

The Awesome Power of Believing, John 1:1-18 Sunday, January 5, 2025

I am convinced that this can be the best year of your life if you will simply ACCEPT ONE PRINCIPLE...

WHAT YOU BELIEVE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN WHAT YOU HAVE OR WHO YOU ARE. Can you accept that? *The most important matter in your life is not what is happening to you, but what is happening in you.*

The story is told about a man on a train crew who was accidentally locked in a refrigerator box car. The rest of the crew did not notice that he was missing and went home for the night. When the man realized that he was locked in the box car, he began banging on the door until his fists were bloody. He shouted for help until he was so hoarse that he was nearly speechless. "I'll freeze to death before anybody finds me," he thought to himself. Panic seized his mind. In the box car he found a piece of a knife and painfully he began carving a message onto the wooden floor: "It's so cold, my body is getting numb...If I could just go to sleep...these may be my last words." The next morning the man's body was discovered inside the locked refrigerator box car. Every physical sign indicated that the man had frozen to death. Only one thing puzzled the investigators. The refrigerator unit on the box car was inoperative--it did not work. The temperature inside the car did not fall below 55 degrees. It was not the outer cold but an inner conviction that killed this poor man.

WHAT YOU "BELIEVE" IS "MORE IMPORTANT" THAN "WHAT YOU HAVE" OR "WHO YOU ARE."

You can be the richest man in the world, like Howard Hughes, and be a recluse hidden away in a dark and lonely hotel room obsessed by fears that terrify you and will not set you free. You can be the most popular entertainer in the world, like Elvis Presley was at one time, and take hundreds of pills each day to ease an inner pain. You can make millions laugh, as did John Belushi, but have such an inner sadness that you will pump your veins full of a deadly narcotic and drink every day. **What you believe is more important than who you are or what you have.** The importance of that statement cannot be exaggerated.

Let's begin with WHAT YOU BELIEVE ABOUT YOURSELF. One of the most perplexing diseases of our modern society, if we may call it a disease, is a set of symptoms we call anorexia nervosa. This awful disease afflicts mostly young women between the ages of 15 and 25. One of its most famous victims was also one of the most popular and most talented singers of the last decade, Karen Carpenter.

A young woman with anorexia believes quite simply that she is too fat. It makes no difference what her body size is. You can show her a picture of herself as an emaciated, shriveled up piece of skin and bones looking very much like a victim of starvation in Ethiopia and she will still say, "I'm too fat." Can you imagine the grief and anguish of family and friends as they seek to deal with this perverted, distorted self-concept? The reality of the situation is not as important to the anorexic as what she believes that she is too fat. What you believe about yourself will determine your destiny.

On a more positive note, comes an illustration from the world of basketball. Every basketball fan is familiar with the name Adolph Rupp, the late but immortal coach of the Kentucky Wildcats. It is said that Adolph Rupp once made a boast at a news conference that he could take any young man and make an All-American basketball player out of him. A reporter challenged him on his boast, and they made a friendly wager. Rupp had at that time a blonde haired, blue-eyed first-year basketball player of somewhat average ability named Cotton Nash. From that day forward, Adolph Rupp began to refer to Cotton Nash as my "All American Center." Every news conference, every speaking engagement, it was my "All American Center, Cotton Nash." Would you be surprised if I told you that Cotton Nash was named to the All-American team not once but three times? Rupp made a believer out of the press, but more importantly, he made a believer out of Cotton Nash. What you believe about yourself is more important than your talent, your I.Q., your skin color, or your social status. If you believe that you are a unique creation of God, if you believe that he created you to be a winner and not a loser, you can be a blessing to yourself and to others.

What you believe about yourself is important, as well as **WHAT YOU BELIEVE ABOUT YOUR PURPOSE FOR LIVING.**

Charles L. Allen, in his book, YOU ARE NEVER ALONE, says about a man named John Davis who was a farmer and a self-styled, self-made man. Throughout his life he had amassed considerable money but no friends. Nor was he close to his wife's family. They had never approved of him, and he had nothing to do with them.

When his wife died, Davis hired a sculptor to sculpt a beautiful statue in her memory--a statue of a love seat with the two of them seated at each end. Davis was so pleased with the completed work he ordered another statue built, this time of himself kneeling at her grave placing a wreath there. Again, he was delighted with the result, so he commissioned a third monument, this time showing her kneeling beside his grave placing a wreath upon it. Since she was already dead, he had the sculptor place a pair of wings on her shoulders. One idea led to another until he had spent over a quarter of a million dollars on this series of monuments.

