

A New Year's Resolution Suggestion
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December 28th, 2008...we are, if you count it strictly by the calendar, mid-point between Christmas Day and New Year's Day. Now if you're Joel Stamooolis, you will count... [aside to tech.] What, you want me to do something with this? My car didn't start this morning, either. So I went to jump my son's car, and it didn't start, so...but I'm here. But we're gonna go through this, and this is gonna work.

But we are mid-point between Christmas Day, so we're good, and New Year's Day. I was gonna say if you're Joel Stamooolis you'll count Christmas for twelve days, but technically Christmas is behind us and New Year's Day is in front of us. So I like to think of this day as in between the reality of Jesus Christ being known to the world and a look at things to come. Think of us as a mid-point there. And often New Year's Day is a day where we make resolutions.

Now, I checked with Harris Group pollsters, and they say that fifty percent of Americans make resolutions. Only fifteen percent of them keep them. But fifteen, fifty...half of us will make resolutions for this coming year. A gentleman that works in a gym says January is one of their biggest months in the gym, ok, and it declines from there. But often, we make resolutions about various things in our lives. And when I think of...you're gonna get a little bit of how my brain works...when I think of resolutions, I think of Calvin and Hobbes. Anybody else know who Calvin and Hobbes are? Please? Ok, I'm not the only one. Calvin is...Calvin and Hobbes is a cartoon, comic strip in the papers. Calvin is a six-year-old boy; he's always in trouble. He's constantly throwing slush balls at Suzy Dirkins; he's gettin' kicked out of school constantly; the boy's a stinker. And it's fun to watch, over the years, how he has developed. But every year at New Year's Calvin has a situation about resolutions. And one of my favorite ones...I'll read it to you so you can get this one here...he's walking with his animated tiger, Hobbes. And Calvin says, "I asked Dad if he wanted to see some New Year's resolutions I wrote. He said he'd be glad to, and he was pleased to see that I was taking an interest in self-improvement. I told him the resolutions weren't for me. They were for him!" Only Calvin would walk around with a list of resolutions for other people.

But I thought that might be a good idea for today, so I will give you a suggested resolution. How's that? So you can put aside your 'going to the gym' resolution, and 'you're not going to wax off all those cookies on the counter' resolutions, and I'm going to suggest a resolution to you for this coming year. And we can find that in our text today. We're going to...ok, turn with me to Philippians, chapter 3. And we're going to be reading from here, not the screen, anyway. So as you find Philippians chapter 3 we're gonna start in verse 7. Philippians 3:7-14, and I'm gonna set this thing down just in case I'm doin' something... Follow along as I read.

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted loss for the sake of Christ.

Let me pause here. This is Paul speaking. And we'll go...we'll be in Philippians a little bit today; we'll look at the context of this as we go. But Paul is talking about how he compares things of the world, things around him, to knowing Christ. Verse 7...

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead; not that I have already obtained it or become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet. But one thing I do; forgetting what lies behind, and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal of the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul here is talking about the balance in his life between the things of the world and the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Now what he does with the things of the world is he considers them rubbish, so he wipes 'em off completely.

When I think of the word 'rubbish' I'm reminded of last week, standing in our sanctuary at Wasilla Bible Church amongst the stuff on the floor. ServiceMaster put down plastic all over the place, and then they taped off the plastic. And in one section of plastic it says '107'; that was my room number, my office number. And I'm standing in section 107, and they had cleared things out; they worked clear through the night that first night. And I think they got things messed up, because I've got some of Pastor Jim's stuff in my section. And he was standing in his section, and I'm lookin' at this stuff goin' "Oh, this is garbage; oh, this is trash; oh, this is trash"; and he's goin', "Wait a minute—that's my stuff!" Well, it's trash. And later on in the week Pastor Jim was up in there, he had his hard hat on and safety goggles; he was on the floor separating what he could keep and what he could not keep. And there was a stack, and it was getting pretty big, of things that had to be considered trash. And I said, "Thanks, Jim, for the illustration!" because there's just some things that we have to consider trash. And it's unfortunate, but that's the way it is.

But Paul does this intentionally. He considers the things of the world trash compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. So what he's done with the equation...it looks like this. That's all that's left, is the surpassing greatness of Christ Jesus my Lord. Now, how does he do this? How does he get to this point? Well, he gives us some clues in the passage. It says in verses 13 and 14 here, it says

Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet. But one thing I do; forgetting what lies behind, and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal of the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

His mechanism, if you will, of forgetting, of considering things rubbish, is to forget what is behind. Now you have to understand that not everything that's behind you needs to be forgotten. In fact, there's many times in scripture where Paul tells his readers to remember—remember where you came from; remember what Christ Jesus did for you. But there's other things that are worthy of just plain forgetting. I'm sure you've got some things that happened in 2008 that are worthy of forgetting. But in order to consider everything rubbish there's some key things that we need to forget. So what is Paul forgetting?

He lists a number of things, or we can find a number of things in Philippians, here. The first of the things that he lists that he's forgetting is his personal attempts to gain heaven. We can look in verses 4 through 7, just preceding this passage that we read earlier. He said,

Although I, myself, might have confidence even in the flesh, if anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh I far more; circumcised the eighth day of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is from the Law, found blameless. Those things; but whatever these things were gain to me, those things I have counted as a loss for the sake of Christ.

Paul, among all the people I have ever met, would probably be the one who, if he could have gained heaven by just pure working for it, he was the man. Did you hear what it said—"...as to the Law," and this is the law that was set up by the Pharisees, who spent their days debating and arguing over the Law. And as to the Law, he was found blameless. In other words, he was keeping every little letter of the Law. He was attempting to gain righteousness and thereby gain his way into heaven. Nobody worked harder than that, than Paul. In fact, he was so zealous for his way of righteousness that he was willing to take out Christians and put 'em in prison. And that's what he was doing when he encountered the reality of Jesus Christ. And when he met Jesus Christ all those other things—his own righteousness, his own attempts at gaining heaven—became rubbish, garbage, worthless. 'I cannot do this by myself. In fact, all my attempts are trash. Time to throw them away; time to forget them and press on.' He would trade in his attempts at righteousness for the surpassing greatness of knowing Jesus Christ, his Lord. That's the first thing that he said 'I'm gonna forget. I'm gonna forget my own attempts.'

And there may be some here who, in this past year, in your life so far, have said 'I am trying; I am working; I can do this.' And you find yourself not doing as well as Paul. It doesn't matter if you *do* as well as Paul. If you are trying to work your way into that righteousness so that you may gain heaven, it is rubbish. You need to put that aside, forget that, and grasp the reality of Jesus Christ. And when you do that, all those other things are like rubbish.

Well, what else does he encounter? His circumstances; we can read about his circumstances a couple chapters back in chapter 1, verses 12 and 14. Paul is speaking here and says

Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else; and that most of the brethren, trusting in the LORD because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.

Where is Paul when he's writing this? He's in prison! He was in prison, not because he had done anything wrong; in fact, he was in prison because everybody else had done something wrong. He was preaching Christ crucified and the resurrection, and a riot started. And the Roman guards came in and they figured out really quick that Paul was the reason everybody else was rioting. And instead of arresting everybody that was rioting it was easier to arrest the guy that's being rioted against. Now, that doesn't fit our justice system, but when you're under Roman control that works. 'So let's put this guy in prison.' Ok?

He's innocent. He has every right under normal circumstances to be grumbling, griping, and complaining about his circumstances. Prison—it's not the place you'd want to spend most of your days, and that's where he's spending much of his days. But he's willing to forget his circumstances as compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord. He's willing to give those things up, forget 'em.

I'm sure some circumstances you are in now...I can tell that you're sitting here, you're not in prison, which is a good thing. But your circumstances may not be great, and you may think that you have...that this might be the time for you to focus on those circumstances, and focus on 'Woe is me,' grumbling and griping about the circumstances. We have a tendency to do that. I think that Paul would recommend that we forget those and focus somewhere else. Our focus is on the surpassing greatness of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord. Circumstances may be great, but Paul is saying we have something much greater to focus on. It is the surpassing greatness of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord. The reality of Jesus overshadows even prison as far as Paul is concerned.

So what else is Paul forgetting, things that are behind? His conflicts—it's not just enough that he's sitting in prison. If you've kept your place in chapter 1, we're gonna continue reading verses 15 through 18. It's not just enough that he's in prison; there's people out there that wanna make his stay in prison more difficult, ok? So he's facing conflict. Verse 15 says

Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from goodwill. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed and in this I rejoice.

Do you see what it said in verse 17? It says that some are proclaiming Christ "out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment." There were actually people who knew that Paul was preaching the gospel of Christ, and now he's in prison. And they've been having some strife with Paul, and there's envy. We know why the strife was there—because of the envy. And they think...their thought pattern is 'If we preach Christ, then that's gonna make Paul feel even worse than he is right now, because he's in prison and can't be out here preaching Christ.' Isn't that some twisted thinking? But that's what they were thinking, is 'If we can preach the gospel, it's just gonna do this to Paul, make him just feel worse about things.' Ok?

So Paul's conflict with these folks, he's dealing with envy and strife in these folks. And they're tryin' to make him feel bad; but his answer to that is, again, the reality of Jesus Christ. That's somethin' that he can put behind him—the conflict—because the surpassing greatness of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord overshadows that conflict. In fact, Paul gets to the point where he's able to say, 'They wanna preach Christ to make me feel bad? Christ is being preached! I'm gonna rejoice.' So he rejoices in the face of this.

