

I don't make New Year's Resolutions anymore. Trust me, it's not because I'm perfect in everyway, with nothing else to change. No, it's because I'm a man whose a sucker for punishment and would prefer to be disappointed in myself numerous times a year. Don't just give me one chance to decide, "this change, this routine, this hobby, it'll be the one to make sure my life is in order," rather I like to do this monthly, or even weekly. And let me tell you, the fall out is spectacular. The number of times that I've committed to using my phone less in the past year, only to not let it leave my hand that very same day, well, I don't know if we could count that high together.

But I get New Year's Resolutions. People see an empty calendar in front of them, they see a blank slate just waiting to be filled with good things, and they look back over the past year as they sit around the table with family and friends, reminiscing and they realize there are things they wish were different about how they spent their time and energy, so January hits and it's time to make changes, an earthly repentance if you will. It makes sense to me.

And typically I'd say that the changes people set out to make are admirable. No one ever says I'm going to waste my life and spend 16 hours a day on video games, you wait and see, or I'm only going to eat gravy and see what wonders

that does for my physique and longevity. No one sets out to single-handedly support to the liquor and tobacco and gambling industries in Alberta.

No, we choose to eat better so that we can enjoy the gift of life longer and more fully. We plan to read more books to expand our knowledge. We determine to reconnect with friends, to exercise a little more, to finally take up wood-working, to settle into a routine of prayer and devotion. We, though up to this point I've simply been describing what I've endeavored to do over the years, we aim to make our lives better, healthier, fuller. We want to make good use of the time we've been given.

We have this neat little insight that we are not as we should be. We see our lives playing out in front of us and we see that damage that we bring to them by choices we wish we could change, by habits we wish we could break, and we know that we can't really do anything about the past 12 months, but mark our words we're going to do better this year.

Everyone has this insight—I'm certain it's common among all cultures, through all times, in all religious traditions. We can see that life should be better, and a lot of what is wrong has to do with our part in it. That's the only part that we can control at least.

And we seek to control these aspects of our lives for multiple reasons.

Firstly, because we simply see that it'll make our days easier. We're seeking, in one way or another, our own approval. Whether it's our eating and exercise, our work-play balance, our hobbies, or whatever you could want to change, to some extent you do it for yourself. But on another level we do it for the approval of those around us. Husbands change for their wives. Wives change for their husbands. Friends change for one another. We all change for those viewing our lives on social media. We know that they know that we could and should be better, and we crave some positive affirmation so we seek to make changes (yes, for ourselves) hoping that someone else will notice and pat us on the back.

But sometimes we change to get God's approval. Getting more regular, in our Bible reading or praying or attending church, gossiping less, doing charity work more, even the trend of gratitude boils down to us trying to get right with God, doesn't it? In all honesty, whether or not we're aiming to change for God, all the little goals we set, the alterations we make, they arise from a place of knowing that we are not living life as we ought to—we are not right with God.

So we tweak this, we try that, we say this year, this week is the week that I can silence this nagging conscience, but take it from someone who might be an extreme example, we don't have the power. I'm unable to master my time, my

appetite, or my desire to nap when I begin reading. So how would I be able then to rule over the sin inside me fighting against a constant prayer life, a dedicated devotional life, a better tamed tongue or eyes that seek only true beauty and wisdom.

No, for as long as we are sinners, rotten fruit will come from our trees, salt water from our streams, evil from our hearts. We might be able to cover some of it up for a time. We might be able to hide it behind superficial changes so that people see how funny we are, how much time we give, how smart we can be. You might be able to change the things of this world and thus forget about the deeper wrongs that also plague your conscience, but they persist.

Paul says that we must die to our sin. We can't fight against it and overcome it, changing what was evil into what is good and right. The old self, with its desires, with its curved and selfish will, with its weakness to do any good, it must be crucified. It must undergo the baptism of fire that John proclaimed Christ would bring. It must breathe its last so it would come to an end. That is the only way to cease its atrocities.

It's what we sinners deserve, whether we want to admit it or not. And because we cannot change ourselves for the better, it's what we get. But just before it happens, Christ appears. Eternal God appears in created flesh. Holiness

and goodness perfect stands among the sinners, pleading for forgiveness in the Jordan. He is drowned in repentance, turning away from sin to God, in the hopes that He might be merciful to this man born in Bethlehem. That's what everyone else sees, at least. Luke tells us that Jesus is just one of the crowds lining up to get dunked.

But we know that this man alone knew no sin. Jealousy nor lust ever were sparked by what He saw, gossip and slander never exited His mouth. The only anger He would experience was that against sin. The only sin He would be acquainted with was that which He stole from the creatures around Him. This is the sin that He repented of. Of yours and mine, as it became His.

Jesus resolved to change. He underwent a change in the opposite direction of the one we must go. Life Himself submitted to death, righteousness allowed Himself to be consumed by sin, the one with nothing to purge or wash away underwent both water and fire, in the Jordan and on the cross.

And He did it so that Isaiah's prophecy over God's people would be true.

**"2When (and not if) you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you."**

Christ has already endured the wrath of God which purges away all sin, the fire that should have consumed us completely. And into Him, into His being, His perfection, His life and His death, we are baptized. So even though we haven't taken our last breath, your Old Adam has more than a death sentence. He's been drowned (even though he likes to swim to the surface and cause mischief). In His place you have risen in Christ—you have been raised already, to newness of life, even if your days are still frustratingly consumed by your sin. You have risen from the waters and alongside Christ God says "You are my beloved, in whom I am well pleased."

Not because you got your life together at last, not because you conquered the sin that has entangled you for so long, not because of anything you could actually accomplish or even hope to do, but because you are in Christ alone. And in the Son the Spirit rests upon you and the Father speaks, He sings delight over you.

Because of this you can just live your life. Going from day to day as a gift given you from your Heavenly Father for the sake of Christ who has suffered in your place. You can live freely knowing you don't need to earn any approval, not from God, and therefore not from yourself or anyone else either. With the promise in your ears, with water still dripping from your forehead, with faith

placed in your heart, you go as God's child, constantly repenting of when you turn from God, and learning by faith that you are forgiven, going with His power and will to love your neighbours (we aren't reliant on what we can must up, thanks be to God), and enjoying each day free from fear because God Himself has said fear not, I am with you, I am delighted with you, I love you, all for the sake of Christ who dove in first that He might rise first, and go with you all the way.

Amen.