

Reflections on the New Year

by Thomas Reade

Thomas Reade's sermon reflects on God's mercy and the importance of a genuine relationship with Christ as we enter a new year.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 7:12, Psalm 51:10, Psalm 103:2, Isaiah 41:10, John 3:16, Romans 7:24, Galatians 5:17, Ephesians 2:8, Philippians 3:9, Revelation 22:17

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Gods Grace"

Description

Thomas Reade reflects on the commencement of a new year, acknowledging the passage of time and the importance of gratitude for God's help throughout the year. He emphasizes the need for self-reflection, repentance for sins, and a deep love for God's mercy and grace. Reade urges listeners to seek a genuine, vital union with Christ through faith, recognizing that true righteousness and acceptance with God come only through Jesus. He highlights the ongoing internal struggle between the flesh and the Spirit in believers, underscoring the necessity of God's grace to overcome sin and grow in holiness.

Transcript

68. REFLECTIONS ON THE COMMENCEMENT OF A NEW YEAR

Samuel then took a large stone and placed it between the towns of Mizpah and Jeshanah. He named it Ebenezer--"the stone of help"--for he said, "Up to this point the Lord has helped us!" 1 Samuel 7:12

Another year has fled! But how has it fled? Bearing the sins of unnumbered multitudes, which shall all be exposed at the judgment day! When first it opened upon me, it was greeted with thankfulness. A monument of gratitude was erected, on which was inscribed, "Up to this point the Lord has helped me." But, it has been an eventful year to many. Numbers, who beheld the opening year, full of hope, and prospects of happiness, are now in the silent grave.

"He builds too low,

Who builds beneath the skies."

I am preserved in life, while death has cut down many a lovely flower; and why is this? Why am I now on mercy's ground, within the precincts of salvation, while many are imprisoned, where hope can never come? It is because my gracious Lord has interceded for me. "Do not cut it down. Leave it alone one more year." His thoughts towards me, are thoughts of peace and not of evil. In richest grace, he bears with my

rebellious heart; he deigns to wash me in his blood; to cover me with his merits; to purify my heart; to make me a trophy of his love. "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy," is the language of a Sovereign. "I will," is the voice of the Omnipotent Jehovah.

How sweet is the sound, when coming through the Covenant of Grace, "I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them. And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." "I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God; for they shall return unto me with their whole heart." Precious indeed are those words of power, uttered by Sovereign Love. Truly it is by grace that we are saved. God works in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure. He inclines our hearts to himself, so that when the call is given, "Come you to the waters;" "whoever will, let him take the water of life freely;" the power goes forth with the command, and the sinner, by grace, is saved.

While I meditate on the days that are past, two principles operate in my heart-

1. Hatred of myself, for having so long and so grievously offended the best of Beings; for having so much delighted in sin, and so little in things divine.
2. Love to God, for such unbounded mercy, such amazing forbearance, such striving and inviting, such compassion and pity, shown to the chief of sinners- an heir of hell!

Oh! my soul, humble yourself in the dust before the Majesty of heaven. Think how many precious moments, hours, days, and years, have borne on their wings ten thousand times ten thousand sins, which you have committed, and which are obliterated from the tablet of your memory. But, oh! remember, God has not forgotten them. He will bring into judgment every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. Can you think of this, O my soul, and not tremble? Can you think of this, and not fly with eager steps to the Cross of Christ, that, through faith in his atoning blood, all your guilty stains may be blotted out, and your sins and iniquities be remembered no more?

Lord! behold me prostrate at your feet. I come to your mercy-seat; to the Lamb which was slain, who alone can redeem me by his blood. Look upon the bleeding sacrifice, and then your look on me will be a look of pardoning love. Yes! blessed Lord, you never have, nor ever will reject the vilest sinner, who clings to the Cross of Christ, and there, besprinkled with the falling drops of his atoning blood, cries out for mercy. Look on me, O God of my salvation. Behold a sinner vile and wretched, pleading before your throne the merits of your Son. For his only sake, O Lord, pardon all that is past; for his only sake accept me graciously; for his sake love me freely; and mercifully vouchsafe a rich effusion of your Holy Spirit, that this opening year may be spent in your service, and to the promotion of your glory. May all my powers be devoted to you, every affection and desire be fixed upon you. Make me sincere in all I pray for. Give me a single eye in all I do. May every word spoken for you, be the sincere expression of my heart. You know what I am. Lord, teach me to know myself. Give me daily the victory over all my inward corruptions and spiritual enemies. Grant unto your servant every internal and eternal blessing; and not to me only, but to all who are united to me by the bonds of friendship, or the ties of blood.

