



It Is A New Year...Now What?

What Is Your Plan for the New Year?

The thing about a new year is that it feels like a fresh start although every day actually is and to some degree so is every hour of each day. Yet, we psychologically set up January 1 as the opportunity to rethink our goals and habits. Years ago on New Year's day when I was 18 I decided to read through the Bible in a year and it has had a life changing impact on me. We all have life changing moments, times in our lives where something new begins, a change of course that alters how we think of ourselves and the purpose in life we embrace. How important are your goals? How valuable is it to come up with a plan and stick with it? I planned last year on reading two books a month and I finished seventeen for this year. I was going to lose twenty pounds and instead gained five. I did though begin a new ministry, doing two minute video devotionals and that has been a nice challenge for me. What would be your response if I were to ask you, "What is next for you as you peer into the coming year?" Mary and Joseph, after the birth of their new son Jesus, had some work to do as they got started in their new life together as parents of the Savior of the World.

Luke the biographer of Jesus and writer of the third Gospel tells us that after the shepherds came and told them all the wonderful account of the angel and the heavenly host wildly celebrating the birth of Jesus, they circumcised Jesus eight days later and gave Him the name Jesus in accordance with what the angel Gabriel commanded Mary. Not long after they left Bethlehem for a short time and went to Jerusalem. **When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."** (Luke 2:22-24 NIV) It took thirty-three days for the time of purification to be completed with the birth of a boy, so it was forty-one days after Jesus' birth that his parents brought Him to Jerusalem to set Him apart before the Lord.

While in the Temple Courts, they came upon a fascinating fellow who had been waiting for this moment for years. Somehow the Holy Spirit let him know that he would not die until he was able to lay eyes on the Messiah. On the very day Jesus was brought by Joseph and Mary into the Temple grounds, the Holy Spirit let Simeon know that the Messiah was there. When they met, Simeon in great joy took the baby Jesus in his arms and offered praise to God. **"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."** (Luke 2:29-35 NIV)

As soon as Simeon finished prophesying over Jesus and Mary, another intriguing character approached the young family. Anna had been a widow for decades. She was a prophetess who was now 84 years old. Ever since her husband died, Anna lived at the Temple, staying there night and day, worshipping, fasting, and praying. As soon as she spotted Jesus, Anna came forward. **Coming up to them at that very moment,**

she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. (Luke 2:38 NIV) For years, these two faithful believers went about their daily activities living with anticipation of the day they would finally meet the Savior of the world. Perhaps it seemed like that day would never arrive and yet they faithfully held out hope that they would see the Messiah themselves. You might say this was the life mission of each. One day the Messiah would come, and they would speak for God and reinforce the calling of Joseph and Mary to raise Jesus as God's Son. It came in a blink and then Jesus was gone along with His parents. An entire lifetime devoted to this one short moment. Imagine that. What if the complete collection of your glorious days came down to just one solitary experience, one brief encounter? What would you make of how your life was lived?

We see key moments in the lives of God's people throughout the Scriptures. Moses meeting God at the burning bush and not turning away from the strange sight. Ruth walking away from her hometown and starting her journey with Naomi for Bethlehem. David picking up the five small stones and turning toward Goliath. Rahab the prostitute letting the Hebrew spies hide inside her house. A seemingly small decision on your part can change the course of your life as well as countless others. A simple act of faith, a day just like all the rest that suddenly becomes the entire reason why you have lived. Anna and Simeon woke up as dawn arrived that fateful morning and most likely saw nothing about the sunrise that announced momentous events were coming and yet there it was, the day of the Messiah had arrived.

You cannot know now how crucial decisions you make at the start of this year will be for you. It is hidden behind a supernatural veil of God's mercy and wisdom. Let me suggest a few possibilities this year. Perhaps you could make a commitment to pray more often and with greater urgency. Who knows what the Holy Spirit might let you know? You could build a relationship with someone who needs your friendship. Perhaps you decide to give it your best effort to share salvation with someone. Forgive an old wound. Let go of your bitter feelings about having been hurt. This year find a ministry that you could help. Maybe you get involved in an orphanage overseas or write letters to shut-ins. This year might be the year you really rebuild your life with God. Set your mind on knowing Him as much as you can. Read the Bible more than you have before. Take someone under your wing to mentor or tutor. Start a prayer list and pray each day for the needs of others. Make deserts for those in your neighborhood who you want to gain a deep love for Jesus. Visit people in a nursing home or at a hospital.

God has a plan for you this year. No one but you can embrace it and find joy in it. This very well could be the most important and happiest year of your life if you find your purpose in it with God. It may be time for a fresh start. Who knows what sort of miracle you might experience as you make Christ your all in all? Take some time as this new year begins and invite Christ to show you the way this year, to guide your every step and be in charge. Make a renewed commitment to walk with God this new year.