



Series: Advent	Reference: 2 Corinthians 4:7-9 & 16-18	Title: Beyond Christmas	Date: 12.31.17
Website Writeup: What's God done in 2017? What's he going to do in 2018? He fills & sustains us, and we can choose to witness & participate in his kingdom work in the coming year.			

Color changes in text indicate slide changes

-SLIDE PERSON: PLEASE RECORD THE SERMON-

~Poetry Reading - Senah Guynes ~

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day*

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote the following poem at a time of deep personal grief, mourning the loss of his wife & wondering about the well-being of his wounded son, and as a committed abolitionist, during a time of war & grief in his country...

*I heard the bells on Christmas day
Their old familiar carols play,
And wild & sweet the words repeat
Of peace on earth, good will to men.*

*I thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along th'unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good will to men.*

*And in despair I bowed my head:
'There is no peace on earth,' I said
'For hate is strong, and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good will to men.'*

*Then pealed the bells more loud & deep:
'God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,
With peace on earth, good will to men.'*

*Till, ringing, singing on its way,
The world revolved from night to day
A voice, a chime, a chant sublime,
Of peace on earth, good will to men.*

Sermon 1: Looking Back

At the end of the year we tend to look backwards & forwards...let's begin today by looking back.

The top 10 most followed celebrities on Instagram in 2017 were Selena Gomez, Cristiano Ronaldo, Ariana Grande, Beyoncé, Kim Kardashian West, Taylor Swift, Kylie Jenner, Dwayne Johnson, Justin Bieber, & Kendall Jenner, in that order.

The top 10 most followed pets on Instagram in 2017 were Jiffpom, Nala Cat, Doug the Pug, Marutaro, Grumpy Cat, Marnie the Dog, Tuna, Juniper, Lil BUB, and Loki.

Let me remind you...you're here today. In this space. Alive & at least relatively well. You may've even just laughed which is a good sign. You made it. You weathered 2017. With all it's ups & downs. It's sad & happy moments. Trump. Black Lives Matter. White Supremacy rallies. Harvey Weinstein. Louis CK, Kevin Spacey & all other inappropriate old men. Hurricanes. The Manchester Attack. Wild Fires. Earthquakes. McGregor & Mayweather. Kim Jong Un. Tax Reform. The Texas Church Massacre. Uber Espionage. The Las Vegas Shooting. The Opioid Epidemic. Russian Hacking. Six:Eight's first full year in this space!

Maybe you had a career change. Got engaged. Got Married. Moved. Had a baby. Had another baby. Broke up with someone. Someone broke up with you. Had surgery. Graduated. Got certified as a nurse (Joe Gargano). Applied for college. Took your PSAT's or SAT's. Bought a house. Gave your life to Jesus! Came back to church. Got into a Community Group. Made new friends. Lost friends. Bought a vacation property. Retired. Had a loved one pass on. Paid off school debt. Started paying school debt. Argued with your spouse. Made up. Got divorced. Or crossed something off your bucket list!

It's been a long year filled with good & bad, bitter & sweet. Stress levels have been high. We've felt hard-pressed. What does Scripture say to us about that? A familiar passage in 2 Cor. 4:7-9 talks about just this...

"But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God & not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

We may feel weak & in reality are. Think of your life as a jar. An empty jar is fragile, weak & brittle. Squeeze the outside with enough pressure & and it'll break into pieces. Scripture teaches, in some way, which we're unable to understand, God sustains all life. However, Scripture also teaches there's a unique in-breaking & infilling of God's Spirit for those of us who've given our lives to Jesus.

When you take a jar of clay, fill it with soil & plant something in it, suddenly it becomes stronger. Squeeze the sides now & it's much harder to break. What gives the jar its



strength is what fills it, not necessarily the jar itself - as Paul said, “...*this all-surpassing power is from God & not from us.*”

Think back over the past year. To all the things which happened you didn't expect. Odds are, some of those things were treasures; gifts from God which are worth stopping & giving thanks for right now! Other things, however, weren't so welcome, they didn't look like gifts. You may have felt the sting of suffering. Suffering can leave us feeling isolated, lonely & convinced those who love us are, at the very least, unavailable. Maybe you're still smarting over something. Maybe you haven't yet caught the greater picture of God moving in that scenario. Maybe you'll need 2018 to see it?

We're going to take 4-5 minutes right now to do exactly this. In a prayerful posture, ask the Holy Spirit to review your year along with you. Look back & see both where God met you & where you still need to see his hand. Think about how he has sustained you by his filling. And use the outline provided to journal your thoughts to Him. You might write down painful memories from this past year, and pray God would make sense of those things, praising him that he brought you through them. You might write down happy memories, and choose to praise & thank him for those things. Let's do this now, and a few minutes we will come back together with a communal reading of Scripture.

