

Resolution: The Year in Pixels

2 Corinthians 3:18

1. Seeking

- *Luke 19:10; Luke 15:1-32; Isaiah 53:6*

2. Serving

- *Philippians 2:6-8; Mark 10:45; Galatians 5:13-14;
John 13:3-17*

3. Saving

- *Matthew 1:21; Luke 19:10; John 3:16-17, 12:47;
Romans 6:23, 8-10; John 10:10; 1 Corinthians 9:22*

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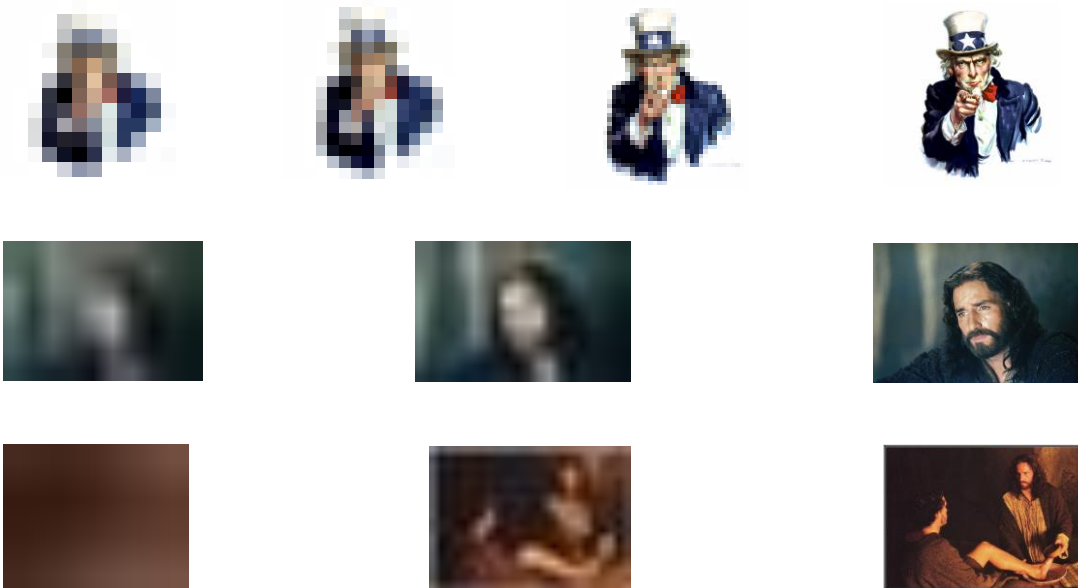
West Valley Church
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1/7/18

Resolution: The Year in Pixels

2 Corinthians 3:18

According to statistics, over 50% of us have already broken our new year's resolutions. We talk a lot about resolutions this time of year. Last week I shared that the definition of "Resolution" is not so much about making decisions or goals, but it is about finding clear focus, so we talked about being focused on Christ, especially as we shared communion. This morning I'd like to talk a little more about resolution, since as we are now a full week into the New Year.

Pictures are made up these days of pixels. Pixels are the small individual units that together make up the entire picture. If the pixels are too large and too few, you won't have a clear picture. The more pixels you have, the clearer the picture becomes. Let me give you some examples of what I'm talking about.



The greater the resolution, the better the picture. So here's the point: if you are a Christian, it is your job to give the world a clear picture of Jesus. Every believer in Jesus has the responsibility to give the world around him or her that clear picture of Jesus. Collectively, we as a church are the pixels that make up the clear picture of Jesus to West Valley. That's the resolution God wants each of us in this church to have for this year: to accurately give a picture of Jesus. That is "the year in pixels:" that we re-present the source of Life, Jesus Christ.

This year, let's bring Jesus into sharp clarity for the people of West Valley who need to see a clear image of Him. They've had enough of pictures that people have tried to pass off as Christ, but upon closer inspection it turned out to be a lousy imitation. They've had enough of blurry and undeveloped photos. They want to see a clear picture of Christ, because in Christ the longing of their own hearts can be fulfilled—to be loved, accepted, forgiven, and given purpose, so that they too can do what they were designed and created to do—to reflect the Glory of God's Son in their lives as well. The Bible clearly gives us this directive in 2 Corinthians chapter 3:

“All of us, then, reflect the glory of the Lord with uncovered faces; and that same glory, coming from the Lord, who is the Spirit, transforms us into his likeness in an ever greater degree of glory.” (2 Corinthians 3:18, gnb)

This is our task; to give a clear picture of Jesus to those around us. So what does that picture look like? How do we know when we are giving people a clear picture of Jesus? I want to give you three snap shots of Jesus that; combined together we will give a clear picture of Him to those around us.

