

New Year~2020

“2020 Vision for the New Year” Pt.2

(1/5/20)

Last Wednesday we entered into a new year—2020.

As we said last time, every new year brings with it new hope—the hope that this year will be a better year than last year.

And primarily, the hope that many Christians have is that God will give them new strength to finally see victory over things like alcohol, drugs, pornography, anger and other besetting sins.

Or the hope that their relationship with Jesus will experience revival—where their heart will be set on fire once again and they will regain the passion for the Lord they once had.

This hope for the new year could take the form of hope for new opportunities to serve Him in ministry or maybe the hope of a new job or a new promotion at their current job.

If you're single, it could take the form of the hope that God will bring someone new into your life, or restore your marriage, save a wayward child or heal you or a loved one of some disease or chronic affliction.

The old saying that, *“Hope springs eternal”* is especially true at the start of every new year!

This morning, as you stand at the beginning of a new year, there are probably things you'd like to see changed, things that you'd like to be different.

The problem is that—for most people, when they enter into a new year, all they do is *hope* that things will change, all they do is engage in *wishful thinking* that things will be different but they never do anything to bring about any change.

And so, it doesn't take long for the hope of a new year to become the same old defeat and discouragement of the past—so what do you do to make this year different?

Well, to begin with, we need to understand that change only becomes a reality when—we get serious about it and set our sight firmly upon it.

And by that I mean, changes in life come from knowing what the problems are (and not shifting the blame onto others) and what needs to be done to correct the problems and bring about change.

This means we must see clearly if we're going to “*take aim at change.*”

As the old saying goes, “*If you aim at nothing—you'll probably hit it!*”

And so, with that in mind, we have undertaken a series we've entitled, “*2020 Vision for the New Year*”—or simply put, “2020 Vision for 2020!”

As we said last week—if we're going to see positive change take place in our lives this year—then it's critical that we see clearly what's really important and worth pursuing in this new year.

To do that we must see this year (and every year after it) thru the lens of God's Word.

It's only when we view the new year (and life itself) thru the lens of God's Word that things will come into focus and become clear.

Why the Word of God and not some other 'lens' (philosophy or ideology)?

Because God made us, and as our Creator, no one knows us better than He does, and therefore—no one knows how we function better than the One who made us—our “Manufacturer”.

As we said last time, if we look at God as our “Manufacturer”—the Bible then becomes the “Manufacturer's Handbook.”

A manufacturer always includes with their product (especially a complicated piece of technology) an instruction manual that explains, first of all—who made the product, how it works, how to care for it—and usually, a section that tells how to trouble shoot problems that arise and how to fix them.

The Bible tells us that we are “*fearfully and wonderfully made*”. (Psalm 139:14)

In other words we are a complicated ‘piece of technology’ and only the One who made us (our Manufacturer) has the expertise to tell us how our lives were designed to operate and how to care for them spiritually and emotionally to ensure smooth operation and maximum productivity.

And especially, how to troubleshoot problems that arise in the course of life and what to do to “fix” what is broken and bring us back to wholeness and full working order!

So, the Bible in general is God's instruction manual for our lives—which if followed will allow our lives (including complicated things like ‘marriage’) to function the way God designed them.

We either follow God’s instruction manual, containing *His* wisdom for life—or we’re left with trying to live our lives by following the ‘*wisdom of the world*’.

James tells us that the wisdom of the world is: earthly, sensual and demonic and produces selfishness, confusion and every evil thing—whereas the wisdom that is from above is full of good fruits—(Psalm 1:1-3; Psalm 19:7-11).

You might be thinking—“*Is there one thing—one principle, or commandment in the Bible that God stresses above the others—one that is the most important of them all?*”

Well, actually there is—Jesus told us in Mark 12:30 that the greatest commandment in all of God’s Word is:

Mark 12:30 (NKJV)

³⁰ *And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.*’ This is the first [supreme] commandment.

This then becomes the ‘lens’ that we must view the new year thru—the number one pursuit of this new year.

I believe if we make this our goal and pursue it by God’s grace and strength—we will see the change we desire in this new year.

Let’s break down this command and look at it point by point:

I. Love God with All Your Heart

I want you to take note that in the greatest command in the Bible how God stresses the word “all”—that we love Him with all our heart—with all our soul—with all our mind—and with all our strength.