Another year has elapsed. New mercies call for fresh praise. I long to be a Christian indeed. Mere profession will profit nothing. It yields no comfort. It brings no glory to God. It differs as much from vital godliness as the portrait does from the living subject. It is the appearance, not the reality of religion.

Nothing can make me happy, but a real, vital union to Christ by faith. Nothing can procure my acceptance with God, but his righteousness. The great Apostle Paul desired nothing so much as to win Christ, and be found in him; not having his own righteousness, which is of the law; but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. This is what I need, and for which I pray. Let differing Christians understand the blessed truth in whatever light they may, yet, of this I am persuaded, that no sinner has, by nature, any righteousness of his own. To assert this would be a contradiction in terms. How strange to talk of a sinner's righteousness! of a sinner's holiness! We might as well speak about the loyalty of a traitor, or of the sobriety of a confirmed drunkard. The most devoted children of God have cause to exclaim, "Behold, I am vile;" how much more those, who have never experienced regenerating grace.

An unconverted sinner is always proud. He is ever ready to place his honorable dealing, benevolence, and refinement, against his glaring violations of God's commandments, and then to flatter himself, that the balance will be in his favor; or, at least, that God will be too merciful to execute his threatenings upon him. He charges with uncharitableness, the faithful dealings of the righteous, who boldly tell him, that "the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." He will not believe that the God of Truth will be true to his word. He dares the result, and dies to learn in hell, what he willingly remained ignorant of while on earth.

But how different are the views and feelings of the awakened sinner. He sees the precipice on which he is standing, and trembles to behold the yawning gulf below. He stands amazed at his former blindness; sees his utter inability to escape from the ground which he feels to be sinking beneath him; cries aloud for help, saying, "Lord, save me," embraces with anxious solicitude the gracious hand which is stretched out to preserve him; and acknowledges the infinite goodness of that God, whose free love thus snatches him from destruction.

Am I this ransomed sinner? Have I been saved through the beloved of the Father, from the curse of the law, and the damnation of hell? Have I experienced the renewing influences of the Holy Spirit? Do I feel the grateful emotions of a new heart? a sincere devotedness to the Author of all my mercies? Happy, thrice happy shall I be, if I possess this inward witness that I am a child of God. Then will the opening year, be a year of blessedness. Trials may come, but they will all be sanctified. Death may come, but it will only bear me into the presence of my Savior.

What abundant cause I have to bless and praise my heavenly Father for all the grace, mercy, and peace which he has bestowed on me through Jesus Christ my Lord. It is like a flowing stream, whose pure waters refresh and gladden the soul. God is love. Oh! that my heart could enlarge itself in some humble proportion to the blessings which it receives. May every affection, desire, and purpose have gratitude written upon them; and every action of my life be the fruit of holy love, of unfeigned faith in the Lord Jesus.

In the midst of the divine mercies, I have to mourn over an evil heart, ever ready to turn aside like a broken bow, and too prone to cleave unto the dust. Oh! how hateful is sin. It is the disease of the soul. It is the poison which kills my joys and comforts. When it works within, O what languor it produces, what deadness of feeling! Sometimes it racks the conscience, and then nothing but war reigns in the soul- a wild confusion, a stormy night!

How precious, at such a season, is a believing view of the Cross of Christ. How gracious the voice, "Look unto me, and be saved." The stormy wind is then hushed; the swelling waves subside; a sweet calm ensues, and peace once more resumes its empire in the soul. Every tempest-tossed, afflicted believer,

can bear witness to the all-subduing, the all-consoling voice of the Son of God, when he says to the inward storm; "Peace, be still."

