

January 2, 2022

What Will the Year 2022 Be Like?
Isaiah 43:14-21/Matthew 25:14-30
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Last Sunday morning, JJ Rowell's family was supposed to fly to Florida for a family vacation. But something unexpected happened to them. Their flight was canceled because the omicron variant forced many pilots and flight attendants to miss work. The Rowell family was forced to drive all the way to Florida, and right now, they are having a good time there. Faced with the unexpected appearance of the omicron variant, we panicked because we had no idea how serious it would be. It has been reported that while it spreads quickly it causes mild symptoms to those people who contract it. (slide 1) Thus, some experts cautiously predict that the omicron virus can help change the pandemic to an endemic, which means that coronavirus outbreaks will be consistently present but limited to a particular region, as is the case with malaria, but will not lead to serious complications to those who contract the illness. Though we are still struggling with the covid virus, we can begin 2022 with an optimistic view of our lives.

(slide 2) What do you think the new year, 2022, will be like? Do you feel excited that there can be a vast improvement in the virus situation this year? Do you expect and anticipate that something good will happen in your lives this year, or are you filled with worry and anxiety over the possible uncertainties and ambiguities of 2022?

Some of us might have spent last year busily dealing with many kinds of issues in life that happened unexpectedly, and suddenly realized that a new year had arrived yesterday. Thus, we may feel that last year time, like a fast-flowing river, had flowed so fast that this year has appeared before we were prepared for it.

Regardless, we need to have a clear spiritual understanding of our time in 2022. The year 2022 is a very precious gift that God has given to all of us. We should not think about 2022 apart from our faith in God. God controls our lives and has a unique plan and purpose for this year, even though we may not be aware of that. And God does not want us to spend this year doing nothing and complaining about all of the possible bad situations we may encounter. Neither does He want us to spend our time only achieving our goals and expectations. Neither does He want us to live our lives in 2022 unwillingly nor wasting the precious time of this year.

Then, (slide 3) what are God's expectations for us for 2022?

As we examine the two scriptures we read this morning, I would like us to understand what God wants us to realize in terms of His gift of time, 2022.

The first scripture is Isaiah 43: 14-21, (slide 4) which was a part of God's revelation of Israel's future as they suffered from Babylonian Exile (B.C 602-538). During that period, they lost their nation, Judea, the Jerusalem temple was defiled and destroyed and many socio-political and religious leaders were captured and moved to the Babylonian Empire. No one had hope for the future and everyone was in deep despair because they were powerless to change their history. They even questioned whether God cared for them and would save them from their sufferings. They could do nothing meaningful other than securing their own physical survival.

(slide 5) At that time, God called the prophet Isaiah and revealed to him what He would do for His children, who were suffering from their miserable and painful life. (slide 6) First, Isaiah reminded his people who God was and what He had done for them a long time ago in Egypt. *"This is what the Lord says -he who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters, who drew out the chariots and horses, the army and reinforcements together and they lay there, never to rise again, extinguished, snuffed out like a wick."* (v.16-17)

Then, Isaiah showed them what God would do for His people in Exile by using an analogy. (slide 7) *"Forget the former things, do not dwell on the past. See I am doing a new thing!..... I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland."* (v.18-19) He pointed out that just as God had saved His people from Egypt, so He would free His chosen people from Babylonia and return them to their native land.

God did not want His people to be stuck in their despair and have no hope for their future. Instead, He wanted them to stand firm in their faith in God's faithfulness to care for His people, He called Isaiah to prophesy His hidden plan of salvation, **which would come true for their lives through the second exodus from Babylonia**. We can be sure that God's unfailing love and faithful commitment for His people **made 'a new thing' possible in their lives of Exile**.

(slide 8) I believe that God will make a way in our desert and provide flowing streams in our wasteland as we live in 2022. Since 2019, we have been struggling with the virus and its overwhelming damage to many areas of our lives. In addition, we all may have been struggling emotionally, relationally, or financially with other issues in life. Knowing all of the details of our weaknesses and limitations, this year He will work on them in His mysterious **and miraculous way so that we can encounter His presence and power in our lives of suffering**.

At the beginning of a new year, we must have faith in God's faithfulness to save us from our burdens and restore our lives. God is enthusiastic for us to have this year full of salvation and restoration. Let's step forward into this year with our trust in Him.

