

**GATEWAY TO TOMORROW**  
**JOHN 16:33**  
**1/3/99**

We are in the process of making some adjustments with our platform area and so for that reason our choir had to slip out this way this morning. Please forgive us for that. I promise it will be better in the days to come and better as we step into this new year together and we are looking forward to that but I tell you my heart was blessed by that song. How about yours? Amen. That is right.

Just a few days ago I was going through some of my old briefcases that I use from time to time when traveling here and there. As I was going through them I found that I just had a number of boarding passes, stubs, that I had not thrown away. I also had ticket receipts. I don't know why I hang on to those things but I guess, like most of us, I am always worried that those frequent flyer miles aren't going to get counted so I try to be sure that I can always put my hand on them and get to them again. As I was going through and throwing these things away the other day I thought, you know in so many ways when you turn the last page of a calendar year like 1998 it is like throwing away the boarding pass from the flight you have just taken because it is something that has come to an end, it has come to completion. In many ways, as you begin a new year like 1999, it is like being issued a new boarding pass for a new flight to the future. This morning, by virtue of the fact that you are here in this place, you have been issued a boarding pass on flight 1999 headed to tomorrow. You have thrown away the boarding pass to flight 1998 because that leg of the journey is done.

As you stand here today releasing yesterday and looking toward tomorrow, it is important for you and for me that we begin to enter through the gateway to tomorrow with a fresh sense of perspective about where we are going and about what tomorrow will hold for each and every one of us. In fact you may find it interesting, if you do not know this already, that our month, January, is named after the ancient Roman God, Januus, which was a God that had two faces, one facing this direction and the other facing that direction. So when we come to the month of January it is as though we are closing the door on looking to the past but we begin to look afresh and anew at the future.

Today, as you stand at the gateway of tomorrow, you have this boarding pass in your hand for flight 1999. I want you to be able to take a step through the gateway and begin to make the journey to tomorrow with a great sense of confidence and with a very real sense of clarity about what may be ahead in the journey for you.

I want to invite you this morning, if you have your Bible, to take it and open it to the heart of Matthew, Chapter 5. Matthew, Chapter 5 in the fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters where the greatest sermon that was ever preached was being preached by the greatest preacher who ever lived. His name is Jesus Christ. Jesus was talking to those who were there with Him that day about what it meant to follow Him. He was bringing the message of the kingdom of God to the hearts and minds of the people in that day and in that time. There is something that Jesus mentions, actually in a teaching on the subject of

love, that I think has inference and reference for us today. In Matthew, Chapter 5, verse 43 Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said you shall love your neighbor and you shall hate your enemy but I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you." Now that is a New Year's message in and of itself isn't it? But since that may be a little heavy for us this morning, let's just go on and take the rest of his explanation here beginning in verse 45. He says, "You are to act this way that you may be sons of your father in heaven." Then look how he describes the Father in Heaven and the relationship that all of us share to Him. It says, "For he makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good and he sends rain on the just and on the unjust." Now when you start thinking about our Father, God, and when you think about how God operates as Creator in this universe, you find that actually whether you are a follower or not, whether you are a believer or not, that the fact of the matter is this, the same sun rises every day on the good and on the evil. The same rain falls on the just and on the unjust. Frankly, I believe that simply in that illustration we find one of the most important things for us to understand as we board flight 1999 to tomorrow and that is simply this, regardless of who you are, regardless of how long you have known Christ as your Lord and Savior, regardless of how many victories or how many defeats you may have had in the year gone by, the fact of the matter is, as you board this flight to the future, you and I need to understand that Christianity is not immunity. As we begin to make this journey into the future the sun is not always going to shine just on our house while it rains on the rest of the block. But if it rains, it is probably going to rain on us just like it rains on others and we will enjoy the benefit of sunshine in the grace of God just as others are enjoying in their life.