How great is the goodness of the Lord. His tender mercies are over all his works. Surely goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life. What shall I render unto the Lord for all the benefits which he has done unto me? I can render nothing unto the Lord, but what I first receive from him. And what can I render, but praise and thanksgiving? How can I better show my thankfulness, than by receiving the cup of salvation, the glorious and gracious offers of redemption through the blood of his beloved Son. But this also comes from God. It is the fruit of his everlasting love. It is the work of his almighty power. All good comes from Him. I can render nothing unto God that is pleasing in his sight, but what he first bestows, according to the riches of his grace.

Oh! that I could feel my heart deeply and abidingly impressed with a sense of his goodness. I deserve nothing but wrath; yet God speaks in mercy. "Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my victorious right hand."

When I look upon the year which is past, I have cause to lament my unfaithfulness, and unfruitfulness. The review should indeed fill me with humiliation. In myself, I find so much of earth, and so little of heaven; so much of the old man, and so little of the new; that I may well doubt whether any saving work has been begun in my soul. My feelings and sentiments about religion may be the effect of the society with which I am connected, and of the ministry under which I am placed rather than the work of grace, before whose potent rays the darkness of error flies as the evening mist before the rising sun. I may be evangelically right in my views, and yet practically wrong in my heart and life. Knowledge and holiness are not always connected. There is a knowledge which puffs up, but charity edifies. The wisdom that is from above is pure.

In prosecuting my enquiry, I find much comfort from the Apostle's own experience in the seventh chapter to the Romans; and from his declaration to the Galatians; that "the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh;" that "these are contrary the one to the other; so that we cannot do the things that we would." Hence, there is a conflict in the heart of the believer, which is peculiar to himself, and which is unknown, because unfelt by the unregenerate. There is, indeed, in unconverted people, a struggle at times, between natural conscience, and their wicked desires and practices. But, as their conscience is darkened and defiled, through original corruption, so it is always insufficient to break through those sins which are constantly weakening its force by repetition, until it become, not only without feeling, but a justifier of those actions which once it condemned. Hence arises those excuses for sin, and those self-justifications, after a course of transgression, which would not have been made at the first outset into the paths of wickedness. David has strikingly described the progress of the wicked, by walking, standing, sitting. He who walks after evil counsel, will soon stand in the way of evil men, and finally sit down in the seat of the scornful.

This inward fighting, between natural conscience and wicked desires, is vastly different from the struggle between nature and grace. In this struggle, the flesh indeed rebels, but grace reigns. They both struggle, as the Apostle expresses it, but grace obtains the ascendancy. The will of the believer is decidedly for God, although the animal passions may struggle for indulgence. The affections are too often, alas! allured from better to baser objects, but the new principle checks the aberration, and preserves the heart from a total departure from God. Thus believers "are kept by the power of God through faith," that new implanted principle, "unto salvation." For the same gracious purpose, the Almighty says; "I will put my fear in their

hearts, that they shall not depart from me;" which fear is another holy principle tending to keep the believer in the way of life and salvation. This faith and fear, combined with holy love shed abroad in the heart, through the power of the Holy Spirit, forms that spiritual life, which is imparted and maintained by the indwelling Spirit of Christ.

The natural conscience may sometimes check, but it can seldom restrain, except through the fear of temporal punishment, or worldly disgrace; and these are often found to be feeble barriers against the violent assaults of natural corruption. So depraved is the heart. The new principle of grace in the believer, not only restrains from evil, but restores the soul to the image of God. Thus a person may know whether he be a child of God or not, by examining the habitual state of his mind and affections; by observing the inward workings of his heart; and watching over the continual motions of his spirit. Hence the Apostle draws this important conclusion; "Those who are after the flesh, mind the things of the flesh; but those who are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit." So that, "to be carnally minded is death; but to the spiritually minded is life and peace."

O blessed Savior! be pleased to redeem my soul from the bondage of corruption, and bring me into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Implant in my heart the seed of holy desires. Ripen those seeds of grace. Cause them to shoot forth and bud, to blossom, and to bear fruit. Make me more humble, more holy, more weaned from the world, more devoted to you, until you shall transplant me to the Paradise above.

Another year is now opening upon me. Where shall I be before it closes? in time, or in eternity? To many thousands this year will be the last; yes, to many, on whose cheek now plays the hue of health, and in whose limbs vigor is transfused. What reason have I then to suppose, that the arrow of death may not be commissioned to lay me in the dust? Surely none. Oh! that my heart may be duly and deeply affected by the following truths-

I AM A FALLEN CREATURE.