We read another scripture, (slide 9) Matthew 25:14-30, known as either the Parable of the Bags of Gold or the Parable of the Talents. This parable shows two types of servants who had the trust of their master but who responded differently to the master's trust. The servants who received five and two talents earned double from their hard work and, in the end, earned more credits from the master, while the servant who received one talent, misunderstood the master's intentions, found fault with his master, and subsequently did not put his talent to work for his master. Eventually, he did not receive credit from his master, and instead, his talent was taken from him.

(slide 10) What differences do you find between those servants? What made the servants respond differently to their master?

First of all, (slide 11) let's remember whether or not they realized that their master put trust in them determined how they managed to deal with their talents and how they should use their time.

The servants who doubled their talents were deeply moved to see that their master entrusted them with an enormous amount of money because he trusted in their abilities. Thus, they went 'at

once' and put their talents to work and doubled them. (slide 12) They accomplished their tasks by making use of their talents and time.

However, the servant, who received one talent, did just the opposite. He thought of his master as being wicked and hard, who wanted to harvest where he had not sown and gather where he had not scattered seed. Feeling afraid of his master, he went out and hid his talent in the ground. Although he had enough time and talent, he did not want to use his time and talent for his master. (slide 13) Instead, he wasted his time and did not profit from his talent. Eventually, he was called a wicked and lazy servant and not allowed to participate in his master's happiness.

Which type of servant better describes us? Do we acknowledge that we have precious talents from God, which we should use for His kingdom? Are we willing to invest our time in increasing our God-given talents? Though it may be challenging to answer these questions, (slide 14) we clearly know that we should be like the servants who realized that, because their master had put his trust in them, they eagerly used their talents and time for their master.

This year God continues to put His trust in us, expecting us to make use of our talents and our time. Our focus and direction this year should be to work hard for God's kingdom with our many blessings and talents.

Let's put these two scriptures together and understand what the year 2022 will be like.

This year God will faithfully work for us in every situation and **make 'a new thing' for us**, even though we don't always realize the mysterious ways that God works in and through our lives. (slide 15) As we live our lives in 2022, **discerning how God will save us from all kinds of life's burdens**, we should, at the same time, make use of our talents and time.

I think the best way for us to encounter God, who diligently works for us, and serve God's kingdom throughout this year can be the good management of our time.

I would like to share a story I heard when I served a Korean immigrant church in Cincinnati. A man, who came from Korea to study atomic engineering for his Ph.D. degree program at the University of Cincinnati, strived to offer his tithe of time. Even though he was so busy doing his academic studies during the weekdays, it was said that he came to church to spend time helping in the office, cleaning the sanctuary, praying for the church, and reading the Bible. He offered the tithe of time as much as he possibly could.

(slide 16) While we are very familiar with offering the tithe of our income, the concept of tithing our time may be unfamiliar to us. Does it sound impossible to you that we can offer a tithe of time? I hope you will not think about it legalistically **or limit our offering tithe of time to works within church.**

Instead, **relating it to many areas of our lives**, think about what benefit we could gain from spending our time in knowing God through Bible reading, helping His people through our prayers, and serving the church and people through doing some small, but meaningful things. And we do not need to calculate the exact amount of time we need to offer as a time-tithe. Whatever time we tithe will be good and mean a lot for us and God's kingdom, if we choose to manage our time well and spend more time working for God's kingdom,

(slide 17) My wish is for all of us to plan our time in 2022, relating it to our faith and ministry. Then, our time will become a spiritual channel through which we can experience God's abundant love and blessings.

Two weeks ago, my family traveled to New York City. (slide 18) One day, we were in the Brooklyn area and saw some Jewish men who had side curls and wore traditional long, dark jackets and wide-brimmed hats. Later, when I did a Google search for specific Jewish dress codes, I learned they were Hasidic Jews who want to adhere to their dress codes to keep their tradition of the Old Testament Law. Their dress codes show who they are, that is, their identity as Hasidic Jews.

Have you ever thought about what aspects of our lives can show our Christian identity? Can it be attending Sunday worship, offering tithes, or pledges? Missions or ministries?

(slide 19) I would contend that how we deal with our time shows our identity as God's people. We should spend our time knowing God's will and purpose for our lives, building closer relationships with God and His people, and serving His kingdom. Time is like a canvas on which we can draw beautiful things regarding our faith. When we invest our time with our talents, we will experience beautiful things happening in our lives in 2022. And behind the scenes, God will help us experience those things.

(slide 20) Throughout the new year of 2022, God will work through us to make marvelous things happen in our lives. I pray that all of us can experience God's miraculous works for our lives, and we will use our talents with joy and diligence for God's kingdom