

Looking Forward

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My title today is:

Looking Forward

There's a lot to look forward to right now. Douglas McArthur—General McArthur—wrote a book entitled Reminiscences. In the book there is a quote that I think is quite profound. He said,

"I've learned one of the better lessons of life. To never try to regain the past. You'll find that fire has turned to ashes."

If you look back over life, there's nothing you can redo, there's nothing we can go back to. No matter what we would like to do over again it's all passed. All I can do is take the lessons and learn what we can from them—good and bad. I think God has designed this world so that we would have a lot of mistakes to look back on and learn from. I think He's designed the whole world that way. God is telling us the same thing. In Philippians 3:13.

Philippians 3:13 *Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,*

14) I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.
(NKJV)

God is telling us the same thing through Peter. Don't look back, look to the future. The future is where it is. There are things to learn and to press on with. In this regard I can't help thinking about the church. My wife and I have been in the church a long time now—most of our lives. I think we've learned an awful lot from that experience. I do believe Mr. Armstrong was called by God for a purpose or purposes. Mr. Armstrong taught us the basics, which we still hold on to. I believe that God worked a lot of miracles through Mr. Armstrong in the very early days. Money would come just in time for the radio broadcast to go on a little local station. Somehow, He led Mr. Armstrong to the property in Pasadena and made that available, which I think was a miracle. Pretty soon there was Ambassador College there and then pretty soon 3 college campuses with the broadcast going out on the largest radio stations in the world—50,000- and 100,000-watt stations—blanketing the world.

There's a big lesson in that. I think that whole era ended with a lesson that God has taught mankind over and over again. That greed and lust and lust for position and power ends in destruction. I think it's a lesson that is being played out in this world, even as we speak.

A number of organizations have tried to rebuild the Worldwide church. I don't think they realize that that fire has turned to ashes. You can't rebuild what God has destroyed. You can try, but it just doesn't seem to work. We can try to learn the lessons from that and press on and move forward. God says that we have stiff necks and hard heads and I think that's true enough. We have to concentrate to learn the lesson that He is trying to teach us. When I was 10 years old, I threw a rock and it went the wrong way and broke a neighbor's window and it was a lesson that is still here—I'll never forget it. Like a lot of things in our past, I can think of things that I've done wrong and what I've learned from them and I think that's what God intends.

We need the trials and tribulations to teach us the lessons from the past. I think it's true in our personal lives and it's true for the church. Ecclesiastes 7:10 is a verse that I think about when my mind tends to go back and dwell on things of the past.

Ecclesiastes 7:10 *Do not say, "Why were the former days better than these?" For you do not inquire wisely concerning this. (NKJV)*

It's easy to live in the past. I've done that at times. It's easy to think of the past as being rosier than it really was. I think that's vanity. There are a lot of things that I would have done differently if I had a chance. But I can't, it's all over and passed. You can only take those lessons and go forward.

There's another threat that comes into our minds. Sir Thomas Moore coined the term Utopia, the title of his book describing a society where everything is perfect. It's perfectly just and fair. Centuries later, searching for an opposite term, a word that would mean just the opposite, John Stuart Mill coined the term Dystopia (meaning "Bad Place"). I think Satan has been doing a pretty good job of turning this world into that kind of a place right now. Our economy is \$36 trillion in debt. You can't really imagine that. The internet is full of warnings about the coming crash. There are threats of trouble from China and Russia, Korea—North Korea—Iran. The Middle East could at any time spark another World War—and Ukraine with the things that are going on in the Middle East. Eggs are \$6 per dozen. These things can boggle our minds if we let them.

More than ever, I think it's a time to concentrate on keeping control of our minds. Putting aside the past and also the things that are around us that tend to absorb our minds. The important thing is God and His future. What God is doing. In a Pacific sermon that aired back in January, Mark Sappington was talking about Joseph in Egypt. He said that perhaps Joseph was about 11 years in prison, learning patience and leadership—preparing him for leadership. Suddenly in one day he was the leader of Egypt under Pharaoh. I think God's 7000-year plan is a lot like that. We've been preparing for the millennium—for what's coming. For the end of man's rule finally and God taking command. I'd like to turn to 2 Peter 3:1.

2 Peter 3:1 *Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder),*

2) *that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior,*
3) *knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts,*
4) *and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." (NKJV)*

If you try and tell someone today that Jesus Christ is going to return, you'll probably get some laughter. Notice verse 10.

