

THE EYES OF THE LORD

DEUTERONOMY 11:11-12

The Christmas season was over. The young family started taking down the Christmas decorations and putting them away for another year. The little girl in the family observed her mom wrapping up the nativity scene and placing each figure carefully away in a storage box. When it came time for the little figure of Jesus in the manger to be wrapped up in paper, she looked at her mother and said, "Look, Mommy, you're putting Jesus away for another year!" That can happen in other ways, can't it? Will it happen to you in 2009? Will this be a year you grow closer to Jesus or, for some reason, move further away from Him?

One of the great preachers of all time was an Englishman by the name of Charles Spurgeon who pastored a church in London in the late 1800s. Some years ago I came across a message he preached that spoke to my heart. As a result, I've used some of his ideas and some of my own today in preparing this message. Before we read today's scripture passage, let me give you a little background. Moses, the great leader of the nation of Israel, is giving the people some instruction before they enter the promised land of Canaan. As they're about to enter the land, Moses makes it clear that they can expect God's blessing only if they're obedient to God's will and wishes. With that in mind, let's turn to our text today and read it.

In the Bible, the land of Canaan became a symbol for our relationship with Jesus. For instance, over in the New Testament, Paul saw in the experiences of the people of Israel a type, a model or an example of developing a personal relationship with Jesus. He says in one place, "These things happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us who live at the end of the age." (1 Corinthians 10:11 NLT) In other words, the Bible says that the history of the nation of Israel in the Old Testament is more than just stories about certain events thousands of years ago. Another reason God preserved these stories is because they teach or reinforce spiritual truths that we can learn and grow from.

So, here's a little symbolism to consider. The land of Egypt was literally a place of bondage for the people of Israel. Symbolically, it represents your life and mine before we became Jesus' followers. Sin puts people into a spiritual kind of bondage. The miraculous crossing of the Red Sea – where God held up the water creating a dry pathway for His people to cross from one side to the other – represents being born again, being converted or committing your life personally to Christ. The land of Canaan was the destination for God's people – a land of agricultural wealth and plenty. Symbolically, it represents for us the Christian experience. How so? It was a place of rest. When you live your life to please Jesus, you do enter into a kind of spiritual rest. You're no longer trying to impress God or earn your own way into heaven. You've accepted His free gift of eternal life. Canaan was also a land of plenty. When you place your ultimate trust in Jesus, you also discover a life that is full of spiritual plenty and wealth: forgiveness of your sins, the Holy Spirit's presence and power in your life,

knowing God as your Father, having a new purpose for your life, and having God-given compassion for others. But Canaan was also a place of warfare. Enemies had to be defeated and driven out by the people of Israel. In the same way, the Christian experience this side of heaven has many spiritual battles as well. We, too, have enemies, spiritually speaking, who need to be defeated and driven out of our lives.

Now, I wanted to talk about all that because it allows me to adjust our text just a bit to make it more applicable and personal. If indeed the land of Canaan represents in a spiritual sense your relationship with Jesus right now, then we can safely adjust Deuteronomy 11:12 to say, "You are a person the Lord your God cares for, the eyes of the Lord your God are continually on you from the beginning of the year to its end." How's that for a new year's promise as we begin 2009? Let's think about a few implications of that verse. First of all:

GOD LOVINGLY OBSERVES YOU ALL YEAR LONG.

One of the essential attributes of God is the fact that He knows everything. The word for that is omniscience. There is no fact and no body of knowledge of which God is ignorant. God never has to learn or discover anything. Nothing is a mystery to God. When Moses talks about the eyes of the Lord in this verse, he doesn't mean God has eyeballs. He's referring to God's omniscience. For instance, elsewhere the Bible says, "The eyes of the LORD are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good." (Proverbs 15:3 NIV)

But more than omniscience is being suggested here. True, the Lord knows everything about you – every minute detail of your life past, present and future. But the Lord not only observes everything about you; it's also clear that He looks upon you with delight, compassion and love. He doesn't take you in like some kind of heavenly computer or scanning machine. No, instead, His eyes are full of affection, care and loving interest. If you're a parent or a grandparent, you can relate to this kind of look. Haven't you caught yourself just looking at your kid (or grandkid) – not just to see if his or her face is clean, hair combed and clothes on straight? No, there is far more than that in your observation. The eyes of a parent or grandparent are full of delight in that child, affection for that child and concern for any hurts or troubles in that child's life.

