

Christmas 1/New Year's Eve
December 30, 2018

Numbers 6:22-27
441-42-38/75-71

Enter the New Year with the LORD's Blessing

- I. Blessed with His continued care.
- II. Blessed with His continued grace.
- III. Blessed with His continued peace.

Dear Christian friends,

The end of one year and the start of another usually brings MIXED EMOTIONS. There may be RELIEF – we're glad the year is **finally** over. There may be SADNESS– we lost some very **dear loved ones**. There may be ANTICIPATION– we're looking forward to a **graduation** – a **birth** – a **wedding**, etc. Then again there may be **some ANXIETY**- major health problems may be **taking their toll**. We don't know WHAT the new year all holds but **as Christians** we do know WHO HOLDS US in His hands – our **dear triune** God.

As we look at the FAMILIAR WORDS of the **benediction** we hear God say, **“So they will put My name of the Israelites and I will bless them.”** As we get ready to CLOSE OUT one year of grace and enter a new one – ENTER THE NEW YEAR WITH THE LORD'S BLESSING. **In the new year** we will be blessed with the Lord's 1)continued care, 2)His **continued grace** and 3)His **continued peace**.

I. Blessed with His continued care.

Looking over 2018 do you see some GOOD DAYS – **maybe** a good harvest this fall – a special vacation, etc.? **No doubt** you can also see some BAD DAYS – water standing in **fields waiting** to be harvested – days spent in the **hospital** or at a **bedside**. There were also plenty of AVERAGE nothing spectacular days. Just like all other years 2018 had its UPS and downs.

Look again at 2018. Do you SEE YOUR GOD there every day of the year for you? Through all those **ups and downs** do you see your God LOVING you – taking care of you – **protecting** you?

“The LORD said to Moses, ‘Tell Aaron and his sons, this is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: The LORD bless you and keep you.’”

“The LORD BLESS you” – and SO HE HAS! James reminds us that **“every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like the shifting shadows.”** The Lord blessed us with FAR MORE than just our **“daily bread.”** Enter the new year confident of God's CONTINUED CARE!

“The LORD bless you and keep you.” That **“you”** is SINGULAR – each one of you. God's **“blessing”** and **“keeping”** us is not done as a MASS PRODUCTION one size fits all – but on a PERSON-TO-PERSON basis. **This last year** and on into the new year the Lord gives each one of us His PERSONAL ATTENTION. It's not that God PEEKS IN on us **ever so often** to see how we're doing. God has His eye on us CONTINUALLY.

Enter this new year confident of God's CONTINUED CARE. In your devotions this week read Psalms 91 and 121. Both speak of God's PERSONAL CARE for us. Psalm 91 has the promise, **“He will command His angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.”** Psalm 121 ends, **“The LORD will watch over you coming and going, both now and forevermore.”** In your Bible put a bookmark at Romans 8. We heard some of it before, **“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him. If God be for us, who can be against us?”** Sometimes God's ways LEAVE US SCRATCHING our heads GOD KNOWS what He's doing even when we don't.

II. Blessed with His continued grace.

There's something else we can BE SURE of next year – we will continue to sin every day. We will have a CONTINUING – DAILY NEED for God's **grace** and **forgiveness**.

That's SIMPLE HONESTY. We are sinners stuck with **stubborn** sinful natures. Paul wrote in Romans 7 and 8, ***"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is in my sinful nature. I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do, this I keep on doing."*** We can all relate to that, right? Paul went on, ***"The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so."***

Just look WHAT A FIGHT our **sinful natures** gave us this year! Maybe we entered 2018 SO DETERMINED that this was the year we were finally going to overcome **whatever** sin. THIS YEAR I will control my **temper** – I'll be more faithful in coming to church – I'll start having daily devotions at home. This year I won't gossip about people – I'll stop drinking too much – stop checking out porn on the internet. **This year** I'll BE CONTENT and not complain about how God is **taking care** of me. So did you honestly make GREAT STRIDES FORWARD in **living a holy** life – or are you STILL STRUGGLING with those **same old sins**? We must close out this year **as we do each day** – with the HUMBLE PRAYER, ***"God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"***

