

December 31, 2006

New Year Anticipation: Passion For Jesus

John 17:25-26

NLT

"O righteous Father, the world doesn't know you, but I do; and these disciples know you sent me. And I have revealed you to them and will keep on revealing you. I will do this so that your love for me may be in them and I in them."

NCV

"Father, you are the One who is good. The world does not know you, but I know you, and these people know you sent me. I showed them what you are like, and I will show them again. Then they will have the same love that you have for me, and I will live in them."

AMP

I have made Your Name known to them and revealed Your character and Your very Self, and I will continue to make [You] known, that the love which You have bestowed upon Me may be in them [felt in their hearts] and that I [Myself] may be in them.

I'm not one to make New Year's resolutions...are you?

At the beginning of a New Year, a high school principal decided to post his teachers' New Year's resolutions on the bulletin board. As the teachers gathered around the bulletin board, a great commotion started. One of the teachers was complaining. "Why weren't my resolutions posted?" She was throwing such a temper tantrum that the principal hurried to his office to see if he had overlooked her resolutions. Sure enough, he had mislaid them on his desk. As he read her resolutions he was astounded. This teacher's first resolution was not to let little things upset her in the New Year.

I don't know if you are into making New Year's resolutions. I do know something that is more important than resolutions, though. How do you see this New Year? Is it one that you approach with anxiety or anticipation?

Michael Bausch tells a great story about archaeologist Howard Carter. In 1922 Carter was completing nearly fifteen years of digging in the famous Valley of the Kings in Egypt. He was hoping to find the royal tomb of Pharaoh Tutankhamen. Having found nothing, his days of digging were coming to an end. Money was running out. Then workers discovered sixteen stairs leading into the earth. Thousands of baskets filled with rocks and sand had to be carried away, but eventually a door was found at the end of a long passageway. Carter drilled a small hole in the door and stuck an iron-testing rod into a dark, blank space. He then inserted a candle into the hole and peered in. As his eyes grew accustomed to the light, details emerged into his view, and he saw strange animals, statues, and everywhere the glint (sparkle) of gold.

He wrote of that moment, "For the moment, I was struck dumb with amazement." A partner asked, "Can you see anything?" And Carter's reply was, "Yes,

wonderful things.”

We can look into this New Year and see wonderful things, if we look forward with anticipation instead of anxiety.

Today is the last day of 2006. Some of you may be anxious about the New Year, some may anticipate wonderful things and may even make resolutions, that is, resolve to do all they can to have a better year.

I was going to call this message simply, “New Year Resolution – Passion for Jesus.” But I changed it from resolution which is determination to “New Year Anticipation” which is an expectation and a hope. Perhaps we need both, determination and anticipation, resolve and hope.

We don’t have to be anxious about the New Year if we will anticipate wonderful things. We must have hope and faith instead of anxiety. I believe we can have hope for the New Year if our New Year Anticipation is passion for Jesus. Anticipating a life with God gives us hope no matter what circumstances we may face in 2007. Passion brings power. Passion for Jesus will give us the power of Jesus.

So how do we develop this passion and power? It will take both determination and anticipation. We will need both resolve and hope.

When I think of someone with passion for Jesus I think of Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus. Let’s look at Luke 10:38-42 (NLT)

As Jesus and the disciples continued on their way to Jerusalem, they came to a village where a woman named Martha welcomed them into her home. 39 Her sister, Mary, sat at the Lord's feet, listening to what he taught. 40 But Martha was worrying over the big dinner she was preparing. She came to Jesus and said, "Lord, doesn't it seem unfair to you that my sister just sits here while I do all the work? Tell her to come and help me."

41 But the Lord said to her, "My dear Martha, you are so upset over all these details! 42 There is really only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it--and I won't take it away from her."

Mary had such a desire and affection for Jesus that she sat at His feet listening to all He had to say. It was dinner time, but she preferred to be with Jesus than to eat. In her culture she was responsible, along with her sister Martha, to serve Jesus, His disciples and any other guests that may have been in her home. However, she didn’t care what others thought or would say or what was proper, she cared only about being with Jesus. I’m sure if Jesus told her to go and help her sister, she would have done so in an instant. But there was no way she was going to leave the presence of Jesus unless He commanded her to do so. Furthermore, she had a stronger desire to be with Jesus than to serve Jesus.

When Martha came to Jesus and said, "Lord, doesn't it seem unfair to you that my sister just sits here while I do all the work? Tell her to come and help me," she was asking, not telling Jesus to rebuke her sister. Jesus not only refuses to rebuke Mary, He commends her. He says, "...There is really only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it--and I won't take it away from her." What had Mary discovered? She discovered that to be with Jesus is better than serving Him. We can be so busy, even doing good things, that we don't have time for Jesus. We can even put our confidence in the good things we do as Christians, while neglecting personal time with Jesus.

If you are to develop a passion for Jesus the first step is obvious. You cannot love someone or have passion for someone you don't know.

When I first met Ann I wanted to be with her as often as I could. Sometimes, after spending hours with her, talking together, I would go home and the first thing I would do is call her, and we'd talk some more. Why, I wanted to know her, I wanted to be with her so I could know her better, because I loved her. And the more I got to know her, the more I loved her.

Like Mary, we must take time to get to know Jesus. The more we sit at His feet and listen to Him, the better we will know Him. And the more we know Him the more we will love Him.

