

Christmas 2019 & New Year 2020 Devotion

We're very excited to share a **truth** that is rather new to us, although we're certain that to some of you it will not be new but something old. Jesus spoke of this in the following verse:

Matthew 13:52 TPT, Bold is my emphasis and () is my explanation

He (Jesus) responded, "Every scholar of the Scriptures, who is instructed in the ways of heaven's kingdom realm, is like a wealthy home owner with his house filled with treasures **both new and old**. And he knows how and when to bring them out to show others."

What did you want for Christmas this past month? Remember the old song, "All I want for Christmas is my two front teeth"? One of my grandsons may have said that for several years after having his front teeth knocked out after falling off a counter and hitting his teeth when he was only a year and half old. Gage is now seven, and just a few months ago the vacancies were finally filled in. But what about us as adults? Is our Christmas want list any different? Maybe, like us, you're old enough that you'd just like to have all the teeth back that you've lost over the years?

On a more serious note, what were three things that you really wanted for Christmas last month? Some may have been actual needs or maybe they were just wants. Most often they are things that make our physical life easier or more enjoyable. Assuming that you received some of those things, other than the satisfaction of getting what you wanted, how have those items benefited your spiritual life and the Kingdom of God?

Let's broaden the question from Christmas to the coming year: what three experiences are on your bucket list for 2020? If you are able to experience one, two, or all three, how will it impact your own spiritual life in the coming year? Will it cause you to love God and others more? How would it spiritually influence your family and the spiritual lives of others in your circle of influence? How would it bring the Kingdom of Heaven down to earth in a greater way than you've ever experienced before? These are vital questions that we need to ask ourselves.

Here are a few more questions that you may have never considered before: What did Jesus ask his heavenly Father for this Christmas? What did Jesus ask Abba Father to experience in 2020? Is it possible that the scriptures provide some answers to these questions?

Background

This devotion focuses on one **truth** with many subtopics that I believe should be on every believer's bucket list to experience during 2020, considering the open heaven season we're in that will soon culminate with Jesus' return. Why? Because they should be very similar to what Jesus desires.

Susan and I began hearing about this **truth** back in California while attending some of the conferences at Shekinah Church in Lancaster CA. At first the **truth** seemed strange, different, something I had never even thought of, much less experienced, nor ever considered possible. The speakers indicated that anyone could experience it, but at that time I didn't have a file to put this **truth** in. Consequently it just sat in my mind and occasionally I would ponder it. The concept was kind of like something I'd eaten that sat heavy in my stomach while I wondered if I was going to get sick or start feeling better. Later I heard about and purchased The Passion Translation (TPT) of the bible, which was written by a man that understood this **truth** and brought it out in a multitude of verses where I'd never seen it before.

Then I was led to begin studying and praying verse by verse thorough John 17 where Jesus prayed for himself, then his disciples, and finally for all those that would eventually believe in him (that would be you and me). After a while I began to focus all of my attention on just the following verse:

John 17:24 NASB

24 **Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me...**

Today I've come to believe that what I thought was impossible, really is possible, although I haven't yet had the experience. I've been meditating on and studying this one verse for about several years now and seldom

have felt comfortable enough to share my insights except with very few people. Fear that others might think that I was twisting the scriptures certainly hindered me from sharing, that is until recently.

Set Up

On December 6th the Father set me up in a situation that I either had to share or keep holding it in. Susan and I were asked by a couple at our church, that we didn't even know, to their house for a Christmas dinner, which we gladly accepted. When we arrived to what we thought was going to be a dinner for just us, we were shocked to discover 16 people in attendance and only one couple that we had met and talked with once. The age of those present ranged from the early 20s to 70s. It was a fabulous extravagant dinner, but we had no clue of what was about to transpire after the meal.

Mary, the hostess, explained that we were going to play a game, and most everyone begin to moan, "Oh no". All the tables were moved out of the way and people were asked to take their chair and make a large circle. Mary explained that she was going to ask a question and that each person would have to answer. We could share as much or as little as we wanted. The first question dealt with our childhood and what we wanted to be as a child, teenager, and as a young adult.

Before proceeding, here is a little background. The church we're currently attending is a little less than 70 years old and has had only three pastors: the founding pastor stayed 35 years (now 93 and still attends regularly), his son was next and stayed 30 years and then he chose the current pastor who has been there 4 years. Most of the people grew up in the church, were married there, and raised their children there. So you would think they would of known each other very well. But as each person began to share what they wanted to be at each stage of life, there were amazing reactions. Within a short amount of time the mood begin to change, especially for Susan and I, from feeling cool and distant to feeling like a family and able to relate with one another. It reminded me of the atmosphere of the home group I was involved with at Santa Clarita Vineyard from 2005 to 2009 after moving to California in 2003.

