – true believers stayed true to God and connected to the church – either in person or on-line. But research shows that 1/3 of people who attended church pre-COVID are now totally disconnected from church. They don't attend nor do they watch on-line.

Hard times show you who is really with you!
Hard times sift the weeds from the wheat!

Another thing that 2020 taught us is that is that making goals and plans is great, but we should always remain flexible – to hold our plans with an open hand.

Most of us made plans for 2020. We did as a church. We had a Vision Sunday and presented our vision for the year. Yet all of that went out the window when COVID hit.

Now – because of that we should not get the misconception that setting goals and making plans is wrong. We can't get passive and say, "I'm not making plans, I'll just trust God." Yes – you should trust God – but do you know that the Bible tells us to plan?

The Living Bible version of Proverbs 16:9 says:

We should make plans – counting on God to direct us.

Making plans and trusting God are not mutually exclusive. We should make plans *and* trust God. The NIV says it this way:

In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines His steps.

In other words – we should make plans with God help and even then we must trust God with the outcome! Proverbs 19:21 says:

Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.

Because of that - we must resist the temptation to take control of our lives rather than trusting God to direct our lives. Jeremiah 10:23 says:

I know, O Lord, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his own steps.

2021 is not a time to try to run your own life apart from God. Neither is 2021 a time for passivity – it's a time to passionately pursue God! It's a time to hope for the best and trust in God no matter what.

I've taught many times on the three sides of faith. We really need all three right now.

1- The belief side of faith

To believe is to be confident that something is true and to expect it to come to pass. To believe is to know that something exists even when there is no physical proof of its existence or reality – but because God says so.

This is the kind of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11 – the great faith chapter of the Bible. Hebrews 11:1 says:

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

We should pray big prayers and believe God for big things. But everything does not always work out like we thought.

This year, there were people we asked God to heal. We prayed. We fasted. We warred. We stood on the word of God. We believed for healing - yet they died. We don't understand that. We don't know the whys. That's why we need the second side of faith.

2- The trust side of faith

There are times we don't understand tough times we go through, but we choose to walk by faith not by sight.

Once we believe God for something, we must trust Him with the outcome.
 We choose to trust God and we choose to worship at all times.
 We choose to believe God is good all the time, even now.
 We choose to trust in His ways, even when we don't understand.
 We choose to believe what the Lord said in Isaiah 55:8-9

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,” declares the Lord. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.”

During tough times, we must trust in the goodness and wisdom of God. We must believe big, pray big prayers and expect big answers, but when God in His sovereign wisdom does things in a different way than we think He should – we must trust that He is right. We must do what Proverbs 3:5-6 says:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.

Our own understanding will not get us through tough times. We cannot lean on it the least little bit. We must totally trust God. Hebrews 11:33-40 speaks of people

...who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again.

Sounds pretty amazing – but it goes on to say this about other people of faith:

Others were tortured... still others faced mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented — of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. And all these were commended for their faith, yet none of them received the promise.

Notice that some people of faith did not receive the promise in their lifetime. This was not due to a lack of faith. The Bible says they obtained a good testimony through faith! They trusted God and kept the faith no matter what the outcome! They understood –

3- The hope side of faith

Many people think that hope is just wishing for good things to happen.

But hope is actually faith for the future. Confident assurance that God is good and God is on the throne and He will work all things out for our good!

We must be careful to balance these three sides of faith. For instance – some people are strong in believing God but weak in trusting God. So, when something that they believe for doesn't happen – they tend to turn on God and blame God.

When people are strong in trust but weak in believing – they tend to get a passive view of life – whatever will be will be. But we need to be people who believe God, trust God and hope in God!

I also felt led to teach you today that there is a difference between faith and presumption. Faith is based on what the word of God reveals about the character of God, the ways of God and the will of God. Presumption is believing something to be true because it seems reasonable to us, to our will and our ways – even without any proof.

In our court system – we have what's called the presumption of innocence. When someone is on trial for a crime – they are presumed to be innocent unless the prosecution proves they're guilty.

