

Choose A Great New Year

John 1: 1-18

It was Abraham Lincoln who is quoted as saying, “Most people are as happy as they choose to be.”

A woman went to her doctor with a whole catalogue of complaints about her health. He examined her thoroughly and came to the conclusion that there was absolutely nothing physically wrong with her. He became convinced that it was her negative outlook on life that was responsible for the way she felt. She had become filled with bitterness and resentment.

The wise doctor took her into the back room in his office where he kept most of his medicine. He showed her a shelf filled with empty bottles. He said to her, “See those bottles. Notice that they are all empty. They are shaped differently from one another, but basically they are all alike. But most importantly they have nothing in them. Now I can take one of those bottles and fill it with poison – enough poison to kill a human being. Or I can fill it with enough medicine to bring down a fever, or ease a throbbing headache or fight bacteria in one part of the body. The important thing is that I make that choice. I can fill it with whatever I choose. “ Then the doctor looked her in the eye and said, “Each day that God gives us is basically like one of those empty bottles. We can choose to fill it with love and life affirming thoughts and attitudes, or we can fill it with destructive poisonous thoughts. The choice is ours.”

My friends, as we begin this new year the choice is ours. We can fill each of the next 365 days with the ingredients for joy or pain. The choice is ours. In this next year we can be a blessing to those around us or a curse. I heard about one mean old mountaineer who fell sick and was thought to have died. There were no funeral directors back in the hills then, and embalming was not yet practiced. So the widow and family dressed the body and placed it in a homemade coffin. As the deceased was being carried from the house, one pallbearer stumbled, causing the coffin to crash into a gatepost. The knock somehow revived the old mountaineer, who sat up yelling at everyone in sight.

The man lived for over a year and was as mean as ever. Then he got sick and he did die. Once more the body was put in the coffin and the pallbearers lifted their burden. As they shuffled by, the long-suffering widow lifted her head and said, “Watch out for that gatepost!”

I know people who are so ill-tempered that I wondered how their families ever did put up with it. Our lives can be a blessing or a curse. We make the choice.

We would like to blame our circumstances. It was fashionable a couple of decades ago to blame our troubles on our parents or our society or upon God. We tried to ignore the fact that many people overcome all sorts of circumstances. Take Stevie Wonder for example. Singer and composer Stevie Wonder has never seen his blindness as the handicap others do. “One of my teachers told me I had three strikes against me – that I was poor, black and blind, and the only thing an uneducated blind man could do was to make potholders.” But within a couple of years, Wonder was being labeled a 12 year old

Genius. “Being blind,” he says, “you don’t judge books by their covers. You go through things that are relatively insignificant and pick out the ones that are more important. The people I feel sorry for are those who have sight but still don’t see.”

There are perhaps many of us who have eyes but do not see. It is pointless and self-defeating to let circumstances determine our destiny.

The list of successful people who have conquered circumstances is awesome. We are told that Einstein could not speak until he was four years old, and did not read until he was seven. Beethoven's music teacher said about him, "As a composer, he is hopeless." When Thomas Edison was young, his teachers said he was so stupid he could never learn anything. When F.W. Woolworth was 21, he got a job in a store, but was not allowed to wait on customers because he "Didn't have enough sense." Walt Disney was once fired by a newspaper editor because he was thought to have "no good ideas." The list goes on and on. Certainly we are all products of our heredity and environment. Of course opportunities vary from one individual to another. You are right, some of us are not as smart or as talented or even as fortunate as others. But after all the excuses are made, when you come right down to it, many of us are unhappy. Many of us would rather wallow in despair than take the initiative and responsibility to make our lives better.

That is the first thing we need to be aware of. **WE CAN CHOOSE THE WAY WE RESPOND TO LIFE.** Please don't misunderstand me. I am not suggesting that in 2011 we wear rose-colored glasses. There is a lot of bad news in the world. And life sometimes is rough. The question is, how will we choose to respond?

Somehow I believe that our relationship to Jesus is the key to developing life-affirming attitudes.

A group of high school seniors went to New York for their senior trip. They had engaged rooms in one of the finest hotels. When they arrived in the city they went to the hotel and registered. They were assigned rooms on the 30th floor. After getting settled in their rooms they went out to see the sights. They went to Manhattan, the Empire State Building, the Statue of Liberty, etc. Finally they came back to their hotel, utterly exhausted. They went to the desk and asked for the key to their rooms. The clerk said, "I am sorry the elevators are not running. You will have to walk up or wait until the elevators are repaired." They thought of the Beauty Rest mattresses in their room. Tired as they were they decided they would climb the thirty flights of stairs. When they reached the tenth floor they were still going strong. When they reached the twentieth floor their legs were like lead and they were panting for breath. The steps got longer and longer but they trudged on. When they reached the twenty-ninth floor one of them began to laugh. He sat down on the steps and almost had hysterics. Finally, he said, "I have just thought of the funniest thing that I have ever heard of in my life." They said, "What is it? Tell us!" He said, "We left the key in the lobby."

Can you use your imagination for a moment and see people who are tired and discouraged and bitter – who have lost the key to life.

JESUS CHRIST IS THE KEY. John's Gospel tells us that Jesus is the Word of the living God sent into our world to bring light and life. He is God's gift to us. He is the one who gives us the power to become children of God. Can you begin to comprehend the beauty and majesty of such a fact, as John writes,

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son of the Father...And from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace." (John 1:14, 16)

That is a magnificent phrase, grace upon grace.

When Admiral Byrd was exploring the Arctic Ocean he decided to measure the ocean's depth in a certain place. He commanded a crewman to let down the measuring line. When he had let down all the measuring line without reaching the bottom he shouted, "It's deeper than that." He tied on more line and let it down again. Again he shouted, "Deeper than that." Then they tied on all the line they had and let it down again. Once more the crewman shouted, "It's deeper than that."

Grace upon grace. No matter how far out you may venture, God's grace and his love are "deeper than that."

My friend, you can choose a great new year. You may not be able to control the things that happen to you, but you can choose the spirit with which you deal with them. The spirit of Jesus who is the Word of God can help you be victorious.

There is a source of love and joy and peace that is so deep that you could never begin to exhaust it.

Grace upon grace – that is what Christ brings to our lives. **CHOOSE HIM AND CHOOSE LIFE.**

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