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“BEHOLD, I DO A NEW THING”: A DOSE OF NEW HOPE FOR THE NEW YEAR

Damilola Abraham

Happy New Year. I warmly welcome you to the year 2021. *Death to 2020*, the title of the latest Netflix movie released a few days ago, captures what many people think of the last year. It is such a great relief to see the year 2020 gone! For the record, it was the year the world was ravaged with the global coronavirus pandemic in our own lifetime. In what could not be forgotten in a hurry, the effects of the pandemic were devastating on all aspects of human lives around the world: families, businesses, celebrations, holidays, sports, religious gatherings, etc., have been affected. Yet, 2020 was not just about the coronavirus pandemic. Some other issues and events were momentous and attracted global attention. The death of George Floyd—after a police officer in Minneapolis knelt on his neck for eight minutes—enraged the whole world and sparked worldwide #BlackLivesMatter protests. The year-long Brexit negotiations between the UK and the European Union unsettled many British citizens and migrants. Americans and the entire world watched with astonishment the race to the White House with all its shenanigans. Nigeria and some other African countries were also engulfed in nationwide street protests against police brutality. Thousands of lives were lost to the terrorist activities of Boko Haram in North-East Nigeria and Al-Shabaab in East Africa. In sum,

2020 was the year everything changed. The entire rhythm of the world was altered in monumental proportions. Indeed, the events of 2020 were transformative.

As we journey through this new year, still gripped with the fear of the second and third waves of the new more transmittable strain of the virus, not shying away from the many conspiracy theories and uncertainties surrounding the vaccines, the shaky future of the British society now out of the EU, and the fears and doubts of what the next American presidency would bring, I commend to us a *new hope* in God – a new hope in the God that can calm all storms and cause the raging waves of the present pandemic to cease. Hope is an essential attribute of the Christian. Hope is the anchor for our soul in times of trouble. In biblical understanding, hope is a confident expectation and desire that something good will happen in the future. It is an assurance based on our existing experience of God’s goodness and love, and the faithfulness that God already has shown towards us. Our hope in God for a better future is not vague, nor is it wishful thinking. The certainty of our hope is rooted in the immutability of God’s counsel, and in his promise to do new things. Not only that, we are



confident that God will indeed do what he has promised, for his faithfulness is ever sure.

God is a God of new things. The scripture is replete with the many acts of his newness: He causes the afflicted to sing a *new song* (Psalm 40:3); he gives his people a *new name* (Isaiah 62:2); we witness his steadfast love and mercies that are *new every morning* (Lamentations 3:22); when we come into union with his son Jesus Christ, we become *new creations* (2 Corinthians 5:17); he inputs into us a *new heart* and a *new spirit* (Ezekiel 36:26); he will consummate everything at the end of this age by creating a *new heaven* and a *new earth* (Revelations 21:1) and he will make *everything new* (Revelations 21:5). While he remains the same (Hebrews 13:8) and does not change (Malachi 3:6), he changes times and seasons (Daniel 2:21). He causes one season to end and he ushers in a new one. God created a need for times and seasons and thought it necessary to divide time into days, weeks, months, and years, thereby creating the possibility of a fresh and new beginning.

In the oracles of Isaiah, we see God's great promise of a new beginning in concrete terms: "Do not remember the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing, Now, it shall spring forth; Shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert" (Isaiah 43:18-19). At the time these words were uttered, the worst had happened to the nation of Israel — they were locked down in Babylonian captivity, God's treasured people have been vanquished, their cities burned with fire, they were transported to a strange land and forced into hard labour, and they were without any hope of returning home. Yet, into their situation, God speaks a message of hope and restoration. They were commanded not to remember the past ugly events — their challenges, suffering, and shame — for God will do new things. This message of hope sets within them a future assurance of restoration and a new beginning in their native land. This same prophecy speaks to our situation today. Let us not remember the woes and the tragedies of the year 2020. We must leave the past behind us and focus on the bright side of the future that is now here with us. Just as God promised to do 'a new thing' for the nation of Israel in Isaiah's days, God will do a new thing in our world in 2021.

The hope of a new beginning in a new year and the promise of God to do new things provide the impetus for strength, encouragement, peace, and excitement that 2021 will be a better year. We shall overcome this pandemic. The psalmist also provides us with a word of encouragement from his expression of hope during his affliction, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? *Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation*" (Psalms 42:5). Yes, we will hope in God, and we shall again praise him. As we hope in God in anticipation of a new beginning, I graciously invite us to become proclaimers of the same message of hope in this new season to the troubled world around us. Let us bring hope to the many who have suffered losses in their health, finances, marriages, careers and businesses as a result of the pandemic. Let us offer hope in God to counter people's fears, and to build community resilience as well as individual mental and spiritual resilience. Once again, welcome to 2021. "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13).

Shalom and have a blessed year.



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