

Farewell to 2017

We've come to the final Sunday and the last day of 2017. The Bible tells us God's mercies are new every morning. Perhaps there's a supply of mercy for each year. I don't know about you, but I feel like I've just about squeezed the last bit of God's mercy out of 2017. I'm happy to say farewell to 2017 and praise the Lord, we made it through another year!

If you've been around here for a while you know I typically share a little wrap up of the year on the last Sunday and share a few thoughts about how we move on into a brand new year. No point in breaking with tradition at this point.

We started 2017 with our Rise and Build campaign. God has blessed as you've been faithful to give to the building fund. The bills are paid and we are just now borrowing funds as we enter the home stretch of completing the building. We've had a couple of delays along the way and they are estimating completion in the middle of February. As Pastor Billy Joe Daugherty used to say, "it will be finished right on time." It's going to be exciting over the next few weeks as we get things finished.

We spent the first part of the year preaching about Nehemiah and his challenge to the Israelites returning from exile to rise and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. We then preached a Lenten series focused on the cross and what Jesus accomplished for us through his death and resurrection and ascension to heaven.

May 7th we moved here into the gym. Let me say thanks again to everyone that has worked so hard to make having service in the gym possible. It has had its challenges but I think we've met each challenge graciously. I'm thankful for the leadership of this church back in the late 1970's that had the wisdom and foresight to build this gymnasium!

We spent the summer focusing on the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit and then spent a few weeks talking about the storms we encounter on the journey of life and how God is at work, even in the storms. We celebrated the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation and spoke about the basis for our faith and then spent four weeks in an important series on Biblical Sexuality. That led us to Advent as we focused on the miracle of the incarnation and the message heaven sent to us as the Word became flesh and dwelt among us!

In spite of being in the gym, we have seen our numbers increase on Sundays and Wednesdays. In fact, our Wednesday church continues to grow with new people, not people changing churches, but people that haven't been attending church finding God and acceptance

and new family and friends here at Carbondale! If you are part of our Homecoming Wednesday night, we spent the year studying the book of James and then studying the life of the prophet Elijah. The New Community with Pastor Brian has spent the year studying the book of Acts. Pastor Jeff had about 40 youth find Jesus as Savior in youth service. Jeff mentioned 15 members of Webster High School's basketball team have gotten saved this year and are attending CAGY on Wednesday night. Youth in their small groups have studied the whole armor of God, the parables of Jesus and the importance of godly friendships. They ended the year with an emphasis on the importance of worship.

Pastor Brittany has done a great job with our children on Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights. Through the year they have focused on the importance and value of prayer, teaching a series on the Lord's prayer and another series on the prophet Elisha. They too on Wednesday's taught on the parables of Jesus and the importance of putting on the whole armor of God. They taught our children the importance of committing God's word to memory, the importance of hungering after God and seeking him.

Adult Sunday School focused on the fundamental truths of the Assemblies of God. We continue to look for ways to teach God's word. 2017 saw Carbondale blessing the community as Jesus taught us. The Day of Hope blessed so many people, and we've continued to distribute groceries, shared Christmas gifts with the elementary students at Robertson and Clinton, given generously to support missionaries at home and around the world. We did all those other pastoral things along the way: married couples, dedicated babies. We baptized believers and received new members. We said goodbye to some precious people this year, including Don Hodges, Loretta Gilliss, Joyce Steele, Karen Artz Arner, Ola Lewis, Carolyn Breedlove, Tom Luker, Glenn Ramey, Audrey Sharp, Verble Caviness, Barbara Hartshorne and Ray Hale. Those are just some of the funerals I conducted as Pastors Brian, Sarah, Brittany and Jeff all conducted funerals as well. I know many of you said goodbye to family members and friends this year. Others of you battled sickness, underwent surgery, battled through the challenges that life brings. The bible says we rejoice with those who rejoice and we grieve with those who grieve. We've done that as a church family throughout 2017!

