

2016: It's Time!

We've come to the last Sunday of 2015. Some of you didn't know if you would make it to the end of the year but you did! All the struggles and trials of 2015 couldn't defeat you. You're still here, thanks be to God. I think often of a song Ira Standfil wrote that said, "I may not look like much when I get there, but I'm gonna make it through somehow." Praise the Lord you made it through 2015. (Well almost. I realize we've still got a few more days to go.) You may look a little worse for the wear, it may feel as if you have exhausted God's mercy and grace for the year, but you've made it.

I typically take this Sunday to bid farewell to the year and make a few suggestions as to how to approach the new year with purpose and hopefulness. No predictions for the coming year other than to predict that by the time we reach November of 2016 and the presidential election, many of us may be on the edge of despair. We will see but may the Lord have mercy on us. Regardless of what happens in politics in our country, I am hopeful for what is going to happen for us at Carbondale this year. I believe God has good things in store for us.

As I thought about what to share for this message this morning, an annoying phrase came to my mind. Some of you know who Michael Buffer is. He is the ring announcer who coined the phrase, "Let's get ready to rumble." He made a fortune from that phrase. He has a lesser known half-brother named Bruce Buffer who is a ring announcer for mixed martial arts, the UFC. It seemed Bruce was hoping for similar fame in trademarking a line but his hasn't exactly caught on. It seems a little generic to me. However, he gives it all he's got. Listen.

With thanks to Bruce Buffer, I decided to call this message, 2016: It's time! Time for what? I'm glad you asked. First of all, **It's time to let go of 2015.** You can't change what happened in 2015. You can repent, feel remorse and regret, but you can't undo what's been done. What you can do is determine you aren't going to make the same mistakes in 2016. What you can do is choose not to carry bitterness and the wounds of 2015 into the new year. Let it go. Turn loose of 2015 and get ready to live a life of obedience and faithfulness in the new year. It's time to turn loose and let go of 2015. There is a new year just ahead with new opportunities. You can't embrace what God has for you in 2016 if you are holding on to junk from 2015.

For Carbondale **It's time for a new story.** The pastoral staff talked about preaching through the big stories of the bible this year. We are calling this The Story and beginning next Sunday we are going to start with the creation story in Genesis and try to walk through the big

stories and themes of God's word for the year. We will have a reading guide for you to help you follow along as we study together. It's time for a new story. It's time to dig into the word of God and make His story your story. We've let the word of God slide in importance and influence in our lives. It's time to embrace his story. The writer of Hebrews said, "**In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food...solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.**" **Hebrews 5:12-14**

I think that passage applies to far too many of us. I've been a Christian for 55 years and have been a credentialed minister for 45 years and yet I feel I still need someone to teach me the elementary truths of God's word all over again. It's time for us to dig in and study God's word. It's time to make God's word a priority in our lives. Study and apply God's word because by constant use we can train ourselves to distinguish good from evil and that means we will be making wise choices.

If you are a parent with children or teens, let me especially encourage you to make Sunday school a priority for your family. Sunday school is the teaching hour for your children. If you are only coming for the 10:30 service and your children are only in children's church, although they are learning the bible, they are missing the systematic teaching of God's word that Sunday school provides. Missionettes is offered to the girls on Sunday morning and it is a wonderful teaching program for the young ladies. You need to have your children in Sunday school and in Children's church as well as the Wednesday night service. And moms and dads and grownups and singles, it wont hurt you either! We have some new adult classes starting in January. We have a new class beginning next Sunday for 20 somethings – folks out of college and in their 20's married or single. Drs. Steve and Tammi Lahr and Scott and Katie Parmley are co-teaching this new class. Check out the classes and get your soul renewed and refreshed by studying God's word.

We are going to refresh our souls this year and we are looking once again at refreshing the facility. We have talked several times about trying to remodel the sanctuary and it just hasn't come together but in the past few months I felt suddenly, It's time! It's time for a new look. We've met with the architect and designer and I hope in a few weeks and for sure by our annual business meeting to have some designs to present to you. We need to refresh our building, our

parking lot. We need to refresh our technology so we can live stream our Sunday morning service for folks that can't be here. It's time to upgrade and refresh things and I'm excited to present this to you in a few weeks.

