FACING THE FUTURE

Years ago there was a TV program called "Early Edition." I only saw it once or twice but if I remember the basic storyline centered on a young man who was given tomorrow's newspaper today. In other words, he was able to know what was going to happen a day before it actually happened. Now let me ask you. If you were able to know what was going to happen before it happened, how would you use that knowledge? Would you use it to get rich? If you knew the stock market or tomorrow's lottery ticket numbers would you use that information just to make money? Would you use it to help those in need? If you knew that someone was going to be in trouble or would die would you rush to help them? What would you do if you knew what was would happen tomorrow?

Human beings have an unquenchable thirst to know about the future. We will do anything to find out what's going to happen next. People will pay good money for palm reading, fortune telling, tea leaves, fortune cookies, crystal balls, astrology. None of this stuff works. Predicting the future is big business. Books like Megatrends are best sellers. Many magazines seek to forecast the future – economically and culturally.

Eccl 8:7 Since no man knows the future, who can tell him what is to come?

Years ago Naomi and I were travelling on the 401 and I lost control of the car on the icy highway. It was a terrible feeling – we were completely out of control. Sometimes it seems the future is like that – you feel like you are out of control and unable to deal with what will happen next. Nobody knows what the future holds except God. What does He say about the future? To Face the Future there are 3 things that you should NOT do:

a. DON'T PRESUME ABOUT TOMORROW!

Prov. 27:1 Do not boast about tomorrow, for you don't know what a day may bring forth.

You can't brag about what you're going to do next year, you don't even know if you're going to have tomorrow. Remember the man Jesus talked about in Luke 12:18 who said to himself "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry". Each of us are only a heartbeat away from eternity. E.g. Dad's retirement plans.

b. DON'T PANIC ABOUT TOMORROW!

Matthew 6:34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself

Live one day at a time. Worry is an attempt to control the future and it doesn't work. Worrying is stewing without doing. It is living tomorrow before it comes. The future doesn't come to us all at once but in bite sized, 24 hour segments called days. We are to live one day at a time. You can plan for the future, but you can't live there. You can only live today. Yard by yard, life is hard, but inch by inch life's a cinch.

c. DON'T PROCRASTINATE ABOUT TOMORROW!

Eccl. 11:4 Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap!

What has God told you to do this year that you haven't done yet? The year is almost over! Do it now! Don't wait! Perfectionism is often the root of most procrastination. You set such a high standard that you never get started. E.g. helping Naomi's dad to build the front porch.

Procrastination is my sin, it only brings me sorrow
I know I ought to change my life, In fact I will -- tomorrow

These three are the wrong way to face the future. What does God say is the right way to face the future? In Joshua 1 God is about too lead Israel into a very uncertain future. Joshua knows that the moment he leads them across the Jordan River he's going to face many enemy nations, all of them bigger than him. They will be in a continuous battle for the next several years. Facing this very uncertain future, God's pep talk to Joshua is clear:

Josh 1:1 After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: 2 "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them--to the Israelites. 3 I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. 4 Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates--all the Hittite country--to the Great Sea on the west. 5 No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. 6 "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. 7 Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. 8 Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. 9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go." 10 So Joshua ordered the officers of the people: 11 "Go through the camp and tell the people, `Get your supplies ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the LORD your God is giving you for your own.'"

How do we face the future with courage? If you don't know what the future holds remember that you do know the One who holds the future. To face the future you must do 3 things:

1. SET UP A PLAN – VS 1-6

God plans, He doesn't just do things spontaneously, He has a plan. Likewise, you must learn to plan. Some people think they can just move through life passively, drift through it, and whatever God wants is fine. God says you ought to plan. He told Joshua:

"…get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give …"

God had a plan – He knew what He was about to do. A survey done a while back discovered that 27% of all the people in America have never given any thought to the future. 60% of people give some thought - usually about finances. 10% have given serious thought to the future – these are the high achievers. However, only 3% of the population has written down goals. They are the super achievers. Those with written goals outperformed High Achievers 10 to 1. If you fail to plan you plan to fail!

Successful people set up a plan. They get ready and make the most of their time and life and energy. Do you do that or do you just drift through life?

God starts here by saying to Joshua "Moses my servant is dead". One of the ways you prepare for the future is by letting go of the past. Joshua and Moses had been close, they had been together for years. But this was a new day. Moses was dead but God wasn't dead and He had a plan for his children.

I heard about a youth pastor that had taken over a very successful youth ministry from the previous youth pastor. At his first youth meeting he held a memorial service for the previous ministry. It was his way of saying that the past, as wonderful as it had been, was over. It was time for a fresh start.

Sometimes we have to let go of the past in order to possess the future. Maybe there's been a death and you're still holding on to that. Somebody walked out of your life or something happened and you are still living in yesterday. God says to let go of the past. Moses is dead – but God still has a plan for your life. So how do you know your plans are God's plans?