The fact of the matter is that as you board this flight to tomorrow you and I must understand that in 1999 we are going to face new problems. Now that is not really good news this morning is it? However, it is true isn't it? It is going to rain on the just and the unjust. The same sun is going to rise on each of our lives and we need to understand that we are going to face new problems so what we need to do is do just exactly what you do when you get on an airplane. You get into that airplane, you find your seat, you go through the gate, they detach this portion and keep it, they hand you that boarding card, they tell you go on, you find your seat, and the first thing that you are required to do is to fasten your seatbelt. Why? Because they want to be sure you are prepared in the event of a problem. I believe today that as we stand at the precipice of this new year that it is important that we are honest with God and honest with ourselves and that we understand that whatever else may be through the gateway of tomorrow, one thing for sure is we are going to face some problems this year.

Listen to what Jesus said in the 16<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Gospel of John. In John, Chapter 16, and in verse 33. I am reading this from The Message; a wonderful new translation by Peterson that I think may be helpful. Some of you may enjoy this year, just in rejuvenating your life, taking a new translation like The Message or the new Living translation or one that you have not used, but a good translation, and simply to read through it, it will enhance your Bible reading as you do. You didn't pay anything extra for that I just thought I would tell you that.

Now, let's read this together. It says, "I told you all this so that trusting me you will be unshakable and assured deeply at peace. In this godless world you will continue to experience difficulties but take heart, I have conquered the world." Now Jesus just tells us straight up, in this world you are going to experience difficulties. You and I need to understand today that it is a fact of life that as we enter into the new year that there are going to be new problems. They are unavoidable. But just as problems are unavoidable, the way that we face those problems in our life is consequential. Since you are going to face problems and I am going to problems let's face them with our seatbelt fastened and with a sense of confidence that our Captain, the Captain of our souls, Jesus Christ, is going to see us safely through the journey in the year that is to come. The significant thing about the way you face problems and the way I face problems is that we need to learn to face them by focusing on character rather than on circumstance. Now hear me! We need to learn to face our problems by focusing on our character rather than our circumstance.

When we focus on the circumstances of our lives we tend to focus on the surface issues, just that which is right there at the surface. When you are sitting on an airplane it is very easy to look out the window and see that big monstrosity of metal that is sitting over there next to you, to look at those oversized tires, to look at those trucks that are just feeding into there pounds and pounds and pounds of weight, called luggage and cargo, and looking at the masses of people getting onto that big piece of machinery. It is easy for you from a surface level to say this thing can't fly! I mean, it is just too big! It just weighs too much! How does something like that get up in the air and leave the ground? If you simply focus on the surface, on the circumstances, your mind would say, this doesn't happen. For that reason some of you don't fly, right? I know I have some non-flyers here this morning. But you see, if you look very carefully at that piece of machinery sitting next to you, you will find that not only is there the cargo and not only are there the people but there are some very large cylindrical-looking objects on the side of that piece of machinery. What you can't necessarily see is what is housed inside them. They happen to be turbines, jet engines. Those engines have the ability to create propulsion that will ultimately take that piece of metal beyond the law of gravity, off of the ground through the law of aerodynamics and that piece of metal can fly.

Something you and I need to understand is that if all we do is look at the surface, at the circumstances, at the problems that come, and we think no further, we see no clearer than simply the surface issues, then we are going to have to understand that we are doomed to failure. But if, on the other hand, we will look beneath the surface and realize that yes, there are problems in life, that there are obstacles to advancing in life, but the fact of life is that the one who is in charge has the ability to do something in me that can overcome these surface issues in my life, then I begin to face these problems, these challenges, with a whole new perspective.

Romans, Chapter 8, verse 28. "We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love him and to those who are called according to his purpose." Then you know what the very next verse talks about? It talks about the fact that those who are called according to the purpose of God are those whom God predestined to be conformed

to the image of his Son. When you and I face problems in life it is important that instead of focusing on the circumstances that we get to the issue of character and that we understand that in whatever the issue may be on the outside what God desires to do on the interior of my life and the interior of your life is that he desires to make us image bearers of Jesus Christ. It says in Philippians, Chapter 1, verse 6 that we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God has before ordained that we should walk in them. God is working in you! God is working through your problems! God is working in the obstacles! What he is working to do is not simply to change the surface of circumstance but what he is working to do is to shape the depth of character in your life. Consequently, when you face new problems this year, focus on character instead of circumstances and then choose to face the problems of your life confidently and creatively. Confidently and creatively because you have these parallel promises in your life that God is going to use them for a greater weight of glory and God is going to use them for a stronger workmanship in your life. You see, each of us needs to see and to understand that instead of facing these things and saying oh, what a miserable thought about the problems of tomorrow we must instead begin to say thank you Lord that whatever I face this year is going to help to work the work of character in me. One of the great challenges when you talk about character is dealing with the interior of your life and in particular dealing with the issue of your attitude.

