



# *A Wonderful Time*

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## A WONDERFUL TIME IN 1970

Scripture: Genesis 1:1

IN A very short time 1970 will be on our hands. Questions arise. What will it mean to us? What will it do to us? What can we do with it? These are thoughts which come naturally with each year's end. And these questions have an answer.

By way of suggesting this answer might be, I would like to tell a little incident. A night or two ago when I was thinking about this sermon I went to my memory bank to December 31, 1910. Perhaps not many of you can go back that far in memory. But I can visualize the date very clearly. My father was a minister of the Gospel in the city of Cincinnati and although he was quite liberal-minded, he was at least in one respect an old-fashioned man. He always wrote letters by hand, painstakingly and slowly. I remember that on this particular New Year's Eve he was writing a letter and he put on at the top

"December 31, 1910." Then he turned to me and said, "That's the last time I shall ever write '1910.' Tomorrow morning I shall write 'January 1, 1911!'"

Being a very young boy, I was impressed by this awesome transition from one year to another, and I said, "Dad -". No, come to think of it, I didn't call him Dad back in that era it was Mama and Papa, Grandma and Grandpa. Dad is a latter-day usage. I said, "Papa, what do you think 1911 will be like?"

My father always shot from the hip and he turned and leveled a finger at me and said, "Norman, I tell you this: it will be just exactly what you and I and God do with it. And he added, "Don't forget it. That goes for every year you'll ever live."

Well, long before my father thought of this, Ralph Waldo Emerson suggested that one should write on his tombstone that every year can be the best year he ever lived.

And Plato was always saying to take charge of your life, for you can do what you will with it. Therefore I should like to give you a text for the New Year.

I had a bad idea to write it down somewhere so you could consult it now and then. But it is so short that all you need to do is write it on your conscience.

It will carry you through the beginning of the year, the middle of the year, and the end of the year. The first four words with which the Bible begins: "In the beginning God .." (Genesis 1:1) Take that the start and you will have a wonderful time in 1970.

Some people might object, "How can you be sure of this? We haven't done all that well in 1969. Of course we haven't done what we hoped in every respect. We had riots - not as widespread as the previous year, but too many for all. And the ghettos are still a national disgrace with miserable housing conditions. There have been strikes interfering with our daily life and in some cases posing health problems or a threat to

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the national interest. Traffic in obscenities continues here and there. And we are still involved in distressing international conflicts. In some respects we haven't done too well.

But, you know, friends, there is something great about the human race. It can be dirty; it can be violent; it can be rotten and wicked; but it can also be truly tremendously great. So, having counted our weaknesses and sins in these last days of 1969, let us also remember the greatnesses. Among other things accomplished we sent to space the intrepid spirits, Armstrong, Aldrin and Collins, who literally took their lives in their hands but were unafraid. Have you ever noticed the types they choose for these trips into space? They do not choose men whose morals are doubtful. They do not select men who have no faith. They do not select men whose integrity is open to question. In evidence the space authorities choose men of character. God-fearing men. Why? Because they have to be. Right? Count on them, for one thing - to know they are right. Know they can be depended upon. And maybe there is another reason. If you are going to send men out into great unknown space of Almighty God you should send men of imaginative comprehension who see God in it all.

Man's capacity to remember God and determine with his help to achieve great objectives and the God-given intelligence to find the means of doing it are what have made possible all the wonders of civilization. The earliest outgoing vessels to the Apollo moonships. And they will enable us to solve our most serious present-day social problems, like in the cities and the schools.

It is God's world we live in. It is a good life. And despite all our faults and failures we are a good people. It is a good year ending and a good year beginning.

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And here "in the beginning God . . . " That is the chart by which to set your course.

Now let's get down to a few simple things. You will inevitably have some hardships in 1970; you will have some problems; you will have some disappointments and some frustrations - and you are not always going to live up to your best. But you will live up to your best as much as you can. So let us suggest some good rules for having a wonderful time in 1970.

Number one is to practice the art of forgetting. Man is what he remembers, but man is also what he forgets. One of the healthiest things a human being can do is to become a master of forgetting. Whatever you do don't lug into 1970 your resentments, your hates, your frustrations, your disappointments, your regrets. There is too much impediment about that. It will wear you down. The thing to do at year's end is to drop all that - forget it - skip it - throw it into the past - and look to the future. Did it ever occur to you that if you take the letter *t* off the word *forget*, it becomes the word *forge*? Forge ahead! It is a great art to know how to forget. Drop it, skip it, let it go - whatever it is. Start anew.

