

## What Does It Matter!

### Scripture reading- Acts 4:13-22

How well did you hold on to your resolutions last year?

Peanuts cartoon-

In the New Year, what attitude will you face this year with? Will it be one of anticipation or one of giving up or failure?

Rick Atchley says that there are really only two kinds of people in the world... no not Red Sox fans and then everyone else. Not Democrats and Republicans; not even Christians and non-Christians. What Rick says is there are Trekkies and non-Trekkies! Think about those old episodes with Captain Kirk, Spock, Bones and Scottie. Each episode started out with Captain Kirk saying something about mission. To go where no one has gone before??? Was that the mission? No! The mission was "To boldly go where no one has gone before."

Now that's a good mission... to boldly go. And that's what I want to do in my life's mission. That wherever God leads me in this New Year, I intend to go boldly! I intend for this to be a brave new year!

A person doesn't have to dig to deeply in the bible to realize that fear and faith do not go hand in hand. What you'll begin to see in Scripture is that those who seem fearless are not the people who are without difficulties or are not facing frightening circumstances in their lives, but they are people who have decided to live by faith!

The unique aspect of faith is a life that lives with consistent courage regardless of circumstance. What I'm saying is, faithful people are consistently bold.

A brother and a friend has helped me to see a little clearer in this regard. He's a little older than I am, he has a lot more white hair than I do. His hair is much longer than mine and he's even been known to put it in a pony tail from time to time. **Thank you brother!**

Faithful people are bold people. Many Christians it seems live their lives reactively. They have no idea what kind of people they are going to be in this new year because they don't know what is going to happen to them in 2006. The circumstances of their life will determine their attitudes, their priorities and their values. But a person of faith does not let what happens on the outside—determine who they are on the inside.

So many people believe that it really does come down to what happens to them that makes a difference. However, I have seen again and again people of faith who have had some bad things happen to them (I mean really bad things)—and when it was all said and done, it was the stuff on the inside that made the difference in their lives. Some people respond to the circumstances of their lives with discouragement, despair, hopelessness and timidity. They are this way because they have let their circumstances determine who they are, and at the very least, to believe that life will always be this way for them.

What really makes the difference here is faith! People of faith are people who are bold. By boldness I don't mean an in-your-face-kind-of-boldness. I certainly do not mean an arrogant boldness that says it's-my-way-or-the-highway. I'm talking about a boldness that is determined to be responsive to God and not reactive to circumstances. Biblical boldness will lead a person to see that "up until now" life has dealt me these cards; "up until now" I've reacted this way and "up until now" I have not been living faithfully. Biblical boldness moves us from the "up until now" to the "from now on." "From now on" I intend to respond to God in courageous, consistent and bold faith.

Not only is this biblical boldness, the Scripture shows it to us in action. Acts 4 we see that the church was told to shut up! Acts 4:23 Peter and John go back to the church and have a prayer meeting.

**vv.24b-31** "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. 25You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:" "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? 26The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One. 27Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. 28They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. **29Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.** 30Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus." **31After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.**

Listen... don't miss it. When a person has the Holy Spirit, one of the gifts is courage! Courage is a huge part of the Christian life. Courage comes when we really believe what we say we believe.

**2 Cor. 3:12-** Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold.

In other words, if we really believe what we say believe about God and the hope we have in Him, we will be bold.

**2 Cor. 5:6-** Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. 7We live by faith, not by sight.

Paul wants us to know that he lives by what he believes and not by what he sees. If we live by what we see, 2006 is probably not going to be a very fulfilling year. I suspect that this year will show us some pretty frightening things.

Courage has nothing to do with how much power a person has; or how intimidating a person can be; or much money a person has; or how educated someone is. It is very possible to have none of these things and still be a person of great courage and boldness.

**Acts 4:13** When the priests, the captain of the temple guard and the Saducees saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men...

I mean why were these guys so courageous? They didn't have any reason to be so courageous. ...they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

Hebrews 3:6 says- **But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.**

Here's a good question you might want to ask yourself: Last year, how good of a job did I hold on to my courage?

- When the days were the hardest, was I still bold?

There's someone that we can look at this morning who epitomizes what it means to **hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.**

If there's anybody who lived by consistent courage it was the apostle Paul. And you'll recall that if there was ever anybody who had a right to be discouraged, it was Paul. When Paul wrote to the Christians in Philippi, he wrote from a Roman (many believe) prison where he was unjustly under arrest, and was unfairly criticized by other religious leaders and where he was unaware of what his future held (would he be released or executed?).

Here's a guy who had a lot of reasons to be a little on the discouraged side—don't you think?

12Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. 13As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard[b] and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 14Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.

15It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. 16The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. **18But what does it matter?** The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, 19for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. 20I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, **but will have sufficient courage** so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. 21For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

What a great response for us to read. Although this is a fairly well known text, there are two Greek words that really stand out for me. In the NIV the two Greek words are translated **But what does it matter (τι γαρ)**.

