

A Sermon Preached on December 30, 2018 at

Bethany Beach Christian Church, Bethany Beach, DE

From the annals of the Internet comes this story. A father writes, "I'm an IT specialist. One day I was approached by my young son who told me proudly, "I know what the Bible means!" I smiled and replied, "What do you mean, you know what the Bible means?" My son replied, "I do know!" "Okay," I said. "What does the Bible mean?" "That's easy, Daddy." the young boy replied excitedly, "B\_\_I\_\_B\_\_L\_\_E\_\_\_. It stands for 'Basic Information Before Leaving Earth.'" I'd say he's on to something there!

As Oscar Wilde said, "...now is the accepted time to make your regular and good resolutions. Next week you can begin paving hell with them as usual." We are at that time when 2019 is just around the corner. Who knows what it will bring. But one thing is for sure: we bring our own hopes and expectations with it. So a little background information will help set the stage. Perhaps most preachers in America's pulpits will be hearing sermons of how Jesus grew up in a family that went to the Passover festival each year. It was in that environment of faithful adherence to the law that Jesus grew into spiritual maturity and an understanding of his identity and mission." As it requires a lot of conjecture on the part of biblical scholars, we need to dip into the extra-biblical texts in order to understand what the NT Bible does not give us. The last we checked in on Jesus he had just been born in Bethlehem. We know he and his family stayed there a while for it takes two years for the kings to make a visit. Then the small family unit moves onto Egypt to escape Herod's wrath. Sometime during Jesus' youth the family is told by the angel of God that it is safe to return home. Here we pick up the story of Jesus preaching like his prophet ancestor Samuel in the temple at age 12. He next appears at about age 30 in the Galilee near where he was born. What was he doing in the mean time for those 18 years, what are called, among other names, the "unknown years?"

The experts at *Wikipedia* tell us "The unknown years of Jesus (also called his silent years, lost years, or missing years) generally refers to the period of Jesus' life

between his childhood and the beginning of his ministry, a period not described in the New Testament.

The "lost years of Jesus" concept is usually encountered in esoteric literature (where it at times also refers to his possible post-crucifixion activities) but is not commonly used in scholarly literature since it is assumed that Jesus was probably working as a carpenter in Galilee, at least some of the time with his father Joseph, from the age of 12 to 29, so the years were not "lost years", and that he died on Calvary.

In the late medieval period, there appeared Arthurian legends that the young Jesus had been in Britain. In the 19th and 20th centuries theories began to emerge that between the ages of 12 and 29 Jesus had visited Kashmir, or had studied with the Essenes in the Judean desert. Modern mainstream Christian scholarship has generally rejected these theories and holds that nothing is known about this time period in the life of Jesus.

The use of the "lost years" in what is called the "swoon hypothesis, suggests that Jesus survived his crucifixion and continued his life, instead of what was stated in the New Testament that he ascended into heaven with two angels. This, and the related view that he avoided crucifixion altogether (as in the movie *The Last Temptation of Christ*), has given rise to several speculations about what happened to him in the supposed remaining years of his life, but these are not accepted by mainstream scholars either.<sup>ii</sup>

In the *Book of Mormon*, Jesus visited an Israelite people (led to the Americas around 600 BCE to avoid the Babylonian conquest) after his resurrection. Evidences of Christ in America are claimed in the legends of Viracocha in South America, and Quetzalcoatl in Central America. Details of his adult early life can be found in the apocryphal books *The Gospel of Barnabas*, *The Gospel of James*, *The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* (in its sources, the Gospel adds the first known mention of an ox and a donkey being present at the nativity of Jesus. The work also helped popularize the image of a very young Mary and relatively old Joseph from *The Gospel of James*); and *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas* (some of these we looked at during our Lenten class earlier this year).

What is the point, what is the reason for knowing these stories or versions of the same story? For one thing, it tells us how important and strong tradition is in the Christian sphere. Though these tales may not have made it into the bible, the centuries have not been able to bury the myriad of stories relating to Jesus and

his family. The bible is quite clear about Jesus' fate, regardless of the apocryphal works I mentioned earlier. The bible does not tell us what happened to Mary or Joseph. It is assumed by the same biblical scholars that Joseph died during those "lost years," probably about the year 18CE at the age of 28.

Mary's death was a bit more complicated. The early church teaches that after years of traveling with St. John, at the time of her death she fell asleep or had a "natural death"; she then was taken bodily into heaven either at or before her death. Both these death stories are merely tradition, but they have survived 2000+ years and they make up part of the story of the life of Jesus, only a portion of which, as you can see, is presented through the Bible passage we heard today. There is more to tell, more to know with over 500 texts in play, many of which are part of our tradition though not part of our Scripture. Ah, so many stories to read, so little time. Perhaps we can make it part of our New Year's resolution to examine one or two of these texts weekly (see me if you are interested about what the name of the texts are and where to find them.) It may contain the change or insight you've been seeking....

