

A Renewed Resolution

Joy to the World

Matthew 28:18-20

December 31, 2017

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

This morning I want us to spend some time praying for one another, but I want us to be very specific in our prayer time. So here is my starter question. How many of you regularly make new year resolutions? Are they part of your normal routine? Have you made any resolutions yet for this coming year? Time is short!! Its over at midnight.

Even if you aren't a resolution person, I want to ask you to make one this year. I want to encourage all of you to make at least one resolution this year that is specific to your spiritual life. And, then I want us to take some time, right now, to give you an opportunity to express that resolution and pray for one another in small groups. This can be a little stressful for some, who have not had time to really think about this. I totally understand. But think of this as a starting place for the development of your spiritual resolution for 2018. It may change some or develop further in the next

days or weeks. That is fine. But share the general idea with your group so they can pray for you. [break into groups]

It is the last day of the year. Amazing. It seems that it was just a few days ago that I was out putting up our Christmas lights... earlier than I have ever done it in the past, and I was thinking at the time that it was crazy to put lights on the house before Thanksgiving. Our tree was up, the house was decorated... all because Susan was doing a piano recital that first weekend of December and all the preparations needed to be in place. So, we put it all up and then said, "We will probably be sick of all this stuff by the time Christmas comes!" But we weren't. In fact, the lights are still on the house and the decorations just came down yesterday... its always a little sad frankly. Christmas just came and went so fast. Yet, we are still enjoying the season and the amazement of the birth of our savior, Jesus Christ. This Advent season has been very special for us and I pray that it has been special for you as well. For me, it has been a time of renewed vision and anticipation of what God is going to do this coming year. It has been a time of deep personal reflection about the future. You know, it has been an interesting thing as I find myself getting older. My thought process has not changed as much as I once thought it would. It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that as you age, you should start thinking about slowing down and lowering your expectations for the future. Retirement age is

associated with extended “me time”. But that has not been the case with me as I have aged. On one hand, I do realize my physical limitations more clearly. I am not as physically capable as I once was and I certainly don’t hear as well as I used to... you can talk to Susan about that. But the Lord is continuing to press me to think about what it means to be conformed to the image of Christ and to live in obedience to His will. He is continuing to convict me about exercising my gifting and being willing to die to myself and live for His purposes, whatever the consequences or the outcomes. That is where I am coming from this morning as I begin this message, the final message in our five-week Advent series. I have titled it “A Renewed Resolution.”

God’s Resolution – Build the Church

Ok, first let me ask you this. Do you think God makes new year resolutions? I guess the answer to that question really depends on how you define a “new year resolution.” When you make a “resolution”, you are “making a firm decision to do something”. So, to answer my question. While God doesn’t make new resolutions each year, nor does he fail to keep any that he makes, he has made a number of resolutions, a number of firm resolutions to do something, and he has communicated those resolutions to us through scripture.

So, what are God’s resolutions? Well, there are many in scripture, but this morning I would like to focus on three, which flow out of an overarching

resolution to redeem a fallen world, through the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our savior. That is what Advent is all about.

God's Resolution – I Will Build My Church

So how will God redeem the world? Through mass evangelization, the proclamation of the gospel by angels? NO, not even close. The Bible tells us that God will redeem mankind one person at a time. And as he does, he is in fact building his church, which scripture also calls the bride of Christ. OneTreasure is part of the church of Christ, his bride. That is pretty amazing. Who are we that God should take notice? Yet he does. He loves us with an eternal love that is unmatched in the universe. We see God's clear intention at the end of the second chapter of Ephesians. This is one of my favorite New Testament passages. It says, ¹⁹*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,* ²⁰*built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,* ²¹*in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.* ²²*In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.* ¹

God's resolution to redeem the world and build the church will not be frustrated. God always follows through on his resolutions. We know he will prevail because one day, when Jesus was still with his disciples, he asked them what other people said about him, who they said he was. The

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Eph 2:19–22.

