

## **Readings Ecclesiastes 3:15, Isaiah 52:12 and Matthew 6:34**

**3 January 2021**

### **Happy New Year**

Good morning everyone, welcome to 2021. This time we are looking back over 2020 and looking forward to 2021, but more importantly we want to look at is how does God want us to live in these times of uncertainty.

### **Security from yesterday**

We start with the past, with last year. I do not know how you have experienced 2020. What I do know is that our expectations of 2020 this time last year was considerably different then what we thought 2020 might bring. I know that when I preached last year I was thinking of starting swimming ... well, I started swimming but some things called Corona Virus and Lockdown stopped all that! The swimming pool at the Simon Langton Grammar School for Boys has not yet reopened since.

For me this year has not been so much about doing but about being. We suddenly found ourselves with time and space, on our own. We thank Zoom that we could be church together virtually, but we all agree that the last year has not been easy. We thought Brexit would be in the headlines,

instead it has been the Corona Virus. But that may have overshadowed any other things that have happened last year in our personal lives. Good things maybe, like I know of the births of a number of grandchildren. But also the passing away of those who we held dear, and that would include my own father. And we may have had situations that when we were locked-in we could not stand it any more, and anger, frustration, despair and impatience may have dominated our lives.

I have started to read a new daily reflection booklet: My Utmost for his Highest by Oswald Chambers, and I have adapted some of his words here:

‘Security from Yesterday:

“God requires an account of what is past (Eccl 3:15). At the end of the year we turn with eagerness to all that God has for the future, and yet anxiety is apt to arise when we remember our yesterdays. Our present enjoyment of God’s grace tends to be lessened by the memory of yesterday’s sins and blunders [, and yesterdays hurts and sorrows]. But God is the God of yesterdays, and he allows the memory of them to turn the past into [...] spiritual grown for our future. God reminds us of the past to protect us from a very shallow security in the present.”

So at this time I want to pause for a few minutes for us to bring to God any of these sins and blunders, hurts and sorrows and, based on his promptings, either ask for forgiveness, forgive, or receive his healing hand on your soul. Give up any of the burdens that is troubling your soul to day....

‘Quiet’

and receive the infilling of his Holy Spirit for **healing**.

### **Security for tomorrow**

What can we expect from 2021 based on 2020? It looks like the Corona virus will be with us for a longer time. The vaccine is here, but will it work and will be all receive it in time? The rate of infection goes up, and the NHS is finding it very difficult to cope. Now that the UK has really left the EU we will also find out what that means and what the benefits as well as downsides really are. But looking ahead, can also give us more anxiety and stress. Last year we looked at the Sermon on the Mount and I want to highlight these verses from Matthew 6:31-34

‘So do not worry, saying, “What shall we eat?” or  
“What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?”’<sup>32</sup>

For the pagans run after all these things, and your

heavenly Father knows that you need them.<sup>33</sup> But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.<sup>3</sup>

God asks us to trust him. But do we really trust him? Or have we established our relationship with God as we would do with our electricity providers? Do you have in your mind a Service Level Agreements or Key Performance Indicators, with regards to our financial security, housing provision and pension, for instance, to judge God? God does not work that way. He says to trust him and he will give us more than he gives the birds of the air, but he does not say what that is. But Jesus urges us to have our minds focused on him and on his Kingdom.

And then we may worry about who we are. As we sinned and blundered last year, would we sin and blunder again? Undoubtedly. But Orson Chambers writes:

‘Security for tomorrow:

“The Lord will go before you” (Isaiah 52:12). This is a gracious revelation – that God will send his forces out when we failed to do so. He will keep watch so that we will not be tripped up again by the same failures, as would undoubtedly happen if He were not our “rear

guard” And God’s hand reaches back to the past,  
settling all the claims against our conscience.

So at this time I want to pause again for us to bring to God any of our anxieties and worries for ourselves, or for others. To give to him anything that concerns you about the future, about 2021. Give any of the things that is worrying your heart and mind and give them to Jesus ...

‘Quiet’

and receive the infilling of his Holy Spirit for **peace**.

### **Security for today**

The passage in Matthew 6 continues with:

<sup>4</sup>Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.’

Now that we have given the trauma of the past and the worry for the future to Jesus, let us give our todays to him too. It is always today. It will be tomorrow and it was yesterday, but it is always today. The author of Hebrews often quotes verses of the Old Testament with “Today”, for instance in 3:6-8

<sup>7</sup> So, as the Holy Spirit says:

“Today, if you hear his voice,

<sup>8</sup> do not harden your hearts

as you did in the rebellion,

during the time of testing in the wilderness,

It does not matter what you did yesterday, it does not matter what you will do tomorrow. What matters is what you will do and who you are **today**. In the Kingdom of God it is about our relationship with God **today**, about what he calls us to do and to be **today**. So let us only worry about today, and let us only do the thing that God asks of us today. Tomorrow will be a new day and there will be a new ask.

If we live that way then we also do not need to be in haste, as it does not matter when we arrive or even where we arrive. We only know that it is good for us, as we trust God. Even if we die, it will be good for us. Phil 1:21 says: “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain”.

Oswald Chambers writes:

‘Security for today:

“You shall not go out with haste.” As we go forth into the coming year, [...] let us go out with the patient power of knowing that the God of Israel will go before us. Our yesterdays hold broken and irreversible things for us [...and...] have lost opportunities that will never

return, but God can transform this destructive anxiety into a constructive thoughtfulness for the future. Let the past rest, but let it rest in the sweet embrace of Christ.

So I want to pause again for us to bring ourselves to God . We have given him our past and we have given him our future. So today, we want to give ourselves to him: “all that we are and that all that we own. May the ordinary become holy and heaven be opened to the people of earth. So now give yourself to him:

‘Quiet’

Receive the infilling of his Holy Spirit for **yourself**.

### **Final thoughts**

Oswald Chambers finishes with: “Leave the broken irreversible past in his hands, and step into the invincible future with him. The author of Hebrews says in the final chapter (13:8): “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”

Trust Jesus and with him step into 2021. For with Paul I “... am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,

neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:37-39)

I therefore pray that you and your loved ones will have a blessed 2021, safely in hands of God, but stepping out with him to be his disciples.

**Amen.**