

## **“FINISH”**

### *ECCLESIASTES 7:8-10*

Now that Christmas is behind us, the real work begins: de-decorating; restoring your home to its pre-Christmas glory. To me, this is the worst part of Christmas. Have you ever tried to put your Christmas tree back in its original box? It is impossible! Here is the easiest way to store your Christmas tree. (Picture) Every year I rush to take down the lights and hate myself next year because I just wadded them up in a ball to get the job done. Perhaps since de-decorating is a chore to me, I put it off as long as I can.

More than likely, you have projects around the house which have been left unfinished; I do. When Sherry reminds me, I just say, “I’m working on it.” It has been four years, but I am working on it! Doing something right takes time! Unfinished business.

Many of us will be walking into a new year carrying the baggage of unfinished business from the old year. All those things you did not do, but should have – the things you did, but should not have done. The time people have hurt you, but you refuse to forgive them – the time you have hurt someone else, but did not seek forgiveness. The mistakes, sorrow, words which should have never been said; all the unsettled issues you have with yourself, others, and God.

If you want to make 2023 better than 2022, then spend time resolving any unfinished business. Do not carry the baggage of yesterday into your tomorrow; allow the Lord to *renew your strength so you can mount up with wings as eagles, run and not grow weary, walk and not faint* as you enter 2023. Ecclesiastes 7 gives wise instruction in how to finish the old year well.

#### **SCRIPTURE**

*The end of a thing is better than its beginning.* Some would say a proper translation is the end of a sermon is better than its beginning. While I am not sure that is sound translation, I would agree with the point. I have preached a few sermons in which I was glad to make it to the end.

The end of 2022 can be better than the beginning of 2023 if we leave the baggage behind.

#### **SOOTHE YOUR REGRETS**

Reflecting on 2022, perhaps you are mindful of opportunities you have missed, or mistakes you have made. Regrets sting. “I wish I had this year to live over! I would love to fix this or that.”

*Do not say, “Why were the former days better than these?” For you do not inquire wisely concerning this.* (10) Would you really like to relive the storms of 2022? Maybe you have undergone some physical storms, would you really like to hear the doctor give you the bad news again? Perhaps your struggles were spiritual. The arrows Satan has slung at your faith this year are gone! They can never be used against you again! Would you really like to go back and struggle with those temptations again?

2022 is gone and you are wiser for having lived through it. James says, *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.* (James 1:2) God has used the events of 2022, even your failures, to help you grow. The end of 2022 is better than its beginning; we are freed from our past.

### **CALM YOUR FEARS OF THE FUTURE**

But, will this year be any better? Maybe you are afraid of what the storms of 2023 will bring. “Will I be able to bear up underneath it?” Remember, no matter how bad the beginning is, the end is always better.

If you wake up in the morning and the sun is behind the clouds, do not assume the sun will never shine again. It is like a girl who saw an eclipse of the sun. She asked her daddy, “Why did the sun go out?” That is understandable for a child, but an adult knows the sun will shine again.

If you are in a dark period of your life, do not despair, the sun will shine again. Take this verse as a prophecy to give you hope and dispel your fears. The end will be better than the beginning. God is still in charge. He promised Israel, “*For I know the plans I have for you,*” says the LORD. “*They are plans to prosper you not to harm you, to give you a future and a hope.*” (Jeremiah 29:11) God has a plan for you, even in the darkest of times.

Joseph, sold into slavery by his brothers, was falsely accused, and thrown in prison; it was his darkest moment. Yet, he could never have risen to his high position of power in Egypt had he not gone to prison. Like gold, we must be refined in the fire before we can truly shine. If you are in a dark moment and dreading the future, take heart; *the end of a thing is better than its beginning.*

### **ENCOURAGE YOUR FAITH**

The spirit of our time cries out for instant satisfaction. But, God says we should wait for His time. *But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not grow weary; they shall walk, and not faint.* (Isaiah 40:31) In our waiting, we learn to rely on God and trust Him.

If we will remain faithful to God, then the end will be better than the beginning. Jesus promised, *Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.* (Revelation 2:10) If you are struggling to hang on to your faith, take heart! The end will be better, and it is worth waiting for.

*For I consider the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.* (Romans 8:18) Throughout His life, Jesus was rejected, abused, and finally killed; yet, now He is glorified in Heaven.

The same waits for us. Paul instructs the Romans, *Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him.* (Romans 6:8) Endure tough times, hang on to your faith, because we will be glorified in the end.

On November 22, 1873, while crossing the Atlantic Ocean, the steamship, Ville du Havre was struck by an iron sailing ship. Two hundred and twenty-six people lost their lives, as the Ville du Havre sank within only twelve minutes.

Four of the 226 who died that day were 11 year-old Anna, 9 year-old Margaret Lee, 5 year-old Elizabeth, and 2 year-old Tanetta. Their mother, Anna survived. She wired her husband, Horatio, with the news: "Saved alone".

Sailing to be reunited with his wife, the captain summoned Horatio to the bridge of the vessel. He said they were passing over the spot where the Ville du Havre had sunk, and where his daughters had died. Horatio returned to his cabin and wrote these words "When peace like a river, attendeth my way. When sorrow like sea billows roll. Whatever my lot, thou has taught me to say, 'It is well with my soul.'"

Is it well with your soul? Will the end of your life be better than the beginning? If you have not been saved by the blood of Jesus Christ, then you are headed for an end worse than your beginning. On judgment day, the Book of Life will reveal either your sins recorded, or your sins forgiven because the blood of Christ has washed them away.

If your sins are recorded in the Book of Life, then you will be separated from the presence of God for eternity in a place called hell. But, for those whose sins have been washed away, then you will live with the Father for eternity in a place called Heaven. The choice is yours.

Do not carry the baggage of unfinished business into 2023. Trust the Lord today. Christian, it may be time to make a new beginning in your relationship with the Father. Come back to Him. Start walking in obedience to His Word. Put Christ first. Serve Him faithfully in the church.