

† The Heart of Christ – the message of the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17)

“...having loved His own who were in the world, He love them to the end”(John 13:1.)

The Consoling Savior – Seven Resolves of the Believing Heart John 16:25-33 – Part 1 (16:25-28)

25 These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; an hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but will tell you plainly of the Father. 26 In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I will request of the Father on your behalf; 27 for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came forth from the Father. 28 I came forth from the Father and have come into the world; I am leaving the world again and going to the Father.

What is the Christian life? In a phrase, what might it be that would define what it means to live the Christian life? While such a question might be similar to “What is a Christian?”; there is yet a subtle yet important difference. The question, “What is a Christian” essentially defines for us one who belongs to Christ; one who has been redeemed, purchased with the blood of Christ; one born-again, regenerated, transferred from death to life and made a child of God. The question, “What is the Christian life” seeks to define how does the “Christian” live his life in light of his belonging to Christ? What are the marked characteristics of the life, the actions, the attitudes, the words, and the very worldview of the Christian? If I could answer the question, “What is the Christian life?” in a phrase, I would say that it is *the passionate pursuit of the holiness of Jesus* manifested in one’s life. In a word, the Christian life is “sanctification” – it is pursuing the living out of the holiness and the uniqueness of the life of Christ.

This all may sound, well and fine – to our ears. I would hope that none of this causes anyone difficulty. This is all fairly basic. And yet the reality is that living a life of ever increasing Christlikeness; of growing sanctification; or of a radical and seemingly reckless pursuit of living out the words and ways of Jesus is often considered secondary rather than primary to most believers [pause]; optional rather than necessary [pause]. Sadly, our Christian culture often views sanctification, this passionate pursuit of Christlikeness as some kind of upper-level graduate course; necessary perhaps for a select few who might be pastors, or elders or teachers or missionaries – but not for the common believer. Yet the truth of the matter is, this passionate pursuit of holiness, this Christlikeness, sanctification or radical, Biblical Christianity is the core class of all believers. We read verses like Hebrews 12:14 –

Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.

Such a verse reminds us that pursuing peace and holiness of life is a process; that is it requires effort and self-discipline. Holiness of life does not “just happen.” It is work and for many, the idea of working their Christian life is not appealing, particularly in an age of great spiritual laxity. As one preacher put it, ***“Many who profess Christ are pampering themselves to death rather than pushing themselves to holiness.”*** (Lawson, Steven; ***“The Unwavering Resolve of Jonathan Edwards***). Let me ask you this – are you pushing yourself to holiness? Are you passionately pursuing living like Jesus Christ? As Jesus so aptly reminds us in Matthew 5:8 –

Blessed [most happy] are the pure in heart (holy), for they shall see God.

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What is it that will make you most happy with the coming year? Will it be losing those 10 to 20 pounds? Will it be being more physically fit? Will it be stopping some vice or bad habit? Will it be starting some good habit? Will it be reading through the entire New Testament – twice? Three times? How about reading through the entire Bible? With the coming of the new year many of us will make resolves – things we desire to see accomplished in our lives; generally to our own benefit, sometimes extending out to the benefit of others. As we come to our text today in John 16:25-33, let me say first of all that I know Jesus was not presenting to His disciples resolutions for a New Year.

These words are some of the final discussions and directives Jesus gives before His remarkable prayer of John 17 followed by His time in the Garden of Gethsemane which would lead to His arrest, trial and crucifixion. But from these final words of Jesus, I would have you see some seven resolves; seven determinations that we can pull from our text and apply to our lives as we consider following after Jesus. We will take a look at four of these resolves this week, the last week of the year and the final three next week, the first week of 2009. So, whatever other resolves you might be tempted to included in your New Year’s repertoire, let us look at seven resolutions worth considering as they point us to God and drive us to the holiness of the life of Christ.

1. Know the greatness of God (16:25)

These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; an hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but will tell you plainly of the Father.

If there is anything worthy pursuing as believers in Jesus Christ, it is the knowledge of the Holy. You might remember that even last week we considered John 17:3 where Jesus defines the essence of eternal life as what? As knowing the only true God – or in other words, knowing the greatness of God.