So much of the outcome of my problems is in proportion to the attitude that I have in those problems, the perspective and the attitude that I bring to those problems. I have to have an attitude that is eager to learn even from things I don't enjoy. I love what Proverbs 18 and verse 15 says in the New Living translation, another one of those you might want to pick up and look at this year. Listen to what it says. It says, "Intelligent people are always open to new ideas. In fact, they look for them." Are you the kind of person who is open to new things, to God doing something new even through something hard in your life? Listen again to that same translation at the point of Ephesians, Chapter 4, verses 23 and 24. "Your attitudes and thoughts must be constantly changing for the better. You must be a new and different person holy and good." God takes the hard things of life and keeps trying to do something new in you and something new in me. But there is a problem with that. That is, instead of us allowing God to do character work and creative work in our lives we have an attitude that says I just gotta get out of this. I just have to tell somebody how miserable my life is. Every one of us struggles with a problem, a heart problem called hardening of the attitudes. Have you ever known anybody who had that problem?

Not long ago USA Today newspaper did an interview with a man who was 105 years old. The interviewer looked at him and said to him, sir, you have lived 105 years you have seen a lot of changes in your life. He looked at that interviewer and said, I sure have and I have been against every one of them. He has a problem called hardening of the attitudes. I want you to know that one of the things that God struggles with in our lives is the fact that we have this problem called hardening of the attitudes. We increase the problems in flight because of the fact that we are not willing to abide and we are not willing to obey and allow God to work to bring adjustments, to be pliable, to be moldable, to be shaped beyond the surface and into the interior of our lives. Now I know

change is not easy. Facing the challenges of life and the changes they bring can be some of the hardest, heart-breaking moments of life.

It was Mark Twain who said, there is only one person who likes change and that is a baby with a wet diaper. That is about the truth! Most of them cry while it is happening, did you ever notice that? But, you see we do have to understand that as we go through life we are going to face new problems. As we face those new problems we need to focus on character instead of circumstance. We need to consider and count the challenges and changes that come as a part of God's confident creative work in our lives to shape something new and fresh in us. Then when we face those problems it is important that we do not allow ourselves to be limited by our experience.

You know, it is amazing how many times in life we become limited by our own experience. We go far enough in life to have some experiences and then the next thing you know experience is a bad teacher. An experience tells me I can't, I won't, and I don't. As a result, when the problems of life come I immediately go into this isolated state, this paralysis that says I am limited. But I want you know that God uses the problems of life to become the very points that He explodes and creates new open doorways to take us beyond the limitations of our experience which allows us to walk and to journey with him in new and fresh pathways in life.

Like many have done in this building I took my family, not so long ago, to see the new movie The Prince of Egypt. It is a wonderful movie. It is an animated movie. I think that most of us go expecting that because it is animated it is going to be sort of silly, sort of cartoonish, and it is not that at all. It is the story of the life of Moses. But whether you are watching the Prince of Egypt or the old movie The Ten Commandments or whether you are simply reading through the books of the Bible and reading through the Book of Exodus, what we read as we make our way through, is about a man named Moses who God touched, raised, and used to be a leader among his people, who had been called, who had been enslaved in Egypt. There is a marvelous moment in which, after all of the diversity and all of the challenges and all of the resistance of Pharaoh, the leader of Egypt, that finally he gives in and he says to Moses, take your people and get out. So Moses begins to lead the people out. It is a beautiful scene in this new movie; just the sense of celebration as the people are released from all of the drudgery and hard work that has been a part of their lives. They don't know exactly where they are going they just know they are following the leader. But you know there comes that moment when after they have traveled out of Egypt and they feel like they are on the horizon of the future when suddenly they are there at the edge of the Dead Sea and as they begin...It is the Red Sea isn't it? I just wanted to know if you were listening or not. I mean, you know you all go on autopilot on me here saying yea, we know the story. The Red Sea, they came right there to the edge of the Red Sea. As they were there at the edge of the Red Sea suddenly there is a cloud behind them, the armies of Pharaoh are coming against them, and here Moses is standing with all these people with a sea in front of him and with an army behind him. It is a hopeless situation. It is hopeless with one exception. Moses decided not to be limited by his experience.

