

## **A NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION**

### **(Reflections on the life of Johann Sebastian Bach 1685 - 1750)**

Johann Sebastian Bach was born in Eisenach Germany in 1685. He was orphaned at the age of ten and went to live with an older brother. The older brother, unfortunately, was jealous of Johann's talent and forbade him access to a collection of advanced music. The younger Bach had such a passion for music, however, that he would stay up all night long and copy the forbidden music by moonlight. Several months later his disobedience was discovered and the music destroyed. The younger Bach was left with a broken heart and permanently impaired vision.

Young Johann had such a passion for God that at the age of 15 he walked 200 miles to secure a job singing in a choir. Later he became the court organist at Weimar for nine years. His passion, however, was to bring glory to God. Therefore he took a job at the St. Thomas Church in Leipzig even though it paid only one quarter of his former salary. For the next twenty-seven years he composed a volume of music without equal. The church, however, never appreciated his efforts and some of his compositions were even used as wrapping paper for sandwiches. Nevertheless, we still have nearly 300 cantatas, two oratorios, a series of masses and motets, etc. that came from his years in Leipzig. On the margin of many scores he would write the words that had become the focus of his life and ministry, "to God be the glory".

Bach spent his life in obscurity, poverty and privation. He died unknown and unappreciated and was buried in an unmarked grave. His heavenly reward was secure, but his earthly reward was a long time coming. It was eighty years later that a fourteen year old Jewish boy, Felix Mendelssohn, discovered Bach's "St. Matthew's Passion", and fell in love with it. Six years later Mendelssohn directed that production and the audience was swept away by the performance. So great was the genius of Bach that he had painted vivid pictures with mere notes. When Christ spoke His words were surrounded by a shimmering halo of strings. On His way to Calvary the music evoked the sound of footsteps plodding under the heavy weight of the cross. The music was alive with lyric solos, moving arias, and ringing psalms of exaltation.

Today, millions have been blessed by the music of a man whose major focus in life was to give glory to God. Each year there is a Bach Festival in Bethlehem, PA that showcases his music. It began at the end of the last century when a local organist named J. Frederick Wolle went to Europe and was overwhelmed by the power of Bach's music. He returned to America and recruited a volunteer choir. They practiced for two years before presenting Bach's "B-minor Mass". The performance was so successful that it developed into the annual event that has been attended by so many thousands.

### **WHAT ABOUT YOU AND ME?**

Wouldn't it be great if we could make glorifying God the focus of our faith. This would be a New Year's Resolution with eternal significance. Many of our New Year's Resolutions are shallow and self serving. The late Irma Bombeck quipped, for example, "Lord, if you can't make me thin, then at least make my friends look fat". What she said in jest may be the major focus of some people's faith. How sad! There is, of course, nothing wrong with making resolutions involving personal health. It is important to remember, however, that bodily exercise only profits for a little while godliness is profitable for all things. There is nothing wrong with resolving to make more money that we might better care for our families. It is better, however, to lay up treasure in heaven where neither moth nor rust consume and where thieves do not break through and steal.

I am told that there are three entrances to the cathedral in Milan. Over one is carved a rose with the inscription, "That which pleases is but for a moment". Over the opposite entrance is a thorn with the reminder, "That which pains is but for a moment". Over the central entrance is a cross with the words: "That alone is important which lasts for eternity".

**Let's make New Year's Resolutions that will count for eternity!**