When Jesus came to this earth, one part of His mission was clearly to **“seek and to save that which was lost”** (Luke 19:10) as well as **“to give His life as a ransom for many”** (Matthew 20:28). In addition to this mission, Jesus also came to make the Father known – to reveal the greatness of God’s holiness, of His righteousness, of His graciousness and of His willingness to save sinful humanity. In John 1:18 we read:

No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

Jesus has explained God the Father. This is a most true statement and yet the way Jesus explained God and His ways was not always understood. Here in John 16:25 Jesus says, **“These things I have spoken to you in figurative language...”** In other words, the truths about God and salvation and the times to come have often been given in “figurative language” or “proverbs” – referring to some veiled or cryptic sayings. The point is that neither the disciples who were with Jesus or even ourselves at times understand what Jesus is teaching us. Whether it be because of circumstances, being too distracted or too busy to think things through; or because we are just a bit dull or slow to understand, something the teachings of Jesus,

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something the reading of the Bible is one of those, “Huh...what did I just read...” or “what did I just hear” occasions – is this not right?

In John 2 Jesus said to the religious leaders, **“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”** Of course the religious leaders, as well as the disciples thought He was speaking about Herod’s temple, not realizing that Jesus was speaking of His own body at the resurrection. I love the statement of John 2:22 which says of this incident;

So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken.

Sometimes we are given truths that we don’t fully understand at the time that the Lord uses later to build our faith and hope in Him. Another example of this not readily understanding the teaching of Jesus is found in Matthew 13. After speaking many parables, the disciples asked Jesus to explain these to them. I could give many more examples, but the point is this – while it is true that Jesus speaks truth concerning God’s person and ways; the natural human heart will not grasp the meaning and application of that truth by itself. Something else is needed. Actually someone else is needed so that we might grasp the greatness of God. Look again at verse 25,

...an hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language (hard to understand), but will tell you plainly of the Father.

Never forget that one of the key subjects of this entire discourse or sermon of Jesus that began back in John 13 was to teach the disciples about the ministry of the Holy Spirit in their lives. What Jesus is saying here, when put in context of what He has taught about the Holy Spirit, is that once the Holy Spirit comes, which He did at Pentecost, because the Holy Spirit would fill them, be in them, illuminate their hearts to the reality of who God is, this would be how Jesus speaks to them plainly the Father. Let me just show you that. Turn to Acts 2. In Acts 2:1-4, we have the coming of the promised Holy Spirit. We read:

1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

So, the Holy Spirit had come and filled them. God now resided within His people. And what was the result of this indwelling presence of God? Look down with me at Act 2:11. After a list of all the different languages and people groups were identified it was said by them...

...we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God.

Beloved, to know the greatness of God is not a mere resolve of our hearts and minds. If you pursue reading through the Bible, or studying ten books on the subject of God and yet do not

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have or yield your life to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, your efforts are in vain. I submit to you that we need to resolve to know the greatness of God, but in order to accomplish this, we must first resolve to know the Holy Spirit. Is your life characterized by the evidences of His filling? What are those evidences. In Galatians 5:22-23 we read of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Are these yours and increasing? Jesus promised that with the coming of the Holy Spirit, we would and could know the greatness of the Father.

So, in reality there are two resolves here; not only to know the greatness of God, to then to look to be filled continually (as Ephesians 5:18) tells us, with the Holy Spirit, who gives us understanding and knowledge of God. Will this be your resolve?

2. Know the intimacy of God (16:26)

In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I will request of the Father on your behalf;

A second resolve I would have you consider flow right out of this knowledge of God and I would say to you to resolve to know the intimacy of God. Jesus says, “In that day..” meaning...in that time period when you will be filled by the Holy Spirit; “**...you will ask in My name and I do not say to you that I will request of the Father on your behalf...**” The emphasis here is that it will be those who have been filled with the Holy Spirit who “**will ask in My name...**” Because of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross; because our sins have been atoned for; because we have been made right with God because of Jesus’ death for us; we don’t have to make our requests to Jesus only or Jesus first and hope that He will then take the matter up with the Father. Again the emphasis is that “you will ask” – we will ask – we have the privilege and responsibility to pray. But I say to you this implies not only the communication of prayer, but of intimacy with God. Because God’s Holy Spirit lives in us, we can ask the Father for anything in Jesus’ name and He will give it us. Isn’t that remarkable? This ought to cause our hearts to resolve to come all the more to the Father. It reminds us that Jesus died on that cross not just to take away our sins, but to bring us near to God. 1 Peter 3:18 says,

For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God...

That we might be brought to or have intimacy, closeness to God. And beloved, it is not as though Jesus does not pray for us as well, but we are able to draw near to God in prayer and fellowship as well as having Jesus continue to pray for us as well. In Hebrews 7:25 we read:

Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

And let me make this comment on the idea of praying in the Jesus’ name. This is not a magic formula by which we are guaranteed everything we request. Rather this serves as a reminder, as that which focuses our prayers.