Because we're at the end of the year, it is only natural that all this talk and thinking about tradition brought me to think about one of the major New Year's traditions, that of making and keeping resolutions. They are well and good, but can they stand up to the Christian traditions the church has handed down to us? Many of the top New Year's resolutions are made by people who will keep them for exactly long as they are convenient, and the minute the resolutions become a challenge to keep they are dropped like a very hot pot being grabbed with bare hands.

Resolutions are made and forgotten like balloon animals, and they are a dime a dozen. But why?

"Good resolutions are simply checks that men draw on a bank where they have no account" says Oscar Wilde.

Why is it that we have no more moral stamina than a noodle when it comes to keeping our resolutions? All of the New Year trivia sites (including *Wikipedia*) will tell you that only 8 to 12 out of every 100 people keep their New Year resolution for an entire year, and the sad or funny thing is that the number may well be less than that.

Granted, there is no way to really count how many people keep their top New Year's resolutions, but the concept remains the same: New Year's resolutions are made just for us to look good in front of our friends at New Year's, and are quickly forgotten when they become inconvenient.

Are New Year resolutions like friends that we can drop when they become too inconvenient to do? Why do you even make resolutions if you aren't going to keep them?

It doesn't matter whether your resolutions are funny New Year's resolutions or serious ones, but it does matter that your word and resolve is so useless that you can't keep a promise to yourself.

You will find that no one other than yourself will follow up on your resolutions, but as the immortal Shakespeare once said, "Please pass the bacon, I prithee." Oops, wrong quote. "To thine own self be true."

Be true to yourself this year, and only make resolutions that you are going to keep.

No one cares if you resolve to "diet more", "die less", "eat better", "smell worse", or just "give up on everything."

The only one who really has an investment in your resolutions for the new year is you, and it is in your best interest not to be lying to yourself when you tell you that you are going to be a better you for your next year.

This New Year, make resolutions that you are going to keep. "I will break my other New Year's resolutions within the first week" is at least one that is accurate, as is "I will diet for two weeks and go back to eating pretty much anything I want after that".

At least make resolutions that you can stay true to, as that way you won't need to comfort yourself by turning to the food that you are trying to stop eating!

Face the New Year ahead of you with a new perspective; one of actually living up to your New Year's resolutions.

You won't be doing this for anyone else, but you will be doing this to prove to yourself that you actually have the guts to say you will do something and see it through.

If you can make it through even two months of keeping up with your resolution, you will feel much better about yourself. If you can make it through a whole year, you are a far better man than I and my hat comes off to you."<sup>iii</sup>

Once again, therefore, I'd like to offer the 2019 Top 10 New Year's resolutions. It was hard to find an atypical list, where the suggestions were little more than common sense (eat better, weigh less, spend less, reduce stress, etc.) That meant I needed to go away from mere mortal fare and look at the divine, or what best constitutes it, in this world. I considered sharing Kim Kardashian's beauty tips, but I assume you already know this. One country music station in the Midwest had a fascinating list, but since I did not know any of the songs or the artists who were singing them I had to give up on that one. Kate Lopaze's ideas for building your career were very good, but a little too inaccessible for a basically retirement group. The best I could come up with was a 2018 list of top 25. It had some advice I rarely see on the Top 10 (learn a new language), plus a few good one-liners that needed no other explanation (complain less, create a positive attitude, learn a new hobby, try something new every day, give to charity, play more video games (?), etc.)<sup>iv</sup> Most interesting to me is that in a survey by U. S. states, no state had "finding love" as [a top New Year's resolution for 2019](#) , though some had it listed as No. 2, behind saving money (Pennsylvania) and exercise (Rhode Island).<sup>v</sup>

So, as you segue into 2019, may you be open to new possibilities mixed in with those older traditions. You might find life shagging in bits and pieces, for the better. And like Jesus at the temple, you might bring light and life to others, just by what you do and how you go about doing it. If you find what I said today and how I said it to be a stretch, come back and talk to me at the end of 2019, and we'll see what we can do. As for me, as of now, that's all I got!

Happy New Year!

Amen.

(The Rev. Dr.) Rayner W. Hesse, Jr.

Pastor, BBCC

---

<sup>i</sup> <http://www.everyday-wisdom.com/church-humor.htm>

<sup>ii</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unknown\\_years\\_of\\_Jesus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unknown_years_of_Jesus)

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.inspirational-quotes-short-funny-stuff.com/>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.thetoptens.com/new-year-resolutions-for-2018/>

<sup>v</sup> <https://www.kgun9.com/news/national/these-are-the-top-new-years-resolutions-for-2019>