**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**Sermon**

 ***New Year in the Lord -2023 / So That You May Live***

 **January 1st, In the Year of Our Lord 2023**

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(Unless otherwise noted, NAS is quoted – New American Standard Bible)

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Every year, we joke about New Year’s resolutions. Below is a sample of New Year’s resolutions with which most people can identify.



It seems to be human nature to have a new beginning or to “seek” to have new beginnings. A fresh start is always a positive. Leaving the past behind with all the things we learned in order to have an improved life. We build upon the foundations of the past. We remember quotes like, “*Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results*.”  Doing the same things over and over again and wonder why you get the same results, and then whatever it is with which you’re dealing never gets better?

 But for the Believer. . . we are called to constantly build ourselves up as individuals and as a body of Christ. We read in Ephesians 4. . .

 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. **(Ephesians 4:12-13)**

 Therefore, whatever we Believers do, we are called to mature in the direction of the fullness of Christ.

All of the resolutions cited above are positive. It just takes willpower. Fallen humanity, on its own, does not possess the most successful *overcoming* willpower. I share with you a passage of Scripture contained in one of Paul’s letters that God’s Holy Spirit directed him to write to Believers in Philippi two thousand years ago.

**Philippians 4:4-13**

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, rejoice!

5 Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near.

6 Be anxious for nothing,

but in everything by prayer and supplication

with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension,

will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable,

whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely,

whatever is of good repute,

if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise,

dwell on these things.

9 The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me,

practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

 10 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly,

that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed,

you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity.

 11 Not that I speak from want,

for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.

 12 I know how to get along with humble means,

and I also know how-to live-in prosperity;

in any and every circumstance

I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry,

both of having abundance and suffering need.

 13 **I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.**

Paul writes to people just like us. They are Believers in Philippi who struggle with life. His words specifically apply to Believers. I see that most people are seeking to be successful in life. So, when Paul states “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” it is in the context of being a Believer. Obviously, God does not intend for the bank robber to say. . . *I can successfully rob all banks through God who strengthens me.* Paul’s words impower Believers to accomplish God’s will in our lives. Remember that God has plans for every person to walk in (Ephesians 2:8-10). However, until a person has surrendered to God, they cannot be strengthen to fulfill His will for their life.

It is important to remember that Paul wrote at least four letters while being a prisoner in Rome (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon) from 61-62 A.D. We receive these words knowing that Paul wrote from circumstances that were life-threatening as he awaited his trial before Caesar. Paul had been arrested in Jerusalem by the religious leaders who turned him over to the Roman authorities. Paul then declared his Roman citizenship by birth and appealed his case to Caesar. Through a long journey under Roman guard, Paul arrived in Rome and spent his time writing and witnessing to all. Paul is a prisoner for two years but is afforded to rent his own quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered (Acts 28:28-31). Paul is released because there were not any witnesses that came to Rome from Jerusalem to testify against him. Let us now focus on God’s message to all Believers that are contained in the New Testament book we call Philippians.

I see that these words can be received as a New Year’s resolution. In fact, these words are a daily resolution for life. Why wait until January 1st? What does the condensed list look like derived from Philippians 4:4-13?

1. Rejoice in the Lord.
2. Let everyone see your gentle spirit.
3. Pray with thanksgiving to God.
4. Allow the peace of God to guard your heart and mind.
5. Dwell on what is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good repute and all things worthy of praise to the Lord.
6. Practice the life God calls us to live, and He will be with you.
7. Through the application of all these Godly attributes, learn to be content in all your circumstances, because you can do all things through Him who strengthens you.

The first audience intended to receive these words are the Believers in Philippi. The second audience is those seeking a purpose in life but who have not surrendered to the Lord. I see that this passage of Scripture is a good one to share with a person who has not surrendered to God. And I believe you will be blessed with being a part of enlightening another person. They will be challenged to pray to the Lord to turn their hearts toward Him. Once their hearts are turned, they then can be empowered by the power of God’s Holy Spirit at work in them to turn their lives into the life He has called them. With this said, God calls all people to afford themselves the opportunity this list of uplifting life-resolutions offers.

Where in the Bible does the Scripture detail people surrendering to the Lord and their lives were improved? I believe God has the best life-plan for all people. This includes the best plan for the survival of the human race. We read in Acts 2:36-38 the results of Peter’s Holy Spirit preaching.

