

## CHURCH RESOLUTIONS - HEBREWS 10:22-25

NEW YEAR, 2010

8 decades ago, Ricoh was a teenager, a student in Pisa, Italy. He is not remembered in his school as being an outstanding student. He is remembered for the many practical jokes that he pulled on fellow students and faculty alike. You see, Ricoh was one of the ring leaders of a club which called itself the "anti-neighbor society". This club was dedicated to the task of playing as many practical jokes on as many people as they could. You could recognize members of Ricoh's club by the big colorful padlocks that they always carried with them on their belt loops. Sooner or later during the day, someone would be locked to his chair or table by one of these colorful padlocks. A water-pail over a doorway - everyone knew that a member of the "anti-neighbor society" had been around. Once Ricoh's group launched a successful campaign to elect the least attractive girl in the whole school for home-coming queen. Mischief - that was Ricoh's game. And he was very good at it. And while Ricoh and his colleagues certainly annoyed a lot of people, most just tried to ignore the "anti-neighbor society", perhaps hoping that it would somehow just go away.

Ricoh was largely ignored, that is, until one day when he just went too far. There was one class that was particularly boring to Ricoh. So he came up with a plan to liven up the classroom. Ricoh designed a stink bomb. He then brought the stink bomb to class with him with the plan that he would set it off right during the most boring time of class. Well, Ricoh did let that stink bomb off. And he quickly evacuated that classroom. But the faculty and administration of Ricoh's school were of the unanimous opinion that Ricoh and his group had stepped over the line, and that Ricoh must be made a public example to restore discipline to the school. The Head Master called the faculty for a meeting with the expressed purpose of voting to expel Ricoh from the school.

At that meeting, only one faculty member - a man named Louie Pachatti - spoke up on behalf of Ricoh. Yes, he was mischievous, a nuisance to everyone. But Ricoh did not have a bad heart. In Pachatti's opinion, Ricoh was actually a very bright young man. He certainly needed to change directions in life, and the teacher thought that he could persuade him to do so. Well, the faculty gave Louie Pachatti permission to work with Ricoh. But if there were one more incident, no matter how small, Ricoh would have to go.

Pachatti called Ricoh into his office and read the riot act to him. Did Ricoh want to ruin his life? Did Ricoh just want to end up being a juvenile delinquent? Did Ricoh want to end up wasting his potential or worse - spending his life behind bars? Now was the time for young Ricoh to make up his mind to change and reform his ways - before it was too late.

We can be happy for this faculty member who took a special interest in young Ricoh. And we can also

be happy for a young man who showed enough maturity to change his direction in life into a more productive pattern. For Enrico Fermi would grow up to be a brilliant physicist. It was Enrico who produced the first nuclear chain reaction in 1942. It would be Enrico Fermi who would lead the team that produced the atomic bomb. It was Enrico who unlocked so many of the mysteries of nuclear power. But the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1938 or the Hughes Medal of the Royal Society in 1943 could never have been attained, if Enrico Fermi hadn't resolved to change the direction of his life, from a frivolous, mischievous and sometimes destructive direction to a mature, productive, and fulfilling direction.

Every person needs to evaluate his or her life from time to time. Am I being as productive as I can be? Am I growing as much as I should? What areas of life should be changed so that I can better reach my potential? It is at this time of year that many people evaluate the direction of their lives, and often resolutions are made to change certain directions.

What is needed in the life of an individual is also necessary in the life of a church from time to time. And especially as the Rockford Baptist Church begins this New Year in its newly renovated sanctuary, I thought it would be good for us to discuss some church resolutions together this morning. Now these church resolutions, if adopted, certainly require individual resolve and action - for a church is made up of individual members. The church resolutions that I would draw your attention to this morning are worthy ones - I have no question about this. For these resolutions were given under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God through the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

I could have entitled this sermon "The Salad Sermon" because we are going to center our attention on the words "Let Us". 5 times the author exhorts his readers to "Let Us" in Hebrews 10:19-25. And each time he does, an important aspect of church life is addressed. These 5 "Let Us" statements form 5 worthy church resolutions for the New Year.

Now we must note first THE BASIS FOR THESE RESOLUTIONS: THE HIGH PRIESTLY MINISTRY OF CHRIST.

HEB 10:19<sup>19</sup> Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,<sup>20</sup> by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body,<sup>21</sup> and since we have a great priest over the house of God,<sup>22</sup> let us . . .

We are not exhorted to resolve in our own strength. We are not commanded to somehow work up the strength for these resolutions from within. No, we are first reminded of the atoning work of our great high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. And we are to have great confidence from this truth, the author says. Because the precious blood of Jesus Christ has cleansed us from all sin so that we can now enter the holy of holies of God's presence with absolute confidence, and because we presently have an high priest interceding on our

behalf at the right hand of God the Father in heaven, we have all the help and strength that we need to be able to make these resolutions with assurance. This is important for us to note right off the bat. Now let us look at these New Year Church Resolutions.

