

**12/31/17 @ BUCYRUS UMC – NEW YEARS MESSAGE**

**TITLE:** CHANGE FOR OTHERS

**TEXT:** ACTS 9:1-16

**GOD'S WORD:** JONAH 4:1-4

**I – YOUTH RESOLUTIONS:**

Today is New Year's Eve. There will be all kinds of celebrations going on this evening as we say goodbye to 2017 and hello to 2018. Tomorrow we'll get up and greet the New Year as we eat the traditional sauerkraut and pork.

One of the other traditions we have as we enter this New Year is to try to improve our lives by making resolutions. By setting goals to change ourselves for the better.

I thought since it is youth Sunday today – the youth will be doing the next service in its entirety – that I would ask them what resolutions they would make if they could concerning themselves...their society...and their church. Listen to their answers:

SHOW VIDEO CLIP OF OUR TWEENS

**II – CHANGING OTHERS:**

As I asked them the questions I was struck by the fact that their resolutions were not so much aimed at changing themselves, but in changing others as well.

They really weren't interested in how they could change themselves, as a matter of fact they seem to be pretty happy with who they are and how they are. But when it comes to changing things they want to change those around them, like having people live in peace.

I was really surprised by their answers on what changes they would make in their church. It wasn't about our music, our seating, or even our worship styles...things I expected to hear. It was about talking to one another. About having good communication between all the different ages and groups within our church family. They want everyone to change so that it changes everyone. Let me say that again...everyone change so that it changes everyone.

As I think of some of the resolutions I've made over the years, and of the ones others have made, it dawns on me that if it worked and changed me it would change others too. A lot of times what we do in life affects those around us as well as ourselves.

### **III – JONAH:**

I see this principle in some of the Scriptures I read in the Bible. That what we do can affect the lives of others.

As I thought about this I was drawn again to the story of Jonah in the Old Testament. There was city called Nineveh. A city we are told in the book that had 120,000 people plus all kinds of animals. They were great sinners who lived lives of sin and God called the prophet Jonah to go there and warn them that he was not happy with them and if they didn't change their ways he would destroy them. Jonah did not agree with God's plan. He hated Nineveh. These people had treated the Hebrews badly and they were detested by the Hebrews because of it. Jonah didn't want God to save them in anyway, even if they did straighten up their acts. He didn't want God to send them grace and mercy, but to rain down fire and brimstone on them instead. He wanted to see them wiped out and removed from the face of the earth. So instead of doing what God asked him to do, he ran the other way. He got on a boat and sailed in the opposite direction. But as he found out you can't out run God. God caused a storm and Jonah got thrown overboard where he was swallowed by a large fish. Three days in the belly of the fish convinced him that he should not run from God but instead do what he was told to

do and he was spit back up on the shore. He went to Nineveh and preached the warning God had told him to deliver. Jonah Changed!

But it's the rest of the story that tells me that this change by one man changed the lives of thousands others. The Scriptures tell us that the people heard his message and took it to heart. They repented of their sins, sat in ashes in mourning clothes, and fasted and God had mercy on them. Because Jonah changed and followed God instead of himself he changed the lives of the 120,000 people in Nineveh.

#### **IV – TEXT:**

But there's another example in the Bible about a man who changed and his change has affected the lives of millions and millions of people. His story is recorded in the book of Acts in today's text.

#### **Acts 9:1-16 (NLT)**

<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord's followers. So he went to the high priest. <sup>2</sup> He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them—both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains.

<sup>3</sup> As he was approaching Damascus on this mission, a light from heaven suddenly shone down around him. <sup>4</sup> He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?" <sup>5</sup> "Who are you, lord?" Saul asked. And the voice replied, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting!" <sup>6</sup> Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

<sup>7</sup> The men with Saul stood speechless, for they heard the sound of someone's voice but saw no one! <sup>8</sup> Saul picked himself up off the ground, but when he opened his eyes he was blind. So his companions led him by the hand to Damascus. <sup>9</sup> He remained there blind for three days and did not eat or drink.

<sup>10</sup> Now there was a believer in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision, calling, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord!" he replied. <sup>11</sup> The Lord said, "Go over to Straight Street, to the house of Judas. When you get there, ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is praying to me right now. <sup>12</sup> I have shown him a vision of a man named Ananias coming in and laying hands on

him so he can see again.” <sup>13</sup> “But Lord,” exclaimed Ananias, “I’ve heard many people talk about the terrible things this man has done to the believers<sup>[c]</sup> in Jerusalem! <sup>14</sup> And he is authorized by the leading priests to arrest everyone who calls upon your name.” <sup>15</sup> But the Lord said, “Go, for Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel. <sup>16</sup> And I will show him how much he must suffer for my name’s sake.”

Saul was a young man on his way to a life in the ranks of the Pharisees. He is first introduced to us as the man who held the coats of the other men as they stoned Stephen to death for preaching the Gospel. He deemed it his sworn duty to wipe out the followers of this new religion called “THE WAY.” He went about doping everything in his power to destroy anyone who proclaimed the name of Jesus Christ as the Son of God...The Messiah.

To this end he went to the Chief Priests and obtained written permission to pursue the Christians who had fled to Damascus to avoid the persecution they were receiving in Jerusalem. He wanted to find them – both men and women, place them in chains, and drag them back to Jerusalem to be dealt with by the religious powers there.

It was on this journey that his life began its change. Jesus met him on the road, blinded him with a great light and knocked him to the ground and spoke to him, asking him why he was going about persecuting him. He then had him led, still blind, to Damascus where he stayed until another man changed.

A man named Ananias was called upon by God to go and pray over Saul. Ananias had heard the reputation of this man named Saul and voiced his apprehension to God. But unlike Jonah he didn’t run in the opposite direction to escape God’s plan, but obeyed and did as he was asked. He went and prayed over Saul, whose life was changed.

Because Ananias changed the life of Saul was changed. And Because of that change Saul became the Paul. The Apostle who took the Good News to the Gentile world, the Apostle who wrote a third of your New

Testament. Because he changed the lives of millions and millions of people have been changed...including yours!

## **V – CHANGE YOURSELF - OTHERS:**

So my message for you this day is to change in the New Year. I'm not speaking about the normal New Year's resolutions of change like losing weight, exercising more, and the like. I'm talking about the changes you can make in your life that would affect those around you as well as yourself.

I want you to ask yourselves the same questions I asked the Youth. If you could change anything, what would you change:

- About yourself
- About your society
- About your church

And then decided the changes you have to make personally that will affect not only your life but the lives of those around you as well. What changes need to be made in your life to enable you and your church to defeat the darkness by shining the light of Christ to others.

The answer to that should guide your resolutions for this New Year.

AMEN