36 "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ-- this Jesus whom you crucified."

 37 Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?"

 38 Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

After receiving the truth from the Holy Spirit preaching of Peter in the name of Jesus. . . the first process of the salvation/regeneration event or change to these Jews was that their heart was pierced (cut).

The consistency of God’s Word regarding salvation is revealed through the Bible. What we see take place, chronicled in the Book of Acts, is the same change of heart that God has planned for all people detailed in the Old Testament books of Ezekiel 36 and Deuteronomy 30.

**Ezekiel 36:25-27**

25 "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean;

I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.

 26 "Moreover, I will give you a **new heart and put a new spirit within** you;

and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

27 "I will put **My Spirit within you** and cause you to walk in My statutes,

and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

This is the same transformation of spirit that Jesus tells Nicodemus he must go through to see or enter the kingdom of God (John 3).

After verse 27 in Ezekiel 36, God details that He will prosper the people in the land He had given their forefathers. Then, in verse 37, God declares that they ask Him to do these things for them that are also listed.

36:37 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "This also I will let the house of Israel ask Me to do for them: I will increase their men like a flock.

When a person asks God to do something they are humbling themselves to Him. Humbling is surrendering to the love-grace-authority of God. This is the first Beatitude listed in Matthew 5:3. . . *Blessed are the poor in spirit,* [humble to God] *for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* The Jews listening to Peter recognized that they could not achieve, on their own, the goal they sought (reconciliation with God). This is why these Jews in Acts 2 asked Peter. . . “What must we do?” They had been convicted by the Holy Spirit (John 16:8) and their hearts had been pierced (circumcised - Deut. 30:6) by the Holy Spirit preaching of Peter in the name of Jesus.

The contextual setting of Acts 2 must not be missed. Jesus had been recently crucified and He had instructed His disciples to wait in Jerusalem to receive additional empowerment by God’s Holy Spirit to preach in the name of Jesus the Good News.

45 Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, 46 and He said to them,

"Thus, it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day,

47 and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 "You are witnesses of these things.

49 "And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." **(Luke 24:45-49)**

So, the apostles waited in Jerusalem. And we see with their additional empowerment received on the day of Pentecost, they went to the Temple and preached from the steps of the Temple. So, we see that God does call-out to all people in the midst of opposition (even those people who crucified Jesus) and asks them to turn to Him. "Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; For I am God, and there is no other (Isaiah 45:22). And we know that whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved (Romans 10:13).

Over seven-hundred years before God directed Ezekiel to write. . . He directed Moses to write **Deuteronomy 30,** which took place about 1,400 years before the Incarnation.

6 "Moreover the LORD your God will **circumcise your heart** and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, **so that you may live. . . .** 8 "And you shall again **obey** the LORD, and **observe** all His commandments which I command you today.

 In this one verse, we receive the truth of God’s intent for all of fallen humanity. That is. . . the only way to observe and keep His commandments is to have one’s heart circumcised, pierced, cut. Again, this is why Jesus tells Nicodemus (John 3) that he must be reborn of spirit to see or enter the kingdom of God. Once we are reborn of Spirit, we receive the spiritual strength to follow the Lord’s commands. And we know the two greatest commands are to love God and our neighbor. These are written in the book of the Law and in the New Testament (Deut. 6:5, 10:12; Lev. 19:18; Matthew 22:37-39). Jesus further said that these two commandments depend on the whole Law and the Prophets. With love there is accountability to God and each other. This is why all the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands. The other benefit of practicing the Lord’s teachings is that our lives will be more prosperous. This does not mean we will be wealthy. However, we will have our needs met.

9 "Then the LORD your God will prosper you abundantly in all the work of your hand, . . .10 if you obey the LORD your God to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this book of the law, if you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and soul.

11 "For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach.

12 "It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?'

13 "Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?'

14 "But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it.

15 "See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity;

16 in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the LORD your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it.

17 "**But** if your heart turns away and you will not obey, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, 18 I declare to you today that you shall surely perish.

**Did Jesus Teach a Moral Code by Which we are to Live?**

We are not under the Law to achieve salvation. But the Law served as a tutor of our need for a Savior (Galatians 3:24). We need to examine the words of Jesus recorded in the New Testament. Remember that Jesus was a Jew who had perfect knowledge of the Old Testament. Jesus often quoted Old Testament Scriptures to prove His legitimacy and authority to the Jews and their religious leaders. So, when Jesus said . . .