1. RESOLUTION #1: LET US DRAW NEAR TO GOD VS. 22

<sup>22</sup> let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

What a worthy resolution this is for each of us for this New Year. To draw near to God so that by the end of 2010, we would know God more fully and we would be in closer fellowship with him than we are right now. There is no more worthy resolution that we can make than the resolve to draw near to God.

When the Apostle Paul was approaching the twilight years of his life, he was secluded away in a Roman jail cell. And as he was reflecting introspectively about what his life had meant and what was most important to him, he wrote down some of his thoughts in a letter to the church at Philippi. In that 3rd chapter of that brief letter, Paul confessed that what he had considered to be most important in his younger days, he now knew to be a very little value. The fact that he was a Jewish man, the fact that he was of the prestigious tribe of Benjamin which had produced the first Jewish King, the fact that he had been a respected Pharisee - at one time in his life, these had been most important for Paul. But now in his spiritual maturity, he realized what was most important in life.

Listen to his words to the Philippians: "I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ - the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings." Phil. 3:8-10

If you were to ask the Apostle Paul what his new year's resolution was for the last year of his life, without hesitation he would have answered "to draw near to God; to know Jesus Christ more fully this next year."

Is this your desire for this year? Do you really want to draw near to God? Do you really want to grow in your experiential knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ this next year?

There is a 15 century old prayer that is as relevant today as it was in the 5th century. It is called Patrick's Breastplate. Listen to part of it. "Christ be with me. Christ in the front. Christ in the rear. Christ within me. Christ below me. Christ above me. Christ at my right hand, Christ at my left. Christ in the fort, Christ in the chariot seat, Christ at the helm, Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me. Christ in the

mouth of every man who speaks to me. Christ in every eye that sees me. Christ in every ear that hears me."

The person who originally wrote that prayer had resolved to draw near to God. And you know, something interesting happens in our life when we resolve to draw near to God. All of the other aspects of life seem to fall into place as well. As someone once said, "If God is the center of our lives, the circumference will take care of itself."

## 2. RESOLUTION #2: LET US HOLD UNSWERVINGLY TO THE HOPE WE PROFESS VS. 23

<sup>23</sup> Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

We live in a day when relativity rules. Most of the intellectuals of our day, most of the popular leaders of our day, most of the people who live around us do not believe in or practice an absolute nature of truth. Most practice some variation of a situation ethic - that the situation that you are in determines what a right or wrong action should be. This sea of relativity has caused unbelievable uncertainty and instability in our nation where most people feel like they are bobbing about on the sea of life tossed to and fro by every new idea that surfaces to claim its moment in the sun as truth for the day. It is simply amazing how polls can show the majority belief of people one week to be completely different from what it was a week or two previous.

It is easy for us to forget that many other generations have fought similar battles to those that we are fighting today. In fact, when the bible was written, the Roman Empire was steeped in a humanism that espoused a relativity of truth. When Jesus stood before Pilate and said that he had come into this world to testify to the truth, and that everyone who was on the side of truth would listen to him, Pilate responded by asking the rhetorical question "What is truth?" Here was Pilate, a very high Roman official, the governor of a significant Roman province in the Middle East, and he had no idea of what truth was. He was steeped in the philosophy of relative truth that was promoted by the Roman Empire. So he had no basis upon which to make the right decision about what to do with Christ. All he could make was a politically expedient decision.

Now the church was born in this environment. And the author of Hebrews knew the dangers inherent. That is the reason for his exhorting his readers in Hebrews 2:1, "We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away." And again, in Chapter 6:19, "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure."

Every fisherman knows the importance of an anchor. When he finds just the right spot to cast his line, just at the edge of the lily pads where the fish would be feeding below the surface, the fisherman knows that if he doesn't cast anchor, he is going to drift away from that good fishing spot. There might not appear to be any current. He might not think that there is a danger of moving. But his boat will drift if it is not secured by the anchor.

And it is the same in our lives. We are living in a world system that has a rapid current. And that current is not running down the channel of God's truth. Unless we are anchored firmly to the hope that we profess, we are going to quickly be floundering downstream. A worthy resolution is to commit oneself anew and afresh to the word of God as his or her foundation for life, to resolve to read and study it every day of the New Year, and to use God's word as the compass that directs all of life. For he who promises is faithful. God and his word remain a trustworthy constant in this uncertain world.

### 3. RESOLUTION #3: LET US SPUR ONE ANOTHER ON TOWARD LOVE AND GOOD DEEDS VS. 24

<sup>24</sup> And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

Anyone who has seen an old western is familiar with the jangling spurs that the cowpoke wore on his boots. The purpose of the spur was to encourage the horse to move on out when the cowboy wanted him to go. When the sharp edges of those tiny stars dug into the horse's belly, the horse knew that it was time to go forward.

Now most spurs that are used today by people are used in a similar manner to those used by the old cowboys. They are painful jabs used to move sluggish inactivity into reluctant productivity. And we have all experienced these types of spurs. The critical memo, the snide comment, the veiled threat. But while these spurs usually bring an immediate response, the long range benefit is not normally good. Often, in the end, there is resentment and resistance and even bitterness.