Prov 20:18 Make plans by seeking advice; if you wage war, obtain guidance.

As a church, we have a plan for moving forward. Our plan revolves around our 4 purposes as a church. We exist to exalt God, embrace one another, equip for service and extend the kingdom.

In the first chair, in the area of exalting, we are growing as a church. You see from our attendance figures that good things are happening. A few weeks ago we had a report from our auditor. His firm handles most of the larger church in the GTA. He said at the end of that meeting that, according to the numbers, we are the fastest growing church in the GTA. That is something to thank God for!

In the second chair, embracing, our small groups are growing. We have hired Joshua on as Small Groups Pastor. In the last year we have had a number of new groups start and a number are about to start in the coming weeks.

In the third chair, equipping, we have begun a new season in Christian Education. We now have over 150 adults and more than 40 youth in Sunday morning classes. More than 100 are attending our Wednesday evening H2O program. Wonderful things are happening.

In the fourth chair, extending, we have begun a new Local Outreach Team that is looking at strategic opportunities for reaching out to the community around us. We had a wonderful year in terms of our World Missions Team, including bringing on several new missionaries. We are planning on increasing our involvement in church planting in Quebec and are sending a team to Japan in March to look at opportunities to further our ministry there. We ending the year with a $50,000 surplus. God is good!

2. STAY IN THE WORD – VS 7-9

Everything for Israel was about to change. Life beyond the Jordan would be very different to what they knew. In the midst of change they understood that God was in control. The Word of God had lead them to the Jordan and it would also lead them beyond it. It the midst of change they needed to hold tight to the unchanging Word of God

The same is true of us as a church. This is a new day. There are new challenges and opportunities before us. Change is inevitable, but as we move forward we do so holding tight to the unchanging Word of God.

God says to Joshua "Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left". In other words don't get sidetracked. A lot of people start off with a plan but then they get sidetracked.

1 Tim 1:3 As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer 4 nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God's work -- which is by faith.

It was the final hole of the 1961 Masters Tournament, and golf legend Arnold Palmer had a one-stroke lead and had just hit a very satisfying tee shot. He felt he was in pretty good shape. As he approached his ball, he saw an old friend standing at the edge of the gallery. The friend motioned him over, stuck out his hand and said, “Congratulations.” Arnold later said, “I took his hand and shook it, but as soon as I did, I knew I had lost my focus.” On his next two shots, he hit the ball into a sand trap, then put it over the edge of the green. He missed the putt and lost the Master’s because he had first lost his focus.

Arnold Palmer was not on that golf course that day to renew old acquaintances. He was not there to accept congratulations. He was there for one purpose and one purpose only -- to put the ball in the hole. We are here for one purpose and one purpose only -- to live for the Lord. If we live, we live for the Lord. If we die, we die for the Lord. And if we ever lose focus on that purpose then we, like Arnold Palmer, are in serious trouble.

Why do some people who start out so good in the Christian life get sidetracked? They didn't stay in the Bible every day. Like steering a car we need constant guidance. You need to read the Bible everyday. Set up a plan and stay in the word or you're going to get sidetracked.

God says "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it".

a. Don't let it depart from your mouth - in other words talk about it. Get into a small group so you can discuss what the verses mean and how they apply to your life. If you're not in a small group who do you talk about the Bible with? If you don't talk about it with anybody, you're probably not getting the real truths of it for your life. You need to talk about it with people.

b. Meditate on it day and night - that means seriously think about it. Meditation means thought digestion – rolling it around in your mind. When you get a verse of the Bible and think about it over and over you begin to understand it and it becomes more meaningful in your life.

c. Do it - practice what it says. Be a living Bible. Someone once said that "A Bible that is coming apart is usually owned by somebody that's not." This book will keep you from sin or sin will keep you from this book.

Maybe you are saying "I'm too busy to study the Bible daily". Joshua was leading a couple million people, but he made time to set out plans and stay in the word every day.

Prov 16:1 To man belong the plans of the heart, but from the LORD comes the reply of the tongue.

This means that it is good to plan but God always has the last word. You always want to get the last word from God before you go make the decision. If you're not reading the Bible everyday and thinking about it, meditating on it and talking about it, you might miss that word.

Moving forward we need to be a church that holds firm to the word of God. Introduce The Story – importance of having a good overview of the Bible like a bible survey.

3. STEP OUT IN FAITH – VS 10-11

God told Joshua three times in this chapter to be strong and courageous. Joshua stepped out and ordered the people "Get your supplies ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan".

Faith is not just believing something, mental assent. Faith is action. You can believe in skydiving. You can read lots of books about and take a class. However, faith is jumping out of the plane!

Hope is hearing the melody of the future. Faith is to dance to it. -- Rubem Alves

Joshua 1:9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.