Each time someone from the nearby town would suggest that he might want to contribute to some need in the community, John Davis would answer with a scowl, *"What's this community ever done for me? I don't owe this town nothin'!"*

John Davis died at age 92 in the poorhouse. Only one person seemed genuinely saddened by his passing. He was Horace England the tombstone salesman. All that is left behind are those monuments slowly sinking into the ground in a cemetery near Lincoln, Kansas--victims of time, vandalism, and neglect--mute testimony to the poverty of values of a self-made man who never understood the true meaning of his life.

Have you ever sat down and thought about the meaning of your life? God has richly blessed most of us. Are we making our gift back to life, or are we simply building idle monuments of no use to anybody after we are gone?

What we believe about ourselves and what we believe about our purpose for living are both of critical importance. **It is also important WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT OTHERS.** An article in the "You" section of the New York DAILY NEWS (February 21, 1985), points out the importance of how we feel about others:

"A lot of us are working hard at living long these days," notes the writer. "Exercising regularly. Eating well. Trying to cut back on bad habits. And it's all great, because it's working.

"But there's evidence that something else could help us live longer. Something very easy to do.

"'Love and health go hand in hand,' says Peter Hansen, a therapist consultant who conducts workshops in getting people's affections in shape.

"The mandate to "love your neighbor" is not just a moral mandate it's a physiological one,' says James Lynch, author of the 'Broken Heart.'

"Researchers from the University of California at Berkeley found several years ago that socially isolated people were more susceptible to illness and had death rates about two to three times higher than people whose social lives were richer.

"But perhaps the most intriguing study was done recently by psychologists at Harvard. Measurements were made of a germ fighting substance in the saliva of people before and after they watched various films: A Nazi war movie, a short film on gardening and a documentary on Mother Teresa, the nun whose charitable works earned her a Nobel prize.

"Without a doubt, the film on Mother Teresa was kindest to the viewer's immune systems. Levels of IGA (an immune agent especially effective in fighting colds and other viruses) rose sharply in response to the Mother Teresa film, while no changes occurred in response to the other movies.

"It seems something deep inside our cells responds positively when we feel love. **Love appears capable of sparking healthy biological reactions.**

"Dr. Robert Taylor, a psychiatrist from California, thinks it may boil down to love's potential for being a great reducer of stress. `When people have close relationships, they feel less threatened, less alone, more confident and more in control. Knowing you have people you can turn to in times of need can provide some very important feelings of security, optimism and hope--all of which can be great antidotes to stress."

What we believe about ourselves, what we believe about our purpose for living, what we believe about others, but the most important key to a great new year and a great new life is WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT JESUS CHRIST.

There is a brief and somewhat obscure reference in Luke's Gospel to an aging prophetess named Anna who, when she first laid eyes on the baby Jesus, announced that he was the one who would redeem Jerusalem.

John, in the prologue to his Gospel, described Jesus as the *Word become Flesh*, as the light that shines in the darkness which the darkness cannot overcome.

Do you remember Shel Silverstein's story, THE GIVING TREE? It is a story about a tree that loved a little boy. In his younger years they played hide n' seek. In those carefree childhood days, the boy ate the tree's fruits, swung from her branches, slept in her shade, and the tree was happy.

As the boy grew, however, he had less time for the tree. He did return once as a young man, but he was not interested in swinging from the tree's branches now. He was interested in only one thing--money. The tree had a great idea. "Take my apples and sell them," she said. The young man did. The tree was happy. A long time passed before the young man came by again. When he did, he was not interested in play. He wanted to build himself a house. "Here, take my branches," cried the tree, "and build your house." He did and the tree was happy.

More years passed. Now the young man was growing older. He was tired of his surroundings. He wanted to see the world. When he expressed his weary yearning to the tree, she exclaimed, "Cut me down. Take my large trunk and make yourself a boat. Then you can sail away." And that's what he did. The tree was happy. Many more years passed, and an old man returns--too old, too tired to swing from branches, to pursue great riches, to build houses or boats. Says the tree to the old man, "I have a pretty good stump left, my friend. Why don't you just sit down here and rest?" He did and the tree was happy.

That little children's story speaks to me about the love of God revealed in Christ Jesus. How can we face this new year with a feeling of doom and despair when WE HAVE A GOD WHO LOVES US SO MUCH that HE IS WILLING TO GIVE OF HIMSELF THROUGH HIS SON, JESUS. A God who loves us so much that He is willing to heal our hurts and enable our dreams.

"God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever BELIEVES--there is that word again--believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life." **There is the absolute key to your life and mine for a new year.** This is the awesome power of BELIEVING in yourself, believing in a high and noble purpose for your life, believing in the worth of others, and most importantly, **believing in Jesus Christ as your Redeemer, your Friend, your Savior and your Lord.**

It's not what's happening **to you** that matters. It's what's happening **in you** that counts. **May His love happen in us.**

With this BELIEF we can be more than conquerors through Him who is the very Word of God.