I know I say some of the same things at the end of each year, but let me say for at least some of us, **Hallelujah, we made it through 2017!** This may have been a tough year for you, I know it has been for several, including my family. I began the year preaching the funeral for my

aunt Loretta and ended the year preaching the funeral of my father in law. We've all had our share of losses I know. Some of you battled with depression, with sickness, with financial stress and loss that just about did you in. You wondered if you were going to make it. Some days it was so dark you couldn't see which way to turn. It felt hopeless, like there was no way through, no point in going on. I've been there. I understand. Paralyzed with fear, with grief, loneliness, regret. You just wanted to give up, but you know what? You're still here! In spite of it all, we are still here! In spite of everything that happened we made it to the end of 2017. We can say like the Apostle Paul, **"We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair, persecuted, but not abandoned, struck down, but not destroyed...therefore we do not lose heart."** 2 Corinthians 4:8, 16. We weren't abandoned. There may have been times we didn't feel the Lord's presence, but we can look back now and see God was with us after all. He was at work in us and around us and through us and because of that, we are still here. "Therefore we do not lost heart." His grace kept us and led us through 2017 and his grace will lead us through whatever 2018 holds for us as well.

Look at some one and tell them, "I'm still here!" The devil thought he would crush me this year, but I'm still here. He thought he could make me give up on God and give up on the church, but I'm still here. He thought he could discourage me, tempt me, hound me, beat me up and then drag me down to the point of surrender but glory to God I'm still here! I may walk with a limp from some of the battles, but I'm still here. I may have a few new scars, but God's redeeming grace is turning every one of them into stars that shine with his glory and I'm still here. The devil tried his best but God was at work and we are still here. Can we just give thanks to God for his grace that kept us safe this far? We are still here!

Thank God for His faithfulness throughout 2017. If you look back, most of you can see God's faithfulness at work in your life this past year. That's how you're still standing this morning, because God was faithful. Even when you failed or messed up, God was still faithful. The bible says, **"If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself."** 2 Timothy 2:13. Faithful is who God is. It's his nature to be faithful. Even when we struggle, even when our faith is less than it should be, God remains faithful. You counted on him and he brought you through. Circumstances may have caused you to doubt or question, but even if you were without faith, God was still faithful. Listen to me, God is not only faithful, God has faith in you! He believes in you. He believes you will continue to trust him and serve him and obey him

and his word. He believes in you, he has faith in you, that you won't give up or give in but you will continue to serve him and live for him! Don't let him down! Keep living for Jesus!

God was faithful in 2017 and I have every confidence he will be faithful in 2018. The bible says, **"...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."** **Philippians 1:6** He started a good work in you and he isn't going to stop working in your life. Trust him. He is faithful.

God faithfully brought us through the struggles and trials of 2017, now here is my annual advice for the year we are completing, **Leave what happened in 2017 in 2017.** You can't afford to carry baggage from 2017, or from any year for that matter, into the new year. You can't accomplish all you need to accomplish in the new year if you are pre-occupied with the hurts of the past. You can't be all God wants you to be if you are busy nursing old wounds from the past or trying to get even with someone for something they said or did last year. I know you were betrayed, you were hurt, wounded, it wasn't fair, but God is faithful. Turn loose of your right to be angry, your right to be bitter, your right to get even and put it in God's hands. Forgive and let God handle it. If you don't or won't, unforgiveness is a bitter poison and it will eat away at your spirit, your life. It will destroy you. God has forgiven you your sins, your mistakes, your failure and since he has forgiven you, it's time for you to forgive those who have wounded you and sinned against you. Let it go! You aren't saying what they did to you doesn't matter, you are simply saying you are going to release them from your anger, your vengeance, your right to get even and instead you are going to place them in God's hands. Let him deal with them and with the hurt and you live your life in the freedom that comes with forgiveness! Don't let unforgiveness or bitterness cripple you and cheat you out of the life God has for you.

Listen to me: There is something God wants to impart to you in this coming year, something he wants to teach you, something you are to receive from him in 2018, and you can't receive it, you won't receive it unless you turn loose of the past and embrace God's present! You can't experience the blessings of God for 2018 if you are holding on to the wounds of the past.

Jesus told the disciples if a town didn't receive them or treat them well to shake the dust off of their feet and move on. Some of you - 2017 didn't treat you very well. You need to decide today to shake the dust of 2017 off of your feet and move on!