One picture of Jesus that we can reflect is one who is...

1. *Seeking*

Jesus was constantly seeking. Now, there are numerous things we could say He was seeking after. For sure, Jesus was always seeking the will of the Father, which was evident in all that He did. He was also seeking the good of all people. Jesus was also seeking to shake up the religious power brokers. All those things are true from what we read in the Gospels. But I submit to you that there was *one* thing that Jesus was seeking, that more than anything shows the heart of God, and it was this: Jesus was seeking what was lost. Jesus said this about Himself:

“The Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost.” (Luke 19:10, nlt)

Making sure he was clear with us, Jesus very graphically described what was lost in a series of three back-to-back parables in Luke 15. First he talked about a shepherd who had 100 sheep but one of them was lost. So he left the other 99 to find the one, and when he did, the shepherd called all his friends and celebrated.

Then Jesus told of a poor woman who had only ten silver coins, but she lost one of them. She turned over every piece of furniture in her house until she found it, and when she did, she called all her friends and celebrated.

The last story Jesus told was of a wealthy man with two sons. One of those sons took his inheritance, left home and squandered all of it. Lost and alone, he tucked in his tail and returned to his dad. But instead of a scolding or a whipping, he found his dad scanning the horizon looking for him and celebrating his return.

In each of the three cases, there was something very valuable that was lost, and the owner or father nearly disregarded everything else in order to find that which was lost. The owner was so concerned over what's lost that there was a sense of frantic

searching. Then, when what's lost was found, in each case there was a great party—a huge celebration.

I'm sure by now you've figured out the point that Jesus was making. In each case, the shepherd, the widow, and the father all represent *God*. The sheep, the coin, and the son all represent *people*. And in each case, when God finds that lost person, there is a great celebration. In the words of Jesus from the Message translation of Luke's gospel, Jesus says about the sheep that was found:

“Count on it--there's more joy in heaven over one sinner's rescued life than over ninety-nine good people in no need of rescue.” (Luke 15:7, tmt)

Then after the lost coin was found, Jesus said:

“Count on it--that's the kind of party God's angels throw every time one lost soul turns to God.” (Luke 15:10, tmt)

Finally, after the lost son was found, Jesus described the party this way as the father said:

“Quick. Bring a clean set of clothes and dress him. Put the family ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Then get a grain-fed heifer and roast it. We're going to feast! We're going to have a wonderful time! My son is here--given up for dead and now alive! Given up for lost and now found!' And they began to have a wonderful time.” (Luke 15:22-24, tmt)

That's how excited God is when *you* or anyone else comes to Him! And that's the way God feels about every one of us, because every one of us is lost without Him. The Bible says that:

“We're all like sheep who've wandered off and gotten lost. We've all done our own thing, gone our own way.” (Isaiah 53:6, tmt)

If you and I want to present a clear picture of Jesus to others, then, just like Jesus, we need to seek out those who are lost! We as a church must find every possible means and use every possible resource to find those who are lost. This is a key priority for our church. We will be disobedient to God if we do not.

Eva Hart was 96 when she passed away in 1996. She was a survivor, and remembered the night, April 15, 1912, on which the Titanic plunged 12,000 feet to the Atlantic floor, some two hours and forty minutes after an iceberg tore a 300-foot gash in the starboard side. She was seven years old. She said: "I saw all the horror of its sinking, and I heard, even more dreadful, the cries of drowning people." Although twenty life-boats and rafts were launched—too few and only partly filled—most of the passengers ended up struggling in the icy seas while those in the boats waited a safe distance away.

Lifeboat No. 14 did row back to the scene after the unsinkable ship slipped from sight at 2:20 a.m. Alone, it chased cries in the darkness, seeking and saving a precious few. Incredibly, no other boat joined it.

Some were already overloaded, but in virtually every other boat, those already saved rowed their half-filled boats aimlessly in the night, listening to the cries of the lost. Each feared a crush of unknown swimmers would cling to their craft, eventually swamping it.

Christians are the people who are in the lifeboat, and the lifeboat is the church. But too often we think that the purpose of the lifeboat is to make ourselves safe and comfortable! If that were our attitude, then rescuing those who are lost would make our lifeboat uncomfortable; after all, those people are wet and they smell like the sea. They'd crowd us out. They'll rock the boat. But listen Christian: the church in this world is a *lifeboat*! That's what we are! And if we don't focus our energy on seeking the lost in our community then we are not giving a clear picture of Jesus because *Jesus came to seek the lost*. That's Jesus.

