

Remembrance and Expectation

Matthew 26: 26-29, 1 Corinthians 11: 23-26

Rev. Philip Parker

January 5, 2025

On Tuesday evening at midnight we celebrated the beginning of a new year. Today, on the first Sunday of this new year, we have gathered together to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Is there a connection between what are doing today and what took place on Tuesday evening at midnight? This morning let's see if we can answer that question. More importantly let's see how the answer to that question can impact our relationship with the Lord.

Let's begin by taking a look at why the first month of the calendar year is called January. Its origin dates all the way back to the days of the Roman Empire. They named the first month of each year in honor of "Janus." He was a divinity portrayed as a god with two faces, one looking backwards and one looking forwards. He was also associated with the passage of time, the ending of the past and the beginning of the future. Sometimes he was even thought of as a doorway. Accessing his presence was like stepping over the threshold from one room where you had previously been standing to a new room which you were now entering. The first month of the year was, therefore, a time to remember the past while at the same time looking forward with eager expectation to what would be taking place in the future. So that's how we came up with the name of January for the first month of each year.

In doing so, we adopted a name and a tradition that dates all the way back to the days of the Romans. Like them we celebrate it in much the same way as they did. In the days leading up to the new year, we reflect upon those events which have taken place during the last twelve months. There are numerous TV shows, for example, that do that very thing. My wife likes to watch the Sunday Morning Show with Jane Pauley when she gets home from church. This past Sunday it closed with a time of remembrance for those notable individuals who have passed away in 2024. The beginning of the new year is also a time of joyous expectation. What happens at midnight on New Year's Eve? We celebrate. We shoot off fireworks. We have a New Year's Eve party and everyone makes a lot of noise when the clock strikes midnight. Even if we decide to stay home, we can watch the ball drop in Times Square and celebrate vicariously with the millions of people welcoming the new year's arrival in New York City. So for a lot of people, the new year is a time of joyous expectation. They're looking forward to what the future holds in store for them.

But how about us, God's people? Is the dawn of a new year just another secular holiday or are there other reasons why it should be a part of our celebrations as Christians? The answer is yes, especially if you look into the pages of the Old Testament. God commanded the Jewish people to celebrate the new year as a reminder that He was their King. It was called Rosh Hashanah. They were to blow a shofar, a ram's horn (Leviticus 23:23-25), perhaps a reminder of the trumpet blasts that shook Mount Sinai when the Lord gave the Israelites the Ten Commandments and when He set them apart as a special people, holy unto Himself. As such, it was a time for prayer, good deeds, and for amending mistakes during the past year. It was a time of remembrance. Have you ever noticed that over and over again in the pages of the Old Testament, God's people were told to remember and reflect upon all of the ways that God had blessed them in the past. It was also a time of renewal and expectation, looking forward to the Lord's blessings in the future. Festive meals with delicious sweets symbolized the hoped for blessings that the Lord would bestow upon His people in the year to come.

We would do well to follow in their footsteps. So let's begin with a time of remembrance. Let's take a few moments to reflect upon what the Lord has done for us this past year, both individually and as a church family. Yes there may have been some mistakes and some losses. There always are, but how about the blessings? Remember that old gospel song which goes something like this, "Count your many blessings name them one by one." Do that for yourself and you will "be amazed at what the Lord has done." So this morning let's count the blessings that the Lord has bestowed upon our church family in 2024.

Having reviewed the blessing of the past, what about our expectations for the future? What kinds of things would we like for the Lord to bestow upon us in 2025? Speaking I believe for all of us, here are some things that I think we can all agree upon. We would like the Lord to deepen the ties of Christian fellowship which bind us together. They are already strong, but there are some among our fellowship who have not yet experienced our loving care and concern for one another. We would like for the Lord to bless us with additional membership. Wouldn't it be wonderful to see all of these pews in our sanctuary filled each Sunday morning. We would like the Lord to bless us with dedicated volunteers who are eager to serve in the various ministries of our church. As the old saying goes, many hands make for light work. I suspect almost everyone would like the Lord to bless us with a new pastor. We need someone who has been called by God to lead our church into a better and brighter future. Most importantly of all, however, we need the Lord to bless us with an outpouring of His Spirit upon this place and His

people. That and that alone will bring to fruition all of the other blessings that we might hope for.

At the beginning of this sermon, I asked if there was a connection between two very different celebrations, the celebration of the new year and the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Is the answer their proximity to one another, just days apart, or is there another far more important reason? For me the answer can be summed up in two words, "remembrance and expectation." That's obvious with regards to the passage of time marked by the beginning of a new year. Just about everyone reminisces about what took place in 2024 as they think about what life will be like in 2025. But how about the Lord's Supper? In Paul's account of the Lord's Supper as well as in the Gospel descriptions of the Lord's Supper, there is an underlying assertion that something is taking place which involves both a recollection of the past and a hopefulness about the future. We are told to commemorate this meal in remembrance of what Christ did for us. We are also informed to expect His return when He comes into His kingdom. We, therefore, have something to remember as well as something to look forward to. The same is even true with regards to our church. The same Christ who has watched over us in the past will also be with us as we move forward into the future. Yes, on this first Sunday in January it's a time for both remembrance and expectation.