

Observations on 2015

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We've arrived at the end of 2015! I don't know if it's true or not, but it certainly seems like the years roll by faster as we age! As I've sat here reflecting on this past year there is much that could be said about 2015. There have been some tremendous blessings in the past twelve months and there has been some heartaches as well. There have been some challenges and there have been victories. There have also been some surprises along the way. I thought I'd share two or three observations as we close the books on 2015.



1. My most significant times of growth almost always come through pain. If I were to circle the two or three significant times of growth for me in the past year, they all have come with a good deal of pain. Whether it was a difficult circumstance or trial, a word of correction or rebuke from a trusted friend, or a heavy moment of my own need for repentance; each of my significant moments of personal growth and moving forward came with a good dose of pain too. I think we probably all want to grow, the problem lies in that we live in a society of comfort and ease. I've often said I have a body build for comfort, not speed. For me to continue to grow into the person God has called me to be, it will require that I traverse through seasons of pain in order to grow and develop. I think the same is probably true for you, for your church and even for the CGGC. Are we willing to endure the pain necessary to become what God is calling us to become? I hope so, I think the end result is worth the pain.
2. Things don't always go as expected. You would think after four decades I would know this one, but I don't. James reminds us: "Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes." (James 4:13-14). There are a lot of applications here. Some of you were convinced that the four blood moons meant something big was going to happen back in September or October. There was a lot of ink spilled and a lot of money made over predictions about the lunar events of 2015 and too many brothers and sisters got caught up in the madness by forgetting Jesus' words in Matthew 24:36 "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." We're to be ready, watching and waiting for His return, but let's not get caught up in the foolishness of speculation and predicting the dates and times.

There's also a personal side of this reality of not knowing what tomorrow will bring. I'm big on planning and setting some targets or goals. If you aim at nothing, you'll hit it every time! But the wisdom of James reminds me to hold onto my plans and goals loosely, for I don't know what tomorrow may or may not bring. Our MLI friend Reggie McNeal talks a lot about preparing for the future versus planning for the future. We out to be preparing for the year ahead and there's nothing wrong with setting some goals or targets for the next twelve months (I actually think it's a pretty good idea to do so), but we also need to be seeking the Spirit and asking God to help us understand how to respond to all the unexpected realities that tomorrow may bring. Let's not be surprised or taken aback when things happen that we weren't expecting.

3. The cultural and spiritual landscape we are living in continues to change and become more challenging. We live in a pluralistic culture now and those of us who follow Jesus have to realize that we're no longer the only show in town nor are we necessarily the preferred show either. We no longer enjoy the power, privilege or prestige that past Jesus-followers may have enjoyed in our country and it's going to mean we take a different approach than what may have worked in the past. This is not a time for fear or bemoaning the fact that "it isn't like it used to be". I think God is leading us into one of the greatest opportunities to demonstrate and proclaim his Gospel and to make His Glory known. Let's lean into the challenge before us instead of retreating to the safe confines of the already convinced.

I don't know what 2016 will bring, but I would expect that there will be similarities to 2015. There will be some joy and sadness, there will be gains and losses, and there will be some surprises that I did not anticipate or expect. I think there is an election of some kind in 2016 in which many will place a lot of energy and hope in seeking the changes they desire. Don't get sidetracked and miss the main mission. Would you commit with me to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness in this year before us. Let's take Jesus's prayer in Matthew 6 to heart and plead with Him "your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven." Let's seek Him and serve Him so that our lives would bear fruit and reveal His Glory to all the world!

Christ's Peace,

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