To pray in Jesus name is to pray in a manner like and consistent with the will of Jesus. I thought of the phrase, “I come in the name of the King!” In medieval days, if a courier or

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ambassador made that statement, it was taken to mean that that person is speaking in a manner consistent with the will of the king. Such is to be the subject of our prayers, that we pray with the heart and passion of Jesus, which interestingly enough, we see in John 17. In other words, Jesus will reveal to His disciples what it was that was important enough for Jesus to pray. And if you would take the time to read the prayer of John 17 through, you would find it an intensely intimate prayer with Jesus longing for fellowship with the Father, longing to be near to the Father, and yet longing for those whom He loves to be with Him in this intimacy.

In light of this, I ask you to consider to resolve the pursuit of greater intimacy with God through the process of prayer; seeking God’s face; longing for God’s heart to be your heart. Oh to pray the prayer of David every day:

One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek [resolve]: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to meditate in His temple (Psalm 27:4)

3. Know the love of God (16:27)

for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came forth from the Father.

So, will you resolve to know the greatness of God, the intimacy of God and now, thirdly, the love of God. After Jesus calls the disciples to pray in His name and to come directly to the Father in prayer, He next reminds them that the Father is not indifferent toward them. The reason why they can come to the Father and ask anything in the name of Jesus is because the Father loves them. Do you know the Father Himself loves you? How do you know He loves you?

At first glance our text almost appears to be a contradiction with some other teaching in the Word of God. It would seem that John 16:27 is teaching that God loves us because we first loved and believed in Jesus. Because you have loved Me and have believed that I came from the Father, the Father loves you. Is this what is meant here? What of 1 John 4:10 and 19 which read:

10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. . .19 We love, because He first loved us.

Since Scripture cannot contradict Scripture, what is meant here in John 16:27? The point is that the Father actively, not passively loves us. The Father is not indifferent to believers in Jesus. He wants to hear directly from us. The Father’s love for us is direct and special, not indirect and secondary. It is not as though the Father loves us as merely some favor to Jesus. It is not as though the Father loves us because He has to – like a parent might say to a child, “Now tell your sister you love her!” – which the child might do but with reluctance and hesitancy. Jesus because with the truth – **“the Father loves you...”** And the word Jesus uses for love is not the familiar “agapao” – that love which we define as seeking the highest good for another regardless of the cost; but rather is “phileo” – a family love; a brotherly love; a love that seeks to benefit one another – I like to call it a reciprocating love; a love that desires to give, but also has the rightful expectation of receiving.

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The Father loves us, giving us more of Himself; this greater knowledge and this intimacy with Him because He has been receiving something from us – something that He as Father has a right to expect from we who confess to be His children – and that something is our love and belief of Jesus as the Son of God. In other words, as we demonstrate our love for Jesus and confess our faith Jesus, the Father is receiving from us something and is lovingly inclined to give us even more of Himself. And how do we demonstrate our love for Jesus and become the recipients of the Father’s reciprocating love? Remember what Jesus said in John 14:15 – that simple truth? **“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”**

Beloved, our obedience to the words and ways of Jesus Christ is the measure of our love for Jesus. Jesus said here in John 16:27, **“because you have loved Me and believed that I came forth from the Father.”** As we love Jesus in obedience – and a part of that obedience is expressed in our faith or believe that Jesus is the Son of God, we can expect from the Father the expressions of His love; this greater and more intimate knowledge of Himself communicated to us by His Spirit and through prayer. Do you long to know this love of God? Then you must be resolved to express love to God and love to God is expressed by our obedience to the commands of Christ.

If I were to ask you to tell me three things you know that Jesus would have you do; would have you work on in the year ahead; could you give me an answer right away, or would you have to think about it? Not that it is wrong to think about it, but if you don’t know what it is Christ would have you accomplish right now – if there are not at least a few clear goals in the forefront of your mind by which you intend to obey Christ’s commandments and by which to express your love for Him – then you have a couple of problems – first, without any thoughtful, memorable, tangible goals, you will more often fail in expressing love to Christ than succeed. Second, without such goals being met, you can have no expectation of a greater knowledge and intimacy with God. What are some of your resolves?