In the Bible – presumption is a sin. In fact – it has the same root word as the sin of pride. Presumption is rooted in pride – that I know better than God! That's why Psalm 19:13 says:

Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me.

That's what presumption does! It controls and dominates your life. It takes the place of God in your life. That's why so many people who presume upon God turn on God when what they presumed does not prove to be true! The big difference between faith and presumption is hearing from God. Romans 10:17 says:

Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Notice, it does not say faith comes by hearing the word of God. It says faith comes by hearing and hearing comes by the word of God. When you spend time with God in His word, He will speak to you and when God speaks to you, it will build faith.

For instance – think about when Peter walked on the water. You see, Peter was not in charge of the water-walking – Jesus was! Peter did not walk on the water until Jesus called him out of the boat. As far as we know, Peter never walked on water again. He only did it when Jesus told him to. To do otherwise would be presumptuous.

Presumption is when we don't seek God, but instead make our own decisions

about where we live, who we marry, what job we choose, what church we attend, how we spend our money, if we tithe, if we go to church, if we pray, read our Bible, if we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior. But we will not succeed apart from God. We will not be blessed apart from God. We can go without God...but the result is always defeat.

This is what happened to the Children of Israel in Numbers 14:41–45. They disobeyed God and then tried to fight an enemy without God.

“We will go up to the place the Lord promised.” But Moses said, “Why are you disobeying the Lord’s command? This will not succeed! Do not go up, because the Lord is not with you. You will be defeated by your enemies.... Because you have turned away from the Lord, He will not be with you and you will fall by the sword.” Nevertheless, in their presumption they went up toward the high hill country, though neither Moses nor the ark of the Lord’s covenant moved from the camp. Then the Amalekites and Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down and attacked them and beat them.

In presumption the Children of Israel tried to fight a battle without God’s command and without God’s presence and it resulted in defeat at the hands of their enemies. Presumption is putting confidence in anything or anyone other than God. Presumption is taking something for granted without seeking God. The Bible warns against this in James 4:13-15

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.”

Presumption assumes that my will is God’s will. But we should only get out of the boat at the command of God. We should always be submitted to the will of God. And the point is that we don’t always know what that is.

I did a study on this and was surprised how many times people said they planned on doing something, but it would only happen if it was God’s will. I’ll give you a couple of examples: In 1 Corinthians 4:19 Paul told the Corinthians:

I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing.

In Acts 18:21 Paul told the Ephesians:

But as he left, he promised, “I will come back if it is God’s will.”

We need to learn from this as we go into this new year.
We need to always trust in the will of God.
We need to say, “Here’s what we plan to do, God willing.”

We can't just say whatever we want and presume that God will make it happen. We can't just arbitrarily decide we want a new house or a new car and speak it into existence. That's not how it works.

There is a difference between faith and presumption. Our words only have power when in faith we speak God's word and God's will in God's way. Lamentations 3:37 says:

Who can speak and have it happen if the Lord has not decreed it?

Yes, our words have power, yes our words must be spoken in faith but if our words don't line up with the word of God we are wasting our breath. In Jeremiah 1:12 God says...

I am watching to see that My word is fulfilled.

Not our words – His Word! That's what we're saying as we go into a new year with the same God! We don't know what will happen in 2021 but we will not be in fear because Jesus said in Matthew 6:34

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

We don't worry about the new year because we have the same God. The God who never changes. Hebrews 13:8 says:

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Malachi 3:6 says:

I am the Lord, I do not change.

Numbers 23:19 says:

God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should change His mind.

That's why I close with the same word from God I began with. Never let what you perceive about what God is or is not doing negatively impact what you believe about who God is!

2021 might be good, bad or ugly. But God will still be good.

2021 may or may not be prosperous. But God will still be our provider.

We're believing for this vaccine to work in 2021 – but even in COVID mutates and gets worse – God will still be our healer.

And even if some get sick and die – we will say like Paul – To live is Christ and to die is gain because we are with Him forever. Out of pain and no tears in our eyes!

Aren't you grateful that in this new year we have the same God!

Aren't you glad that we can face the future with faith because we serve and praise a God who is always faithful, true, loving, and full of grace!