

I Am Resolved ZCC 1.4.15 II Chron 12: 13-14

So king Rehoboam strengthened himself in Jerusalem and reigned; for Rehoboam was forty-one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which Yahweh had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel to put his name there. His mother's name was Naamah the Ammonitess. 14 He did that which was evil, because he didn't set his heart to seek Yahweh.

When Andrea was small, she wanted to do Tae-Kwan-Do, so we set it up and we took her to the classes every week. Have any of you taken a martial-arts class? I know you have seen a class going through their movements as a group—at the very least, you've seen it on television or in a movie. It looks kinda funny—doing defensive and offensive moves, when there is no opponent there at all.

Do you know why they do that, practicing move after move, over and over? They do it so that there is an automatic reaction to any specific action. After a while, you don't have to think—your body and mind simply know how to react, automatically. Kind of like a muscle memory thing. This decreases reaction time and increases the possibility of winning. The goal of all that practice is winning competition or maybe defending yourself if you are attacked.

Basic training in the military is designed to do about the same thing—to teach the soldiers to follow orders so well and so often that when wartime comes—they do what they are told, without question. The goal of basic training is also to win and to keep the soldier alive.

When it comes to New-Year's resolutions, many of us have just plain-old given up. How many of you have a no-resolution policy? Why is that? Because we never seem to be able to keep them? I know that it is easy for me to make them and much harder to keep them. In fact, this year I haven't shared most of mine with anyone—but I'm not sure if I'm afraid I'll jinx myself or if I'm afraid I will embarrass myself.

We resolve to exercise and we resolve to lose those pounds and we resolve to treat our families better and we resolve to leave for work earlier so we don't have to rush and we resolve to spend our money more wisely—sometimes we manage to keep our resolutions, but often we only do it for a few weeks.

Still, resolutions are a good idea.

Let me re-read the second verse from that short passage I read earlier—now that we have a tiny bit of context. This verse, in some sense, touches on why resolutions can be a good thing: *He did that which was evil, because he didn't set his heart to seek Yahweh.*

I've heard it said that if you shoot for the stars and fail—you might still hit the moon. I've also heard it said that if you have no goal—no destination in mind—that you'll get nowhere.

In a moral and spiritual sense—that is what happened to the king. He didn't resolve to do right—so he did wrong.

Today, I want to talk about starting new and fresh and beginning with new resolve—but I'm not going to mention our cholesterol or our weight or our blood-sugar. Let's talk about spiritual things—about changes we need to make.

Some of this has really been on my mind—so much so that here I am at 0800 on Sunday refining and changing. In fact, I probably will do that again with my pen after I get to church—because this seems so important to me right now.

I have been looking at the prophets recently. When I look at the things they denounced—the things God's people struggled with, I recognized them.

They seem to me to be the things the church still struggles with today. I'm not talking about murder or sexual immorality or evangelism or tithing or even the “drinking and dancing and going to movies” that I heard about all the time when I was younger. I'm talking about some more basic and maybe more important struggles.

Let me outline the things the prophets of old denounced and fought against—and see if you don't recognize most of them—if not in your heart, in the hearts of the church in general.

(1) One major thing they fought against was Israel's tendency to absorb the religious practices of the pagans around them. When the children of Abraham occupied the promised land—what did God tell them to do?

[He told them to kill or drive out the people of the land.]

Why did he do that? For one thing, to help cut down on their temptation to stray in their worship. So, did they follow his orders? [No.]

And what happened? That's right—they began to practice some of the same rituals and include them into their worship.

At times, this included fertility-rites and even child-sacrifice.

When this began to happen, the prophets stood and declared the worship of Yhwh God as the only rightful worship for Israel.

Now, don't misunderstand me—I am all for the religious freedom that we have in this country. Here, we have the right to choose God or not. The United States is not a theocracy and I'm not about to attack other religious groups. But, if you notice, [even though Israel WAS a theocracy—a government based in their religion and supposedly lead by God himself] their prophets didn't blast the other groups.

What they denounced was the watering down of Yhwh worship—and a tendency of the people to be undecided and wishy-washy. At one point, Elijah asked Ahab and the people a wonderful question that fits right in here, “How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.”

Jesus said that if salt [that means us Christians] loses its saltiness—it is worthless and that is so. Today, I ask us to commit—to resolve—to be different from the rest of the world—with its religions and lack of religions.

We are not to be changed by them, we are to change them. Let's resolve today to serve the Lord and not money, not things, not anything or anyone but the Lord God.

(2) The prophets of old also struggled against ritual for the sake of ritual. During the days of Hosea and Amos—the tithes were being paid and sacrifices were being made—but God was not pleased, why? Why wasn't God happy with them? They were doing what was required, weren't they?

Not really. They had substituted ritual and legalism for the seeking of God's face and the desire to know him and to serve him. Do you remember what God said about their sacrifices—the ones made for the wrong reasons? (They are a stink in my nostrils!)