RS. Peale one time made a trip to South Dakota in connection with our denomination. She attended a meeting in a country church. People came from hundreds of miles around to this meeting. And they had a big church dinner - a regular old fashioned church dinner. Mrs. Peale sat across the table from a hard-bitten South Dakota farmer who was very taciturn - not what you could call a conversationalist. A silent man wanted to see if she could engage him in conversation and the first thing she thought to ask him was, "How have the crops been this year?" You naturally would ask a farmer that.

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"The crops?" he replied. Well, ma'am, to tell you the truth they weren't very good. First, we had a visitation of grasshoppers. They ate up most of our crops. And then we had a big dust storm. The dust storm buried all the rest. About 90% of my crops. Then he added, "Some people were worse off than I was. My brother lost everything."

My wife was appalled by the desolation that the man described. She couldn't help saying, "Isn't that awful! How did you stand it? How did you live?"

The man had a weather-beaten, strong countenance, looking like it had been carved out of stone, like those figures of four Presidents on the Black Hills of South Dakota. It lighted up with a smile. Well, ma'am, he said, "it doesn't bother me any more because, that's over and I just aim to forget it. It was a man who had labored with the good earth for years. In seasons of prosperity and in seasons of disaster, he practiced the principle 'In the beginning God ...' and he mastered the art of forgetting it. Just aim to forget it."

Now every one of us needs to practice that attitude. In fact, it is a very important part of effective living. Do all you can about a problem, when you have done all you can, then don't try to do any more. You've done it. Forget it, skip it, and look to the future. Forget it.

REMEMBER when I first started preaching sermons.

No matter how long you have been at it, sermons you have preached don't count. The only one that matters is the one you are preaching. And you never get to the point where you think you know how to do it. At least I don't.

Well, as a young minister I had this church in Rhode Island, and in preparing a sermon I would work real

hard on it. Always did ad lib - that is, preach with out notes. Because that way I could look the congregation in the eyes and communicate man-to-man, speak not over a manuscript. I know this doesn't make for perfection, but anyway it is the way I like to do it. And I would go home after preaching and get hot all over because I would suddenly realize that the best thing I had had in mind to say I didn't say. Or I had said some stupid thing. And I would think to myself, Why didn't I say that? Or why in the world did I say that!

One day I took this up with an urban, sophisticated preacher. He told me, "Listen, son, prepare your sermon honestly, pray to God about it, get into the pulpit and do the best you can. But when you walk down out of the pulpit forget it. The congregation will - so you might as well make it unanimous!"

This is it. No matter what your failures or frustrations or disappointments or resentments have been in 1969, let them go. Make up your mind you are going to take hold of 1970 and shake the life out of it. Drop it. The t off of forget and forge are the basis of the text "In the beginning God".

Another important thing to do is to live a day at a time and take it as it comes. Have you seen a 1970 calendar yet? Well, you know something? In order to get to January 2nd you have to live through January 1st - no other way. And you don't want to spend January 1st with December 31st and December 30th and December 29th piled on your back or spend it worrying about January 2nd. Whoever figured out the calendar figured it out right. Live a day at a time and live on the basis of easy does it. Don't get too worked up about it. Just take it as it comes.

I have a quotation from Marcus Aurelius which



somebody sent me, which will lend a classical note to this story. The great Roman emperor-philosopher wrote this: To live each day as though one's last, never mastered, never apathetic, never attitudinizing - here is the perfection of character. At a time as though it were your last day . . . Don't be flustered. Don't be apathetic. Don't attitudinize. Now what in the world does that last one mean? I think we know. Don't try to be something you're not; be what you are, don't try to pretend. Don't dress like somebody else because somebody else dresses like somebody else. Dress the way you want to. Be yourself. Don't strike poses. Don't build barriers. Don't attitudinize.

