

In this New Year I Purpose to...

“Indeed, what will it benefit a person if he gains the whole world but forfeits his life? What could a person give in exchange for his life? For if someone is ashamed of me and of what I say in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man also will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.” (Mk 8:36-38)

Another new year is upon us. This is the time when America makes New Year’s resolutions. What are you purposing to do next year? Have you made *your* New Year resolutions for 2014?

We are in the middle of the most explosive information age, the most technologically advanced, and there seems to be no shortage of affluence. I am convinced that the Lord’s message to us remains the same – to finish the course, maintain our bearings and to keep our focus on the Lord. The first and greatest commandment is and continues to be: *“Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad [Hear, O Israel, Adonai is our Elohim, Adonai is one], and you are to love Adonai your Elohim with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your understanding and with all your strength”* (Mark 12:29-30). Our first love and our first priority must be the Lord (*Abba, Yeshua* and the *Ruach Elohim*). The Lord is still looking for those that *delight in Him*. Not those who delight in His system, not those who delight in His religion, but those who delight *WITH HIM AND IN HIM ABOVE ALL*. Our heart should continue to be a heart that is entirely sold out to the Lord.

*“**Stop relying on man**, in whose nostrils is a mere breath - after all, he doesn't count for much, does he? ... **I will put children in authority**; capriciousness will govern them. People will oppress each other - everyone his friend, everyone his neighbor. The young will be insolent toward their elders, the insignificant arrogant toward the respected. A man will take hold of his brother in his father's house and say, ‘you have a coat, so rule us! Take charge of this ruin!’ But on that day, he will protest, ‘I don't have a remedy, I lack food and clothing for my own house; **don't put me in charge of people!**’ For Yerushalayim is ruined, and Y’hudah has fallen; because their words and deeds defy ADONAI, in open provocation of his glory. **Their very look witnesses against them! They parade their sin, like S’dom; they don’t even try to hide it** - all the worse for them! - They bring evil on themselves. Say that it will go well with the righteous, that they will enjoy the fruit of their actions; but woe to the wicked, it will go badly with him; for what he has done will be done to him. **My people - children oppress them, and women are ruling over them. My people! Your guides lead you astray and obliterate the paths you should follow.**” (Isaiah 2:22; 3:4-12, emphasis mine).*

Will the Lord let our generation go unpunished? Will the Lord ‘look the other way’ so to speak, and spare our society of its sin consequences? Do you really believe (trust) that He will let our generation continue in its merry way, mocking Him, and making His Word and His Savior of none effect? Think again.

“As the people crowded around him, Yeshua went on to say: ‘This generation is a wicked generation! It asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it – except the sign of Yonah. For just as Yonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be for this generation. The Queen of the South will appear at the Judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them; for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Shlomo, and what is here now is greater than Shlomo. The people of Nineveh will stand up at the Judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they turned to God from their sins when Yonah preached...’” (Luke 11:29-32)

Which of our ‘New Year’ resolutions will you and I really keep this time around? I wish we would keep them all, but we do not seem to. Should we not at least keep the one that really count – to make the Lord King of our life – with all of our heart, with all of our soul and with all of our strength?

Resolutions, Convictions or Preferences

What is a Scriptural conviction? A conviction is a basic Scriptural principle that we purpose to follow, whatever the cost. Suppose someone says: "I have a conviction that I should try to overcome an overeating (or a drinking, pornography, smoking, cursing, or spending) problem." Is it really a conviction? No it is not, because a conviction must be seen in daily living. The above statement is really a person's preference. Or suppose someone else says: "I have a conviction that as a man I should lead my family spiritually, but in some situations this may change." This is also a preference because convictions must not change. And if someone else says: "I have a conviction that *some* of the television programs that I watch are harmful for my children." Is this a conviction? Not quite – a conviction MUST be consistent. If it is harmful for children, you better realize that it is harmful for adults also. How about this one: "I have a conviction that I should not tithe." What do you think about this one? This is an un-Scriptural conviction. Are we better than our father *Ya'akov* who paid tithes on everything: "*and of everything you give me, I will faithfully return one-tenth to you*" (Gen. 28:22).

As we begin a new year in our life and in our congregation, we ought to examine ourselves to see if any way we have in any way *left our first love*. This is not just an evaluation of our motives, our work, our commitment, or even our suffering for His sake. Instead this is a call at the deepest level possible to ask of us the question "*Do I really love you Lord?*" Do we (I) get into the doing and living a Messianic Lifestyle in such a way that my deepest feelings of love get "masked" and wane? If even a little bit of this has or is happening in us we need like Ephesus in Revelation to repent and do the first works again ("*Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first...*" Revelation 2:5) We love Scripture such as Psalm 37:4: "*Delight yourself in the Lord; and He will give you the desires of your heart.*" We (I) tend to focus on the "*desires of my heart*" part instead of in the "*delight yourself in the Lord*" part that is, in fact, a pre-requisite. Are you delighting in the Lord today? Are you delighting in the Lord right now? Are you concerned about Him: His feelings, His agenda, His commandments, His (abundant) life, His reputation, His character, or His desires for you as you are concerned about your feelings, your agenda, your freedom, your life, your reputation, your character or what you want? I confess that I find myself at times weak and unfocussed and lacking in *agape* love (genuine love) toward Him. I serve Him, I work for Him, I obey Him, I do His bidding, I strive to live a true Messianic lifestyle, but I must ask: "do I *delight* in Him?" Perhaps if I *delighted* more I would also have more of the desires of my heart fulfilled.

What does it mean to do the first works again? I believe that speaks of the times when we first came to Him. Oh what great days were those! For many of you that came to the Lord after living in sin for a while, I am sure you remember those first days after you became a Believer. Internally, I was changed and it showed. My life changed, my attitudes changed, my internals changed, and yes, I loved Him so much! However, for many of you that have been Believers a lot of your life or for you that came to the Lord in early childhood, there may not have been any "drastic" changes in belief, attitudes and lifestyle. Maybe for you the first love years were not so pronounced. Regardless, we are all to return (and repent) and rededicate ourselves to first "Love Him," second "Love Him," and third "Love Him." What a difference will such a resolution/commitment would make! It will literally bring about "*Life, and Life more abundantly.*"

A new year is upon us. Maybe you have not made your "New Year's resolutions" yet. If so, make them today, even now. Will you make it your priority and your New Year resolution to "*Love Adonai your God and His Son Yeshua with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength?*" I can't imagine anything more important than making Him to be the center of our universe. If so, our delight in Him will increase and as a consequence His delight in Congregation Kol Simcha will also increase. Then, maybe, He will give US the desires of our hearts. Even so, Bo *Yeshua Bo*, Amen and Amen. Shabbat Shalom!