

And This Is 2020

For those of you old enough to remember the news program with Hugh Downs and Barbara Walters...and this is 2020! Here we are. I want to just share some thoughts with you this morning I believe the Lord has impressed on my heart for 2020! A brand new year with new possibilities, new opportunities, new challenges. We've already had babies arrive and dear saints leave us for heaven. We've had an Iranian general killed by our military that will escalate problems in the Middle East. We've got Russia, China and Iran engaging in joint naval drills in the Gulf of Oman. We have an historic Evangelical Denomination in America, the United Methodist church that will very likely split apart this year over the validity and integrity of the Scripture regarding LGBTQ marriage and ordination. We have a president that's been impeached by the House and awaiting trial in the Senate and we've got a presidential election coming that will contribute to the ever deepening divide in our nation, our culture and our politics, not to mention the fact that the campaign ads and rhetoric will likely drive us all to the brink of insanity! And I'm the guy that told you the Lord spoke to my heart this would be a year of blessing for Carbondale. Blessed in the midst of all of this? Absolutely!

Understand something about blessing. There is a general sense in which you can expect God to bless because he is good to all. He is merciful and compassionate. The bible says, **"The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made."** Psalm 145:9. But the bible also explains that blessing is tied to obedience. In that same chapter that tells us God is good to all the Psalmist also says, **"The Lord is near to all who call on him...He fulfills the desires of those who fear him...The Lord watches over all who love him but all the wicked he will destroy."** Psalm 145:18-20 God intends to bless those who call on him. That means you know him, you are in relationship with him and you are looking to him. God fulfills the desires, i.e. he blesses those who fear him. To fear the Lord means to reverence him, to live for him and obey him and his word. God will bless you as you obey. The Lord watches over and blesses those who love him. If you love him, you are going to want to obey him and please him with your choices, with your life. If you love him you'll be surrendered to his plans and purpose for your life. Blessing is tied to obedience!

Specifically, blessing is tied to obedience to God's word. Jesus said, **"Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it."** Luke 11:28. Do you want to be blessed in 2020? Obey God's word. To live in obedience to God's word you'll need to read it and study it.

We can help you do that by your attending services here and attending Sunday School classes. But you'll need to read the bible and apply it on your own. Blessing comes with reading and obeying God's word!

Do you want to be blessed in 2020? Just in case you haven't already made the decision to make Jesus the savior and Lord of your life, the bible says, **“Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven.” Romans 4:7** Blessing begins by asking Jesus to forgive your sins and make you a new person in Christ. That's how you need to start out 2020, with your sins forgiven. That's the pathway to blessing. When you ask Jesus into your heart and life, blessing comes. The bible says **“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realm with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” Ephesians 1:3**

Every spiritual blessing is ours in Christ Jesus. That means God's blessings aren't tied to the economy, to politics, to circumstances. God blesses in the middle of chaos, he blesses in the morning and at night, he blesses when the harvest is plentiful and when the fields are bare. You can expect his blessing in 2020 because you've got Jesus in your heart and in your life and you are living in obedience to him and his word. Read the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5. Jesus promised to bless you with his comfort when you are in mourning, to satisfy your hunger and thirst for righteousness, to show you mercy, to bless you by revealing himself to you, to call you his own. His blessings aren't necessarily tied to material blessings or economic benefits; read it for yourself - but his blessings will make you rich in his mercy and grace. I'm expecting the blessings of God in 2020! He intends to bless you with his presence, his mercy and peace as you obey him and seek him and live close to him!

I think preachers all over America are using this idea of 20/20 vision for 2020. It's too good to pass up so I'll use it too: I'm believing God for 20/20 vision in this new year. I think it was two years ago I shared with you a word from our General Superintendent calling us to pray for clarity. We need clarity. We need 20/20 spiritual vision. I'm asking God to help us see the world and our circumstances as he sees them rather than how we see them. Our view is too small, too prejudiced and biased, too determined by our own circumstances and history and our own fears, too earth bound. We are short sighted most of the time. We need to see heaven's bigger picture, to see from an eternal perspective. We need to see life from the perspective of the Kingdom of God.

