

January 4, 2009

## A GREAT AND WONDERFUL NEW YEAR

*“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” Ephesians 1:3*

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 how you are doing on your 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 excitement and 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 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.”

The Apostle Paul gives us some reasons you and I can look into this new year and see wonderful things. He gives us reasons why we can look forward with excitement and anticipation instead of anxiety.

**FIRST OF ALL, PAUL SAYS WE ARE BLESSED.** He writes, Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the

heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” Is there anyone in this room who does not feel blessed?

Are there no blessings in your life? Do you have no one who loves you, no beauty outside your window, no strength left in your body, no mind to guide you to new pleasures and opportunities, no faith to bear you up when circumstances weigh you down? Are you really without any resources for making 2009 a wonderful year? Count your blessings, says the old hymn.

An old man came to the back door of a house some college kids were renting. The old man’s eyes were glassy and his face glistened with silver stubble. He clutched a wicker basket holding a few unappealing vegetables. He bid the students a good morning and offered his produce for sale. They were uneasy. They made a quick purchase to alleviate both their pity and their fear.

To their chagrin, he returned the next week, introducing himself as Mr. Roth, the man who lived in the shack down the road. As their fears subsided, they got close enough to realize it wasn’t alcohol but cataracts that marbled his eyes. On subsequent visits, he would shuffle in, wearing two mismatched right shoes, and pull out a harmonica. With glazed eyes set on a future glory, he’d puff out old gospel tunes between conversations about vegetables and religion.

On one visit, he exclaimed, “The Lord is so good! I came out of my shack this morning and found a bag full of shoes and clothing on my porch.” “That’s wonderful, Mr. Roth!” the students said, “We’re happy for you.” “You know what’s even more wonderful?” he asked. “Just yesterday I met some people that could use them.” Count your blessings. We are blessed.

**PAUL ALSO SAYS, WE ARE CHOSEN.** “For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.”

You and I have been chosen. Can you get your mind around an idea so powerful? You have been chosen. What a beautiful word that is – chosen.

Can you remember the agony of not being chosen? Is there anybody in the room who was ever the last to be chosen for baseball? Anyone who did not make the cheerleading squad? Anyone ever sit on the bench while someone else got the glory? Well, this time you and I are not left out. We have been chosen.

Yes, it makes a difference in anybody's life if they feel chosen. This is why a parent should never, even in jest, give a child the idea that he or she was an "accident." Every child deserves to feel wanted, prized, chosen.

Dr. Ruth Barbee, a well-known family relations expert, once said that about 90 percent of so-called "naughtiness" in small children is simply their way of getting "noticed." When they cannot get the attention they want any other way, they do something guaranteed to drive their parents up the wall.

Criminologists say that many crimes, especially sensational ones, are performed by people who never had satisfied their craving for being noticed. The criminal goes out and does something spectacular which will make front-page headlines and says to himself, "Now I guess the world will sit up and take notice of me."

Every now and then someone takes a poll of husbands and wives to see what are the most common complaints that spouses have against each other. Invariably, "not being noticed," in one form or another, heads the list. Many women particularly have had it with being taken for granted in the home and in the office and, perhaps, even in the church.

Everyone in this world has a need to feel like he or she counts. Thus it is with great joy that we hear the words from the Scripture, "we are chosen!"

**FINALLY, PAUL SAYS WE ARE PREDESTINED.** "In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will."

We could trip all over that word "predestined." One pastor described the difference between Methodists and Presbyterians like this: "The Presbyterian church is Calvinistic. It believes in predestination, that is, that everything which is going to happen was planned by the Almighty at the beginning of time, and that mankind cannot alter the divine plan. The Methodist church, on the contrary.....rejects predestination. By this I mean the Methodists believe that when anything happens, the Almighty is just as surprised as anybody else." I like that. Maybe we do surprise God sometimes.

Dwight L. Moody tried to resolve the conflict between Paul's writings on predestination and human freedom like this: "I come to the door of salvation, and see written over it 'Whosoever will may come.' I enter the door, and look above it, and it says, 'Chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.'"

I have no magical answer to the question of predestination, but I have no question about God's ultimate will for us all and that is that we shall recognize ourselves to be members of his own family. And when we realize that we are predestined from the beginning of time to be members of that family we come to see ourselves as we really are – sons and daughters of the Divine.

As Abraham Lincoln pointed out, “It is difficult to make a man miserable while he feels he is worthy of himself and claims kindred to the great God who made him.”

Friends, as we look into this new year, why shouldn't we see great and wonderful things? For we have been blessed, we have been chosen, and we have been predestined to be children of God.

May 2009 be your best year ever!

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