One of the greatest physicians of modern times was a Canadian-born, Sir William Osler. He was knighted after he went to England to teach at Oxford, following twenty years as a professor in this country at the University of Pennsylvania and Johns Hopkins. On one occasion when Osler had been asked to give a commencement talk at the College of Medicine of the University of Pennsylvania - a tough assignment because it meant addressing a lot of young medical men on what a doctor ought to be - he consulted the writings of Antoninus Pius (again a Roman emperor, the predecessor of Marcus Aurelius) and he found Antoninus had said that one quality every human being should cultivate as an important aspect of his character is equanimity. So Sir William Osler told those doctors-to-be that, while they had to have medical knowledge and had to be well trained and had to be scientists, nevertheless they should remember above all else that no one would ever be a good doctor unless he has equanimity. In his sickroom where he finds himself confronted with a crisis of life and death a doctor must never show to anybody else or even reveal to himself, that he is not master of the

situation. He must practice equanimity. He must be in charge.

Well, if that is good for a doctor, it is good for an individual, and it is good for a society. A society must never get so disturbed, so wrought up, that it cannot think in the presence of its crises. We must practice equanimity, serenity, - but not get so serene that we forget there is a great world outside that we have got to get into. If we had enough people practicing equanimity out in this society we would change the problems of society. The trouble is that there are too many wrought-up people trying to take leadership. But people who pattern their lives on the basis of beginning God: "have this equanimity by means of which they can take charge of crises.

His was dramatically illustrated in one of the campus riots on the West Coast a year or so ago. Some agitators who make a profession of it came to the college for the purpose of starting a riot. They had a thousand or two young people involved. This riot was well advertised in advance and it became known to the Campus Crusade for Christ. That organization, like the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, includes in its membership some of the great athletes of our time - great basketball, baseball, track and football men. They decided that if outside agitators could move in on this campus, so could they. So they moved and infiltrated the crowd. There was a peppery, agitated little fellow who had the microphone and was telling the students what they were going to do. People were calling to him, and finally he asked, "Someone else want to speak?" That is where he made his big mistake, for a big football captain about 6' 6" tall and weighing some 225 pounds said, "Sure, I want to speak." And he came up and took the microphone away from the little fellow.

"Sure, I want to speak." Then he started telling the crowd about what a mess he had made of his life during their New Year's Eve party they opened the Jesus Christ got hold of him. At this kind of strange envelopes. Here is the way things had worked out talk the little fellow wanted the microphone back, but some of them: he took a look at the man who had it and decided to forget about it. And before they were through the Crusade for Christ had turned the would-be of the old, miserable same." into a great inspirational meeting. Young people will go and what did you get?" they asked. for anybody who gives them the right kind of leadership. That is exactly what I got," he answered.

One woman had listed ten things which she frankly expected to receive, but she had added, "if it be God's will that I should have them." Nine of them had come to pass. One was denied. They opened the envelope of the man who had died. He had written: "None of the men in my family has survived beyond the age of sixty. I shan't either." He had expected to die during the year. And he did - one night before he would have been sixty.

AND then finally one more thing I would suggest for making 1970 a wonderful year is to expect great things and put your life in God's hands. Have hopes, have great dreams, have great belief. See visions and believe in them. Believe that life is good and that it is going to be better and the best is yet to come. Difficulties and frustrations He got them too. One woman participating remarked that Capricorn was her birth sign too, but she hadn't known she was supposed to have troubles that year. And she didn't. Now maybe this gives an oversimplified picture of what expectations do, but I think it is true that if you expect great things of God, great things will come from God.

A group of people got together one New Year's Eve and started talking about New Year's resolutions. Then somebody said, "What do you say we discuss our New Year's expectations. What do you expect from the New Year?"

And presently the suggestion was made that each one take pencil, paper and envelope, write down what he expects from the coming year and seal it up. The sealed envelopes would then be put in the hands of one of the group and they would all meet on the next New Year's Eve to see what had happened to their expectations.

Well, all but one of these people gathered again at this point in time, the end of the year of our Lord



1969, thank Thee for life — for this precious wonder, with all its hopes, its dreams, its opportunities, its cherished and beautiful associations — and for the fact that it gave us opportunity to know Thee and the Lord Jesus Christ. Help us to put our hands in Thine trustingly and go ahead knowing that, as Socrates said, "No evil can happen to a good man, either in life or after death." Help us to live by the text, "In the beginning God . . ." Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



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