We are moving into a new season at Carbondale in 2018. I don't know exactly what it is going to look like, but I don't want anything from the past to hinder us or prevent us from

experiencing all God has for us in the coming year. Turn loose. Let go. Leave all that happened in 2017 in 2017 and commit it to Jesus and get ready for all God has for you in 2018! I'm emptying my hands so I can receive all he has for me in the coming year! Get ready!

As you leave 2017 behind, rest in the sovereignty of God. What do I mean by that? A sovereign is one who exercises supreme power and authority and there is only one who is king of kings and has the ultimate authority and that is God. He is our sovereign. To rest in the sovereignty of God is to submit our lives to him and trust his timing, his plan, his purpose and his will for our lives. As I leave 2017 behind I am acknowledging that in it all, God knows best!

There were things that happened in 2017 that I can't understand. It didn't make much sense as to why God would allow that to happen, or why he allowed it to happen when it happened. I don't have answers. What I know is that God is sovereign and he is in control. He knows best in his timing, in his plans and purposes. I'll mess it up if I try to control every aspect of my life. I've asked him to be Savior and Sovereign Lord of my life because I know he is God and he is good and he is loving and just and righteous and he is truth and he is all wise and all knowing and faithful and he alone is worthy of my absolute and total trust. I can trust him and his sovereign actions in my life. You can too. Rest in the sovereignty of God.

What he decides is good for me is and will be absolutely good for me. God's pattern and purpose for your life is higher and wiser and better than anything you can set for yourself, so trust the path in which he is leading you. If you look back, you may be able to see from this vantage point the places where God worked unexpectedly in your behalf. You might be able to see even now where God caused all things, even the hard and difficult things, to work together for your good. Maybe you can see now that thing you thought was the worst thing that ever happened to you turned out to be the best thing. But if you can't see it, I'm telling you that you can still rest in God's sovereignty. He is still at work and I believe He will yet cause all things to work together for your good and for his glory! Give him time and trust him. Trust him with the parts you can't understand, the mystery that presents itself to your faith, the questions that confront your faith, submit it all to Jesus. We aren't promised answers to all of our questions, but we are promised his abiding presence will be with us. I can tell you that regardless of how it may have appeared to you, you were never separated from God or his loving presence in 2017. Not for a moment!

I remind you again, the bible says, **“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.” Deuteronomy 29:29.** God has given us his word and revealed himself to us. He has shown us the way we are to live in his word, but there will still be things we don’t understand. The secret things. The mystery. What do we do? Rest in God’s sovereignty. Trust him. God is at work. Don’t try to figure him out, just trust him. He isn’t a mystery to be solved or a puzzle to be worked out, he is the God who makes himself known to us in Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. Get to know him better and you’ll trust him even more.

Finally, as we say farewell to 2017, **Thank God that nothing in 2017 could separate us from the love of God.** 2017 had its challenges, its sorrows, its defeats and obstacles. It left us with mysteries we couldn’t solve or explain but in spite of that, there is one thing I know: God still loves me and nothing can separate me from his love. He proved that love at Calvary when he sent his Son to take my place, to bear my sins and die on the cross so I could have eternal life. I may not be able to make sense out of everything else, but I know Jesus loves me because he gave his life for me! He loves me and he is preparing good things for me in 2018, preparing good things and a place for me to be with him for eternity. That’s how much he loves me. Nothing can separate me from his love! Stay in love with Jesus and keep trusting in him, regardless!

Paul makes it clear, **“In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 8:37-39**

Life tried this year but couldn’t separate us from his love. The devil tried but his schemes couldn’t separate us from God’s love. Circumstances couldn’t conquer us, neither life nor death could defeat us for we are more than conquerors through Christ. And Paul is sure of his God, sure of God’s faithfulness, that nothing in the present in 2017 and nothing in the future in 2018, can separate us from God’s love either. We’ve made it this far and thank God, whatever 2018 brings, we will make it through! Let’s thank God for his faithfulness, thank God that we can trust him, thank God that we can rest in him!