

Today is the first Sunday of the new year, 2009. And, we begin this new year as we should, at the Lord's Table.

It appears to me that for many people in our nation and around the world, this new year begins on very shaky ground. World economies, led by our own economy in the United States are in a sort of chaos not seen since the 1930s. With the greed and outright thievery we have seen from leaders in the financial markets, it will not be easy to restore the level of confidence needed to regain prosperity. The wars in Iraq and in Afghanistan have not yet been resolved. The Israeli/Palestinian conflict has just erupted into fresh violence. Struggling and failing economies promise further political destabilization in many countries. Terrorist cells will surely do all they can to test the spine of a new administration in Washington. 2009 could prove to be a very bumpy ride into the future.

All of this turbulence in the world around us has a trickle-down effect in our individual lives and relationships. It can make it more difficult to provide for our families, plan for the future, and maintain positive and productive attitudes. The stress can make us fearful, cranky, more accident prone, and more likely to do stupid and self-destructive things that will only make things worse.

As I was thinking about these things the words of one of our old hymns came to mind: It's entitled "In Times Like These:" "In times like these you need a Savior In times like these you need an anchor; Be very sure, be very sure Your anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock! This Rock is Jesus, Yes, He's the One; This Rock is Jesus, the only One! Be very sure, be very sure Your anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock! In times like these you need the Bible, I times like these O be not idle; Be very sure, be very sure Your anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock! This Rock is Jesus . . ."

I don't know whether or not you have made any New Year's Resolutions for 2009, but I have. Last year I followed a rather aggressive plan of reading the Bible. It took me through the Old Testament once, through the New Testament and the Psalms twice, and led me to read the book of Proverbs once every month. I learned in Proverbs to stay away from seductive women, not to grab a dog by it's ears, and that it is better to live in the corner of an attic than in a wide house with a nagging wife. I am left with mixed emotions. I feel good about the fact that I was able to stick to the plan and do all that reading, and that I did learn a few things along the way. I feel bad that all that reading didn't make me feel any closer to God and that I have no sense that it deepened my spiritual roots.

So, my resolution for 2009 is to read less and listen more. I still plan to be in the Word on a regular basis, but my goal is to come to that Word as a place to encounter the voice of God. I want to quiet myself and still myself long enough to hear God speaking to my heart. I don't need the words on the page as much as I need the living word to come and restore my soul.

Actually there are three things I think we all need to pursue in this new year. #1, we do need to pursue a deeper walk with Jesus Christ. He is our Anchor. He is the Rock. He is the Unchanging One, Who alone can guide us safely through these changing times. We need to commit or recommit our lives to Him and make sure that we are paying attention to Him, listening to Him, and walking in obedience to His voice. As a part of that we do need to be in the Bible, and hide those precious words in our hearts so we will not sin against the Lord. We need to cultivate prayer as a two-way conversation where we bring our concerns to the Lord and listen until we hear or sense what He has to say to us in return. We need to come to the Lord's table this morning reminding ourselves that we have been forgiven our sins and

bought with a price to live for God. **In times like these, let's be sure, be very sure, our anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock.**

A second thing I think we all need to pursue in 2009 is the strengthening of our relationships in the Family of God. This was one of the main things that gave strength and vitality to the early believers. They allowed the tough times and circumstances they faced to bring them together. They were persecuted and prosecuted. They were denied jobs, and sometimes their homes and possessions were confiscated. Many were put to death because they took a stand for Christ and refused to abandon Him. Yet, for all of that, the church flourished, grew in numbers and influence, and eventually prevailed. The Church survived and flourished because the believers supported one another in prayer, and helped to meet one another's physical and financial needs. They continued to meet together on a regular basis and they encouraged one another to walk in the way of the Lord. **In times like these we need the Lord and we need one another.**

A third thing for us to pursue in the new year is the great commission given to us by our Lord. Matthew 28:18-20 say, "Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

There are several benefits of remembering and recommitting ourselves to the Great Commission. Number 1, it keeps us focused and gives us a purpose beyond ourselves. Far beyond any real threat, the confusion in the world around us is a distraction; it's the Devil's tool to erode our faith, divide us from one another, and to cause us to forget what we are really here for. But we can turn the tables on the

Devil. By using the stressors of these times to turn us to the Lord, draw us closer to one another, and to remember our mission, we can become stronger, not weaker.

Number 2, recommitting ourselves to the Great Commission enables us to take advantage of a great opportunity. When things seem to be going great in people's lives, even when they are going the wrong direction, they aren't likely to change. When their present idols seem to be serving them well, they aren't apt to turn from them. Good times tend to enhance and reinforce people's illusion that they are able to care for themselves without God's help. We see this throughout the history of the people of God. When people prospered they tended to become arrogant and disloyal to the Lord. But whenever they were hungry or thirsty or when their enemies were breathing down their necks, they would suddenly remember how to pray. In Proverbs 30, the author asks God to give him what he needs but not to overdo it. In verse 9, he explains, "Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the Lord?'"

But, I think there are a lot of people in our troubled world today who are beginning to get really scared. Some will now accept an offer for us to pray for them. Some will now be open to an invitation to come to church. Many are now looking for a community of people who will care about them and support them in their time of need. Many are now looking for the Lord whether they know it or not. We need to take advantage of the opportunity this affords us.

Number 3, the recommitting ourselves to the great work of reaching others for Christ is a great way to worship the Lord and to bring joy to His heart. The Bible tells us that there is a celebration in heaven every time a sinner repents and turns to the Lord. We can show our love for Jesus by reaching out to those who know Him not and telling them and showing them that God loves them also. **In times like these it is a great time to return to the Great Commission.**

Of course the first step in embracing the Great Commission and strengthening our relationships with each other in the Family of God is to seek a deeper relationship with our Lord Jesus. This can begin for us this morning at His table. Let us come to this time with reverence and awe, as we remember the great price Jesus paid for our lives and for all who will receive Him as Savior and Lord.

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### In Times Like These I Corinthians 11:23-32

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