The problem with all too many Christians in America today is that—they are trying to love God while still loving the world—which is forbidden in Scripture: “*Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you.*” (1 John 2:15 NLT)

When a person tries to love God *and* the world simultaneously—it’s what the Bible (God) calls having a ‘*divided heart*’.

When I think of someone in the Bible who personified that kind of heart—I think of Solomon.

Solomon started out pretty well in his relationship with God as a young king → 1Kings 3:3-13

But after a while it seemed that something was missing in his life—his heart seemed unsatisfied and empty and so slowly he began to drift away from the Lord to pursue other things—like many Christians today.

David, Solomon’s father, on the day of his coronation as king of Israel had admonished his son—to serve the Lord with a *loyal* heart.

But the Holy Spirit tells us later on in 1Kings 11:4, that Solomon’s heart was not loyal to the Lord his God.

The Hebrew word for *loyal* carries with it the idea of “*completeness*” or “*whole-heartedness*”—in other words, Solomon’s heart was not completely given over to God—Solomon had a *divided* heart.

I believe that Solomon knew the Lord, but his heart was still restless—his relationship with God didn’t really satisfy him like it did his father David. (Comment—Psalm 27:4)

Because of it, he slowly began to turn away from the Lord looking to fill the void with other things—the things of the world, and his relationship with the LORD suffered greatly. (Explain)

He spent most of his life in a backslidden state chasing happiness in a number of different ways: Education, Pleasure, Building projects, Business etc. (read Ecclesiastes)

Most commentators believe that Solomon wrote Proverbs and the Song of Solomon early in his life during the years he walked with God.

And near the end of his life he comes back to God and writes the book of Ecclesiastes in which he is looking back over his life lamenting the mistakes he had made and all the vain things he had pursued trying to find happiness and fulfillment.

Jesus told us that we can't serve two 'masters' (God and the world) for we will inevitably love one and neglect (or even come to despise) the other.

God wants all of us—all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

To offer God any less means that other 'loves' have taken hold in our heart and are competing with our love for God—and that is as unacceptable to Him as a wife who says she '*loves*' her husband while secretly having a lover on the side.

Now, as we said last time—to love God with all your heart means that you have to *purpose* certain things in your heart.

A. Purpose in your heart to live a life of obedience and commitment to God

B. Purpose in your heart to control what comes out of your mouth

1. Lying
2. Gossip

C. Purpose in your heart to honor God with your finances

1. Giving to God
2. Spending on self

D. Purpose in your heart to bring God into every (substantive) decision

Too many Christians are living their lives like they're still in charge, making important life decision without praying and asking God what He wants them to do.

If they do pray—it's after they have made their decision and then pray that God 'blesses' what they have decided.

It's no wonder their lives are in turmoil and stress and anxiety has taken hold of their heart—they are relying on their own wisdom which often causes their lives to "get off into the weeds" or worse—where they drive it "off a cliff" (and then blame God!).

Proverbs 3:5-6 (NLT)

⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. ⁶ Seek his will in all you do, and he will direct your paths.

II. Love God with All Your Soul

The soul is the seat of our emotions so when we talk about '*loving God with all our soul*'—we're talking about having a *passion* for God.

Say you as a man meets, starts to date and falls in love with a woman and you desire with all of your heart to enter into a deep lifelong commitment with her (marriage) but when you propose she responds, "*I just want to be friends*" wouldn't that just crush you?

This is what many Christians say to the Lord when He wants their relationship to go all the way into the deepest of all commitments and they respond, "*Lord, I just want us to be friends.*"

One pastor said—

“How sad, when a Christian through carnality and compromise is satisfied with living at a lower level of the Spirit and a lower level of relationship with Jesus than that full-on, totally committed level that allows them to enjoy their relationship with Him to the fullest.”

Casual Christianity has become a real problem in the Church today—where too many Christians just want to be ‘friends’ with Jesus or to go on perpetually ‘dating’ Jesus instead of making a full-on commitment to Him (as in marriage).

And to compensate and make themselves ‘feel’ better—they substitute service for passion, like the church of Ephesus—

Revelation 2:2-4 (NKJV)

² I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; ³ and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. ⁴ Nevertheless I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love.

