

NEW YEARS INTRODUCTION

- Happy New Year to you all.
 - A time of reflecting on the past year and planning for the next.
- Some of you may or may not make a big deal out of the New Year
 - No matter how you choose to measure it, really it is just another day.
 - Not as significant of Christmas.
- Any of you work with China? – I was there recently – New Years in China is a big deal.
- Chinese New Year will be on Feb 8th this year. (though there are 5 days prep)
 - 15 day celebration -- We plan for zero productivity from mid Jan to min Feb.
 - ❖ Industrial China nearly shuts down as people travel out of the city back to the rural areas of their family farms. They pay tribute to their ancestry and reconnect with their families, who many may not have seen or spoke to all year.
 - ❖ Many laborers don't return. They hear about better jobs in other parts of the country and migrate there. (ie: Apple starting the iphone 6 build, or a new xbox ...)
 - Based on the Luni-solar (similar to the ancient Hebrew calendar)
 - Began in the Zhou dynasty 1046 BC. Adopted the Gregorian calendar 1873 Meiji period
 - ❖ Gregorian calendar 1582 – Solar calendar.
 - Traditional story goes: *Nain the red dragon would awaken from his winter slumber on the new moon of the renewing of the season (ending of winter) and rampage the country side eating villagers. The villagers would put food out to appease the dragon. Eventually people started putting red lanterns and wearing red to scare Nain away. Then they would light off fire crackers throughout the village.*

Eventually Hongjun Laozu, a Taoist monk, subdued Nain with red garments and became his mount. (350BC)

Humanism

- For us the season of renewal tends to be a time of resolutions, hopes of a new beginnings maybe a healthier more prosperous year.
 - We think about change, eating better, exercising more, a better body, bank account, travel experiences.... Maybe remodeling – kitchen ... master bath.
 - A better life – a better world.
 - But for many of us this is all by human effort – humanism.(Human progress and understanding)
- We seek renewal because we know something is not right.
 - We have a desire for something better
 - ❖ We pull ourselves up by our boot straps and climb out of past mistakes – issues
 - ❖ Grow “evolve” into a healthier, happier more prosperous – better person
 - Build a better immediate environment around us.
 - Perhaps make amends with past ancestor – subdue or slay the dragon.
 - Say we are really motivated and we do all this. Things can be better – marginally.
 - ❖ But there are limitations.
 - ❖ Always something else to repair - continual maintenance – nothing on this earth stays new.

- We are battling against entropy. (2nd law) All things move to a higher level of disorder.
 - We exist in an imperfect fallen world. It has been scarred by sin.
 - From the system of physics, the degeneration of biological self and certainly the spiritual.
 - We feel this and we desire for a new world – a new self.
- Something is not quite right. We sense it, but God knows it.
 - **God** gives us the ultimate New Year's resolution.
 - But it isn't a chore assigned to me that I must do to feel successful, where my failure burdens me with guilt and inadequacy.
 - Hear God's promise:

[Ez 36:26-27](#) ... I will give you a **new heart** -- and a **new spirit** I will put within you. And I will remove the **heart** of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. [27](#) And I will put **my Spirit** within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my commands.
- A new heart – a new spirit.
 - Well that leads me to ask, “What is wrong with my old one?”
 - God says it there – it is made of stone.
- We recognize there is good and evil, there is something better.
 - But we can't quite put our finger on it or how to mend it.
 - That is part of the human condition.

Modern philosopher Jacob Needleman – “Why can't we be good?” (2008)

Writes about the enormous volumes of self-help and social theory on “how we ought to live”

“Human beings who know what is good, never the less remain mysteriously helpless to internally adopt and do the ethically moral and religious ideas bequeathed to them.”

- It isn't a lack of knowing good and evil – of knowing what to do.
- First of all, from where does this concept of “ought to” come?
 - ❖ Where does this concept of good come from? Why would there ever be a concept of a utopia?
 - ❖ Why would we not act on our instincts developed out of the animal world and seek food, shelter, protection – and be content with our status as the top of the food chain?
- Secondly, (ignoring the first question) why can't we achieve it? Why can't we do good?
- We have the knowledge of good and evil, but not the means to comprehend it nor the measure of love to act on it correctly.

A quote from A Canticle for Lebowitz: (1959)

There was still **the serpent** whispering [in our ear]: For God doth know that in ~~what~~ [that] day ~~soever~~ you shall eat ~~thereof~~, [and] your eyes shall be opened: and you shall be as Gods.

