

THE FIRST 15

Tuesday, December 31, 2024

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Today is New Year's Eve. As a new year begins we explore what the Bible says about new beginnings.

OPENING PRAYER

As I enter a time of prayer, I pause and become still. I calm my thoughts and silence my mind. I breathe deeply and slowly, and center myself upon the presence of God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Holy Lord, in the peace of these morning moments, I long to experience Your presence. Come Holy Spirit, reveal the new things you want for me in this new year. Enable me to hear the message You have for me in the name of Jesus Christ my Lord. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her vindication shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch. The nations will see your vindication, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will bestow. You will be a crown of splendor in the Lord's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God. No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hephzibah (my delight is in her), and your land Beulah (married); for the Lord will take delight in you, and your land will be married. As a young man marries a young woman, so will your Builder marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you. Isaiah 62:1-5

REFLECTION

Today we read from a section of the book of Isaiah known as Third Isaiah. The people of Judah were in their own land. They returned from Babylon after seventy years in exile. The restoration and rebuilding of Jerusalem was a challenging and overwhelming task. The prophet Isaiah's message was that the city of Jerusalem would experience a reversal and this transformation would be symbolized by a name change. The old names recalled the suffering and humiliation of defeat and exile. The people had become known as "deserted" and "desolate." In this beautiful passage, Isaiah promises that God will give the people a new name, one that reflects His delight in them and His covenantal relationship with them. As God's beloved and redeemed people, they take on a new status and a new name.

One way I can read this passage from Isaiah is in the original context of the people of Judah. Another way I can read this passage is from my own personal perspective. The salvation and glory that I receive through Jesus is a beautiful and amazing thing. I find redemption and new life because of the cross of Christ. The old has passed away and God is in the process of transforming my heart and soul into the likeness of Jesus Himself.

The crown of splendor I wear and the royal diadem in my hand are not of my accomplishment or doing; they are a complete act of grace done by God. God makes me holy and worthy, as

unholy and unworthy as I am. Yet, I reflect on how often I allow those old voices to “name” me. Voices of my past. Voices of sin long ago revealed, repented and forgiven. Why does shame over the past sometimes bubble up? Why do I sometimes feel regret? God says no longer will I be called “deserted” or “desolate.” The bridegroom takes delight in me, rejoices over me and makes a new covenant with me. I am made new in Christ. I live a new life in him. My past is to be left in the past.

God is speaking to me today and I need to hear His voice above all others. The name that I call myself is an essential part of my identity. I consider the names from my past that cause me shame, labels that haunt me on occasion. Names from bullies on the playground, abusive relatives, unkind parents, spouses or siblings. Names with which society has labeled me. Names I have given myself in regret, names that define my sin. I list these false names before God. Isaiah says these names are “desolate” and “deserted.” I will no longer be called these names. I renounce these past names. In this new year I walk into life in Christ and claim the names God gives me - “crown of splendor,” “royal diadem,” “redeemed of the Lord,” “sought after,” “beloved”, “precious”, “valuable”, “holy of the Lord”. I am His and He is mine.

Ask: What actions from my past still cause me to feel shame and regret? What negative names do I continue to call myself? How can I give these false names over to God and fully accept the forgiveness He offers in Jesus?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Holy Lord God, thank You for Your Son Jesus. Thank You for Your mercy and grace that has given me an opportunity to be redeemed and forgiven through His blood. Reveal the source of the negative voices that haunt me with shame and regret. Let me hear Your voice of assurance - I am no longer called “sinner” but one who is saved and sanctified in love. Enable me to experience Your love and delight for me, despite my unworthiness. I invite You to name me. I will be called by no other than You. I am Your redeemed, restored, beloved child and I am grateful for new life in Christ. I am Yours and You are mine, so be it. Amen.