Now, God observes you – His child by grace – in a far greater, more intensive, more focused way that even the most loving parent imaginable. God's love is focused on you. You might say, "But, Rick, who am I that God would fix His eyes on me? I'm not significant. I'm not special. I don't deserve that kind of attention." I agree – none of us do! But God loves you; nevertheless, and He loves you with an intensity and comprehensiveness you can't imagine. God can't look at you except in love. God never thinks of you except in love. God never acts towards you except in love. God never works in your life except in love,

But doesn't God love all people? Certainly! But there is a depth of love for those who've been adopted as children into His forever family that's unique. You're an object of His grace. You've been purchased by the blood of His Son, Jesus. You've been adopted into His family. You're indwelt now by His Spirit. Remember that truth as you move into this new year! God's eyes are going to be on you from the first day of the year until the last day of 2009. But those are going to be loving eyes - every second, every minute and every hour of every day. He will love you no less when He sees you sinning and failing Him. He will love you when life is going great in 2009 and when it's not going so well. He will love you when heartache and trouble crosses your path in 2009.

Author Mike Yaconelli was killed a few years ago in a car accident. Before he died, he told this story. Mike traveled a lot. He came to San Francisco one night and missed his connection back home. He was angry and upset, and he called his son on the phone. Mike wanted his son to encourage him. He said, "Man, I'm stuck in the airport; it's been a horrible day. I've been traveling too much." His son said, "You know, Dad, if you didn't travel so much, you wouldn't have things like this happen." Mike didn't appreciate that observation and got ticked off. He said, "Let me talk to your son (Mike's two year old grandson)." Mike forgot that two year olds can't talk very well yet and, also, the fact that his own hearing was not what it used to be. He hears his grandson mumbling on the phone. Mike's hoping this is going to make him feel better, but it's actually making him feel worse. Then he hears the phone drop onto the floor and he can hear his grandson playing in the background. Mike's angry, frustrated and increasingly miserable when all of a sudden he hears crystal clear over the phone, "I love you, Grandpa." Mike said all the anxiety and stress he was feeling just left him in that moment. So many people are at wit's end because of all the busyness in their lives. If they'd stop for a minute, they might just hear the God of the universe whisper into their hearts, "I love you." My friend, God is going to lovingly observe you all year long. Here's a second truth:

GOD CONTINUALLY OBSERVES YOU ALL YEAR LONG

That word is in our text, isn't it? "...the eyes of the LORD your God are continually on it (or you) from the beginning of the year to its end." (Deuteronomy 11:12 NIV) That word "continually" means something astounding when it's related to God. Have you ever tried to focus on any one object for any length of time? Even if you don't suffer from Attention Deficit Disorder, your powers of concentration are very limited at best. But God is able to focus on you intently with indescribable intensity and interest. And He has that same level of concentration upon every other person who lives on the planet. Maybe you're tempted to think that God watches over the spiritually elite more than average, ordinary people. Isn't it hard to believe that God is as interested in you and your life as He is in the life of a Billy Graham, or a Rick Warren or some other great Christian leader?

I know you feel insignificant to God at times - maybe even forgotten or forsaken. But the Bible makes it clear that it's impossible for God to forget you; in fact, it's impossible for Him to ever take His eyes off of you. Continual, when it comes to God, means perpetual. Even though you are but one of His children, He observes you, sees you, focuses in on you as carefully, as tenderly and as continually as if you were the only child in His family. God's eyes never get red and sleepy observing you. God's eyes never get distracted from you. God's eyes never get bored watching over you. God's awareness of you is just as real and continual when you go through difficult moments in 2009 as it is when you go through wonderful moments this year.

You might remember the words of Br'er Fox to Br'er Rabbit in those delightful Uncle Remus folk tales. Says wise Br'er Fox, "You can't run from trouble. There ain't no place that far!" The truth is that you'll have some kind of trouble in 2009. We all will. What can you do in this new year when you're faced with discouragement, defeat or heartache of some kind? Remind yourself of God's promises. Hold on that much tighter to God. Realize that God and your relationship with Him will outlast any hard time you have in 2009. Remember that the eyes of the Lord are on you continually from the first day of the year until the last day of the year - continually.

