

Last week, on the first Sunday of the year, we started a new sermon series titled “Control: Can’s and Can’t’s.” Each sermon in this series will explore different aspects of control: our thoughts, actions, speech, goals, and responses to challenges.

For example, we learned about the balance between human effort and God’s will in the context of control. We heard that while we can plan and strategize, the final outcomes are aligned with God’s purpose. The main lesson was the importance of accepting things beyond our control and changing what we can, knowing the difference between the two to align our goals with God’s will by accepting our limitations and surrendering to God.

Today’s sermon is about “Letting Go of the Past and Future.” Can we change our past? Can we control our future?

To explore this topic, let’s look into today’s Scripture, 2 Corinthians 3:17, “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”

This verse is part of the Apostle Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians, where he addresses various issues within the Corinthian church, including challenges to his apostolic authority and the nature of the New Covenant. Specifically, in this passage, Paul contrasts the glory of the New Covenant established by Jesus through his life, death, and resurrection and characterized by the Spirit of God indwelling in us as believers, with the Old Covenant, associated with the letter of the law and the limitations of our ability to approach God freely due to our sins.

In the context of our sermon today, “Letting Go of the Past and the Future,” this is particularly relevant. When it says, “there is freedom,” it means that the Spirit of the Lord brings liberation from past mistakes, guilt, and regrets, freeing us to approach God through grace in Jesus Christ. Under the New Covenant, as Paul is arguing, we are not defined or constrained by our past failures; instead, we are offered forgiveness and new life through Christ.

Do you have a problem with your past? If we are honest, we do have problems with our past more often than not. We may remember the good times, like celebrations, achievements, and happy milestones. These memories are like bright spots that make us feel thankful and happy. But more often than not, we also remember the tough times in our past. These are the moments of sadness, disappointment, or when things didn’t go as planned. We know what it feels like to have resentment and self-pity and blame others, even God, for what happened to us that was ugly and hurtful.

The problem with this is that when we live our present in the past, always looking back and reliving the negative experiences, those memories shape who we are today; they define our character, interactions, and how we perceive life as a whole. And we can’t have a good life if we always relive what didn’t work out, who hurt and betrayed us, and our mistakes.

This happened to me several years ago when some people I considered friends, even family, did and said things against me and my family that were hurtful. The more I thought about it, the more I wanted to talk about it until I made peace with it and moved on. I realize now that by holding onto it, I was clouding my present and potentially missing God’s better life for me.

As a pastor, I can tell you that many people have challenges like this and that some never see the better life God has for them because they are always opening up old wounds. Every now and then, they call friends, “Can you believe what they did to me?” It happened 5, 10, 20 years ago, and they are still dragging it up like it happened yesterday. If we are going to experience the freedom Christ has given us, we need to let go and make peace with the past because as long as we dwell on the negatives of the past, we will miss the new things God wants to do. We will not even be able to see them if they are in front of us because the past so blinds us that future blessings get so clouded that we can’t see them.

Can you hear the point here? Dwelling on the past prevents us from embracing new opportunities God has planned for us. The only thing that the past should do for us is make us stronger and more confident for future challenges. The past should not define us but prepare us for the future.

What can we do about the past, then? We can’t change what happened to us in the past, but we can change how we think and feel about it today by surrendering it to Jesus. When we trust Jesus with our disappointment, hurts, guilt, and shame, he changes everything, and we experience his peace and freedom.

That is what we can do and what sets us up for success in our future, too, because how can we trust God with our future if we can’t trust him with our past?

Now, I understand it is also hard to trust God with our future when it is so unknown. Many of us are so fixated on the outcomes we desire that living in the present without preoccupying ourselves with the future becomes a challenge. While we openly profess our trust in God and encourage others to do the same, we often find ourselves covertly manipulating life’s events to match our plans and visions for the future. If we are honest, we would confess that we struggle to trust God with our future by completely surrendering our wants and needs to him.

But as with our past, the freedom Jesus offers us is not only from past hurts but extends to the future as well, relieving anxiety and fear. The presence of the Holy Spirit provides assurance that we do not face the future alone. We can move forward with confidence, not because we know what the future holds, but because we trust in the one who holds the future. By being liberated from the weight of past sins and the worries of future unknowns, we are empowered to embrace the present with joy and peace.

What God Jesus is offering us is wonderful thought of new life and freedom: the best days of our lives have not happened yet, they are still ahead. But you won’t have a future if you do not trust God in your present. All we have to do is to trust him, to walk beside him, to listen to his voice, and act on his wisdom not someday but right now.

I know this is hard to grasp. You can even say, “It is easier to be said than done.” I get it; it makes sense when we speak about it, but I am also aware it can be difficult because we don’t see the full picture.

In 1 Corinthians 13:12, the apostle Paul said, “For now we see only a reflection, as in a mirror, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as

I have been fully known.” This Scripture tells us that though we can't see it right now, there is a bigger picture in our lives. Paul understood that our understanding of life is limited but will be complete one day.

This means that for us to begin to see the bigger picture of God's plans for us, we must begin by trusting him with our past and future, even when we don't have all the answers.

What do we make of all this, then? Our past has shaped us with all its trials and triumphs but does not confine us. It is a foundation upon which we build, not a prison that holds us captive. Every mistake and every challenge we have faced has been a lesson, a stepping stone toward becoming stronger, wiser, and more resilient today.

Therefore, as we stand here today, let's remember that every day is a new opportunity, a gift from God, to live in the freedom granted by the Spirit. Let's cherish each moment, not as a fleeting second, but as a chance to experience God's love, grow, serve, and enjoy the life he has given us.

Here is the good news and invitation: God loves new beginnings and encourages us to let go of the past. No matter the start we had in life, God's plan for our future is filled with promise and goodness. Each day is a new opportunity provided by God for us to live in the freedom the Spirit gives us. Every day is a fresh start, a chance to create a meaningful and fulfilling life under God's guidance.

So, this is what we can do: Let's carry this message in our hearts, to live fully in the now, to let go of the burdens of what has been, and to step forward with faith into what will be. Let's embrace the present as a gift from God, a precious moment where his love, mercy, and grace are actively at work. Amen.