There's another thing that characterizes Jesus; that is that he was always...

2. *Serving*

The Bible pulls no punches in telling us that Jesus is and always has been the King of Kings, and yet he willingly gave up his glory to serve other people. The Bible says:

“(Jesus) had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death--and the worst kind of death at that: a crucifixion.” (Philippians 2:6-8, tmt)

Jesus gave up all kinds of glory to come to us. Instead of coming as the reigning King and demanding that we serve Him (which He could have done), He humbled Himself and came to serve *us*. Jesus said this about Himself:

“That is what the Son of Man has done: He came to serve, not to be served--and then to give away his life in exchange for many who are held hostage.” (Mark 10:45, tmt)

We will never fully understand how humbling it was for Jesus to come and serve us—people who rejected Him and crucified Him. But He did it, and He asks us to do the same for others:

“You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Galatians 5:13-14, niv)

If we want to present a resolute picture of Jesus, each of us must adopt a lifestyle and attitude of self-sacrificing service to others. I know it's not easy; I battle with it all the time, but I can't ever give up and must spend my life giving a clearer and clearer picture of Jesus in this, because I want people to see Jesus clearly. What

would happen if each of us decided to humble ourselves and put our neighbors' needs first? Or if we started serving people who are not so easy to love?

As a church, we know that we have been called to this community to serve her needs. Your church's leaders—your pastors and your leadership team—are always praying about opportunities to serve the needs of people around us, and you have always responded so well. This winter our church had individuals, families, and small groups giving resources to people in need; single moms and poor families. In just the last two Sundays, you have given over \$4,000 to the Brush family who has been so consumed with Blake's pancreatic cancer treatments for the last seven months that they are not able to make mortgage payments on their home with their daughters. In this last year, you have given generously to our partner church work in Guyana, South America, and we've been able to provide over four hundred backpacks and supplies to the families of Wide Hollow and Mountainview Elementary schools. We've hosted and blessed over 2500 people at Trunk or Treat and Breakfast with Santa without cost to them. We have small groups that are always looking for ways to serve the neighborhoods that they meet in. There will be more and more ways that we will serve. Because when our community looks at our church we want them to see Jesus. Can they see Jesus in your life?

Jeffrey Collins wrote of an incredible example of this in "It Happened on a Friday:" "It had been a trying week at our Love & Action office. At five o'clock on a Friday, I was looking forward to having a quiet dinner with friends. Then the phone rang.

'Jeff! It's Jimmy!' I heard a quivering voice say. Jimmy, who suffered from several AIDS-related illnesses, was one of our regular clients. 'I'm really sick, Jeff. I've got a fever. Please help me.'

I was angry. After a 60-hour workweek, I didn't want to hear about Jimmy. But I promised to be right over. Still, during the drive, I complained to God about the inconvenience.

The moment I walked in the door, I could smell the vomit. Jimmy was on the sofa, shivering and in distress. I wiped his forehead, then got a bucket of soapy water to clean up the mess. I managed to maintain a facade of concern, even though I was raging inside.

Jimmy's friend, Russ, who also had AIDS, came down the stairs. The odor made Russ sick, too.

As I cleaned the carpet around Russ's chair, I was ready to explode inside. Then Russ startled me. 'I understand! I understand!'

'What, Russ?' Jimmy asked weakly.

'I understand who Jesus is,' Russ said through tears. 'He's like Jeff!' Weeping, I hugged Russ and prayed with him. That night Russ trusted Jesus Christ as his personal Savior—a God who had used me to show his love in spite of myself."¹

¹ Jeffrey Collins, "It Happened on a Friday," *Christian Reader* (March/April 1998), Vol. 36, no. 2

The Gospel of John records this picture of Jesus as he gathered at his last supper with his disciples:

“Jesus knew that the Father had put him in complete charge of everything, that he came from God and was on his way back to God. So he got up from the supper table, set aside his robe, and put on an apron. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the feet of the disciples, drying them with his apron. . . After he had finished washing their feet, he took his robe, put it back on, and went back to his place at the table. Then he said, ‘Do you understand what I have done to you? You address me as ‘Teacher’ and ‘Master,’ and rightly so. That is what I am. So if I, the Master and Teacher, washed your feet, you must now wash each other's feet. I've laid down a pattern for you. What I've done, you do. I'm only pointing out the obvious. A servant is not ranked above his master; an employee doesn't give orders to the employer. If you understand what I'm telling you, act like it--and live a blessed life.” (John 13:3-17, niv)

That is a clear picture of Jesus—seeking and serving. Now, if that were all that Jesus did, it would certainly make him a nice person and a good example for us, but there is another picture of Jesus that is absolutely necessary, and that is the picture of Jesus...