What else is Paul putting behind him, or forgetting? Well, a whole bunch of stuff, really. When you think about it, Paul was a Pharisee; he was trained under Gamaliel, one of the leading Pharisees of his time. And he was a rising star among the Pharisees. In fact, it was him that got the letters to say, 'I'm gonna go and persecute Christians.' So Paul was on his way up. And the Pharisees were well-regarded in Jerusalem. They were lifted up in status as 'these are the people you're supposed to live like. If you could only live like a Pharisee you're doing well.' So he gave that up. And in consequence, he lost his place to live. He lost his income. And ultimately it cost him his health. In fact, it cost him all things. There were times that the only things that Paul had were the clothes on his back, and those were bloodied because he'd been stoned near to death. There were times when the only things Paul had were the clothes on his back, and those were wet because the ship went down underneath him, and he crawled up on shore.

He was ready, willing to forget all things, put 'em behind him. Why? What would he trade for that? Knowing Christ Jesus my Lord...that was worth trading all things. When he says that forgetting what's behind and looking forward to what lies ahead, taking hold of that for which God took hold of him so that he might know Christ Jesus...that was his driving factor. That was what drove him through life.

Now, I look at myself and I say, "Is that what's driving me through life? Is that what's my next decision? Is that where my next desire comes from, is knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." I think this is a resolution that we can all take on, is knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. You think about it. Take a resolution you may have been thinking about, like going to the gym. That's one that comes to me. I did twenty-three years as a soldier, and ran every other day. Then I stopped being a soldier, and I stopped running. So I gotta get running again. And I could make that a resolution. I could; I could say, "2009 I'm going to run every other month, or week, or something like that." Or I could say to myself, "My resolution this year is knowing Christ Jesus my Lord," and getting to know Him more on a personal level. And when, if, the Lord says, "John, get up and run today," then I run; not because I made a resolution to run, but because I made a resolution to get to know my Lord more on a personal basis. And when He says "Run," I run. When He says "Walk," I walk.

I think every resolution that could go around in your head could be wrapped up in this. Talk about the cookies on the counter—they're there. They're in my house. My wife's a good cook. My daughter likes to cook cookies, too. And we gave many of 'em away, but then other people gave not them back, but gave others back. So we have cookies on the counter. I could make a resolution just not to touch a cookie in the month of January if I want, until they just disappear. Or I could say that my greatest thing would be to know the surpassing value of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord, and go with Him into the kitchen, and walk with Jesus into the kitchen and say, "Oh, Jesus, there's cookies on the counter. Would You like one?" Or not...or not. But my driving factor in that is not my stomach; but my driving factor in that is Jesus Christ.

Paul took all things and set 'em aside, and counted them as rubbish, as garbage, compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord.

Calvin had a list of resolutions. I've only got one. It's up there. I suggest it to you; I suggest it to me. If you've never known Jesus Christ your Lord and met the reality of Him, today would be a good day to start. If you know Jesus Christ, if you've met Him as a babe in the manger and know the reality of Jesus Christ, and as you look forward to the next year that's coming, may I suggest that your daily resolution is to get to know Jesus Christ as your Lord. We help you with that as a church. As Pastor Larry was saying, on the 13th of January we're going to, Lord willing, open up the bottom of the...the bottom floor of the church and start holding classes. We are going to have women's bible studies; we're gonna have men's bible studies; we're gonna have the Holy Spirit application groups; we're gonna have the Holy Spirit theology training. There are numerous opportunities for you to get to know Jesus Christ better. They're coming. We're gonna get back on line, ok? Joining with others, as you're doing today, joining with others throughout the week and sharing your faith with others, living Jesus Christ in a body with others who are going after the same thing can help you do that.

Of course, taking up His word and getting to know Him...the word became flesh and dwells amongst us. We have the opportunity to pick up the word of God and get to know Jesus Christ. For those who have been in the adult Sunday School class this last year, it didn't matter what we were talking about. It always seemed, it always wrapped up to one thing—God was attempting to establish a relationship. He was attempting to establish a relationship with Adam. He was attempting to establish a relationship with Moses. He was attempting to establish a relationship with Joshua. He was attempting to establish a relationship...all through, God was working to make a relationship with His creation. Jesus Christ is our opportunity for that relationship. Get to know the reality of Jesus Christ, the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

There's your suggested resolution for 2009. Let's stand and pray.

Our dear Lord and heavenly Father,

What better thing can we do to get to know Your Son? As we are so close to our celebration of His birth, He's been on our mind, He's been in manger scenes on our tables, He's been in our songs. O Lord, may He be in our hearts and our mind. May He be our focus for the year to come.

Thank You, Father, for that gift of Jesus Christ. Thank You for His birth here on earth. And because of Him, Father, we can look at what lies ahead with expectation, with rejoicing. Father, I pray as we walk into 2009 that we'd be walking with Jesus every step of the way, and that we would truly get to know the surpassing greatness of knowing Jesus Christ our Lord. Thank You, Father, for what You do for us in Him.

I pray this in Jesus' name, amen.