Let me get started here—as a group, THIS is the biggest trouble we Christians have today. Too often, the church assembles and does their thing—all the while NOT seeking God and NOT seeking his will and NOT desiring to serve him (other than when they are at church). As we come before God, we are to examine ourselves and draw near to God and dedicate ourselves to finding his will for our lives and seeking the strength to do that will—moment by moment. Is that why we are here today? Or are we here because of habit or—even worse—because we think this is enough, that assembling and singing and giving our offerings is Christianity?

I've seen this tendency all of my life. I've been guilty of it—at least from time to time. Maybe you have too.

I hope and pray that I am beyond that now, but I have been guilty of substituting external worship for seeking God. For too many of us Christians, we like things just the way they are and we don't want God to use us or to change us—we want to go on with our lives as we are, and God ought to be glad that we make it to church occasionally.

I love to come here and worship. I love to sing the songs and take communion and to repeat the Lord's Prayer with all of you. What we do here is important, but ultimately, Christianity is NOT ABOUT CHURCH.

Christianity is about seeking the face of God and living our lives MOMENT BY MOMENT in his will. It is about showing others, by word and deed what a wonderful thing it is to serve the living God—and thereby increasing the Kingdom of God.

Are we guilty of coming to church to get our consciences soothed—instead of stirred?

Are we guilty of worshiping as Pharisees did—congratulating ourselves that the preacher is talking about everyone else and thinking how good we are and how we measure up?

Do we declare our love of God and then leave this and act as if we don't love God nor humankind—when we know perfectly well that Jesus said that the two most important things we can do is love God with all our being and our neighbors as ourselves?

(3) The third thing the prophets did was save the faith from being swallowed up in despair during the bad times. When the people were carried off and when their religion had been perverted and when they had fallen away from God and into sin and the clutches of the world—when Jerusalem and the temple had been destroyed—the prophets declared that there was a way back and that God never fails.

The people had hung up their harps and refused to sing the songs of Zion—but the prophets of old assured them that God was still God and that he still loved them and that he was the God of the whole world and that he could bring about his will.

As they sat in despair—they couldn't imagine the future and probably the prophets couldn't either—but they learned to seek and embrace God's hand and his sovereignty. In principle, they learned what Paul would later write in Romans 8—"We know that in everything, God works for good with those who love him and are called according to his purpose."

They could never have understood that through them and through all that had happened—the Christ would be born and that he would become not only their deliverer—but the savior of all who would accept him. So, God's will from the beginning—that Abraham would become the springboard for the redemption of the world—would finally come true, in spite of and because of all that had happened—both good and bad.

I'm not really a prophet like those who stood and declared and gave their lives. I'm just a preacher—one who reads what is written and tries to help us know what that means to us. So it is a good thing that you have not fallen as Israel did.

I love this church. I love that you say what you mean and mean what you say and that we are here for the right reasons.

That said, as we resolve to be more and greater and better, I believe the prophets of old still have something to say to us.

(1) Choose God—and once we have chosen, don't let the opinions or beliefs of the world water that down. We serve the Creator. We serve the LORD of all. We serve a risen savior. We are to respect others and their beliefs—but if we believe what we say, we will serve YHWH God with all our hearts, minds, and spirit. With all we are.

(2) Remember that no matter how well we worship and no matter how beautiful the sanctuary and no matter how well we sing and no matter how much we give—Christianity is not ultimately about those things. It is about seeking the face of God and living in his will when we leave this place. It is about doing good in his name and for the sake of the Kingdom. It is about showing others our faith in word and deed—by shining a light on God through our own faith and our actions. When we do that, they will also seek to know God.

(3) God is in charge. God is working. Even when we fail and even when we are guilty of the things I just mentioned—watering down our faith or substituting ritual for faith instead of living our faith. No matter where we are, God is there and God is seeking to redeem. That means individually and that means corporately.

When Israel was sitting in despair and when they had lost everything, the prophets reminded them that God heard and that God would work and that redemption was coming. That is good news. The better news, for you and me, is that we don't have to start at the bottom.

Zion, we are in a good place—but it can be better. As we resolve to be more and to be HIS church for this place and time, he is already working and he is already leading and he is already working to make us more.

I'm asking each of us—again individually but especially as a church—to be different from Rehoboam. I'm asking us to “set our hearts to seek God.”

As we re-commit to do that, I also want to offer a caution. The Gospel never changes. God's love never changes. But the world around us is changing faster than ever before. The people around us is changing as never before. As we resolve to serve God with all our being—individually and as a church. And as we resolve to put our faith into action more and more instead of clinging to ritual for its own sake. And as we seek God's will and his face and prayerfully ask him to work in our lives and especially in our church...

As we do those things, God will change us. I don't know what will change. I don't know what God will grow us to be. But it won't be the same as now.

I challenge us all to continue to pray and to work and to seek God's face as God's people—but to ramp that up. To resolve. To REALLY mean it today and through the coming year.

And then hang on tight because something wonderful is going to happen.