Now, experience being his teacher, Moses would have known that you don't start leading a group of people into the water. I mean, there is one certain outcome. Most of them will drown. But do you know what he did? Moses refused to be limited by his experience. Moses faced the new problem that was in front of him and he took the staff of God, he held it up, he believed God, and he put his feet in the water and what happened! Whew! A pathway right through the middle of the Red Sea! What an incredible moment it was not to be limited by experience and to see the work of God.

Listen to what the Bible tells us in the Book of Isaiah. If you have your Bible, turn over there to Isaiah, Chapter 43, just for a moment. Isaiah, Chapter 43, verse 1 and following. God is talking to his people Israel and he talks about how he has created them and how he has formed them, how he has redeemed them, and how he has called them by his own name. In Isaiah, Chapter 43, verse 2 the Bible says, "When you pass through the waters I will be with you and through the rivers they shall not overflow you and when you walk through the fire you shall not be burned nor shall the flame scorch you for I, the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, am your Savior." Then look down in verse 15. "I the Lord, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King, I am the one who makes a way in the sea and a path through the mighty waters, who brings forth the chariot and the horse, the army and the power, they shall lie down together. They shall not rise. They are extinguished. They are quenched like a wick. 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 make a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert." Don't be limited by your experience. Be confident in your faith that whatever problems you face on flight 1999 that God is going to do something in you and ultimately to do something through you that will make all of the difference in your life.

There is something else, though, about this thing, this flight, and this gateway to tomorrow. Just as it is true and it is real that every one of us in this building are going to face new problems in the journey that we make to tomorrow, there is something else that is going to happen. Have you ever noticed how you are sitting on an airplane and you have buckled in and you start down the runway and within just a matter of moments there is that wonderful feeling of we are off the ground. Then there is that horrible feeling of man; my ears need to pop. Have you ever had that problem? Suddenly you start feeling a new pressure on the inside. Guess what! The same thing is going to happen in 1999. On flight 1999 not only are you going to face new problems and you need to fasten your seatbelt but you are going to feel some new pressures this year.

The second point of my message, if you want to write it down, is chew some gum. Now I know you never thought you would come to church and hear a preacher tell you to chew gum. I am not telling you to chew gum at church, okay? You may feel pressure. Maybe that is the only way you can stay awake but just the same, what I am talking about is that in life, if you are going to overcome the pressure changes that go on when you are flying in an airplane, you chew gum, try to pop your ears in some way to keep that pressure from building up. In the same way in life, if you are going to go through this year and you are going to advance, you are going to have to be able to withstand some pressure.

There are going to be pressure points in your life and there are going to be pressure points in my life.

I have found in life that there are at least four consistent pressure points that I face four areas where the pressure builds in my life.

1. Responsibility. The pressure point of responsibility, just what I need to do and accomplish in life.
2. The pressure point that I would call adversity. The pressure of adversity. The things that keep me from doing what I think I need to do and what I know I want to do in life.
3. Then there are the pressure points of uncertainty, just knowing that I cannot control tomorrow. Not tomorrow, being Monday, January 4 or the tomorrows that will come in 1999.
4. Then there are the pressure points of opportunity. When I have new opportunities to do new things it is wonderful! It is great! But they always bring pressure in my life.

I have simply found that whether it is responsibility or adversity, uncertainty or opportunity, in my life just as in your life, pressure comes in life. There is only one way we are going to survive that pressure. That is to have a corresponding pressure on the inside that keeps me from giving in and collapsing.