"The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you." God's ***"face shining on"*** us is God SMILING at us. It's the opposite of God FROWNING and SCOWLING at us – the **opposite** of God looking at us with a DISGUSTED, FED UP look on His face. In ALL HONESTY God should be fed up with us. Look how we've TREATED Him this year. If someone keeps doing something wrong to you over and over don't you finally reach your BREAKING POINT? Haven't we pushed God to the point where He COULD honestly tell us, "ENOUGH! I can't take it anymore!" David wrote in Psalm 31, ***"Let Your face shine on Your servant; save me in Your unfailing love."***

Enter the new year blessed with God's CONTINUED GRACE. Just a week ago we heard that ***"good news of great joy – a Savior has been born for you."*** A Savior who is none other than the **eternal Son** of God Most High born our **flesh-and-blood** brother. WASN'T IT GREAT **every week** this year to come to church and hear again those SWEET, SIMPLE FACTS of the gospel? **In our place** Jesus perfectly obeyed all the commandments and He gives us all the credit for His perfect life. Bearing the sins of the **whole world** Jesus suffered and died on the cross. Jesus PERSONALLY PAID for **every one** of our sins IN FULL with His own innocent death that first Good Friday. **For Jesus' sake** God HAS FORGIVEN all our sins. Those gospel facts may BE SO FAMILIAR but we can never hear them TOO OFTEN!

2019 will be just like 2018. Jesus will be CONTINUALLY INVITING us to COME TO HIM and find rest for our souls - to confess our sins and receive His forgiveness – to hear and study His Word so we can ***"grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus."*** Jesus will be regularly inviting us to ***"take eat – take drink"*** the very body and blood that He gave into death for our forgiveness. As we FAITHFULLY USE those precious means of grace the Lord will continue to ***"make His face shine on us and be gracious to us."***

III. Blessed with His continued peace.

I'm sure there ARE PARTS of 2018 we're glad they're over. Can you SEE SOME DAYS you were stressed out – **maybe even** becoming angry – **bitter** – **resentful**? The start of a new year offers NEW HOPE – a **new BEGINNING**. But a new year often quickly tarnishes with the SAME OLD PROBLEMS. Maybe not the EXACT SAME problems but **problems none the less**.

"The LORD turn His face toward you." God ***"turning His face toward"*** us is the opposite of God TURNING HIS BACK on us. When you turn your back on someone you're telling them **you want NOTHING TO DO** with them. When God threatened to punish the REBELLIOUS Israelites He said, ***"I will show them My back and not My face."***

Where there times in 2018 when it SEEMED like God had **turned His back** on you? Will there be more days like that in 2019? Probably! Will everything go JUST THE WAY you want? You know better than to **expect** that! Will there be times when life is UNFAIR – when people will hurt you – take advantage of you – MAKE FUN of you? YES! It's called life in the REAL WORLD!

“The LORD turn His face toward you and give you peace.” Just a week ago we heard the angel proclaim, ***“On earth peace”*** – peace because we have Jesus our Savior. **With Jesus** as our Savior we have peace WITH GOD – God loves us – God forgives us – God is with us and taking care of us. **With Jesus** as our Savior there's NO NEED to get all stressed out or WORKED UP about whatever. God is IN CONTROL! He tells us, ***“Be still, and know that I am God.”***

Enter the new year blessed with God's CONTINUED PEACE. This year may bring ALL KINDS of **problems** and **setbacks** but we have the peace of God IN CHARGE **even in** if doesn't look like it. This year may bring death to **loved ones** – this may be the year I DIE! – that's OK. We have the peace of our RISEN, LIVING Lord Jesus. He promises us eternal life in heaven the very moment we die. If I die this year DON'T WISH me back! Look to Jesus for **real comfort**. The new year may bring THE END of this world. We have the peace of Jesus promising us, ***“Behold, I am making everything new!”*** As we enter the new year we eagerly pray, ***“Come quickly, Lord Jesus!”***

“So they will put My name on the Israelites.” God FIRST PUT His name on us when we were baptized ***“in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”*** Putting your name on something you're saying, “This is MINE!” Enter the new year CONFIDENT – THANKFUL! – that you are a **redeemed, beloved child** of God and heir of heaven. When you are having one of those NOT SO GOOD days remind yourself, “GOD SAYS, ‘You're Mine! I am a child of God!’”

“And I will bless them.” The benediction is not a wish or a prayer, “MAY God bless you, etc.” This is a statement of fact and a PROMISE – God is blessing us and WILL CONTINUE to do so. So enter the new year IN THE NAME of your God and with His blessing. Amen.

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