If we just look at the world as Americans, as White people, or Black or Hispanic, or Asian or Native, if we just look at the world as Republicans or Democrats, we will miss the perspective of heaven. Heaven doesn't see color or political party, heaven sees lost and found, saved or not saved. We need to have our vision cleared up by the Holy Spirit. We need to be able to see what is truly, eternally, absolutely important from Heaven's point of view.

How far can you see by the Holy Spirit? Can you see others with the vision of heaven? Not enemies, not threats, not opponents, but people that need Jesus, lost and hurting and broken, people that need our prayers, that need our help, that need our compassion and understanding.

Can we see what God is calling Carbondale to in 2020? Can we see the lost around us? Can we see the doors that stand waiting for us to walk through to bring Jesus to students and adults and other communities and other nations and people? Or is our vision limited to just ourselves and self-preservation? Church, 20/20 vision is about seeing and accepting the mandate and the calling of heaven as we look at our world. I want you to understand, the anointing and calling of God upon His church doesn't depend on who is in the White House or who controls Congress. Our value and our voice and our calling as the church doesn't rise and fall with the tide of American politics. I pray that righteousness prevails in our nation, but regardless of what happens, we are the church of Jesus Christ. We won't stop being the church and we won't stop serving Jesus and obeying him. He is our sovereign and Lord and King and we have one mission and that is to reach the world for Jesus. There is an urgency about this. We may well be living in the closing days of time. We have a mandate to go into all the world and preach the gospel, into every community, into every home, but we have to see the need in order to go. We need to ask God to grant us 20/20 vision, to see from heaven's perspective.

The writer of Hebrews said, **“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus...” Hebrews 12:2** We need to keep our eyes on Jesus. That's how we keep our vision pure and holy, that's how we avoid losing sight of heaven's perspective, by keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus. Our devotion is to him and heaven's agenda, not that of any other nation or politician or political party. We have to stay focused on Jesus. Keep your hope fixed on Jesus. Keep your eyes fixed on what is eternally important, on the one who is Savior and Lord and King. It's his agenda, his calling, his commission, his kingdom that matters.

Our General Superintendent, Doug Clay, sent out a message on December 31, to all A/G ministers asking that we join him in prayer. He mentioned three specific areas of prayer for

2020. He asked that we pray for a Spirit-empowered church, a Bible-engaged church and a missions-participating church. In the text he wrote, “As we enter 2020, we’re quite possibly looking at one of the most divisive elections in recent American history. Globally, societies are divided on issues such as immigration, race, economic policies and even the state of our planet itself. My prayer for 2020 is that we keep the pathway to faith in Christ totally free and clear from stumbling blocks of our own making. Our citizenship is different. Our calling is higher. The condition of one’s soul is more important than the label of the political party they wear.”

...Doug Clay, General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God

Regarding his prayer for a Spirit-empowered church, Doug Clay quoted from Zechariah 4:6. “Not by might nor by power but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty.” Then he writes, “If there ever was a theme verse for the Assemblies of God, Zechariah 4:6 would be it. The verse appeared on the masthead for the Pentecostal Evangel during the Great Depression, WWII and some of the greatest crises our nation has seen. The message has always been clear. We aren’t a people who depend on favorable circumstances. Our hope is not in our own might, nor in political power, but by the power of the Holy Spirit. As we enter into yet another divisive political season for the US in 2020, may we be known as people of the Spirit, not people of the donkey or the elephant. May our churches be known for being houses of prayer, fully dependent on God for the sake of our nation.”

He continues, “We are facing a crisis of good judgment. Trusting God’s commands and growing in biblical knowledge will have an immediate effect on our judgment and how we approach our daily lives. Rather than passively complaining about a lack of judgment and moral clarity in our society, let’s make our churches outposts of hope delivered through God’s word. An Assemblies of God church is a church that values Scripture and creates intentional pathways of Bible engagement for people of all ages. ...Biblical accuracy is our goal, not political correctness.”

