

You Have Not Passed This Way Before

Introduction

- I. In 1519 the Spanish explorer Hernando Cortes led an expedition of 600 men to conquer southern Mexico.
 - A. One by one he had his eleven ships scuttled and sunk, till only one was left.
 - B. When his men found out, they loudly upbraided Cortes.
 - C. He asked his men what kind of man would need the ships, except cowards.
 - D. He said if any man was so cowardly, he could board the last ship and leave.
 - E. Cheers drowned the complaints, and he then suggested that they sink the last ship.
 - F. By that single action he committed himself and his force to either succeed or die trying, for they had nothing to go back to.
- II. For all practical purposes last year is behind you—there is nothing to go back to.
 - A. You cannot undo a single action.
 - B. You cannot take back a single word.
 - C. Before you is a new year—full of hope and promise if you so desire.

“I am the new year. I am an unspoiled page in your book of time. I am your next chance at the art of living.

“I am your opportunity to practice what you have learned during the last twelve months about life.

“All that you sought the past year and failed to find is hidden in me; I am waiting for you to search it out again and with more determination.

“All the good that you tried to do for others and didn’t achieve last year is mine to grant—providing you have fewer selfish and conflicting desires.

“In me lies the potential of all that you dreamed but didn’t dare to do, all that you hoped but didn’t perform, all you prayed for but did not yet experience. These dreams slumber lightly, waiting to be awakened by the touch of an enduring purpose.

“I am the new year.” (*Author unknown*)

- III. What has been the best year of your life?
 - A. It might have been your graduation, marriage, birth of children, or baptism.
 - B. This next year can be the best year of your life.
 - C. God wants your life to be a “success” (Josh. 1:7–8; 3 John 1:1–2).

Discussion

I. You Have Not Passed This Way Before

- A. After the days of mourning for Moses, the people of God prepared to cross over the River Jordan.
 - 1. They were told to keep the ark in view (Josh. 3:1–4).
 - a) Aaron’s rod that budded represented God’s miraculous power.
 - b) The tables of stone represented God’s word.
 - c) The pot of manna represented God’s providence.
 - 2. All of these showed God’s presence with the people.

- B. We are entering a new year—we have not passed this way before.
 1. Let's keep our eye on God and His word.
 2. We don't know what the future holds.
 3. James speaks of the uncertainty of life (James 4:13–16).
- C. In the 15th century, mariner's charts crudely outlined the shore of Europe and Africa. Each map showed a spot in the Atlantic Ocean, beyond which no ship or sane sailor dared to venture. Written in were the words, "Here be dragons. Here be demons. Here be death."
 1. We have come a long way in our world concepts since the 15th century, but there is still a certain apprehension about venturing into the "unknown."
 2. Facing the future can be inspiring, challenging and exciting.
 3. It can also be awesome, fearful and dreadful.
 4. Tomorrow is a blank page to be filled in by the passing of time and events—tomorrow means hope and opportunity.

II. Learn To Number Your Days

- A. Moses taught the people to number their days (Psa. 90:1–12).
- B. If you ask a ship captain what his next destination is, he will tell you in one sentence.
 1. He knows where he is going, how to get there, how long it will take.
 2. Imagine hearing this announcement on a plane: "There is no cause for alarm, but we felt you should know that for the past three hours we have been flying without the aid of radio, compass, radar or navigational beam. In the broad sense I suppose you could say we are lost. However, on the brighter side of the picture, I'm sure you'll all be interested to know that we are making excellent time."
- C. We need goals upon which to focus our lives.
 1. Suppose you started a foot race with no finish line—you would not know whether you were in a sprint or a marathon.
 2. Our long-range goal is heaven (Phil. 3:12–14; Heb. 12:1–2).
 3. This is our goal, but how are we going to get there?
 4. Without goals a man comes to the end of his life only to discover his life can be summarized by: 20 years sleeping, 5 years dressing and shaving, 3 years waiting, 6 years watching TV, 1 year on the phone, and 4 months tying your shoes.
- D. How will you achieve your goals?
 1. Do you want to be a better Bible student?
 - a) How many hours will you spend in study?
 - b) What translations of the Bible, history books, commentaries, and atlases are you going to purchase?
 - c) What type of notes are you going to take?
 2. Do you want to be a better spouse?
 - a) What does it mean to be a good husband or wife?
 - b) What qualities will you work on?
 - c) How will you express your love to your spouse?

3. Do you want to be a better parent?
 - a) How much time with children?
 - b) Or do you think you can be a good parent in *abstentia*?
 - c) How are you going to show them your priorities?
- E. Setting goals does not conflict with taking one day at a time (Matt. 6:25–34).
 1. This passage stresses dependency on God.
 2. What man proposes, God disposes.
 3. Some good work might have to be “pruned” (John 15:1–2).
- F. One of our biggest hindrances is the word “if.”
 1. “If I only had more time... If I was healthy like... If my work didn’t make me so tired... If I only made more money...”
 2. Let’s face it, we all do exactly what we want to do.

III. Others Who Journeyed In Uncharted Territory

- A. Noah (Heb. 11:7).
- B. Abraham (Gen. 12:1; Heb. 11:8–10).
 1. “Left a trail marked by the smoke of his altars.”
 2. The challenge of placing Isaac on the altar (Gen. 22).
- C. Moses (Heb. 11:24–27).
- D. What did these men have in common? Faith!
 1. Faith comes by hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17).
 2. Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6).

Conclusion

- I. Many people have customs for welcoming a new year.
- II. Putting away the past and starting fresh with resolutions for the New Year is a great way to start anew.
- III. The Bible encourages Christians to such renewal (Phil. 3:13–14).