2016: It's time for a decision. In the story of the prophet Elijah and the prophets of Baal in their showdown on Mt. Carmel, Elijah asked the people this question, "**How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.**" **1 Kings 18:21** I believe it's time for a decision. The day for checking the box marked "undecided" when it comes to serving God or not, that day is passed. Things are rapidly changing in our world and the lines are being drawn. We are going to have to decide if we are going to live a life surrendered to Jesus or not. We can't continue to waver between two opinions. Jesus is either who he says he is or he isn't. If he is the Son of God and the Savior of the world that means he gave his life on the cross for you. How can you not choose to surrender your life to him and live for him after what he has done for you? I believe this year it's time for you to make a decision to do whatever it takes for you to live for Jesus.

Allow me to share some wisdom from the book of Proverbs. "**Above all else, guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life...Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you. Make level paths for your feet and take only ways that are firm. Do not swerve to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil.**" **Proverbs 4:23-27**

Guard your heart. You've surrendered your heart and life to Jesus, guard it and don't give it to anyone or anything else. Fix your gaze directly before you. Put your eyes on Jesus and stop looking for shortcuts. Stop looking for other options to take or other gods to serve. Make level paths for your feet and take only ways that are firm. Some of you keep falling into trouble because you aren't making level paths for your feet. You keep choosing the wrong path. You are ignoring God's word and the warning signs that say, "Danger, thin ice." Or "Uneven path." Then you wonder why you are in trouble again. Obey God. Heed his warning and his word.

It's time to take a stand for Jesus. The proverb said "Keep your foot from evil." Don't turn down the paths that are disobedient to God and his word. Listen, some of you keep trying to decide if you can afford to obey God. "If we get married instead of living together it will cost us in benefits." Listen to me, it costs a lot more if you keep on disobeying God. "If I pay tithes I won't have enough money to pay my bills." It will cost you more to disobey God's word. "If I don't sleep with my boyfriend or girlfriend...or if I don't drink or use drugs...or if I don't

compromise to fit in... I'll be alone." Or fill in the blank with what ever you choose. You know what's worse than being alone or not having money or qualifying for government benefits or not fitting in with the crowd at school or at work? Losing your relationship with God and spending eternity apart from him in hell. That's really being alone. 2016 – come on, it's time to stop wavering between two opinions. It's time to serve God and truly commit to living for him.

It's time for battle. It goes with the territory. If you commit to surrendering your life to Jesus and truly living for him, the devil isn't going to like it. He is going to come after everyone that takes a stand. He comes like a roaring lion, seeking those he can devour, but the bible tells us to put on the whole armor of God and to take a stand. We don't have to fear the devil. The bible says, "greater is he that is within us than he that is in the world." We have overcome through the blood of Jesus Christ and by his word and by the word of our testimony. Don't be afraid to stand up for Jesus and live for him. But don't be surprised at the battle or the attacks.

It's time for trust. Psalm 56:3 in the King James version reads, "**What time I am afraid I will trust in thee."** **Psalm 56:3** These are fearful times for our world but it's not like it's the first time we've faced evil or terrorism or scenarios that point to the end of the world. Don't let fear cause you to stop trusting in God or start trusting only in man. Whatever the reason for fear the solution, the antidote is the same: Trust in the Lord! If you are fearful of the future, or the present, or fearing because of poor health or financial problems – whatever the cause for the fear, trust in the Lord. Don't panic, trust. Don't worry, trust. Don't despair, trust. The Proverbs tell us "**Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight.**"

Proverbs 3:5-6

I don't know what 2016 is going to hold for any of us, but here is my plan, I'm going to trust in the Lord and acknowledge him. I'm going to lean on him and rely upon his mercy. The bible says the steps of the righteous have been ordered of the Lord. So I'm going to do my best to order my steps, to align my steps and my choices and my life according to God's plans and purpose for me – according to the steps he has already ordained and purposed for me. I'm going to live in obedience to God regardless of what comes. It's the only way to succeed in life. It's the only way to face the fearful times with confidence. When fearful things come – trust in the Lord!