Blessed Lord! give me the deepest insight into myself. Make me to know, in some measure, the extent of my misery and corruption as a child of fallen Adam. Fully to know the desperate wickedness and deceitfulness of the heart, is your prerogative. But oh! let me not be ignorant of my vileness. Let not pride and self-love blind the eyes of my mind; or cause me to fancy myself to be something when I am nothing; less than nothing, and vanity. Show me to myself, through the light of your Holy Spirit shining upon your own word of Truth. In that faithful mirror may I behold my natural state of guilt and misery, and while beholding, loathe myself with perfect loathing. Oh! cause me to sink down before you in deepest self-abasement. Lord break my proud heart. Melt the stone that lies within me. Purge away the dross of sin, and make all new within; that my heart may become a temple, in which you will condescend to dwell.

I AM A HELPLESS CREATURE.

As a person, who has fallen down a steep precipice, and broken his bones, cannot stand upright; so, through the fall of my first parents, I am totally unable to recover myself from the dreadful consequences of transgression.

Lord teach me to renounce all self-dependence. In myself, I have no strength; therefore, of myself I can do nothing to satisfy your justice, or restore your lost image in my soul. Oh! may I never, for one moment, make the vain attempt of appeasing your wrath; or of appearing before you, in the filthy rags of my own

righteousness. Your justice demands an infinite satisfaction; and your holiness delights only in unspotted purity. But I cannot pay the least mite, nor present before you a clean heart, being ignorant, guilty, polluted, and enslaved. Where, then, must I flee? To whom must I look for help, and support? How shall I obtain present and everlasting salvation?

GOD IS LOVE.

Oh! delightful truth! Oh! heart-cheering consolation! Let it be carried round the globe. Let it be echoed from hill to hill, from shore to shore, until all nations catch the joyful sound, that "God is love," that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Here, in this one truth, this precious gospel message, proclaimed by the Savior of sinners himself, is contained all peace, and strength, hope, joy, purity, yes, heavenly glory. Only believe this sweet declaration, with a loving obedience; only receive Christ, through whom this salvation is procured; and all the promises which cluster on the living Vine are your portion, O my soul, freely and fully given by the Father of mercies, through the Son of his love.

O eternal Spirit of light and truth, proceeding from the Father and the Son, work this saving faith even now in my heart. O make me this day, which commences another year of my earthly existence, a true member of the mystical body of Christ, a regenerated member of his Church, a sheep of his fold. Take away the darkness of my mind, and shed a flood of light into my soul. Pluck my feet out of the net of Satan's temptations; and enable me to walk in the path of your commandments. Give me to see the beauty of holiness, and to hunger and thirst after it; to discover the heinousness of sin, to flee from it, and abhor it.

If called into the furnace of affliction, be with me to support and comfort me. If led into the enjoyment of worldly blessings, preserve me from the snares of prosperity. Oh! grant that I may begin this year with earnest desires after Christ and his salvation, that, being kept by your power from day to day, I may be continually waiting for the Savior's coming, and rejoice, when his voice of mercy shall whisper to my soul; "Come up here;" "Enter into the joy of your Lord."

Jesus! I will praise your name,

While my life and being last;

Your rich mercies are the same,

Which saints enjoyed in ages past;

A dying pilgrim here below,

'Tis my bliss, Your love to know.

With the lightning's rapid flight

All my moments hasten by;

Day is soon o'erspread with night;

Flowers of Spring do quickly die.

Jesus, in this land of woe,

Let me Your salvation know.
Fleeting vapors are my days,
Life is but an airy dream;
As the sun's declining rays,
Or the constant ebbing stream.
Fix my heart on You alone,
You, the Church's Corner-Stone.
You, my kind redeeming Lord,
Wean my heart from earthly joy
Change me by your powerful word,
Every sin in me destroy.
Let my treasure ever be,
Safely hid, O Christ, in Thee.
Holy Spirit, Heavenly Fire,
Burn the hated dross within,
Kindle every pure desire,
Save me from indwelling sin.
Let my soul on You depend,
Faithful and Almighty Friend.

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