

As we gather today, numerous New Year's resolutions are on the line. By the time this first month ends, many, maybe including some of you, will find themselves frustrated, disappointed, and discouraged because, once again, like so many years gone by, their New Year's resolutions have failed. Although that may be true, our text offers us a better new year, a new year blessed by God and what we might rightfully call "A New Year's Blessing."

I. Our loving God offers to bless us and our new year. A. Yet, often our new year doesn't start out as intended. 1. It doesn't go as planned because we began it alone. We are living in the "me" generation, at a time where the focus isn't on us or we, or someone else, but it has turned inward. Some have even called it "navel gazing." We all want the new year to start out great, to be better than the past year, yet we're trapped in the body of a two-year old who so often thinks and says, "I can do it all by myself!" In order to receive God's blessing for the new year, we must find a way to escape our generation, to place ourselves outside the norm so that life becomes we and not me.

2. The new year often doesn't go as planned because we fail to entrust it to our God. We want life to be better and the new year to start out on the right foot. But, too often, it goes south all too quickly because we never entrusted our new year to His care. We sing the words, "I am trusting Thee, Lord Jesus, trusting only Thee," but are we singing empty words or faithfully setting this new year at His feet saying, "Here's my life, Lord. Take it, take me and mold me into the person I need to be so that this new year brings You the honor and praise You deserve?" Until we entrust our new year, we can be sure it will bring us a multitude of disappointments.

3. Our new year often veers off course because we don't expect God to step into our lives. When you think about it, it sounds crazy, doesn't it? Why would the Creator of the universe notice you or me? Why would He go so far as to step into our lives? Because it sounds so unbelievable, we find ourselves saying things like, "Where is God when I need Him? Why doesn't He do what I need Him to do? Since He never stepped into my life in the past, why should I expect Him to step into the new year?" As we follow our mind's path, it drags us further from reality; it does its best to convince us that God isn't coming, that God has no intention of blessing us in this new year.

B. Yet God has every intention of playing an active role in your life. Since that's true, what does He offer you in this new year? 1. He offers to bless you. Our text began with those familiar words, "The Lord bless you." But what does it look like in our lives? In this new year, God offers to empower you, to shower you with an abundance of His love, His mercy, His forgiveness, His spiritual gifts. Yet all those blessings are useless until God offers us empowerment. Empowerment enables us to use His blessings and find what we are searching for in our personal lives. As God blesses, God empowers and when we are empowered by God, we are unstoppable.

2. He offers to keep you safe. This world is an unsettling place. Natural disasters occur without warning; economic instability frightens us. The future of our country disturbs us. So many things could happen to our extended family, to

our friends, and to ourselves. If we get ourselves stuck in that mental rut, we'd be afraid of everything and every one. Yet our Lord says to us in the simplest of terms, "I will keep you safe. I will protect you, watch over you, be there when you need Me. I will watch over your world, your country, your family, even your personal life. I will never leave you nor forsake you." That safety is part of His new year's blessing to you.

3. He offers to make His face shine on you. The imagery here is that of the sun as it rises and shines directly in your face. As part of His blessing, God offers to reveal Himself to you in such a way that you more fully understand His love for you. As we see His incredible love, we see God comfort us when we need comforting, renew us when we are frazzled and worn out, wrap His loving arms around us when life doesn't make sense, and give us the courage to take the next step when we have no clue where it will lead. When we see proof of His love everywhere we look, we know His face is shining on us and that He is blessing us beyond measure.

4. He also offers to be gracious to you. "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you." In II Corinthians, Paul offers another benediction that also includes the grace of God, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." But what do we make of this grace? If we were to define it using another term, we could use the term "generosity." God will be generous to you. As part of God's New Year's blessing, He says, "I will do the unthinkable for you because it's what I do. Although you are so undeserving, I will work in your life in incredible ways."

5. As we near the end of His blessing package for the new year, He offers to look on you with His favor. The imagery here I find incredibly beautiful since I'm now a grandfather. The imagery is that of a grandfather looking at his young grandson as a smile that nearly turns to tears comes across his face as he realizes his remarkable privilege as a grandfather to his grandson. Our heavenly Father is the grandfather figure who looks down on us, on those He claimed as part of His family at our Baptism, and smiles that smile that says, "What a great thing I have done" as He quietly says of us, "Well done, good and faithful servant; well done!"

6. As God concludes His blessing, He offers to give us peace. What would your life look like if you could fully grasp His perfect peace? Worries. Gone. Fears. Nonexistent. Insecurity. Replaced with security. Every thought and concern that weighs us down. Gone like a puff of smoke. There is no gift like peace. It is the ultimate gift because every other gift can be wrapped up in peace. When we live in peace because we have grasped His blessing of peace, we discover a new dimension to life and how to truly live each day to the fullest. Where there is God's peace reigning within, everyone around us knows that we have been in the presence of God.

7. The Aaronic benediction as it is called, is God's New Year's blessing and beyond. Because God has offered it to you, claim it; believe it; live by it and, most of all, live in it. Amen.