Now back to the after dinner game. After everyone shared their answers to the first question, Mary introduced the second question: "What are you planning on doing in the next few years?" I was stunned and knew instantly the Father had set me up. Would I really share what I want to do and experience, or would I refuse to be real and honest? What will they think of me if I tell the **truth**? As I waited for those in front of me to share I was in a terrible inner struggle. First of all I didn't believe that it was time to share openly with people, especially this group of people I didn't really know. Second, they were all sharing ordinary life dreams, so would they think I was being super spiritual? But finally it came my time to answer, and I shared that I planned to...

Jesus' Bucket List

Before sharing exactly what I told the group, let's examine **John 17:24** bit by bit. All the words from the verse are highlighted in red below:

Father,

Jesus directs his request to his Abba Father, the same one he agonized with while in the Garden of Gethsemane: Mark 14:36a NASB

36 And He was saying, "**Abba! Father!**..."

When Jesus began this prayer he lifted up his eyes and saw once again into an open heaven (John 17:1) as Jesus did at other times (John 11:41 & Matt 3:16-17).

Challenge: Why do we close our eyes and look down when praying? Some times that is appropriate, but certainly not always. What do we hope to see when we look downward? We might be shocked if we looked up with great faith and expectation and see into an open heaven. Or we might see an open door and be invited in to visit heaven:

Rev 4:1 NASB, Underlined is my emphasis

After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things."

I desire - This is extremely important!!!! Jesus is telling his Abba Father what he really wants in the depths of his heart. The Greek word that is translated in the NASB as "desire" is the most common, but a few other translations use "I will", "I want", "I ask for", or "I long for". The only other time that Jesus used this type of request to his Father was when he was pouring out his heart to his Abba Father in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt 26:39 AMP, TLB, MSG, & NIV), but that was the only time his request was denied. Jesus had to deal with his request being denied, just as we do at times, but I'm certain that Abba Father wants to fulfill this request. One way we can perceive this request of Jesus to Abba Father is that it was his Christmas want list, or in an even broader sense it was his bucket list for the next two thousand years. We can be absolutely certain that Abba Father will answer Jesus' request!

that they - The pronoun "they" refers back to verse 20 where Jesus began to pray for all those who would believe in him because of the message and testimony of his apostles and disciples. This means that you and I are included.

also, - This one word is extremely important, but it will be explained later.

whom You have given Me, - This phrase is first mentioned in John 17:6, where it refers first "to the men" (the apostles and the early male and female disciples) that the Father had given to Jesus out of the world. Jesus goes on to explain that these individuals first belonged to the Father who had specifically given them to Jesus (See John 17:9-12). Then in Verse 20 Jesus acknowledges that all who will ever believe in Him (you and I) are part of the Father's love gift to Jesus. Isn't that an absolutely amazing truth!!!!!!

be with Me where I am,- Now we come to the heart of what Jesus desired, wanted, asked for, and longed for: that you and I would be with him wherever he is. So where is Jesus? From the time that Jesus ascended into heaven (Luke 24:50-51 & Acts 1:9) he has been seated or standing at Abba Father's right hand (Mt 22:44, Mark 16:19, Acts 7:55-56, Eph 1:20, Heb 8:1, 1 Pet 3:22). Remember that after his death on the cross Jesus made a short visit to heaven before returning to earth for 40 days during which he appeared in his resurrected glory and continued to teach Kingdom truths. Wouldn't you like to have that same experience?

Acts 1:3 TPT Underlined in my emphasis

3 After the sufferings of his cross, Jesus appeared alive many times to these same apostles over a forty-day period. Jesus proved to them with many convincing signs that he had been resurrected. During these encounters, he taught them the truths of God's kingdom realm

Understanding that Jesus is fully God, thus omnipresent, a spirit and not limited to a physical body, he can appear in many different places all at the same time. So while his apostles and disciples had to remain on earth until they died, they were provided with many convincing proofs by having encounters with the resurrected Jesus in all of his glory. Jesus wants the same thing for us before we die, and he is very clear why he wants us to have this experience.

so that they may see My glory - Jesus knew that the apostles and the early disciples had already beheld him in all of his glory, some before Jesus died and others after he was resurrected:

John 1:14 TPT, Underlined is my emphasis

14 And so the Living Expression became a man and lived among us! And we gazed upon the splendor of his glory, the glory of the One and Only who came from the Father... (See also Matt 17:1-2)

I Cor 15:5-8 NASB, () contains my explanation

5 and that He appeared to Cephas (Apostle Peter), then to the twelve. 6 After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; 7 then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; 8 and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me (Apostle Paul).