The author of Hebrews is speaking of a different kind of spur here. This is a spur that motivates towards love and good deeds. How does one spur another towards love and good deeds? An individual spurs another on towards love and good deeds in the same manner that God modeled. Let me read 4 brief passages for you that illustrate this.

\*"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8.

\*"This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." 1 John 4:10

\*"There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love God because He first loved us". 1 John 4:18, 19

\*"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers." 1 John 3:16

Now we see from the Scriptures what God did for us. He did not set back and wait for us to love him. He had every right to do this. He had created us for the purpose of giving him glory and love. But if he would

have done that, He would still be sitting up in heaven waiting, wouldn't he? No, God took the initiative and loved us first. And in doing that, he modeled love for us; he showed us what love was and how beautiful it could be. Having received His love and having seen His model, we now can learn how to love God back. This is the only real way to do it. You can't legislate love; you can't solicit love out of another; you can only model love and good deeds and receive them back in return.

And this is what we are to do for one another in the church. We are to give love unconditionally to one another. We are to be kind and generous and considerate of one another. We are to act in the best interests of others. We are to go out of our way to be a blessing to others. And as we model godliness to one another in this way - a very interesting phenomenon occurs. Our lives begin to spur others to love and good deeds.

Is your lifestyle spurring others to love and good deeds? Or are you spurring others to resentment and bitterness? One of the best resolutions that a person could make for the New Year is to be God's instrument to spur one person on to love and good deeds every week.

4. RESOLUTION #4: LET US NOT GIVE UP MEETING TOGETHER - LET US BE FAITHFUL IN OUR CHURCH ATTENDANCE VS. 25

<sup>25</sup> Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing,

There are many Christians whose lifestyle is reflected in a comment once given by Winston Churchill. When asked by a reporter if he was a pillar in his church, Churchill replied, "I am more like a flying buttress; I support the church from the outside."

It is easy to let church attendance slide into irregularity, isn't it? Especially in this day when there is much pressure from work and so many other forms of recreation and entertainment that vie for our attention. And the excuses can so easily be made that Christianity is really just a personal matter - I can have my own times of prayer and Bible study without meeting together with the entire body. Or I can catch a church service on T.V. and worship in my pajamas at home. But I have noticed in my experience that the Christian who becomes irregular in church attendance is like the rechargeable battery that misses its times of recharging. Gradually, the power is weakened and then lost. For God commanded that we meet together for a necessary purpose. It is through our corporate times of worship that we find strength from one another. And we all have experienced this. We all have come to church beat up by the world and have left strengthened with a new charge from one of our brothers or sisters in Christ.

The late Paul Harvey once told a remarkable story about a 73 year old man who lived by himself on a farm. The man had an accident on Saturday when he slipped and fell and broke his leg. He was unable to move and get out of the barn back to the farmhouse where the phone was. So he had to lie all night on the

floor of the barn. But by the next evening, some of his friends had come and found him. They took him to the hospital and got his leg set. When reporters heard about the remarkable story and asked the friends why they thought to call on the farmer, they simply said, "Well, he wasn't in church Sunday morning. When we noticed that he wasn't in church, we knew something must be wrong, because this man just never misses church."

Is your attendance at church so regular that if friends notice that you aren't here they automatically think, "something must be wrong. I'd better pray for him or check on him"? To be regular in church attendance is a good resolution to make for the New Year.

#### 5. FINALLY, RESOLUTION #5: LET US ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER VS. 25

But let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

James Corbett was the heavyweight boxing champion of the world in 1892. He really didn't have any unusual skills that would lead one to guess that he would become a champion boxer. Before he fought for the title, he was a bank teller. But he won the title from the great John L. Sullivan and held it for 5 years. In a speech that he gave at a banquet, the secret of Corbett's success in boxing was revealed.

"Fight one more round. When your feet are so tired that you have to shuffle back to the center of the ring, fight one more round. When your arms are too tired that you can hardly lift your hands to come on guard, fight one more round. When your nose is bleeding and your eyes are black and you are so tired that you wish your opponent would crack you on the jaw and put you to sleep, fight one more round. Remember - the man who fights just one more round is never whipped."

The Bible tells us that we are in a battle. Paul wrote to Timothy and said, "Endure hardship with us, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus." 2 Timothy 2:3. There are victories in warfare, but there are also times of discouragement and fatigue. Sometimes, we need to have someone remind us to just fight one more round. What a blessing our brothers and sisters can be to us as they encourage us in the faith.

5 RESOLUTIONS FOR THE NEW YEAR. Resolutions that can make this year more spiritually blessed and prosperous for each of us.

\*Let us draw near to God;

\*Let us hold unswervingly to the hope that we profess;

\*Let us spur one another on towards love and good deeds;

\*Let us not give up meeting together but rather resolve to be regular in our church attendance;

\*Let us encourage one another

WILL YOU MAKE THESE 5 RESOLUTIONS FOR THIS NEW YEAR?