

Look Around: Look Back

1 John 1:1 through 1 John 1:4 (NKJV)

¹That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—²the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—³that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. ⁴And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.

Series Introduction

1 Corinthians 2:9 (NKJV)

⁹But as it is written:

*“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,
Nor have entered into the heart of man
The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”*

1 Corinthians 2:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.

2009 has come and gone. We lived it and survived. We made it over. This New Year has not yet been revealed to us. In the purest sense, we do not know what tomorrow holds for us. But God knows. Eyes have not seen and ears have not heard, but God has prepared some things to happen in our lives. He has prepared blessings and opportunities. He has prepared challenges and rewards.

He has already prepared our way. He has already numbered our days. God holds every day of this New Year in his hand. He already knows the ministry we will perform next month. He has already ordained and commissioned the blessings you will receive six months from now. He knows the lives he plans for us to touch in the fall. He knows who he plans to bring into our lives and he knows the people who will walk out of our lives this year.

Since our God has already prepared a course for our lives, I believe we must work to position ourselves to receive his blessings. We must seek the heart of God for clarity and direction. It would be a shame for us to miss the blessings of God by being out of position to receive them. Why? It is because God has already ordained that he will reveal them by his Spirit.

To help us position ourselves to receive the fullness of God's blessings in this year, I want to encourage us to look around. We will look back to see how far we've come. We will look around to see life through God's eyes. We will look down to see the obstacles that may trip us up. We will look forward to see the opportunities set before us. We will look up to learn how to walk by faith. Today we will begin with a Look Back.

Introduction

"If we don't know where we have come from, we won't know where we are going." I have heard variations of this comment throughout my life. I have also been taught we need to know history so it will not repeat itself. As we move forward from one year to another, it is a good idea for us to look back as long as we do it in a healthy and spiritual way. There are many things we can examine as the year is in review. We can look at relationships, finances, achievements, holidays, milestones, and more. But when it comes to our faith we need to look back at our relationships with God.

God is real. He still speaks and operates in our world. He is still guiding and instructing. He is still working miracles. God is still healing and providing. He is constantly interacting with his people. Did you know there isn't a moment in our lives when he isn't involved with what we do? There isn't a thing we can do where he can't see us. There isn't a place we can go where he can't reach us. There isn't a circumstance so severe that he can't deliver us.

There isn't one achievement we have reached where he didn't bring us. Remember, it is in him that we move, breathe, and have our being. Whether we acknowledge him or not, God is still God and he is still an active participant in our lives.

Today, in this passage of scripture, John helps us look back by accomplishing two things. First, he shows us How to Look Back. He gives us a framework we can use to look back at our faith in a healthy way. Second, he shows the Blessing of Looking Back. This is where he reinforces the benefits of looking back on key areas of our faith. We will discuss these two topics and conclude for the day.

How to Look Back

In our scripture today, John takes a moment to look back at his encounter with Jesus. We know that it was a personal, intimate, and revealing relationship this Apostle had with the Lord. John walked, talked, ate, worshipped, learned from, and participated in miracles with Jesus. John's experience with Jesus was closer than that of any other disciple. Not only was John present at the transfiguration but he was also the only

disciple present at the crucifixion. John was uniquely positioned to encounter Jesus in his earthly ministry. So when it comes to eye witness accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus, there are no better accounts than that of the Apostle John.

As John affirms this relationship with his readers he sights four things that validate his look back at his time with Jesus.

He says...

¹That which was from the beginning, which we have **heard**, which we have **seen** with our eyes, which we have **looked upon**, and our hands have **handled**, concerning the Word of life

As we attempt to look back at 2009, John teaches us what to look for as it pertains to God. It's what we've heard, what we've seen, what we've looked upon, and what we've handled concerning the Word of life, which is Jesus.

What have we heard?

When did God speak to you last year? All of us had moments when God was speaking to us. Our answer to this question will reveal just how much we were paying attention to God in 2009.