Spiritual Empowerment, Biblical Engagement and Missions Participation. That’s a good agenda for 2020 for every church. That’s heavenly vision. We don’t know how late the hour may be. We may have only a short time to accomplish a great work – to take the gospel to every person on this planet. In truth, each generation can say that. We only have this time, this opportunity, this generation to do what he has called us to do. The Assemblies of God are in 255 countries with nearly 70 million people as part of this movement. But there are 7.7 billion

people on the planet and far too many have yet to hear the good news of Jesus Christ. Don't lose sight of the fact that our calling is to make Jesus known in this world. "Lord, give us 20/20 vision to see the world as you see it and show us how to advance your kingdom and establish your church while there is still time!"

I said last Sunday that we are moving from our teens, 2019, into our twenties. There will be new responsibilities, new demands placed upon us, upon the church, in 2020. Regardless of who wins the White House or who controls the House and the Senate, in America, the church will be required to stand strong in the face of cultural pressure. I mentioned at the beginning about the likely split of the United Methodist Church in America. When it comes down to it, the issue is not about being welcoming or affirming, the issue is about whether we will remain obedient to the Word of God concerning matters of sexual purity, whether heterosexual or homosexual. Is the bible the Word of God or not? We must not waver in our allegiance to Christ and His word. This book is the eternal Word of God. Our commitment to obeying God's word must not weaken or waver, regardless of the cost. We will be challenged not just by the culture and the world that disagrees with us, but we will be challenged by the Word of God as well. Faithful proclamation of the Word of God makes saints and sinners alike uncomfortable. "God, in 2020 help us to uncompromisingly teach, preach, proclaim and explain the Word of God and then help us faithfully and obediently live according to your Word!"

I said as we enter the twenties we have to accept new responsibility. We have to make sure that the church of 2020 is focused on Jesus and on others and not just on ourselves. I want to see an increase in missions, in both going and giving. I want to see us find new ways to serve and minister to others, to bless and bring hope to the least, the last, and the lost. How can we better serve? Where can we better serve? What can we give? "Lord help us accept new responsibility to be the spirit empowered, bible engaged, missions participating church you've called us to be."

One more thing I felt the Lord spoke into my heart as part of the year of blessing. I felt this was the year people were supposed to come home to Carbondale. I meet people all the time who tell me, "I used to go to Carbondale when I was a child" or "I came there when I was a teenager" or "My grandparents went to your church". It's time you came home. There is something about the foundation of this church that has remained stable and strong for 85 years. All the changes that have come to the nation, to our culture, to church culture, but we are still

here, preaching the Word of God, committed to serving Jesus and serving this community. We are still here and it's time for you to come home to Carbondale and join us as we serve together. Some of you have been gone for a generation or more, but this is somehow still home and the Lord is telling you it's time to come home. You are visiting today, or you are watching on line, or someone shared this message with you, and there is a feeling in your heart, a stirring, a knowing that you are supposed to come home. You are supposed to be here at Carbondale. This place of healing, hope, laughter and peace, you need what is offered here, you need the love and care and support of these people, of this place. While everything is uncertain in the world, you and your family need the certainty of this family. You need this place where there is a firm foundation.

You need to raise your children here. You need to connect with your roots in this place. You need to help make an impact in this Westside community because this is where your family roots are. I don't know why I'm saying all of this other than that I feel this in my spirit. There is a connection still here and it's time for you to reconnect.

It's time for prodigals to come home. Maybe you've been away from God, away from the church, you've been living in disobedience to God and his word, but this is the year, the season for you to come home to Jesus. We used to sing a song that said, "I've wandered far away from God, now I'm coming home. The paths of sin too long I've trod, now I'm coming home." It's time for you. Time for family members. We are going to pray tonight especially for prodigals to come home to Jesus and to his church.

There is just something about home isn't there? You are going to be accepted at home. You are going to be welcomed and loved at home. It's time for you to come home, to Jesus, to Carbondale. It's going to be a year of blessing. A year of productivity. More is going to be accomplished and we need you to come be a part!

I want us to pray and promise the Lord that we will steward well the blessings of God this year. Let's ask for 20/20 vision, to see the world as Jesus sees it. Let's commit ourselves to the Lord and his agenda, that we will stay focused on Him and His plans and purposes for us. Let's pray for prodigals, for saints and sinners to come home to Jesus and to the church. Let's pray for God's blessings to be poured out on Carbondale as we walk in obedience as a spirit-empowered, bible-engaged, missions-participating church! God has good things in store. Let's believe it and receive it!