Isn't there a deep desire in your heart and spirit that longs to be included in that group? Something

profoundly changes a believer when he or she beholds, or spends time gazing on, the Lord Jesus Christ in all of his resurrected glory:

2 Cor 3:18 MSG Underlined is my emphasis

Whenever, though, they turn to face God as Moses did, God removes the veil and there they are—face-to-face! They suddenly recognize that God is a living, personal presence, not a piece of chiseled stone. And when God is personally present, a living Spirit, that old, constricting legislation is recognized as obsolete. We're free of it! All of us! Nothing between us and God, our faces shining with the brightness of his face. And so we are transfigured much like the Messiah, our lives gradually becoming brighter and more beautiful as God enters our lives and we become like him.

Experiencing Jesus is much more powerful than just reading about it in the bible, which only gives us a dim view of Jesus in all of his glory. Experience is much more life changing than mere head knowledge. Beholding Jesus in all of his resurrected glory is a primary way believers are changed or are transformed into Jesus' image. The more we behold him, we move from one stage of glory to another as the Holy Spirit works it in us. Sadly too many believers today lack this experience not knowing that Jesus prayed for them to have this experience.

also - Now let's go back to this one little word we skipped over previously. This word is so small that every time we read the verse we just glance over it, but it's so important. Jesus didn't just want the apostles and the early disciples to be with him where he was and to see his glory, he **also** wants all that would believe on him through their testimonies (includes you and I) to have the same experience.

which You have given Me,... - Jesus acknowledges to his Abba Father that although he had used the term "My glory", that he realized that it really was the Father's gift to him. What is amazing, is that Jesus having received this gift, then gives his glory to you and I:

John 17:22 NASB, Underlined is my emphasis

22 The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as we are one;

Oh that we would pray to first see that glory in our self, and then in the lives of other believers rather than constantly being drawn to see only our own faults and the faults of others. Only then will believers come into the oneness that Jesus also desperately craves for his Father's children as Jesus mentions in the last half of verse 22. Once we understand this **truth** and believe it, then we need to receive it, thank Jesus for it, and then begin to use it. Are you doing that?

One Truth With Many Subtopics:

So maybe you think you've figured out what I told the group, but perhaps you guessed one of the subtopics rather than the one **truth**. What I told the group is that I want to visit heaven before I die, and under that category I have a long list of things I want to do while there. The first thing I want to experience is to spend time gazing upon the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ in all of his glory and just enjoying being with him. A very close second is that I want to see Abba Father's face. This is what David was told to do, and then what David was committed to doing:

Psa 27:8 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

8 When You said, "Seek My face," my heart said to You, "Your face, O Lord, I shall seek."

We can do both of these things in the heavenly Throne room that we're invited to come boldly to:

Heb 4:16a ERV

16 With Jesus as our high priest, we can feel free to come before God's throne...

What earthly good will it do us if we have to wait to see the resurrected Jesus in all of his glory, or Abba Father's face, until after we die? So why not seek an opportunity to visit heaven before we die?

Third, I'd like to visit with David and Absalom (if Absalom is there) and find out more about why their relationship soured the way it did. While Jesus was on earth he visited with Moses and Elijah (Luke 9:30), so why shouldn't I be able to do something similar? By the way, David certainly represents Jesus in a multitude of ways, but he doesn't come close to being a good representative of Abba Father. Abba Father would never

hide his face from his sons and daughters like David did from Absalom. I've read a book about a man in India that had three opportunities to get a glimpse of Abba Father's face. I've met people that helped write the book and they knew it was a legitimate experience.

Oh I could go on and on about all the other things that are on my bucket list for 2020 when I visit heaven, but I will share more in another lesson. Hopefully this is enough to whet your appetite.

Context:

But maybe something is rising up in you, like myself when I first began to hear about this **truth**, that says that we can only go to heaven after we die. The key to understanding a verse of scripture is to put it in to the context of the verses around it. Let's consider another verse that is somewhat similar to John 17:24:

John 14:2-3 NASB Underlined is my emphasis

2 In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.

3 If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.

In the last part of verse 3 we have almost the same phrase as in John 17:24, that of being with Jesus where he is, but note the context. Jesus is going away to heaven where he is going to prepare a dwelling place for you, and then he will come back for you so you will be with him forever. This relates to his second coming when he will take all believers living on earth to heaven to be with him forever.

Compare that to the context of John 17:24, especially 20-26, where Jesus is praying for those individuals that will believe on him from the testimonies of the apostles and early disciples. They have to live on the earth till they die, but Jesus wants them to have the same experience that the apostles and early disciples had of beholding him in all of his resurrected glory. Sadly this is an experience that the majority of believers today don't even believe can happen. Don't you know in the depths of your heart that if you could spend some quality time gazing on the Lord Jesus Christ in all of his glory that it would make a major impact on your spiritual life and on those in your circle of influence as you share your testimony with them?