I don't know if you know this or not but just by virtue of the atmosphere around us, there are actually 14.7 pounds of pressure per square inch pressing against you right now. Did you know that? The only thing that is a variable is how many square inches of you there are. Some of us do feel more pressure than others of us today! What is it that keeps you from collapsing under the weight of all of these pounds of pressure in our atmosphere? It is because there is a corresponding pressure on the inside that keeps you from collapsing on the outside. What I am saying to you is this. As you feel new pressures in the year to come what is needed in your life is conviction. A deeper sense of spiritual conviction that you can trust God, that you can believe God, and that you will stand with God regardless of what may come your way.

Someone has defined convictions, and I like this very much, as the intersections of the Christian life where our faith in what we know about God meets with the experience that we are called upon to endure with God. Let me say that one more time. Convictions are the intersections of the Christian life where our faith in what we know about God meets with the experience that we are called upon to endure with God. Thus, deepening our convictions will help us to develop our character. Just as God uses problems to shape us into having a deeper character and a greater image of Christ, God allows the pressure in our life to deepen and to strengthen the convictions of life.

Do you remember a man by the name of Paul who followed Jesus Christ? He was a man who constantly faced pressure in his life. He had some incredible pressure points in his life. In the Book of II Corinthians, Chapter 1, verse 8 Paul, in speaking of his life, talked

about being under great pressure as he sought to fulfill the work of God in his life. But he said in another place, whatever things were gain to me I count as loss for the sake of Christ. Then he went on to say it is not as though I have already become perfect. It is not as though I have already completed the journey. He said but what I do is that I forget what is behind and I press toward what is ahead and I strive for the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. What Paul was revealing there in the third chapter of Philippians is that there was an internal conviction in his life that regardless of whatever else may happen to him that the focus of his life was going to be on going forward with God. As you feel new pressures this year, just as new problems are going to require some confidence and some creativity and some change, it is important in your life, as you feel new pressures, that you experience a deepening sense of conviction in your life.

You are going to face new problems. You are going to feel new pressures. You need to fasten your seatbelt. You need to chew some gum. But there is one more thing you need to see and understand about this new year on flight 1999. That is, you need and I need to focus on some new possibilities. We need to see the tomorrows that God is setting before us as new horizons of possibility and opportunity to walk with Him and to live for Him in this world.

You know, one of the interesting things that happens on flights such as this is that you get on board, you fasten the seatbelt, they go through all of these safety requirements, you finally take off, you get up there, you are soaring through the runway, you are dealing with all those pressure changes, and then, finally you reach cruising altitude. You know what they always do when you get to cruising altitude? You hear this little “bing” that goes off and then suddenly one of the attendants comes on the microphone and says, ladies and gentleman the captain has extinguished the fasten seatbelt sign now indicating that it is possible for you to get up and to move around in the cabin. Now think about that for just a minute. Just a few minutes earlier you were sitting on the ground. Now you are 30,000 feet in the air and you can unfasten your seatbelt and you can walk around at 30,000 feet! That is a pretty incredible thought isn't it? That is kind of a new possibility isn't it, the ability to walk at a level you have never walked before. In much the same way, when God begins to create the new horizons of tomorrow and when God begins to do new things in our lives, God begins to allow us to walk at a level above the circumstances of life that we never dreamed possible.