The old father of lies was clever at telling half-truths: How shall you “know” good and evil, until you shall have sampled a little? Taste and be as Gods.

But neither infinite power nor infinite wisdom could bestow godhood upon men.

For that - there would have to be infinite love as well.

NEW HEART

- Friends it is a heart problem. It is a deficiency in our hear.
 - A siren of angst calling, causing us discomfort in our own skins
 - ❖ Even in the slightest – a humming, a melody of discontent in our soul telling us that we are a-miss. We are in need of cleansing.

- That verse we read a moment ago is out of Ezekiel Ch. 36.
 - God promises Ezekiel that Israel will be renewed.
 - Let me read the whole section.

Ez 36:25-29 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be **clean** (H2889) from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will **cleanse** you. **26** And I will give you a **new heart** -- and a **new spirit** I will put within you. And I will **remove** the **heart** of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. **27** And I will put **my Spirit** within you, and **cause** (H6213) you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my **rules** [commands]. **28** You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. **29** And I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. And I will summon the grain and make it abundant and lay no famine upon you.

- There is renewal. But it is not by our own hands. We cannot fully rebuild ourselves.
 - We cannot wash the slate clean with a rag out of the gutter.
 - We **cannot** clean ourselves. – As the book of Hebrews so explains so complete.
 - ❖ *Personal story* about trying to make myself presentable before Jesus for baptism.
 - I had it backwards. It is through my surrender to Him, through my baptism in Him that I am presentable. It is by His blood I am made new. Not by my efforts, by my surrender.
- We **cannot** clean ourselves, it is only by the power of God that it may happen.
 - It is only by the purity of Christ that we may be washed clean.
- There is no renewal like the renewal of Christ.
- Paul writes to the Corinthians about this:

2Cor 5:17-21 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a **new creation**. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. **18** All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; **19** that is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We **implore** you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

21 For our sake he made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

- (Again) There is no renewal like the renewal of Christ.
 - But there is a rub, you have to die: (vs. 17)
 - The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.
 - As Jesus stated to His disciples.
 - John 12:24-25** Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. **25** Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.
 - When we try to remake ourselves. It is like a perpetually blossoming flower.
 - ❖ Which does not exist. It must drop its seed to grow new again.
 - ❖ It cannot be perpetually renewed. It does not regenerate itself.
 - ❖ The stalk must die so that the seed can fall and be reborn.

MOTIVE

- This is contradictory to our general cultural humanistic view of our western culture: (which is) we are evolving into perfection. Through our knowledge our wisdom we can work out a new society, a new world, a new ... human. --- Nietzsche called it Uber-mensch (Ultra-Human, Above-Human or Super-man)
 - ...hmmm ... then why haven't we? - - many would say we are more corrupt.
 - Yes of course – there has been some remarkable improvements.
 - ❖ The war to end all wars ... uh well we have gained wisdom since then.
 - Course' last century was the bloodiest in history ... and
 - We are facing one of the bloodiest periods in the Middle East since the Ottoman Empire.
 - ❖ Women have more rights than ever in history – however it has taken a toll on the American nuclear family. It is in a devastated state – if we can even define “family” anymore.
 - ❖ The abolition of slavery -- oh but sex slavery is at an all-time high.
 - How is that humanistic evolution going folks?
 - ❖ Kinda like a game of whack-a-mole
- The greatest achievements and movements of humanity still fall short.
- Even though many of these movements and positive changes in society were generated from the Christian world view. We still fall short.
 - *** How Christianity Changed the World -- by Alvin J Schmidt
 - This humanistic thinking of even creeps into our Christian view and our practices.
 - So let's look back at Jesus telling us we must die to gain life.

Mat 16:24-26 Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. **25** For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will **find** it. **26** For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?

 - What does He mean by that?
 - To surrender. Your will not mine. Give up my selfish motives.
- I recall the first real Bible study I was in. The author had us sign our name at the bottom of a page stating our covenant with God to complete it and to read the scripture assignments daily.
 - Of course failed and moped around frustrated with myself for days.
 - Why couldn't I do it? Why did trying to be diligent in reading scripture put me in a worse place than I started?
- Let me take you to the **next level** of thinking on this by using words from Jeremiah

Jer 2:13 ...my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, *the fountain of living waters*, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, **broken cisterns** that can hold no water.

