

Sermon for New Year's Eve

Date: December 31, 2019

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: 1 Kings 3:4-14

Epistle Reading: James 1:2-8

Gospel Reading: Luke 12:25-32

Sermon Text: 1 Kings 3:4-14

Sermon Title: God will make sure we win

Hymns:

LSB 914 – Light of Light, O Sole-Begotten

LSB 387 – Joy to the World

LSB 733 – O God Our Help in Ages Past (v. 1,3,5,6)

LSB 933 – My Soul Rejoices

LSB 899 – Across the Sky the Shades of Night (v. 1,5)

My Soul Flows on in Endless Song

LSB 390 – Let Us All with Gladsome Voices (v.1,4)

LSB 896 – New Greet the Swiftly Changing Year (v. 1,5,7)

LSB 937 – Lord, Bid Your Servant Go in Peace

LSB 922 – Go, My Children, with My Blessing

Distribution:

LSB 878 – Abide with Me

Liturgy:

Divine Service: Creative Worship



Pastor James Groleau
St. John's Lutheran Church
1200 13th Avenue NW
Austin, MN 55912
Office: (507) 433-2642
Shepherd@JamesPlace.net
StJohnsAustinLCMS.org
FaceBook.com/StJohnsAustin
Twitter.com@StJohnsAustinMN
FaceBook.com/Shepherd.James.Groleau
KAUS 1480 AM Sun. 9:00am



Text: 1 Kings 3:4-14

And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place. Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, “Ask what I shall give you.” And Solomon said, “You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David my father, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you. And you have kept for him this great and steadfast love and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day. And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?”

It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. And God said to him, “Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days. And if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days.”

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Grace, peace and mercy be yours in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

Tonight, at 11:59 Eastern Time, over one billion people all across the world will be watching as the "ball" drops in New York City's Times Square. That got me thinking about the history of the New Year's Eve "ball."

The 1st "Time-Ball" was installed on top of England's Royal Observatory at Greenwich in 1833. After the success of that event, approximately 150 such time-balls were installed around the world, but few survive and still work. The tradition is carried on today in places like the United States Naval Observatory in Washington, DC, where a "Time-Ball" descends from a flagpole at noon each day, and of course, once a year in Times Square, where it marks the stroke of midnight.



New York actually held a New Years celebration for the first time in 1904, but it wasn't until 1907 that they "dropped" an iron and wood ball, adorned with one hundred 25-watt light bulbs. It was 5 feet in diameter and weighed over 700 pounds. From that date until today, the ball has dropped every year. (Except 1942 and 1943 during the City's WWII "dim-outs". Crowds still gathered in Times Square during those years and greeted the New Year with a moment of silence followed by chimes ringing out from One Times Square.)

Over the years, the "time-ball" has undergone about 4 major redesigns. The most recent one was created for the new Millennial celebration. It is a geodesic sphere, six feet in diameter, and weighing over half-a-ton. It's covered with a total of 504 crystal triangles that vary in size. Each of those triangles has a special designation: Hope for Fellowship, Hope for Peace, Hope for Wisdom, Hope for Unity, Hope for Courage, Hope for Healing, etc.

The Name of the ball is: The Star of Hope. Why would they call the New Year's ball the "Star of Hope?" Because each new year is a time for new hope. It's a time for opportunity. It's a time for us to consider our future.

Proverbs 17[:24] tells us we have the opportunity to "consider our future" for this coming New Year. There is always new hope with the new year, but that hope doesn't lie in "wishing upon a star." Even a really big one in Time Square called the Star of Hope. The "hope" for fellowship, peace, wisdom, courage and so on are not based upon new years' resolutions, but upon something far more dependable and capable.

Proverbs 24 is saying that the Wise man has a powerful future waiting for him because he keeps his eyes on wisdom. By contrast, the fool has his eyes on

something else. His eyes are on the ends of the earth. What's the difference between the two? How can we become like the wise man who is blessed by God?

Well, let's take a look at the fool first. Proverbs says, "The fool's eyes wander to the ends of the earth."¹ Can you visualize this guy?

Have you ever watched children picking apples, or anything else for that matter? They pick an apple, and then they look up and see another apple a ways off they run to pick that one. Then they look up and see another apple, maybe a couple trees away, and off they go, again and again again all over the orchard. If they would just stand still they could fill ten buckets in the time it takes them to fill one, but their eyes are always wandering, looking for the next new apple.

The fool, in the Proverb is like that. He is always looking for the easy way, or to blame someone else. He is always seeking an easy way to get ahead in life. He's the guy who invests in the future by buying lottery tickets. He can't keep a job because no job is good enough. There is always a rainbow waiting for him over the next hill with a pot of gold for the picking. There is always greener grass just over the fence. His eyes wander constantly to the ends of the earth. They are constantly comparing: themselves, their families, their jobs and their potential to someone else, or something else. They are never satisfied.

Like the kids on the apple orchard who run from tree to tree, they are constantly running from bright blinky bobble, or flashy fluffy fortune, to the next. Always hoping that the next ring they grab will be the brass ring. In the end, they have achieved far less than they could have.