One thing that is sure for every one of us is that God is going to open some new doors in the year to come. While the opportunities will be real our ability to meet those opportunities with a potential of a God-given faith and a God-driven conviction is not going to be automatic. We are going to have to choose to face those possibilities. To choose to respond to what God brings before us, whether it is an opportunity to share Christ with someone or the opportunity to become involved in a new ministry. Whatever it may be we are going to have to choose by faith and with conviction to take that step with God. That is exactly what I believe is important for us this year, that we begin to focus on those new possibilities as God's people here at Boca Raton Community Church, that we see this as the greatest day, the most important day, to share Christ in our community and to touch the world from this community with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I have never believed there was a brighter moment or greater opportunity to live for Christ than this moment because we are looking toward the third millenium. We are also looking toward the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Ladies and gentleman, there is the possibility, the very real possibility, that Jesus Christ could meet flight 1999. We need to understand that there are many opportunities for us in that. We need to be prepared. We need to be ready. We need to be willing to walk with God. The greatest thing I can tell you about the year to come and about all of your tomorrows is this. God desires to be involved in all of them with you. God has created a way for you and for me, every one of us, to have a personal relationship with Him. He has made a new provision. He created a new flight plan, if you will, in life, that was intended to get us off of all of our own sinfulness and self-directives and to get us on course with His plan and purpose for our life. That new provision, that new flight plan, is what is called in the Bible, the New Covenant. That new covenant is simply a provision and a plan that God has made to bring us back into relationship with him so that rather than simply trying to live life flying by the seat of our pants that we could give the charge of our life to a new Captain who would take control of our life and who would begin to take us in accordance with the destiny and the destination of God in our life. God wants you and He wants me to experience the benefits, the privileges, of that new covenant in life.

Hear me carefully. God is not interested in just being your companion in the year to come. He will be your companion. But what He wants you to do is to let Him become your Captain, not your co-pilot, your Captain. The job of your life and of my life is to live life in such a way that we are willing to follow the Captain, to trust the Captain, and to obey the Captain because He is in charge of the journey. So today if that has never happened in your life, if you are trying to just start this year with new resolve and new determination to make your life better, I want you to know it will never happen until you come to the place in life that you turn over the controls of your life to the Captain Jesus Christ Who is the Captain of our souls, the Captain of our faith, and that you give Him charge of your life.

In just a moment we are going to share together the symbol of the new covenant. It is the bread and it is the cup. These symbolize what God paid, the price that was paid, to provide this New Covenant for us, this new relationship. It was the body and it was the blood of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. To live your life journeying with God is free but it cost Him dearly. It cost Him the life of His Son. Jesus Christ died for every one of us that He might become the Savior of all mankind that anyone who would put their faith and trust in Him might be forgiven. But there is a requirement and that is that you have to be willing to give Him your life. It is free to receive but it will cost you your all as you give charge of your life to him.

This morning, in just a moment, as we begin to distribute these elements, I want to simply remind you that these elements are for those who have given Jesus Christ charge of their life. They are specifically for those who can say He is the Captain of my soul and I belong to Him. Never get the idea that the Lord's Supper is just sort of like the snack

they give you on the airlines, that everyone there just ought to take a little part of the snack because that is not what the Lord's supper is. It is only for those who have received Christ and who have given charge of their life to Him. Let me also say that this is not some sort of a first class meal for just a few exclusive people. You see, every one of us is able to partake of this meal only because of the grace of God. We didn't earn it. We don't deserve it. It is something He has provided for us. So those of us who do partake of this supper partake of it with grace and gratitude thanking God for His love and His goodness in our lives today. Jesus came and was born among us that He might go to the cross and die for us. The demand of his death, burial, and resurrection when it is applied to my life is that in all things in my life He is to have pre-eminence. That means He is to have first place. So this morning I want you to examine your heart. I want you to ask yourself this question – have I entered into a new covenant relationship with God? Do I know Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior? If not, then I just want you to sit quietly in these moments and to simply think about what it means this year to try to just go it on your own or to consider giving your life, the charge of your life, to Jesus Christ.

For those of us who have given Him charge I want you to partake of this supper but as you hold those elements in your hand, I just want you to ask this question – Is He in first place in me? Is He my Captain or am I trying to pilot the plane as a passenger? Let's just have these moments as moments of surrender in our lives. Let's be grateful today for a new covenant that gives us a new confidence as we look through the gateway to tomorrow.

Gentleman, would you help me to prepare to serve this meal? Let me lead us in prayer.

Father, I thank you today for the provision of a new covenant. I thank you for the broken body and the shed blood of our Savior Jesus Christ. I thank you, Lord, that as we share in these elements that we share in that which was paid for us that we might be made right with you and that we might have our sins forgiven and that we might become image bearers of Jesus Christ. Work in us afresh and anew even in these moments as we reflect on the new covenant we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Sermon presented by David McKinley  
01/03/99