Example: Franklin Roosevelt

The story is told of Franklin Roosevelt, who often endured long receiving lines at the White House. He complained that no one really paid any attention to what was said. One day, during a reception, he decided to try an experiment. To each person who passed down the line and shook his hand, he murmured, "I murdered my grandmother this morning." The guests responded with phrases like, "Marvelous! Keep up the good work." "We are proud of you." "God bless you, sir." It was not till the end of the line, while greeting the ambassador from Bolivia, that his words were actually heard. Nonplussed, the ambassador leaned over and whispered, "I'm sure she had it coming."

How many times did God speak to us to tell us something important and we just gave him a canned response? How many times did God speak in 2009 and we paid him no attention at all? What did God say? Were we even in a position to hear from God? John was always in a place to hear from the Lord. Even when he had dinner, John sat close enough to lean his head on the chest of Jesus and hear even the slightest whisper.

John says when he looks back there are some sure things he heard from the Lord. He has some solid foundation for his faith. Faith comes by hearing and hearing the word of God. We need to look back and recall if we were in the place to receive the word of God. If our faith wasn't activated in 2009 it is a direct result of what we didn't hear.

What have we seen?

John says he has seen the Lord. He has taken notice of the Lord and he has recognized that Jesus is Lord. To do this John had to have his attention fixed on Jesus. He had to be able to tell the difference between God's Son and any of the other leaders and influencers in the world. John saw what God was doing and could tell the difference between the work of God and the ways of the world.

God was at work in 2009 just as he was in John's day. The challenge we face is we can't see God if we aren't filtering for him. We either filtered the events of the year through the lens of our faith or we filtered it through the lens of our natural world.

For example, if we are looking for help paying bills, we may ask many people for help. We may ask family members and loved ones as well as friends. When the need is provided for, our lenses will determine where we give the praise.

If God is an afterthought, we may give the credit to the person who helped us. But if we are looking through the lens of our faith, we will know that only God could bless another person to be a blessing to us.

Some of us have not been paying attention to God in our lives. We haven't seen God move in a long time. So when we are asked to look back at our faith, we don't see anything of significance. We are then forced to look beyond our own lives and try to remember when God moved for our parents and grandparents. We are living today without a legacy of godliness in our lives. We sit around and ask what has God done lately?

The real question is did we look to see what God was doing? Every Sunday, we attempt to step out of the way and let God shine through in the sermons. Did you see it? The praise team and choir try to point us to God in worship, did we see or did we just critique the singing?

Did we see God's hands sustaining us through the recession? Did we see God holding our families together? Did we see God performing miracles in the lives of others? Did we see God heal our brothers and sisters? Did we see God rewrite history and put President Obama in the White House?

John saw Jesus at work. He saw the Lord ministering to people. He saw the deliverance. He saw the miracles. He saw how Jesus operated. And when John looks back on his faith walk, the things he saw validate and strengthen his faith. But he goes a step further and says he has looked upon the Lord.

What have we looked upon?

The best way for me to explain this idea and how it differs from seeing is to show you in scripture.

Exodus 3:1 through Exodus 3:4 (NKJV)

¹Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

²And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. ³Then Moses said, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn."

⁴So when the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!"

And he said, "Here I am."

There are some things we are not going to understand until we dig deeper. There are some blessings we are not going to harvest until we dig deeper. Sometimes the harvest is full of tops of fruit like corn, wheat, and peas. But other times God allows us to plant and reap things that are under the surface like carrots, potatoes, and beats.

John says he didn't just see he looked! He didn't just gaze at Jesus, he leaned in. John didn't just notice the Lord, he drew in close enough to understand and comprehend. He didn't just know of Jesus, he knew him.

There are some obstacles we can't overcome if we give up. There are some lessons we can't learn unless we draw in closer. There are some breakthroughs we can't experience until we press our way. We need to look back at all of the revelation knowledge the Lord gave us in 2009. God gave us opportunities for deeper things. We need to identify them because in 2010 God will build on those things.

What have we handled?

John says he didn't just hear the word. He didn't just see the word. He didn't just look upon the word. He handled the word. He manipulated the word. He verified the word. He applied the word.

Did we manipulate the word of life? Did we use it and apply it? Did we verify it? Each time we apply the word to our lives it is an act of faith in God's word.

