

Psalm 33:20-22 **“We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. ²¹ In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. ²² May your unfailing love rest upon us, O LORD, even as we put our hope in you.”**

Dear Christians on this New Year's Eve:

Some of us still remember Danish-American comedian and pianist Victor Borge. One of his jokes was that he told his friend that he could tell time by his piano. His friend didn't believe him. So Victor pounded out a rousing march on his piano. Immediately there came a banging on the wall of his apartment as a voice screamed, *“Hey, knock it off, will ya? It's 1:30 in the morning!”*

Time is on our minds this time of the year. It's amazing how time flies...or time seems stands still. In my opinion, we had some of both in 2020. As Christians, it's good to remember that time is a gift from God who created it.

However, thinking about time and its rapid passage can sometimes be disconcerting. It reminds us of our mortality, our limited time on earth. Our gracious Lord, however, helps us overcome that fear. As we end a year and look ahead to another, we are reminded that the Lord is **“Our Hope for Years to Come!”** (1) Our hope in him will not disappoint us, and (2) He gives us optimism and a reason to use our time well.

1

I don't know about you, but one of my favorite hymns is 441 -- which we sang at the beginning of the service: ***“O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come...”*** The hymn's words are similar to the ideas of “help” and “hope” expressed in Psalm 33: ***“We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield.”*** What was the psalmist waiting for so hopefully? He simply says, ***“The LORD.”***

In the psalmists' day, the whole Jewish world was waiting for God's promise to be kept that the long-prophesied Savior would finally come to his people. The name he uses for ***“LORD”*** is the name *Yahweh*, the *“I am”* God -- the God of free and faithful grace; the God of salvation; the God who cares for his people and keeps his promises to them. Thousands of years earlier he had made a promise to our first parents, Adam and Eve, that a Child would be born who would crush the devil's head and win the victory over sin and death brought on by Adam and Eve's rebellion.

In Psalm 33 the psalmist is praying for that event to happen. ***“We wait in hope for you, LORD!”*** Well, it took 10 centuries, but that Savior finally came just as promised. He was born, just as predicted, in a humble little town called Bethlehem to, just as predicted, a virgin. And just as was promised and predicted, he was ***“pierced for our transgressions”*** (Is. 53) on a cursed piece of wood called a cross to remove the curse of our sins and to fill us with blessings beyond measure! As the psalmist writes, ***“In him our hearts rejoice!”*** Our eternal futures are secure. When our days *stop* here, they *begin* in heaven -- and life will be better than ever!

Since God kept that greatest of all promises and gave us the eternal hope of heaven, we also know that he will be with us as we navigate our way through this world with all its pitfalls and pot-holes. ***“He is our help and shield.”*** Prophet Isaiah once beautifully put it this way: ***“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior”*** (Isa 43:2-3). Notice that name again: ***“I am the LORD.”*** I am your gracious, faithful God. I removed your sins. I will also be with you to sustain you through the roiling waters of your emotional turmoil and the intense flames of your physical challenges -- no matter what they might be in this coming year.

When the heat is on and the waters roar and foam around us, where do we go for reassurance that God will keep his promises? We go to where he speaks to us: his **Word**. There he repeats his

promises of his love. There he gives us direction. There he settles our hearts. There he tells how he enabled David to trounce the giant Goliath; how Joseph survived in Egypt; how Joshua conquered Jericho; how Paul and Silas walked out of prison in Philippi -- and so much more! He has been believers' help for ages past. He is our hope for years to come! (If you want to please God and be a great blessing to St. Paul's congregation, go to the Word faithfully.)

So, while 2021 might not turn out exactly as we personally plan it in our minds, we do know that it will turn out as God directs it to. When we keep our eyes fixed on the **cross**, we know that no matter what paths (and obstacles in the paths) are before us, God loves us forever and perfectly in Christ.

2

That gives us every reason to be optimistic and to live with a purpose in life.

Psychologist **William Marston** once did a survey asking, ***"What do you have to live for?"*** The vast majority of people who responded indicated they were simply living life by marching in place, ***"enduring the present while waiting for the future,"*** as Marston put it. Life, for them, was waiting for something to happen -- whether it was better days to come or the other shoe to drop; waiting for the next event whether happy or sad.

While, psychologically, I understand that's how we humans are, as *Christians* we can move beyond that bleak outlook. Our hope in the Lord moves us to live our faith today, and to share our faith as we live it! Christians live in the moment. Our whole purpose in life, our daily goal, is to be a "little Jesus" to the world -- to find new and better ways each day to let Jesus and his love shine through us to others. Our waiting for heaven isn't twiddling our thumbs waiting, it is active waiting.

"Carpe Diem!" is the Latin term. "Seize the day." This day is the day to do a kind deed for that senior citizen neighbor or relative. This day is the day to help my family see and serve Jesus better by being the best Christian leader I can be. This day is the day to evaluate the mountain of material blessings God pours out on me and decide what generous portion of those blessings I will return to him with a heart full of thanksgiving and praise.

If you're searching for your reason to exist, here it is -- Paul's words in Ephesians 2:10: ***"We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."*** God crafted you just so, in just the right way, so that his kingdom might be blessed *when you and I seize the many opportunities* he has planned for us in lives to serve him.

We don't have any clue what lies ahead this year or in our lives. But we do know this: God is going to be there with us. As the Psalmist writes, ***"We wait in hope for the LORD."*** He has been our help in ages past, and he is our hope for years/eternity to come! God bless you, dearly loved members. Our gracious Lord loves you. I know he will be with you always.

Amen.