**Matthew 5:17-20** 17 "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 18 "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

 19 "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

 20 "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

**Did Jesus Uphold a Moral Code? YES**

. . **. Jesus upheld the Law code of God for daily living. The Law included moral codes of conduct.** Understand, the Law Code was not designed to redeem a person (Hebrews 10) from their sin. But once a person’s heart was surrendered to God, they evidenced their faith by practicing the moral commands within the Law Code. Therefore, the practice of Jesus’ moral code is evidence of being spiritually reborn.

It is impossible to keep the whole Law. This is why Jesus calls us to seek forgiveness of sin (1 John 1: 5-10). Within the Law (Tora) was the moral code the Jews were to keep, but God knew they would fail. In their failure, God asked them to turn to Him (and not themselves) for salvation and right-living. But the Jews rebelled and lived the life they chose and failed. They sought to approve themselves to God by their works.

Remember, Paul was a Pharisee steeped in the Law. However, he realized the true intent of the Law and challenges the Galatians, “Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” (Gal. 3:2-3). Furthermore, in Galatians 3:4-19, God tells us who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer. And a person who pursues works of the Law are under a curse. "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM" (Duet. 27:26). Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, "THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH" (Habakkuk 2:4; Genesis 15:6). However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, "HE WHO PRACTICES THEM SHALL LIVE BY THEM" (Leviticus 18:5; Ezekiel 20:11). Obviously, this meant they would fail and be judged by their deeds. We see this judgement in Revelation 20:11ff at the Great White Throne Judgement when the people whose name are not in the Book of Life are judged according to their deeds, and they are thrown into the Lake for Fire along with death and Hades.

This means that a person who claims to justify themselves by keeping the Law will eventually fail. This is why Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us-- for it is written in Deuteronomy 21:23, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE." This is why the promise of salvation is based upon faith (John 3:16). We see this in the faith-salvation covenant God made with Abraham (Genesis 12, 15).

Included in the Law are moral codes of moral conduct in personal relationships that Jesus upheld with His statement . . . "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17). We practice Jesus’ moral code by His indwelling Spirit guiding our lives.

Murder (Exodus 21:12-14; Leviticus 24:17,21)

Striking or cursing a parent (Exodus 21:15,17)

Kidnapping (Exodus 21:16)

Failure to lock-up a dangerous animal that results in someone’s death

 (Exodus 21:28-29)

Sorcery and Witchcraft (Exodus 22:18; Leviticus 20:27;

 Deuteronomy 13:5; 1 Samuel 28:9)

Bestiality (Exodus 22:19; Leviticus 20:16)

Incest (Leviticus 18:6-18, 20:11-12,14,17,19-21)

Human sacrifice (Leviticus 20:2-5)

Adultery (Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22)

Homosexual acts (Leviticus 20:13)

Blasphemy (Leviticus 24:14,16, 23)

False prophecy (Deuteronomy 18:20)

Refusal to obey a decision of a judge or priest (Deuteronomy 17:12)

Perjury in capital cases (Deuteronomy 19:16-19)

A woman falsely claiming to be a virgin before marriage (Deuteronomy 22:13-21)

Sexual relations between a woman pledged to be married and a man other

 than her husband to be (Deuteronomy 22:23-24)

 Rebellion against parents (Deuteronomy 21:18-21)

 Jesus then adds . . . **Matthew 5:18-19**

18 "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away,

not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law,

until all is accomplished.

 19 "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments,

and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven;

but whoever keeps and teaches them,

he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

By Jesus’ own words, Believers are to be moral and distance themselves from the amoral world. God’s Holy Spirit indwells us in order for us to be empowered to live moral lives. This is how Believers spiritually empowered to practice life. And this is why Paul declares in Romans 8:6-11. . . 6 For the mind set on the flesh is death,

but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace,

 7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God;

for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so;

 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

 9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit,

if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you.

But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

 10 And if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin,

yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness.

 11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you,

He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you.

Therefore, anyone who intentionally practices amoral living is not a Christian, because, if the Spirit of God was in their heart, they would not have amoral relationships and lifestyles. We all will have a bad day from time-to-time. This is when God is there to receive our confession and is faithful to forgive us (1 John 1:6-10).

**Conclusion:** The New Year’s Resolution is really a “life-list”. I like 2 Corinthians 5:17. Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. **AMEN**