To develop a passion for Jesus you must set aside a regular time for personal meditation in Scripture and prayer. You must guard against this time becoming mechanical or ritualistic. I purposely used the word, "meditation" rather than study or reading of the Bible. The religious leaders of Christ's day, the Pharisees, read the Bible and knew the Scriptures very well, but they never heard the voice of God. That's what Jesus said to the Pharisees in John 5:37 (THE MESSAGE), "The Father who sent me, confirmed me. And you missed it. You never heard his voice.." We can so easily neglect our Bible and prayer or our Bible reading can easily become a formal procedure or duty and our prayer time can be nothing more than a to do list we give God.

In our times of Bible meditation and prayer, we must remind ourselves that the purpose is to meet with a real Person, not just accomplish our daily duty. We meet with a real Person, who speaks, guides, encourages, reveals and convicts. He gets angry, and He forgives. We are capable of grieving Him or making Him rejoice.

Don't assume that reading or praying necessarily enters you into His presence. Take the time to enter His presence first so that He can meet you in your reading and praying. Ask for God's presence, don't assume it or worse, neglect it. Come to the Word and prayer with the desire to meet and talk with a Person. Listen as you meditate and pray. This year learn to set aside a regular time – resolve, be determined to do that. As you do that on a regular basis, anticipate, expect to meet a Person, and that Person will not disappoint you.

A second key to developing passion for Jesus is to remove any barriers in the relationship.

I cannot stand to have my wife upset with me. When she is I want to fix that immediately. I love her too much to let anything come between us for too long. It is the same with my relationship with Jesus. If something comes between us I want it removed as soon as possible. I don't want anything to separate me from Him for any prolonged time.

Whenever we sin we create a barrier between us and God. The guilt can keep us from going into the presence of the Lord. I can't enjoy someone's company until a hurt has been made right. It is the same with our relationship with the Lord. There is only one thing that will remove the barrier of sin and guilt when we have disobeyed God. The grace of God because of the sacrifice of Christ. 1 John 1:7-9 (NLT):

But if we are living in the light of God's presence, just as Christ is, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from every sin. If we say we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and refusing to accept the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong.

The guilt of sin is taken away whenever we confess that sin, trusting Jesus to forgive and cleanse us. Too many who know this are still weighed down with guilt. They live with a sense of condemnation rather than the freedom of Christ. Some say they have confessed but they don't "feel" forgiven. You must do more than say the words, you must trust the power and love of Jesus to forgive. We will never be good enough, holy enough, or disciplined enough to get into God's presence apart from the sacrifice of Jesus for us on the cross. Don't try to pay for your sin by remaining guilty. Trust in the love of Christ and simply accept His forgiveness with thanksgiving.

There is one more essential if we are going to have passion for Jesus (as we finally get to today's text). As has been mentioned already, our confidence should not be in our discipline, our good intentions, our knowledge of the Bible, or how busy we are serving God. These do not produce love for God. I read something this week that a man (Mike Bickle) said shocked him when the Lord said it to him. Here is what the Lord said, *"If you ever make it in the Christian life, it won't be because you are a good follower. It will be because my Son is a good leader. Put your confidence in His ability to lead you, not your ability to follow."*

That divine revelation should pierce our hearts, free us, and help us. Please don't misunderstand. I am not saying we don't need discipline, or knowledge of the Bible, or godly behavior – certainly we do. I am not saying we just sit back and simply let God do it all. We must do the right things, but we must never put our confidence in our ability to do those things. It is so incredibly easy to deceive ourselves like the Pharisees did. Passion for Jesus is a gift we should pray and ask God for. James 4:2b (NLT): *the reason you don't have what you want is that you don't ask God for it.*

Now, look again at a prayer that Jesus Himself prayed.

John 17:25-26 (NCV)

“Father, you are the One who is good. The world does not know you, but I know you, and these people know you sent me. I showed them what you are like, and I will show them again. Then they will have the same love that you have for me, and I will live in them.”

Jesus said that He is the One who makes God know to us, who shows us what He is like and will continue to do so. Then He mentions His purpose for this. He wants His followers to love Him with the same love that the Father has for Him. I have read this verse many times before, but I never saw that. I know I will never love as perfectly as the Father just as I will never be as holy as the Father. Yet God says to us (Lev 19:2 NIV): “Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.”

We cannot make ourselves holy. We are made holy by the power of the Holy Spirit. By that same power, we can live our lives with a consuming passion for our Lord. Everyday, starting in the morning and praying it during the day when we slip into neutral, we should pray, “Holy Spirit, give me power to love Jesus like the Father does.” How does the Father love the Son? He is devoted to Him, He is one with Him, His eye is always on Him, He never leaves Him. If you pray this, a passion for Jesus will flow into your heart and develop. People will see a change, you will see a change.

Don’t be passive about acquiring passion for Jesus. Make it the focus of your life. You will experience His love for you and you will fall more in love with Him. You will become more like Him. You will begin to love what He loves and hate what He hates. And your passion for Him will give you more spiritual power in your life.

Anticipate more passion for Jesus in 2007, because you have prayed for it, because you will confess when you do anything wrong that places a barrier between you and Jesus and because you will set apart time to be with Him...and expect wonderful things.