10) But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. (NKJV)

So, God has His timetable and things will be done according to His schedule, not anybody else's. In the days of Noah, the people were eating and drinking and all of a sudden in the flood they were carried away—likewise with Sodom and Gomorrah. There's a lesson of faith and patience there, waiting for God and His intervention in this world. God said He is going to have to intervene to save us from ourselves. Otherwise, there would be complete destruction. God will act, He said He will act and He will. 1 Thessalonians 5:2.

1 Thessalonians 5:2 For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.
3) *For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.*
4) *But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.*
5) *You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.*
6) *Therefore, let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.*
7) *For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night.*
8) *But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.*
9) *For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,*
10) *who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.*
11) *Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing. (NKJV)*

God has given us eyes to see what He does. He has given us the Bible. The privilege to be a part of His plan. 1 Peter 2:11.

1 Peter 2:11 *Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul,*

12) having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

13) Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme ... (NKJV)

We are sojourners on our way to God's Kingdom and that needs to fill our minds. In that regard, I've picked out 7 things I think we need to concentrate on as far as thinking ahead and thinking towards God's Kingdom. God teaches a lot through analogies in the Bible and one of the big analogies is human birth. There is pain that proceeds that and likewise we talk about the birth of a nation. We talk about the birth of God's coming Kingdom and it's going to be preceded by much pain that we have to go through. That's all been prophesied.

1. God has a plan and it will be accomplished.

God has a plan and we are in 6000 years of it now and it will be finished and accomplished. Isaiah 46:9.

Isaiah 46:9 *Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me,*

10) Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure, ' (NKJV)

God is saying that He has made a plan and it will be carried out. Winston Churchill spoke before Congress back in 1941 and said,

"He must indeed have a bland soul who cannot see that there is some great purpose and plan being worked out here below."

He saw that, but he didn't know what it was. People today don't, even though there's a general feeling that something is going on and that we are not in normal times. Ephesians 1:9.

Ephesians 1:9 *having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself,*

10) that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. (NKJV)

So, God does have a plan and He is working it out. We have the chance of observing what God is doing, and I think, of being amazed, because it's probably not going to work out exactly as any of us has ever imagined. It seems like that's always the way it is, that

God has a way of doing things that is to our surprise when it happens. When you look back, the prophecies have been fulfilled and it's really amazing. We are witnesses to the purpose that God is working out and it's our duties to learn from our past and carry on towards the future. So, number one, God has a plan and He's working it out.

2. God is all powerful.

He has the ability to do whatever He wants. Look at Isaiah 40:25.

Isaiah 40:25 *To whom then will you liken Me, or to whom shall I be equal?" says the Holy One.*

26) Lift up your eyes on high, And see who has created these things, Who brings out their host by number; He calls them all by name, By the greatness of His might And the strength of His power; Not one is missing.

27) Why do you say, O Jacob, And speak, O Israel: "My way is hidden from the LORD, And my just claim is passed over by my God"?"

28) Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, The Creator of the ends of the earth, Neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. (NKJV)

God has all the power in the universe to perform His plan that He's working out.

3. God does not lie.

Everything that God says is truth. Hebrews 6:17.

Hebrews 6:17 *Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath,*

18) that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.

19) This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil ... (NKJV)

God has a plan and God does not lie. Romans 3 is another scripture.

Romans 3:1 *What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision?*

2) Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God.

3) For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect?

4) Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: "That You may be justified in Your words, And may overcome when You are judged." (NKJV)

God has a promise and He doesn't lie. God says that every man lies. You can see that if you watch the news or what goes on in the political world. You have to carefully sift through what you hear to pick out truth. There is a coming a time of truth. A time when we can have a world of truth, where we don't have to try and pick out the truth. God's government will be a government of universal truth.

4. God's plan includes us.

John 14:2 *In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.*

3) *And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.*

4) *And where I go you know, and the way you know."*

5) *Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?"*

6) *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. (NKJV)*

Titus 1:1 *Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness,*

2) *in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began. (NKJV)*

God has promised eternal life to those who follow Him. I've tried to imagine what the spiritual world or spiritual life might be like and I can't. It's so completely foreign to my physical mind because a part of this physical creation and all that is spiritual is completely foreign to us. I'm a part of this physical creation just as we all are. Some people envision going off to heaven and sitting on a cloud and playing a harp—it's all just strange dreams. When you see this world so perfect we know that heaven must be whatever God has planned and it has to be perfect. If it's utopia, can it be boring? I don't think so. I can't believe that. I just have to take confidence in what I do see. What I do see is that this creation around us is perfect. The earth is perfect, our environment that God made for us is perfect, the human body is the perfect design that carries on for 6000 years and reproduces and still looks the same. It's quite amazing and if this life is so perfect as far as a creation—God says that the life here after will be even better. I just have to take that on faith.