There are 2 things the devil will throw against you when you try to step out in faith. They are fear and discouragement. Fear keeps you from getting started. Discouragement keeps you from finishing -- you get going but then want to give up. Both of these are tools of the devil. He will try to get you to miss God's best for you in the future.

Don't be afraid. Courage is not the absence of fear but the ability to move ahead in spite of your fear. If you're not afraid then you don't need courage. To get rid of fear you move against it. You do the thing you fear the most.

As a kid I remember not liking coming home to a dark house. After all, couldn't there be someone hiding in there ready to kill me? I remember coming home one night. I was afraid to go into the house. I remember thinking that fear was silly so I walked through the entire house in the dark taunting the monsters hiding there to come and get me. Nothing happened. I faced the fear and it went away.

It is fear that keeps you in the desert. The actual number of days it would have taken to walk from Egypt to the Jordan river was just a couple of weeks. However, it had taken them 40 years! It was fear and lack of faith that had kept them wandering around in the desert. Now finally they were ready to face their fears.

A few weeks ago Stu Silvester spoke. He mentioned something very important. He was talking about the life stages of a church. Churches go through times of birth, incorporation and growth but eventually their focus turns inward and they begin to decline and die. Let me ask you a very important question, where are we at as a church?

I believe that we still have a long way to go and that our best days as a church are still before us. Naomi and I made the decision to leave the mission field, from one of the most unreached countries on earth, to return to Canada. We did that because we believed that God was leading us from a season of being on the field to a time of raising up others for the field. I did not come back to Canada to be part of a declining, dying church. God has strategically placed us in a very needy part of Canada to be light and salt. We need to keep moving forward.

This fall we are introducing a special anniversary campaign. The goal is to raise 250,000 for 2013-14. That means $100,000 this year and $150,000 next year. We are raising money for 3 strategic areas – Celebrate, Connect and Communicate.

Celebrate means the first chair, Worship. Exalting God. The way that most people are introduced to this church is through a Sunday worship service. We are growing and we want that growth to continue. We want to raise $150,000 over 2 years so that we can renovate our foyer and sanctuary.

Connect means connecting to one another and connecting to God. This is the middle chairs, Embracing and Equipping. Primarily our focus is raise $50,000 over 2 years to renovate our classrooms in the church, primarily the Fellowship Hall and Youth Auditorium.

The third focus is Communicate. This is the last chair. It is extending the kingdom of God by spreading the Gospel. We want to raise $50,000 over the next 2 years to support a number of projects through local and international missions.

You may be asking why we are trying to raise $150,000 to renovate our building but only $50,000 for missions and outreach. We believe that the more people we have in the first chair the more resources and people we will have for the forth. We saw this happen in the last year. Attendance went up and giving for missions along with it. Just think of what we have been able to accomplish as a church of 1000 people. Let me ask you this, what could we accomplish as a church of 2000? How about as a church of 4000? I long for the day when this church will have a Million dollar mission budget!

Maybe you are thinking that sounds impossible. There was a river that stood in the way from the children of Israel and the Promised Land. God promised that he would deal with that problem.

Joshua 3:13 And as soon as the priests who carry the ark of the LORD -- the Lord of all the earth -- set foot in the Jordan, its waters flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap."

At this point the Jordan River was at flood stage. Usually it was just a big creek but now it was a raging river. Stepping into that swollen river would have taken faith. Add to this the fact that the water did not immediately stop flowing. Look at what the Bible says:

Joshua 3:16 the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away, at a town called Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan

Seventeen miles north, up the Jordan River, God dammed up the water. The moment they stepped in, He dammed it up. But all the water 17 miles down had to rush out first. They didn't know He had stopped it up immediately. It took some time for that to flow down and for the water to go down.

What's the point? The first step is always the hardest. That's the step that requires the most faith. God says, "You lay it on the line and watch Me bail you out!" What is your Jordan River? What is it that looks insurmountable, impossible? Something you can't face financially, physically, health-wise, relationally, emotionally, spiritually? What is your Jordan River? Where do you need to step out in faith? What is it that's keeping you in the desert?

There are times when God will stop the source of our problems but it will take a while to deal with the symptoms. Those are times we need to hang on in faith.

When we moved from Leamington to Brampton I understood this truth. We had a very hard time selling our house. The answer did not come right away. We had to wait for a long time until our house finally sold. During that time there are all sorts of things that go through your mind. Sometimes there will be doubts.

As we move forward as a church we need to do so in faith. Sometimes we will see the blessing right away. Other times we will have to be patient and wait for it. Either way we need to move forward in faith.

Set up a plan - what do I want and what does God want me to do with my life? Pray about it.

Stay in the word - get directions on a daily basis for God's plan. Give Him the last word.

Step out in faith - when you come up on insurmountable problem watch God part the waters in front of you. God holds your future. Face it in faith – be strong and courageous!