Personal Reflection: Looking Back (use this page as your journal)



~ **Responsive Reading** - Jamie Hawthorn ~
Reader, ask people to stand & read along with you
Psalm 40:1-5

*I waited patiently for the Lord;
he turned to me and heard my cry.*

*He lifted me out of the slimy pit,
out of the mud and mire;
he set my feet on a rock
and gave me a firm place to stand.*

*He put a new song in my mouth,
a hymn of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear the Lord
and put their trust in him.*

*Blessed is the one
who trusts in the Lord,
who does not look to the proud,
to those who turn aside to false gods.*

*Many, Lord my God,
are the wonders you have done,
the things you planned for us.
None can compare with you;
were I to speak and tell of your deeds,
they would be too many to declare.*

~ **Poetry Reading** - Mark Llobrera ~
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *A Psalm of Life*

*Tell me not, in mournful numbers,
Life is but an empty dream!
For the soul is dead that slumbers,
And things are not what they seem.*

*Life is real! Life is earnest!
And the grave is not its goal;
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul.*

*Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,
Is our destined end or way;
But to act, that each to-morrow
Find us farther than to-day.*

*Art is long, and Time is fleeting,
And our hearts, though stout and brave,
Still, like muffled drums, are beating
Funeral marches to the grave.*

*In the world's broad field of battle,
In the bivouac of Life,
Be not like dumb, driven cattle!
Be a hero in the strife!*

*Trust no Future, howe'er pleasant!
Let the dead Past bury its dead!
Act,— act in the living Present!
Heart within, and God o'erhead!*

*Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time;*

*Footprints, that perhaps another,
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, shall take heart again.*

*Let us, then, be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labor and to wait.*

Sermon 2: Looking Forwards

How does the in-breaking Kingdom affect the year ahead? What hopes should you allow to fill your heart, knowing challenges are before you?



I like this picture you see on the screen...a tree growing in a small fault of a large rock splits it over time. It reminds me, the life of Christ working in me, can break through my stubborn attitudes in time. That the small God-seed falling in the cracks of my sinful life can grow & stretch until there is a welcomed break. An in-breaking. That old hardened self falling away as I am made more like Jesus & filled with his glorious presence.

If you've ever planted a tree in a pot, you might find over time as the tree grows, the pot cracks & falls apart. It leaves this formed ball of roots which, if left to its own devices, will root down into the soil. Like us being filled with the glory of Christ, the sinful nature is pushed out, old attitudes are changed, newness takes its place. It's our hope, our peace, our joy, and his love working in us.

Many people spend more time getting ready for their work day than they do getting ready for the New Year. We shower, get dressed, comb our hair, brush our teeth - it's all routine. But what prepares the soul for a year which will surely hold both blessing & suffering? Paul continues that passage with which we began with these words from [vv16-18 of the same chapter...](#)

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light & momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

When we acknowledge we're a humble container for the Spirit of God, that our true strength is found in him, then we're ready to be useful in his hands. We do not lose heart, rather ordinary people suddenly do extraordinary things in the power of the Spirit. Those who look for God to break in, see God break in. If we fix our eyes on Jesus, the author & perfecter of our faith, we become aware of him working all the time. Troubles then become momentary & light compared to the greater image of God's kingdom at work. We become willing to be filled, poured out, filled again, and so on. We become kingdom minded people committed to seeing Christ formed in us through any suffering which comes our way, rather than being committed to only our own happiness, or securing a pain-free life.

We can actually tune our lives to be receptive, ready, and aware of God's activity around us. We can have eyes looking to see what the Father's doing, and hearts willing to join Him to see captives set free & the wounded healed. God's victory is always at hand –



because His strategy was, and always will be, Jesus. Jesus is the in-breaking God come for us!

Beginning today, ask God to break into your own attitudes that feed the “bitter complaint” within. Welcome the Holy Spirit to train you in gratefulness no matter your circumstance. It’s the seedbed of Kingdom hope. Let’s take another few minutes & prayerfully think of ways we’d all like to see Jesus break through in our lives this coming year. Write them down. Make these a prayerful conversation with the Holy Spirit. Put them somewhere to refer back to often, and see how God answers these through 2018. We will end this in a few minutes with another Scripture reading...

Personal Reflection: Looking Forward (use this page as your journal)



~ **Responsive Reading** - Ivory Bishop ~
Reader, ask people to stand & read along with you
Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

*He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,*

*he refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake.*

*Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.*

*You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.*

*Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord
forever.*