Let me give you another reason for my trust, regardless of what we may be facing. Psalm 102 is referred to as the prayer of an afflicted man. He speaks of being in distress, of his bones burning, his heart being withered, he says he is wasting away, just skin and bones. But then he links his own suffering to that of Israel and the city of Jerusalem. Seeing his suffering as being like that of the city which has fallen into ruin, he looks with hope and confidence to the Lord and writes, **“But you, O Lord, sit enthroned forever; your renown endures through all generations. You will arise and have compassion on Zion, for it is time to show favor to her; the appointed time has come.” Psalm 102:12-13.** Do you hear what he is saying? You O Lord sit enthroned forever. You haven’t lost control. Your power and sovereignty hasn’t been diminished by the wickedness of the world. Every generation has heard of you and your renown. Because I know you are faithful and powerful, I know you will arise and once again have compassion on Zion (another name for Jerusalem and likely referring to the people of Israel.) I believe the writer is expecting God to visit him with compassion, just as he will visit Jerusalem with compassion and favor. Notice the prophetic hopefulness of that last phrase, “the appointed time has come.”

I believe God has appointed a time. Ecclesiastes says there is a time for everything under heaven. I believe he has appointed a time for the nations, for Israel and the nations of the Middle East and all of the players are moving toward God’s appointed time. We are watching it happen in our lifetime. God has appointed a time and he will deliver Israel and I believe he will deliver us, his people. Don’t be afraid. Trust and obey because at just the right time, at the appointed time, I believe God is going to visit you with compassion and healing and favor and the help and deliverance you need. He will do it for the nation of Israel someday and he will do it for all those who call upon his name. In this psalm the writer said “The heavens and the earth may pass away someday, they may wear out like a garment but Lord you remain the same and your years will never end.” We can trust the Lord, regardless of the circumstances, regardless of what happens this next year for God is still in control and the time he has appointed for us and for Israel and for this world, it will all happen according to his timing and his will. Trust and don’t be afraid.

Finally, **2016: It’s time to take notice of your time.** I mentioned that Ecclesiastes 3 says there is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven. Later, in chapter 9, the writer observes that **“The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong...but time**

and chance happen to them all.” Then he makes this telling observation, “**Moreover, no man knows when his hour will come.” Ecclesiastes 9:12**

Every year at this time I say things like this. Every year I make mention of the fact that none of us know what the year will hold. None of us have a guarantee that we will be here at the end of 2016. We said goodbye to some precious people this past year. Some started the year out knowing they were ill but some didn’t. The young 41 year old lady whose funeral I conducted this past Monday started out the year full of hope. She started attending Carbondale and couldn’t have imagined that her life would be cut short. She discovered the words of the Teacher were correct, “no man or woman knows when his hour will come.” So what do we do? It’s time to decide how we are going to live our lives. You may or may not have time to get everything in order. Those relationships you were going to mend, those things you were going to say, those prayers you were going to pray, those visits you were going to make, no one knows when his or her hour will come. You’d best take care of those things now. It’s time. It’s time to make things right. It’s time to live for Jesus. It’s time to put away sin and the foolish choices. It’s time to break free from addiction and live the overcoming, victorious life to which you have been called in Christ. You don’t know when your hour will come. It’s time to repent. It’s time to surrender. It’s time to live for Jesus now! It’s time.

We may not now the hour or the time, but do you know who is watching the time? Satan. The bible says of the enemy of our soul, “**Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.”**

Revelation 12:12

The devil knows his time is short and so, filled with fury he is going to make his time count. He is going to do all the damage he can do. We don’t know when our hour will come, when the end of our life here will come, but we have hope and we have the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit and while we have time and opportunity, let’s make our life count! Let’s make 2016 count for Jesus, for the church, for family, for our community, for ourselves, for eternity! It’s time to make a difference. Don’t waste a moment. Make your life count. The plaque on the wall in my parents house read, “**Only one life will soon be past, only what’s done for Christ will last.”** 2016: It’s time to make your life count. It’s time to surrender everything to Jesus. Let’s make our life count for Jesus and for eternity. 2016: It’s time!