

## Looking Back

It is the last Sunday of 2019. It seems like it was just a little while ago we were celebrating the start of 2019. It also seems like it was not all that long ago we were celebrating the year 2000. Where has the time gone? We are 2 decades into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. That is 20% of the way through the 21<sup>st</sup> century! Wow! Let's not get carried away with that though. Let's just focus on this past year.

When we started Cell Life Church one of the core values we wanted to instill was the process of reflection and evaluation. We are often looking back over the past weeks and months and evaluating all we are doing. We ask questions about what we have been doing and been involved in. We then make decisions on what to do next. We look at what we need to start doing, stop doing, and continue doing. This is a regular exercise and is very beneficial.

As we approach the end of a calendar year it is good to look back and review what was planned, what was accomplished, what was missed, and what changes, if any, need to be made. We will share our review of 2019 with you in the next month or so after we submit our annual report to the church council. However, today, we want to talk about the process or the doctrine of looking back.

As with many things, looking back can have both a good and a bad result. Looking back can be beneficial and it can be very detrimental. It depends on the motivation of looking back. It depends on the reason you are reviewing. We are going to look at a couple of passages of scripture where someone looked back and apply those passages to life today.

The first verse we want to look at is in the gospel of Luke. Jesus is interacting with some disciples who want to follow him and he is sharing wisdom and instruction with them. In Luke 9:62 Jesus says this.

(62) Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

This is a blanket statement Jesus is making to a person who says they want to follow Jesus but they want to go back and say goodbye to their family first. Jesus is telling this person, and us, that when we are following him, we must leave what is behind us. We cannot change it. It has happened. What is in the past can not be changed.

When we follow Jesus and obey what he asks us to do, we cannot go back. If we do, we actually move away from Jesus. We get further from God as we take our focus off what is before us and the tasks he has given us.

When we are looking back at the end of a year, it must be to evaluate and measure it against what Jesus has asked us to do. Have we accomplished what the Lord set us out to do? Are we able to report that our task has been completed and we are ready for the next one? Or, are we looking back to continually celebrate a success that is getting dimmer and dimmer in the past, losing sight of the new tasks and challenges the Lord is trying to prepare us for and set us in motion for? Jesus is clear, don't look back while you are moving forward for him.

Do you think we should never look back or remember what has happened in the past? Absolutely not. In fact, much of the Old Testament is a recording of what God has done and instructions for God's people



so we never forget. God even instructs us at times to build altars of remembrance so we do not forget things he has done. One of the best passages of scripture illustrating this is found in Joshua. Let's read Joshua 4:1-7

(1) When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, (2) "Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, (3) and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, from right where the priests are standing, and carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight." (4) So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, (5) and said to them, "Go over before the ark of the LORD your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, (6) to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' (7) tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever."

The Lord wanted all of Israel to remember what he had done for them this day. He wanted a memorial left to remind the generations of Israel and to prompt questions from the children. Looking back is not a bad thing when we are remembering what God has done and how he did it. When he is the focus of looking back, we are doing good. When we are the focus of looking back, we get off track.

The calendar year is coming to an end. We need to evaluate all that was accomplished for the Lord. Where did we succeed, where did we not succeed? Where did God really do amazing things and where did we feel we were working under our own power and did not see any results?

As you look back and evaluate the year, compare the results and the methods you used to what God asked you to do? What has the Lord spoken to you? How has he asked you to be the hands and feet of Christ to your community? How has he asked you to equip and encourage the people around you to live out their faith daily and encourage and minister to others?

Do you record when God asks you to do something? Do you write down when the Lord impresses upon you to do something or to start something new? I strongly encourage you to do that. When the Lord speaks, write it down. Sometimes it is an encouragement. Sometimes he shares a new opportunity or new instructions for us to carry out. Sometimes he tells us to stop doing something, its time has come to completion. Whatever it is, write it down. That way when you look back to review and evaluate, you know exactly what the Lord asked you to do. Then you can decide to stop doing whatever you are doing, start doing something else or continue doing what you are doing. None of these decisions can be accomplished if you do not record what God has asked you to do and then look back regularly and evaluate what the Lord is doing in you and through you.

As 2019 comes to a close, look back and see where God used you for his purposes. Celebrate that and continue doing what he has asked you to do. Nothing more and nothing less.