disciples had multiple answers. They said that some people thought he was John the Baptist, others thought he was Elijah, yet others thought he was the prophet Jeremiah. Then he turned and put the question directly to the disciples. Who do you say I am? Peter answered, *You are the Christ, the son of the living God.* Jesus' response to Peter's answer is what I want us to see clearly this morning. What Jesus says to Peter clearly reveals the resolution of God. Jesus said, *Blessed are you Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it...* (Matt. 16:13-18) He says to Peter, "Simon, (that is his given name) son of Jonah, you could not have figured this out on your own. God has revealed this truth to you. Then Jesus is uses a play on words and calls Simon "Peter" or "rock", and then says upon the truth of what you said Peter, it is this rock on which I will build my church. He called Peter a rock, but Peter clearly understands that it is Jesus who is the true rock on which the church will be built. Yet, there is a double meaning, because Jesus is also saying that it is Peter and all the believers who follow, that God will use to redeem this lost world and build his church. It is an amazing plan. Using broken, sinful, yet forgiven and redeemed men and women as the agents of reconciliation. And if you wonder if that plan can possibly work, Jesus makes the answer crystal clear. In the last part of verse 18, when he says this, the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Satan shall not stop the building of the church, evil

shall not stop the building of the church, sinful people shall not stop the building of the church... try as they might, whether at one Treasure or in any other church body in this world. God will ultimately prevail, his will shall not be frustrated.

God's Resolution – Go Make Disciples

So, the first resolution we see this morning is that God will build his church. But how will he do that? What is it that Satan cannot stop? That resolution is found at the end of the book of Matthew. It is a passage that we visit frequently. It is the Great Commission, or as we saw the last time I taught on this passage, it is the Great Summons. We see this as a command passage, and it is, but this morning I would like to look at it from a different perspective. This morning, I would like to look at the Great Commission as a resolution of God, a decision to do something. Look at Matthew 28:18-20.

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

First, Jesus tells the disciples that they cannot fail. How encouraging is that! He has all authority over everything on earth and in heaven. And what flows out of this absolute authority? The heart of God for his children. Out of his love for us, the Great Commission is what God desires

us to do. For our good, for the good of the world, and for his glory. The command statement here is “make disciples”. “Go” is passive. In other words, what this passage says is, “As you go, make disciples of all nations.” As you live your life, as you wander the world, as you go to work, as you care for your family, as you go to the store, as you go on vacation, as you do whatever you do.... Make disciples. And here are the basics. Baptize them, and teach them to obey all that I have commanded. Simple. Profound. God has made a resolution. He has resolved that the world will once again come under his rule. God knows that it is in our best interests to live lives that totally conform to his will. Our hearts will always lead us to a dark place. Listen, Hallmark is wrong, the worlds wisdom is wrong. Don't follow your heart. It will always lead you astray. It is wicked and deceitful. Follow God's heart. Be a true disciple. Die to yourself in baptism then learn to obey all that God has commanded. Then make more disciples, teaching them all that you have learned and are still learning.

God's Resolution – Proclaim the Gospel

And that brings us to the third and final resolution I want us to look at this morning. He will build his church, he will make disciples and now we see God's resolution to proclaim the gospel to all the world. A further along in the gospel of Matthew, a little bit after Jesus declared that the gates of hell would not prevail against the church, he was talking to his disciples about the end times, a time of tribulation and persecution for believers. He predicted that many would fall away; deceive, gossip and betray one

another; and even hate one another. Jesus told his disciples that the people's love for the Lord will grow cold and lawlessness will increase. We see all of that today, frankly. But then, following all that negative prophecy, Jesus makes an astounding statement. It is found in Matthew 24:13-14. Jesus said, ¹³ *But the one who endures to the end will be saved.* ¹⁴ *And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.* This verse has launched whole mission movements. It has inspired believers to risk their lives by taking the gospel into the wild and unreached places of the world. Our good friends Orin and Rosa Kidd are currently in Korupun, West Papua, where they ministered for 23 years. When they went, there were head hunters in the valley next door and the tribes in their valley fought wars in their front yard and in their garden area. Today, the people in these valleys are Christian and the whole culture has changed. In fact, Susan and I were able to have a half hour phone conversation with Orin and Rosa on Christmas Eve. God is building his church. God has resolved that his gospel will be proclaimed throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all peoples... and when that is accomplished, Jesus will return. It all happens one person at a time, one family at a time, one people group at a time. Someone is obedient, someone takes discipleship seriously... and God uses their efforts of proclamation to build the church. That is what it means in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 when it says, ¹⁸ *All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of*

reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

Obedient followers of Christ follow what he has commanded and taught us. He has all authority, so nothing can stop what he wants done. And, when God reconciled you to himself through Christ... he gave you the ministry of reconciliation. OK, now put this passage together with the Great Commission. Here is God's resolution. You have been given... delegated, the ministry of reconciliation. Not that you reconcile, but God reconciles through your proclamation of the message. So, teach them to obey all that he has commanded. Do you see the connection? It is all the same thing. God makes his appeal through us. We speak the gospel truth to people and they are reconciled to God, through God's action in their hearts. These are desperately lost people who are being given new life... eternal life in Jesus.

So, in light of that, what is the most loving thing I can do to show the love of God and His glory to another person? Scripture makes that quite evident. The most loving thing I can do for another person is to clearly explain to them, from scripture, that they are dead in their sin and trespasses and that unless they are reconciled to God through Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross, they will be destined for an eternity that is

unthinkable. That is the one thing I can do to show my ultimate love for others. All my efforts to alleviate their temporal suffering, their poverty, their hunger, their addiction, their broken relationships and their physical ailments are secondary. Important, but secondary. If I love the lost people of my community and want to have them find true joy and fulfillment in their lost and lonely lives, I must clearly proclaim to them the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is also true for you.

This is so important and it leads to a second truth. Proclaiming the gospel is also the most loving thing that this body of believers can do to show the love of God to the community and the world within which it exists. If we believe that the way to most clearly show love to the lost is to show them Jesus and their need for Him, then the most loving thing you can do is to become a deeply rooted, God glorifying, Bible bathed, scripture breathing disciple who will in turn obey the mandate to “Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations.”

A Renewed Resolution

So what do we take away from all of this. Let’s review as we try to apply this teaching to our lives.

1. God has resolved to build his church. He is in the process of redeeming a lost world and his resolution is that a church will be taken out of the world. This church is made up of all redeemed peoples. Since it is God’s resolve to build his church, we know that the gates of hell will not stop

him or prevail against his church. And, the church will be built through the next two resolutions.

2. God has resolved to make disciples. Not only are we commanded to proclaim the gospel, we have been entrusted with it. It is a sacred trust that requires us to become true disciples... those who obey ALL of his commands. God will make disciples through us, as we obey and teach those who respond to the gospel message. Remember, the action word in the Great Commission is “make disciples.” That is the command. We will go, and as we go, we will make disciples. These disciples obey Jesus’ commandments and the cycle restarts with the third resolution.
3. God has resolved to proclaim the gospel. The most loving thing you can do is tell someone about Jesus. You are God’s ambassador, his representative in a foreign land. He is reconciling the world to himself. He is building his church, yet he has resolved to do that through your individual evangelistic efforts. The gates of hell will not prevail, but silence will certainly delay the movement of the Holy Spirit. When the gospel has been proclaimed to all nations, to all peoples... when God has gathered in all of his chosen saints, then the end will come and no sooner. Not that we bring about the second coming of Christ. That is in God’s hands. But we are his vehicle, his vessels. When we die to ourselves and live for Christ alone, then we will be mightily used by the Lord. When we live compromised, disobedient lives that focus on our

needs and wants... the gospel will not be effectively communicated from our mouths and lives.

So here is my new year resolution.

I resolve to renew my commitment to be a fully devoted disciple of Jesus Christ. To love and care for others so much that I proclaim the gospel to them and then teach them to obey all that Jesus has commanded, no matter what.

I do not want to sit in idle or spin my wheels doing things that are not ultimate. I pray that this true of all of oneTreasure Church. I pray that in 2018 we will find ourselves living lives that are honorable, honest, free of gossip and slander, and focused on the glory of God, in Jesus. I pray that we become a body of people who obey all that Jesus has commanded and out of that obedience we proclaim the gospel to all who will listen. I pray we will be transformed and find our joy in Jesus. AMEN

ASK FOR RESPONSE

Endnotes: