

Through Jesus Christ God grants his blessing on our life and our new year.

**New Years Eve 2025
December 31, 2024
Pastor Matthew Ude**

Numbers 6:23-27 23 "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, `This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. Say to them: 24 "The LORD bless you and keep you; 25 The LORD make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you; 26 The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace.'" 27 "So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them."

There are many different new year's rituals throughout the world. In Spain apparently, they eat twelve grapes under the table. In China you are supposed to avoid any cleaning on the first day of the new year as it might wash away the good luck. The goal of all these rituals is to have a lucky or prosperous new year. In America the custom is to make new year's resolutions, this is as much to say, if I want a better year, I must make it a better one. New year's resolutions rarely work any better than eating grapes under the table.

God has a simpler suggestion; I will bless it for you. Through Jesus Christ God grants his blessing on our life and our new year. No rituals, no sacrifices, no superstition, just the word of the Lord.

The LORD bless you and keep you

In this first phrase God promises to provide and protect you. This is something God does for all people, believer and unbeliever alike as the Psalmist states:

Psalm 136:25 Who gives food to all flesh, For His mercy endures forever.

However, in the benediction through your pastor the one who hears and believes these words receives blessing from the Lord which the unbeliever does not.

First the believer knows that "all good things come down from above." He is able to accept by faith as good not only those things which he likes and enjoys but also those things which he would not choose but which still come from God. In other words, the one who trusts in God is able to confess with Job:

Job 2:10 Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?"

The unbeliever cannot accept anything as good other than those things which he thinks to be good. The one who hears the words of text with faith however, can accept everything he receives as a blessing from God knowing that God will certainly "work all things for our good."

Second, the believer receives the Lord's blessings to his good, whereas the unbeliever often receives it for his harm. Whereas God provides food and warmth for the believer and unbeliever alike the unbeliever often receives God's blessings to his own harm, because he takes them not according to

God's instructions but according to his own sinful desire. The sinner in this way often ruins God's gifts and receives what ought to be a blessing to his own hurt.

We too are often guilty of this, but God promises to forgive our sins and to restore his blessing to us. Every Sunday when you hear this first part of the benediction it is a reminder that God has blessed you and kept you, it is a promise that he will bless you and keep you, and it is also a promise that he will restore his blessing on those things that we in our sinful have ruined.

May the Lord restore us in the year to come that you may continue to enjoy his blessings as you have in the years past.

The LORD make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you;

Although the first verse of the benediction is partially a blessing given to all people, the second and third are blessings that God bestows only on his own people. In this second phrase God's face which was turned away from you because of your sin is now turned towards you.

Customs throughout the world vary by culture and what seems rude in one nation might be a sign of friendship in another. For example, Tibetans actually greet one another by sticking their tongues out. Sticking out your tongue in America is generally considered rude. Turning your back on someone is however universally recognized as a sign of enmity.

It is through Jesus Christ that God's face is no longer turned away from you but instead it turns towards you and even shines upon you. It is Jesus Christ through whom we see the face of God. As Jesus told Philip:

John 14:9 He who has seen Me has seen the Father.

Moses was so privileged to see God face to face and his face reflected the light and the glory of God. Peter, James and John saw the light of God in the face of Jesus on the mountain of transfiguration. We also, as John reminds us, "**behold his glory.**" The light of God shines on us who were in darkness through his word. The same word gives us also his grace through the forgiveness of sins.

In this second verse God assures us that we who were enemies have now received grace and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. His face is no longer turned away from us but towards us.

May the light and grace of God's word guide you in the years to come as it has in the years past.

The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace.

The difference between the second and third phrase is not the word face versus countenance. In the Hebrew the same word is use. The difference is in the verb. In the second phrase God's face shines on you. In the third it is lifted up upon you.

The phrase "to lift up your face" means to regard someone with favor. You may remember how Queen Esther was terrified to enter the presence of the king, since she could have been killed if she did not find favor with the king. Yet she did it and the king looked on her with favor.

In the second verse God's face which was turned away in anger because of our sin is now through Jesus turned towards us, now God takes a step farther and looks on us with favor. Not only are our sins forgiven but God approves and is pleased with us. That is, he will say to you on the last day **"well done good and faithful servant."**

This is only possible through faith in Jesus Christ. In Christ our sins are washed away, and his righteousness becomes ours so that God is very pleased with us. You might not have done much that you can consider "good" in your life. Even what little good we might point out is also infected with sin. Yet in Christ all that is evil is washed away. We were like old silver that has become corroded. In Christ God has polished us to shine, so that he is pleased with us.

Through Christ we can enter God's presence in peace, knowing that God looks on us with favor. Through Christ we can enter the year to come in peace, knowing that God looks on us with favor.

All this is done solely by God's grace through Jesus Christ. There is no sacrifice to bring other than the sacrifice which Christ already offered, even his own body and blood. There is no ritual or dance to carry out tonight, although that might be fun to do. There is no magic incantation which will make the year to come greater and more blessed than the one before. God simply speaks his word of promise, and in that word, we receive his blessings. We have blessings, forgiveness and peace in the year to come because God has given this to us through Jesus Christ. Amen