

Begin Again

 www.janetdenison.org/blog/begin-again/

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2017

January is a good time to take a pilgrimage to a quiet place, seek God, and ask for new beginnings. I wrote, rewrote, then deleted my words because I found Jesus' words in Matthew, chapter 4. I don't think I will ever fully understand the purpose of Jesus' temptation in the desert. But, that desert pilgrimage was the way Jesus chose to begin his ministry. The passage can help us contemplate this new year and begin again.

2017 will come with most of the same details, joys, and challenges that 2016 provided. We will make vocational plans and vacation plans. We can chase our goals and dreams or chase God's. Satan told Jesus to "*command these stones to become loaves of bread*" (Matt. 4:3). Jesus was starving and Satan suggested Jesus fix the problem for himself. Jesus responded saying, "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God*" (Matt. 4:4).

It is January and it is time to begin again. The bills will arrive each month, our schedules will get full, and the sun will rise and set each day. As we begin this new year, Jesus would have us sit quietly with him in the desert and remember that, while we are supposed to work and gather our daily bread, nothing is more important each day than the words God will speak. God will have something to say to you *every* day, and you will need to gather that daily bread, too. We will need to be careful not to fill our lives with things that will starve our souls.

2017 will be full of new opportunities to gain something more and become someone else. Our witness and our reputations will be altered by our choices. We can have more friends or fewer friends and more acquaintances. Our witness can grow smaller and more influential, or greater with less significance by the time we celebrate January 2018. Jesus wanted people to know he was their Messiah. Satan told him: "*If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down*" (Matt. 4:6). Jerusalem was crowded with the people Jesus wanted to influence, but Jesus lived to obey God, rather than to impress a crowd.

As we sit with Jesus in the desert, He will teach us what to ignore and how to obey. Jesus told Satan, "Again it is written, "*You shall not put the Lord your God to the test*" (Matt 4:7). Jesus didn't need to test God because he chose to trust him. Our witness will be based on that same choice.

Finally, Satan took Jesus to a high place and *showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory* (Matt. 4:8). Then Jesus said to him: "*Be gone, Satan! For it is written 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve'*" (Matt. 4:10). Jesus had to debate Satan; we will, too. Satan will make each of us some interesting offers in 2017, and we will need to choose whom to worship and serve.

I hope all of us will spend plenty of time with Jesus in that quiet desert. We each have a ministry and a calling, but we need to be confident that we are chasing God's dream for our lives and obeying God's word. As I considered my weekly blog post, this was God's word to me:

2017 will be a successful year if I live and write with the Psalmist's priorities: "*Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart. Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it. Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain! Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways*" (Psalm 119:34–37).

Our best life is discovered on the path God provides. Let's help each other along that path . . . until we look down one day and find that it has become a street of gold.

I wish each of you a blessed and holy New Year.

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