All of these positive qualities all negated by one negative—they were going through the *motions*, but they had lost the emotion in their relationship with Jesus.

Their church was a well-oiled machine—but Jesus doesn’t want machines cranking out emotionless service—He wants a love relationship with His people.

Again, Jesus said that the greatest commandment is *“That you love the Lord your God with all you heart, soul, mind and strength”*—not that you serve the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.

And notice He doesn’t say they *lost* their first love, He says they left it—they walked away from Him.

It didn’t happen instantly or overnight—it was a process that took place over time.

Weymoth—*“Yet I have this against you—that you no longer love Me as you did at first.”*

What is “first love”?— It is the passionate love for Jesus that often characterizes the new believer.

It is excited, fervent, unashamed kind of love—it is the “honeymoon love” of the husband and wife.

And while it is true that mature married love deepens and grows richer—it is also true that it should never lose the emotion and desire for one another either.

The word “Ephesus” means ‘darling’ or “desired one.”

The worst thing that can happen to any relationship—whether it be your relationship with God, or your spouse is when you begin to take the other for granted.

“Yes, but I don’t know how people in Ephesus could serve God with that kind of zeal and yet not love Him?”

It’s possible because people serve in church for all kinds of reasons (guilt, desire for recognition, fulfillment etc.) and not really out of love for Jesus.

The church at Ephesus fell into the trap of thinking that loveless service was enough to please the Lord (Explain).

→ Relate to a wife who says, *“ I don’t love you, I have no feelings for you at all, but I’ll stay married to you, clean your clothes, cook your meals...”*

What husband would be happy with a relationship like that?

I didn't marry my wife to have someone to cook my meals and clean my house—I can hire a maid to do those things.

I married Cyndi because I fell in love with her and she with me and now all the acts of service she does for me are beautiful because I know they are an expression of her love for me!

But without the love they would be *meaningless*.

It's obvious that Jesus wants more than service—He wants passion!

Remember He is holding His church in His nail scarred hands—the ultimate act of love—to die for someone you love.

When was the last time you told the Lord, “I love you” and it wasn't tied to something you wanted from Him? It wasn't embedded in some prayer request?

Some marriages have so degenerated that the words “I love you” are only used to get things from each other (sex for him, jewelry for her...).

Revelation 2:5 (NKJV)

⁵ "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works...

“First love” can be restored if we follow the three instructions Jesus gave.

- First, we must **remember** what we have left and cultivate a desire to regain that close communion once again.

- Then we must **repent**—change our minds—and confess our sins to the Lord (1 John 1:9).
- Third, we must **repeat**—“*do the first works*” (v.5).

“Yes, but what does that really mean?”

One pastor put it this way—

What were you doing when you were on fire for the Lord?

“I was going to church”—Go again!

“I was getting up early for morning devotions”—Do it again!

“I sang praise to the Lord as I drove down the street”—Sing again!”

Remember—Repent—Repeat is the key to restoring your relationship with Jesus.

There are many Christians who have gotten so used to staying away from God (going to church, reading their Bible, having daily devotions)—that it has become their new ‘Christian norm’, thinking their relationship with God is fine!

In their minds, they have gotten enough church and Bible study over the years to keep their relationship with God good.

And because of it—the thought of having daily quiet time, Bible reading and church twice a week is not something they ‘crave’—and so they think it is totally unnecessary!

But it is necessary—and your relationship with God is not good!

You’re either going forward or you’re sliding backward—but it isn’t static.

For years I started out my day by reading my Bible—and then I got away from it and started to read the news to start my day.

For me, the news is like junk food—I crave it but it, but it isn't a healthy way to start the day.

The Word of God is good food and promotes spiritual health and strength.

If you're used to eating junk food (news, sports, 'Dancing with the Stars'!)—you don't initially crave healthy food—and the same is true with feeding on God's Word...(finish)

Be patient in restoring your relationship with Jesus—it's okay to start small.

Get up 15 minutes at first to spend that time with the Lord in His Word and go from there.

God has shown me that the small changes we make moment by moment and day by day—add up to big changes month by month and year by year!

Start small but purpose to—**START SOMEWHERE!**