Let me tell you that these two little Greek words capture the attitude of someone who anticipates a brave New Year! It captures the attitude of people who want to live by faith instead of living by fear.

When you summarize Paul's life you quickly come to the conclusion that so many refuse to see...that life is hard!

Paul starts out here in Philippians by telling us what has happened to him. We can relate to happenings. We've had some bad stuff happen to us. But a person of faith understands that bad stuff happens... a person of faith understands that life is hard!

Listen--sometimes the roast is going to burn!

- The car will breakdown and it wont be pretty.
- The preacher from time to time will preach a bad sermon.
- And on a more serious note, there's someone here this year who will lose their job, not because they are bad workers, but because the company you work for will downsize.
- This year perhaps someone in this room will lose a mate--either to death or divorce- not because you didn't work hard at your marriage, but because your spouse didn't keep their promise.
- This year someone may get word from the doctor that "it doesn't look good--there's nothing more we can do."

And when these things happen to us, many times we are so surprised that life is so hard. **Hard is normal!!**

Christians who are expecting paradise in this world have not been reading the Word careful enough.

Don't miss this now: If courage requires an absence of difficulties and if we are not going to live life boldly unless life is easy then we are setting ourselves up for a pretty discouraging year.

God wants us to know today that we can be brave even when life is hard. This is so because of faith's most basic conviction: **Jesus is Lord!**

Here's the difference for a person of faith--Paul doesn't see himself in prison, rather he sees himself in Christ-- and that reality changes everything!

v. 13- Paul says *"I'm in chains for Christ."*

v. 19- I've been *"helped by the Spirit of Christ"*

v. 20- *Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death*

v. 21- *For to me, to live is Christ*

This is why Paul could say-- "What does it matter" in response to his imprisonment, and critics and his uncertain future--**(τι γαρ)**. "What does it matter!" **Jesus is Lord!**

I can hear Paul saying "they have to chain me up with a prison guard all of my waking hours, and I get to preach the gospel to him. I have now preached the gospel to all the guards in Caesar's palace. **Because Jesus is Lord!**

...But Paul, there are some religious people out there saying some real ugly things about you and your ministry while preaching the gospel--**(τι γαρ)**. "What does it matter!" **Jesus is Lord!** I don't care what people think about me, I care what people think about Jesus.

...But Paul, we don't know if you're going to get out of prison and come to us or if you'll be executed. --**(τι γαρ)**. "What does it matter!" **Jesus is Lord!** If they let me out of prison I'll come to you and preach. If they execute me then I'll be with Jesus.

It's amazing how Paul doesn't focus on the crisis, but keeps his focus on Jesus.

Paul seems to know that there is no circumstance in his life that can't be used for the glory of God. And I'm convinced that Paul knows that for the rest of us who follow Christ the same is true.

The roast is going to burn! *"What does it matter!"* Go get a new one!

- The car will breakdown and it wont be pretty. *"What does it matter!"* Go get another one!
- The preacher from time to time will preach a bad sermon. *"What does it matter!"* Send him and his wife to the Carribbean for a short sabbatical and he'll come back refreshed and ready to go--I promise!
  
- If you lose your job-- **Jesus is still Lord!** He said if you seek my kingdom first, I will meet all your needs.
- If you lose a mate-- **Jesus is still Lord!** He has promised to never leave you nor forsake you, and I believe he'll move the rest of here to love you and help you through.
- If the doctor says "it doesn't look good--there's nothing more we can do." **Jesus is still Lord!** Which means he's going to glorify himself by healing you or he'll glorify himself by bringing you to heaven. But either way... **Jesus is still Lord!**

So the bible can say in Heb. 13:6 that we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can (anyone) do to me?"

Here's our reality-- we wasted way too many days last year feeling sorry for ourselves, complaining, wanting things to get easier and to go our own way... instead of wondering about **Jesus being Lord and how can I bring him glory today!**

My prayer for you and me is that everyday this year we will let God use our circumstances (The good the bad and the ugly) and let Christ be exalted in some way.

Remember the words of Christ in John 16:33: **In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."**

**Presbyterian minister has said- faith is not about how we feel; it is about how we live.**

This year may we have a mission. May we live a faithful life that cannot be threatened so that we can live with consistent courage.

Going back to Phil. 1:21 I want you to fill in the blank **For to me, to live is \_\_\_\_\_.**

Whatever you put in that blank will determine how fearfully or how boldly you will live in 2006.

Is there something in that blank that could be threatened? Money, health, family, employment, education... It is possible that anyone of these things in someone's blank won't even be here next year.

But... when we make it our mission— **For to me, to live is Christ...** nothing can happen to chain that mission.

My goal this year is not about being safe or making life easy. I want to go wherever God leads me this year and I want to go boldly! So I intend to have a brave New Year and you can as well.

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