- I resolve to know God more through the reading of His Word (Psalm 119:9-11)
- I resolve to be a better, more biblical husband to my God-given wife (Ephesians 5:25)
- I resolve to have victory over a vice (anger, lying, laziness – Galatians 5:16-21)

As you have goals such as these or others by which you desire to express your love for Christ; pleading for God’s grace to have success; then you can experience a greater love from the Father – a greater knowledge of Him and greater intimacy with Him. Will you be so resolved to know the love of God this way?

4. Know the gospel of God (16:28)

I came forth from the Father and have come into the world; I am leaving the world again and going to the Father.

The final resolve I present to you this morning then if found in the words of verse 28, a resolve I have called knowing the gospel of God? For in this verse is contained the whole essence of the; the coming of Jesus from heaven; the life of Jesus on this earth and the ascension of Jesus back into heaven. Here is the good news, the gospel as we break it down.

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First, I would have you notice that Jesus says, “**I came forth from the Father...**” While it is true that the Godhead, the Father, Son and Spirit all determined the plan of salvation and in this sense God sent His Son; such a truth is coupled with the voluntary purpose of the Son. All other could only have been sent, but here we see that Christ came. It is Jesus fixed His own time, birthplace, country, parentage, and circumstances. Here then let us note the divinity of Jesus – Jesus came forth from God because He is God.

Second, Jesus says “**[I] have come into the world...**” Although the world had been created by Jesus and owed Him all praise, worship and adoration; the world became virtually praiseless and worshipped vain things, adoring those things that were less than praiseworthy. Man’s heart had been corrupted by sin and man, without God’s intervention, would never even know to seek Jesus for help and salvation. Therefore Jesus – the Son of God – the Holy One – the One of infinite purity and light came into this world of darkness and sin. He came as the Light; to show men the darkness of their hearts; to show them of the great graciousness of God and to call them to give up the pursuit of darkness and living in sin on this earth so that they might live to pursue the light, the holiness for which God intended them, that abundant life Jesus spoke of in John 10:10. And notice that if the first part of verse 27 reminds us of the deity of Jesus – that Jesus is the Son of God, from the Father; that this part of the verse reminds us of the humanity of Jesus – that Jesus is the Son of Man – one of us and now the God/man – the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world.

Finally, Jesus says, “**I am leaving the world again and going to the Father.**” Just like Jesus said, “I came from the Father...” – Jesus now says, “I am leaving the world...” This reminds us of the Sovereignty of Jesus as Lord and King. Jesus leaves when He pleases and even how He pleases. Of course He would be leaving by means of a cross – a violent death; but He knew that death would mean life to those who would believe and love Him. Here then we see that the God/man, this one who was forever united in human flesh, was “going to the Father.” Man was going to be where God had originally intended Him – in perfect fellowship with Him. This would be astonishing to the disciples, that human flesh might be perfected and enabled to be in God’s holy presence. And yet Jesus would be the first fruit, the one in the flesh who would blaze the way into heaven for all who would, by faith, be transformed in heart and will to passionately pursue the holiness of Christ, the life of Christ.

Herein lies the gospel...that Jesus, the Son of God who eternally dwelt in the glories and sinless perfections of heaven, came to this sin-stricken earth and became the Son of Man so that the sons of men, by His giving His life and perfection to those who believe on Him, would become the sons of God, perfected in the righteousness and holiness of Jesus, and eternally dwell in the glories and sinless perfections of heaven with God.

Oh, may we be resolved to know this gospel more and more. The gospel not merely for unbelievers my friends. The gospel is for believers as well. As Milton Vincent so aptly put it, “*The gospel is so foolish (according to my natural wisdom), so scandalous (according to my conscience), and so incredible (according to my timid heart), that it is a daily battle to believe the full scope of it as I should. There is simply no other way to compete with the forebodings of my conscience, the condemnings of my heart, and the lives of the Devil than to overwhelm such things with daily rehearsings of the gospel.*”

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If such be true, then what better resolve than to know the gospel of God, than to daily rehearse this gospel? And how do we do this? For one, read and reread the Bible and the Gospel accounts. Speak of the gospel regularly to unbelievers and believers. Listen well every time a preacher states the gospel to hear some fresh angle or way of understanding it. Read good biblical books about the gospel (I recommend "A Gospel Primer" by Milton Vincent). But unless you resolve to do this, you will be more inclined to fail than to succeed.

So then, know the greatness of God, know the intimacy of God; know the love of God and know the gospel of God. Four resolves that if pursued, would help each and everyone of us come to understand and live out what is the Christian life – this passionate pursuit of the holiness of Jesus in our own lives. May these be ours and increasing daily!

Soli Deo Gloria

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December 28, 2008**