Other's Experiences:

Are there others in scripture that had similar experiences of seeing into or visiting heaven? Paul wrote about his visit to Paradise in 2 Cor 12. The book of Revelation was written by John when he was invited up to visit heaven (Rev 4:1ff). Stephen saw into heaven just before he died (Acts 7:55-56). Even old testament believers had opportunities to see into heaven (Ezek 1:1, & Dan 7:9-14). If they had that experience, wouldn't you want it too? Abba Father shows no partiality and is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34-35 & Duet10:17). That means that what Abba Father or Jesus does for one person, he will do for all believers. Our part is to believe and seek it with all of our hearts.

Visiting Home At Christmas Time:

One of the things that we long for naturally is to visit our family at Christmas time. Most of us go to great lengths spending lots of time, energy, money, and traveling long distances to be back with family especially at Thanksgiving and Christmas. Every good parent longs for their children to come back home for the holidays. Ever wonder where that attitude comes from? I'm more convinced that it truly is the heart of Abba Father to have his children come back for an occasional visit, just as often as you or I want to.

All true believers have an "eternal home" in heaven, which that means that we were with our heavenly Father before He sent us into the world, and we will always be with him after we die. At the point of death our "spirit will return to God who gave it" according to Eccl 12:7b. So our home has always been with Abba Father and He is such a good Father. Would it not be his heart for his children to come back for a visit? His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ died so that we could be restored into right relationship with Abba Father, and Jesus also paved the way to heaven and is the forerunner so that we can visit heaven occasionally before we die. Isn't there something deep in your heart that causes you to long to visit heaven before you die? I believe it certainly is the Father's heart for all of His children.

When Might We Make That Visit?

Over the past few years as I've studied the scriptures, read books, and watched videos of people sharing their testimonies, there seems to be just a few ways and times when they either see into heaven or make a visit:

1. By The Father's invitation - Rev 4:1
2. During dreams - Gen 28:12
3. By visions - Ezek 1:1
4. Just prior to death - Acts 7:54-60
5. Near Death Experience - This is the most common method from all the testimonies I've watched and read about. When a person is seriously injured or sick and is in a coma, sometimes their spirit leaves their body and is able to watch what is happening to his or her body as medical personnel are working on the body. They are sometimes taken on a visit to heaven where they may be given the choice to either stay or return to their bodies. But sometimes they are told what they must do. It sure would be interesting to ask Lazarus what he experienced during the three days before Jesus raised him from the dead. His testimony was so powerful that the Jewish leaders wanted to kill him (John 12:9-11). Could it have been partly due to him visiting heaven and sharing it with the priest and other people?

Challenge:

I mentioned earlier that when I first begin to hear about this **truth** that I didn't have a file to put it in. That type of experience had only happened once before about 19 years ago in Tulsa, and at that time I actually got up and walked out of the service. The message was about "portals" and at that time I had no idea what the preacher was talking about, but over the years I've gained understanding. Although I'm now 77 years old and have attended church all of my life, I'd never heard any sermon or had any teaching about visiting heaven until I attended conferences at Shekinah Church in Lancaster CA. But then I had to dig into the scriptures before I could fully accept the teaching.

If you're like me, then reading this devotional is certainly not going to convince you that it's really possible to visit heaven before you die, so you're going to need a lot more information. It's been too deeply ingrained in most of us that that the only possible way to go to heaven is after we die. However, the Holy Spirit is willing to teach us **all things** (John 14:26), and lead us into **all truth** (John 16:13) for each season of our lives. We are living today in a season unlike any previous generation, and consequently there are new truths being revealed that no previous generation thought possible. But we must ask and then trust that the Holy Spirit will do his job if we have a teachable spirit.

So our challenge is to reevaluate what is on your bucket list for 2020 and decide if you need to make your primary objective to have an encounter with the Resurrected Lord Jesus Christ and gaze upon His glory while visiting heaven. It really is Jesus's deepest longing for you to have that experience.

Additional Materials:

YouTube:

Interview with Oden Hetrick: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G5QBZU870Ms&t=364s>

Jesse Duplantis visits heaven: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tjQqDOkbMHY>

Variety of testimonies produced by CBN: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZerFxzF0OrA>

Books:

"Heaven is Real" by Todd Burpo

"90 Minutes In Heaven" by Don Piper

"Powerful Encounters In The God Realm" by Patricia King

Jim & Susan McCorkle

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PS: Feel free to share this email with any one. Periodically I will be sending out additional lessons on this subject and also posting them on our ministry's website. I'd appreciate your emailing me with any specific questions that you have so I can try and answer them in future lessons.