3. *Saving*

Jesus knew that we were lost and needing to be found. He knew that in our selfishness and helplessness we needed to see a picture of a God who serves us. But none of that would be of any lasting significance if we could not be saved from our own sinful situation – something we can't do for ourselves. If you were with us during the month of December, you heard us say again and again that the reason Jesus came to this earth was to save us.

In Jewish culture, a person's name represented their character or their calling in life. The same is true for Jesus. The Christmas story reminds us:

“(Mary) will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, *because he will save his people from their sins.*” (Matthew 1:21, niv)

That's exactly what Jesus said about Himself in the verse we read earlier:

“The Son of Man came to seek and *save* those who are lost.” (Luke 19:10, nlt)

The word “save” means to deliver, to rescue, to heal, to make whole. That's what Jesus came to do for us – for *you!* I wonder if we often think that God came into our world to condemn us, but that's *not* the case. He came for the sole reason that He wants to save us because he loves us. Jesus gave the reason for His arrival when He explained it this way:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send

his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” (John 3:16-17, niv)

Later on Jesus reiterated himself by saying:

“I did not come into the world to judge it but to save it.” (John 12:47, niv)

What did Jesus save us from? He came to save us from the death sentence that we all have. The Bible says that we’ve all sinned – that we are slaves to it, and the penalty of sin is death. So death awaits all of us, and after death, judgment and condemnation for our sin. And the problem is we are powerless to do anything about it. Jesus took our death-sentence on himself in order to set us free from that condemnation. So the Bible says:

“If we get included in Christ's sin-conquering death, we also get included in his life-saving resurrection. We know that when Jesus was raised from the dead it was a signal of the end of death-as-the-end. Never again will death have the last word. When Jesus died, he took sin down with him, but alive he brings God down to us.” (Romans 6:8-10, tmt)

So Jesus saved us from the death we all deserved, and he then set us free to enjoy abundant life here while we are alive! No more defeated life! No more being buried by circumstances! We can actually have an abundant and rich life! Jesus said He came to save us from a ho-hum life and so that we can have life to the full. And that life lasts forever – beyond death. Jesus did it by giving His life for ours.

Near Mobile, Alabama there was a railroad bridge that spanned a big bayou. The date was September 22, 1993. It was a foggy morning just before daybreak when a tugboat accidentally pushed a barge into the bayou. The drifting barge slammed into the bridge. In the darkness no one could see the extent of the damage, but someone on the tugboat radioed the Coast Guard. Moments later, an Amtrak train, the Sunset Limited, reached the bridge as it traveled from Los Angeles to Miami. Unaware of the damage, the train crossed the bridge at 70 mph. There were 210 passengers on board. As the weight of the train crossed the damaged support, the bridge gave away. Three locomotive units and the first four of the train's eight passenger cars fell into the alligator infested bayou. The darkness and fog was thickened by fire and smoke. Six miles from land; the victims lay as food for the aroused alligators. Helicopters were called in to help rescue the victims. They were able to save 163 persons.

One rescue stands out. Gery and Mary Chancey were waiting in the railcar with their 11 year old daughter. When the car shifted and began to rapidly fill with water, there was only one thing they could do. They pushed their young daughter through the window into the hands of a rescuer, then drown in their own watery grave.

What a picture of our salvation, especially when you know that their daughter was imperfect by the world's standards. She was born with cerebral palsy and needed help with even the most routine things. You'd think she wasn't worth saving. But she was too precious to her parents *not* to save.

We too are imperfect--lives filled with mistakes and bad choices, sin and dysfunction and helplessness. But we are still precious to Jesus--so precious that he sacrificed his life to save us.

Do you know how many people are living life so far beneath what they could live? They don't even realize that there is a great life that could be theirs. They have no idea that God loved them so much that He willingly died for them. Jesus can save them. Why don't we tell them?

We need to have the same attitude that the Apostle Paul had in the Bible:

“To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.” (1 Corinthians 9:22, niv)

Jesus came to seek, serve, and save. And if we want to have sharp resolution when it comes to showing others Jesus, that's what we'll be about too. Seeking those who are lost, serving their needs, in order to see them saved. That's your purpose as a Christian, and our purpose as a church. That's resolution!

Pray