Contrast that with the wise man. First he is focused. "A discerning man keeps wisdom in view."² He's not running all over the place looking for the next easy way. He realizes that the only lasting success comes by sticking to the task. A part of a sermon I read once noted: You can't build a championship team in a single day. No single sales meeting can transform a company into a success. No one sermon can change the hearts of those who hear it.

You can't find success by looking for easy fixes, or by running hither and yon for solutions. The greatest achievements are accomplished with focus. That was what the wise man does. He focuses on achieving his objective. What does the wise man pursue? Wisdom.

1 Proverbs 17:24

2 Proverbs 17:24

King Solomon, who wrote many of the Proverbs, was once asked by God to name the one thing he wanted. Solomon's answer was to ask for wisdom.³ God's responds:

"You've asked for this and not for a long life, or riches for yourself, or the death of your enemies. Instead, you've asked for understanding so that you can do what is right. 12 So I'm going to do what you've asked. I'm giving you a wise and understanding heart so that there will never be anyone like you..."⁴

A poet⁵ once wrote:

We squander our health, in search of Wealth.
We scheme and toil and save.
Then squander Wealth, in search of Health.
And all we get is a grave.
We live and boast of what we own.
We die and only get a stone.

The second advantage the wise man has over the fool is that he knows where to look for wisdom. Where did Solomon get his wisdom? He asked God. Why? Because wisdom comes from God. The Bible teaches us:

If any of you lack wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.⁶

There are other places to look for knowledge and information, and even for what people might value as wisdom. Those places may seem to have value, but any source other than God will eventually lead you astray. Often contradicting itself in the process. For example:

- Many hands make light work... but too many cooks spoil the broth.
- Clothes make the man... but we shouldn't judge a book by its cover.
- Nothing ventured, nothing gained... but it's better to be safe than sorry.
- If at first you don't succeed, try, try again... but don't beat a dead horse.
- If you lie down with dogs you'll get up with fleas... but if you can't beat 'em, join 'em.

3 1 Kings 3:7-9

4 1 Kings 3:11-12ff

5 Tracey Pierce

6 James 1:5

The wisdom of man has its weaknesses because man's wisdom is always based on what mortal men can experience, and our experiences will always be limited.

It's like a man wanting to see as far as he can so he climbs a high mountain, but no matter how high the mountain he can still only see so far. He will always be limited by his own eyesight and the edge of the horizon. By contrast the wisdom of God comes from far above. There is no limit to His vision. There are no boundaries to what He can see.

God says:

From the beginning I revealed the end. From long ago I told you things that had not yet happened, saying, "My plan will stand, and I will do everything I intended to do."⁷

When we look to God for His wisdom in our lives we are not only better off than anyone else because we have an advantage others don't have. We have access to the Means of Grace, and the Wisdom of God in our lives. We can show that we have the wisdom of God when we live under His statutes and direction.

Remember Jesus once told the parable about how two men built their homes. Jesus ended the parable by saying:

"Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand."⁸

But,

"... everyone who hears these words of mine and PUTS THEM INTO PRACTICE is like a wise man who built his house on the rock."⁹

We show that we have gained God's wisdom when we do what He asks us to do. That's why it is so critical that we keep exposing ourselves to His wisdom:

- In Church
- In Sunday School
- In mid-week Bible studies
- In our personal devotions

7 Isaiah 46:10

8 Matthew 7:26

9 Matthew 7:24

The more of God's wisdom we can get into us... the greater our advantage in this world. So, here are the ways to ensure a good New Year for 2020:

- 1) Know God's Wisdom
- 2) Do God's Wisdom
- 3) Repeat

Do this again and again and again – as often as you can.

The key thing to remember is that both as individual Christians and as a church we have access not only to God's wisdom but also to His power. Our ability to have a great New Year for our lives isn't limited simply to what we know and can personally do with our lives. God's power and work in our lives is the single most important advantage we have. As one wise man observed:

“I place no hope in my strength, nor in my works; but all my confidence is in God my protector, who never abandons those who have put all their hope and thought in Him.¹⁰”

If we hold on to God... to His wisdom and His power... then we will prosper in this coming year. We will lay hold of everything God wants us to have. Granted, it can seem to be that that our future may be in doubt at times, but the end result will never really be in question.

One of my favorite stories has to do with the 1959 Biblical epic “Ben Hur.” One of the most famous scenes in that movie was the climatic chariot race which required 5 weeks of filming, 15,000 extras, and 18 chariots, nine to be used by the stunt crew during practice.

In the spirit of authenticity, Charlton Heston actually learned to drive the 4 horse vehicles, but after weeks of practice he expressed concern about the final shoot. He took the stunt coordinator aside and “I can drive the chariot,” he told stunt coordinator Yakima Canutt, who was directing the scene, “but I'm not sure I can win.”

Canutt replied, “Chuck, you just make sure you stay in the chariot, and I'll make sure you win the race.”

Likewise, God is saying to us, “Just stay in the chariot... and I'll make sure you win the race.”

Amen.