 - We continue to try and remake ourselves with flawed materials.
 - ❖ My motive was to better myself.
 - ❖ It was by my efforts, by my reading. I was digging out the cistern.
 - ❖ Oh sure I was pouring in “living waters” but the cistern is flawed. – A covenant of works.

- ❖ I was pouring in the water and the vessel is cracked holding nothing for more than a day.
- ❖ The motive is flawed. – we are under a new covenant, one of grace not of works.
- I know I have said it from this stage before.
 - ❖ Read scripture and your life will change.
 - ❖ But to be honest with you, the **why** you are engaging in it – is everything.
- Often it is to glorify ourselves – in an abstract and backdoor way it is to worship ourselves.
 - *The analogy of the spiritual vending machine.*
 - Even in the most holy acts we are wicked. Isaiah realized that.
 - ❖ **Isa 64:5b**, “How then can we be saved? **6** All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.”
- We can't rely on our fallen selves in a fallen world for renewal
 - It too often is about us and what we may profit from it.
- **What is missing is worship.** True surrender to the glory of God.
- Acting out of the awe of our creator. Meditating on the vast array of His creations – mind numbing distances between galaxies so numerous we develop ideas like “infinity” count-less-ness.
 - ❖ Down to the creativity of how a crystal of water forms into such beautiful structure
 - ❖ I wish to be consumed by scripture because it speaks dynamics between the practical human life and Gods involvement with us. It is the most emotional, philosophical, poetic display of the human physiological struggle every expressed. Constructed over 5000 years piercing through cultures engulfing so many literary genre and breaching every society of today.
 - ❖ I read the scripture because I am amazed by God.
 - ❖ I pray because I long for His relationship. There is no one who knows me better than Christ.
 - I worship Him, He pulls the stone from my soul and fills me with life.
- When my motive is to worship Jesus. Then my view changes – on everything.
 - When I act on His glory, then I live.
 - I AM NEW!

Gal 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

- My wonderful wife pointed me to a short reading plan put together by John Piper
- He wrote in the article “God's righteousness is at stake. His name - His reputation - His honor must be vindicated. Before the cross can be for our sake, it must be for God's sake.”

“All sin is a despising of God, before it is a damage to man. All sin is a preference for the fleeting pleasures of the world over the everlasting joy of God's fellowship. [WE] demean God's glory. [WE] belittled God's worth. [WE] dishonored God's name. That is the meaning of sin – **failing to love** God's glory **above** everything else.”

- When my motive is God's Glory – everything changes.
 - A true heart change. A true renewal.

Johnathan Edwards (Great American Philosopher and Theologian in 1700's)

“People with a new heart love and obey God for the beauty and attractiveness of who **He** is in Himself, they don't love and obey God as a means to and ends. They love God as and ends in and of itself.

- Tim Keller illustration on Mozart. (studied for a grade – now listen because of beauty)
- Maybe use mathematics in my experience.

CONCLUSION

- I'd like to finish with this imagery that God presents to Ezekiel in chapter 37
- A reminder that, it is only by the power of God that we are changed.
 - ❖ *Give description of walking though valley of dry bone. It is Israel – the typological believer.*

God asks can these bones live?

Ez 37:5 Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. **6** And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the LORD."

- ❖ *Rattling of bones as they come together, connect build structure strapped together with ligament and covered in skin. Reverse of decay. By all means humans "but no breath in them"*
- ❖ *Void of spirit – useless – empty. A nation of dead standing there.*
- Makes me think of so many people. Together structurally – job, family, car, phone ... strapped together in social groups ... but dead. Purposeless. A valley of dry bones gathered together.
 - ❖ *Then God filled the valley of full of His spirit and the armies of Israel lived.*

Ez 37:12-14 Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. **13** And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. **14** And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD."

- We are that believer - Israel. A valley of bones.
 - The only way to live is by the breath of God.
 - His spirit and power.
- We are the dragon that needs to be subdued.
- It is by His power, but he works in the vessel that is fully surrender.
 - He fills us when we are emptied.
- His work is His glory.
- "Fall in love with Gods glory above everything else"
- And be made new. A regeneration that lasts forever and doesn't need renewal every year.

PRAY

- Open our eyes to your glory, amaze us with your presence.
- Penetrate our hearts and turn out hearts to flesh
- Fill us with your spirit
- Cause us to walk in your ways – for a life glorifying you.
- Transform us to your righteousness.