Faith in God is a spiritual function. Because faith is spiritual, it has the potential to accomplish whatever God ordains for it to do. Faith comes by hearing and hearing the word of God. So when God speaks, our faith is activated. Our faith releases the Holy Spirit to operate on our behalf. So when God speaks the word over our lives, we must act on that word in faith to release the Spirit to do his will.

If God has spoken into our spirits that he will bless our marriages and keep us together, it is then our responsibility to act in faith. We need to serve our spouses in faith. We need to show intimacy in faith. Regardless of how things look now, we must be convinced of God's word to us.

If God has promised to provide and has spoken into our lives, then we need to fill out job applications in faith. Even if we aren't qualified for the positions, God's word to us cannot return void. It will accomplish whatever he has ordained for our lives if we just have the faith.

Somewhere in 2009 God invited us to hear and handle his word. Those were the times when we needed to apply the word to our lives and have the faith to believe God would deliver. We need to remember those times. Those are the times when we transitioned from being hearers to being doers.

The testimonies of those victories will sustain us through 2010. These four things John saw when he looked back over his faith walk, will help each of us to reap blessings in the new year.

The Blessing of Looking Back

The blessing of looking back is found in the witness of eternal life.

As the word of life is manifested in our lives, we can see it and know for a certainty that eternal life is real. I have a blessed assurance that I will be in heaven some day. I am sure because the same God who delivered me back in August of 2009 said he was going to prepare a place for me.

I am blessed because I have an assurance that the same God who opened the windows of heaven in 2009 and poured out blessings that I didn't have room enough to receive, has also promised me a crown that doesn't fade away.

The witness of my eternal life is secure because the same Spirit who speaks to me and lives within me, the same Holy Spirit who was released to perform miracles in my life in 2009 has sealed me to be a prize when God redeems the world. When I look back I get confidence to press forward.

John says the blessing of looking back is found in our fellowship.

Proverbs 27:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ As iron sharpens iron,
So a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.

Our fellowship with God and the saints have given us strength. God is always speaking to us in prayer, through his word, through life circumstances, and through his people. I've been delivered by words spoken by other saints. When I didn't know if God heard my prayers, he confirmed them in the mouths of two or three witnesses. When I didn't have direction he blessed me with the counsel of the elders.

God has placed each person in the body to be a blessing to every other part. He gave us all gifts for the profit of all members of the body. We need each other. We can't truly have fellowship with the Father whom we have not seen when we fail to love the brothers and sisters we see.

God has promised us that he would bless us through others. He said ...

Luke 6:38 (KJV)

³⁸ Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, **shall men** give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.

When we look back we can see the times God used the saints to pour blessings into our lives. As believers in Jesus Christ, we are blessings to each other as well as recipients of the blessings of others.

Lastly, John reveals by looking back, we can have fullness of joy. He says ...

⁴ And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.

By looking back we have a record of the goodness of God in our testimonies. Each day of deliverance should cause our spirits to be lifted. Every breakthrough should encourage us to move forward in Jesus name.

Even if we have empty places in our faith walk, the stories and testimonies of others can cause us to be filled with joy. If we just start looking back we can probably see the times when the blessings of God ran up and overtook some of us. If we just look back and start counting our blessings, we might get happy.

We don't have to look that far to remember when we weren't in our right minds.
We don't have to look far to remember when our bills were piling up.
We don't have to look too far to recall how we felt when people were getting laid off all around us.

Some of us know it was nothing but God that our homes weren't robbed this summer.
Some of us can shout because we know it was nothing but God that allowed our children to make it through the school year.

Some of us are still walking in a cloud of smoke from when all hell broke loose in our lives.

Some of us are still dripping from walking through the floods that tried to overwhelm us.
Some of us are still crying because of people we lost last year.

But God is still on the throne and we are still here.

Every time I look back I can see the times God carried me.
Every time I look back I can see the times he delivered me.

I can't help but get filled with hope when I look back and see that he got up with all power in his hand.

Conclusion:

Look back. Look back in 2009 and recall what you have heard. Remember what you have seen and what you have looked upon. Rejoice over the things you have handled. The stories of your life with God in 2009 will lay a foundation for the blessings of 2010. Use those stories to confirm your witness of eternal life. Look back and acknowledge the benefits of your fellowship with God and the saints. Let each testimony of 2009 to fill your 2010 with the fullness of joy.