The owner of a photography studio tells the story of a college kid who came in with a framed picture of his girl friend. He wanted to get the picture duplicated. As the studio owner took the picture out of its frame, he noticed an inscription on the back of the photograph. It was written by the girl friend: "My dearest Tommy: I love you with all my heart. I love you more and more each day. I love you forever and ever. I am yours for all eternity." It was signed "Dianne" and contained a P.S. - "If we should ever break up, I want this picture back." God's love never has a P.S. attached. He will never break up with you. You belong to Him. And you belong to Him forever. As a result, you can know that God will continually watch over you from the first day of the year until the last day of the year and every day in between. Here's a third truth:

GOD PERSONALLY OBSERVES YOU ALL YEAR LONG

Who is going to watch over you in 2009? The text says, "The eyes of the Lord your God...." I'm not sure the Bible supports the idea of everyone having his or her own personal guardian angel, although it does seem that God uses His angels to minister to His children in remarkable ways. We live in a world where knowing how and when to delegate responsibility is considered a wise practice. After all, nobody can do everything! Unless you're God. The text doesn't say here that God delegates to some angel the responsibility to protect and watch over you. Instead, it teaches that the Lord Himself watches over you every day of every year - guarding, guiding, helping, loving and correcting. And along with God comes everything that God is. In other words, there is nothing of God's wisdom, knowledge, joy, peace or power necessary for you to live life as fully as

possible that God is going to withhold from you. You don't ever have to fear that God will call in a substitute for Himself. It is God's own eyes that watch over you continually from the first day of the year until the last day of the year.

A businessman liked to fly his own small plane on business trips because it was the fastest, most efficient way to keep up with his customer's needs. Once he was flying over some rough terrain when he saw a car below him trying to pass a large truck. It was obvious the driver of the car was very impatient to get around the truck. His car crossed back and forth from one lane to the other. The man up in the plane watched as, over and over again, the car tried to pass the truck, but then gave up because of a double line on the highway, a hill, a curve or the fact that another car was coming from the opposite direction. Now, from his perspective up in the plane, he could see several miles down the highway. He thought to himself, "You know, if I could just communicate with that guy in the car, I could tell him when it was safe to pass."

My friend, you can't see around the curve or over the hill of this thing we call life. I have no idea what's ahead for my life in 2009. Neither do you. But Jesus does because He sees the road ahead. He sees the end from the beginning. He can tell you when to move ahead or when it's best to stay put. It's the eyes of the Lord your God – personally – that are going to observe you from the first day of the year until the last day of the year. Here's a final truth today.

YOU NEED TO KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE LORD ALL YEAR LONG.

Would you let me tamper with the text just once more this morning? I think it's really an obvious implication: "The eyes of the Lord's people are continually upon Him from the beginning of the year to its end." If God Himself observes you all year long – lovingly, continually, personally – how much more should you observe Him all year long! That may well be the best way to find and keep intimacy with the Lord day in and day out. Keep your eyes on Him all year long! Sometimes we can go days and days without really connecting with God. It's easy to get our eyes on this life, this world, and this present day stuff instead.

Can you afford to do that – take your eyes off of the Lord? Oddly enough, you will be most tempted to take your eyes off of Him when everything is going well in 2009. If you're doing great at work, you have no money issues, your personal relationships are happy, and everyone you love is healthy, it will be tempting to take your eyes off of the Lord. Be careful of the unintentionally negative effect of prosperity and good times: it can make you proud, careless and nonchalant in your relationship with the Lord.

By the same token, don't let adversity make you take your eyes off the Lord. When your heart is breaking for some reason, or when you feel deserted by a friend, or when you face chronic illness or when your future seems uncertain, don't take your eyes off the Lord. The only One who can really help and comfort

you then is the Lord. Do you remember the story of when Peter, Jesus' disciple, got out of the boat and actually walked on the water to Jesus? He was doing fine for awhile, but then he began to sink. Do you remember why? Peter took his eyes off of Jesus. He began to focus on the wind, the big waves, and the miracle of what he was experiencing. Down he went! My friend, if you keep your eyes fixed on Jesus in 2009, you'll survive the bad days intact and you'll enjoy the good days even more! Keep your eyes fixed on Him from the first day of the year until the last day of the year.

One tribe of native Americans had a unique practice for training their young men. On the night of a boy's thirteenth birthday, he was placed in a dense forest area to spend the entire night alone. Until then he'd never been away from the security of his family and the tribe. But on this night he was blindfolded and taken miles away. When he took off the blindfold, he was in the middle of thick woods. By himself. All night long. Every time a twig snapped, he visualized a wild animal ready to pounce. Every time the wind blew, he wondered what more sinister sound it covered over. No doubt it was a terrifying night for many. After what seemed like an eternity, the first rays of sunlight entered the interior of that forest. Looking around, the boy began to recognize flowers, trees and the outline of the path out of the deep woods. Then, to his utter astonishment, he saw the figure of a man standing just a few feet away armed with a bow and arrow. It was the boy's father. He had been there all night long watching over him.

The unanswered question – the thing that's uncertain today – is whether your eyes will be on the Lord from the beginning of the year until its end. God is always present with you. There's no question – no doubt – that His eyes will be on you lovingly, continually and personally from the beginning of 2009 until its end.