5. Physical life is only a "stage" in our educational process.

I think that's something which is little understood in this world. Let's look at James 4:13.

James 4:13 *Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit";*

14) *whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. (NKJV)*

Yesterday we attended the memorial for John Gould. John and I are the same age within 2 months. I have to think that I'm living on borrowed time and whoever I borrowed that time from, I should say thank you, I guess. The older you get the more you realize that time is just something that passes away. It's fleeting. The time frame is for a purpose. God designed the physical body to repair itself to a great extent—not everything. We have diseases that take life. We have other things that are problems. But He has designed every physical being—human beings, all the animals—to have a limited life span. They get old and wear out. He didn't have to. Christ said that with the Father, all things are possible. God didn't design the human body to live forever. Why didn't He? When you ask that question, you have to realize He did that for a purpose. It's a "stage" we are going through. The education that God is giving us, that He knows we need to be His children at some point.

People who don't know that will do anything to preserve their lives for a day, a week, a month, realizing it's all in vain and there's no way to preserve your life forever.

6. God has told us our responsibility.

I'd like to turn to Matthew 19:16.

Matthew 19:16 *Now behold, one came and said to Him, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?"*

17) So He said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments."

18) He said to Him, "Which ones?" Jesus said, "'You shall not murder, ' You shall not commit adultery, ' You shall not steal, ' You shall not bear false witness, ' Honor your father and your mother and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" (NKJV)

He outlined the 10 commandments. This is a start, but there is a lot more than that. Let's look at Micah 6:8.

Micah 6:8 *He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, To love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God? (NKJV)*

Back in Matthew 18, just a page back from where we were.

Matthew 18:1 *At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"*

2) Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them,

3) and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. (NKJV)

I think this is one of the hardest things to do, to humble ourselves as a little child. That's what it takes to be God's child.

7. God has told us the future.

In Matthew 24, the disciples asked Christ about the end time.

Matthew 24:3 *Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"*

4) *And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you.*

5) *For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ, 'and will deceive many.*

6) *And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.*

7) *For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places.*

8) *All these are the beginning of sorrows.*

9) *Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake.*

10) *And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another.*

11) *Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.*

12) *And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.*

13) *But he who endures to the end shall be saved.*

14) *And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.*

15) *Therefore, when you see the abomination of desolation, 'spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand),*

16) *'then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.*

17) *Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house.*

18) *And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes.*

19) *But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!*

20) *And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath.*

21) *For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.*

22) *And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened. (NKJV)*

It's like a human birth—much travail right before the end.

Revelation 20:1 *Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.*

2) He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years;

3) and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while.

4) And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

5) But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.

6) Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years. (NKJV)

Revelation 21:1 Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also, there was no more sea.

2) Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

3) And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.

4) And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

5) Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."

6) And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts.

7) He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. (NKJV)

God is promising that we can be children of God. Back in Romans 8.

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

29) For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

30) Moreover, whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

31) What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

32) He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? (NKJV)

God has promised us a wonderful world to come. I'd like to recap these points.

1. God has a plan and it will be accomplished.

6000 years along now in its organization and it is very nearing the transition time that we are looking forward to.

2. God is all powerful.

Christ said that God can do all things. God has a plan and He's able to carry it out.

3. God does not lie.

He has told us what is happening and what is going to happen and it will happen.

4. God's plan includes us.

God has given us promises. Again He doesn't lie. He's given us promises and told us about becoming eternal beings at some point. Once we have finish this physical life which is just a phase we are going through. God promises so much more.

5. Physical life is only a "stage" in our educational process.

Designed for us to learn from. To experience all kinds of problems, to learn from them and to carry on and learn to be what God wants us to be.

6. God has told us our responsibility.

He given us His laws and we've learned these things from the church. We've also learned a lot more. So God has told us what we need to do and laid out this future for us.....

7. An awesome future that is ahead.

Terrible times are coming. Like a terrible birth that has to take place—war and suffering—but beyond that, a wonderful time. 1000 years of peace, truth, and beauty and a wonderful thing. A time beyond our wildest dreams. Keep looking forward and don't look back.