

Accepting the Blessings and Challenges of a New Year

Compiled by Paul R. Blake

Introduction:

A. New Year's Day: What is its impact?

1. It is an arbitrary line marking the count of years.
 - a. It has moved about the calendar over the years of human history.
 - b. It has no external moral, spiritual, astronomical or physical impact at any level.
2. The only purpose of such a day is emotional.
 - a. It is a time to review our past choices and endeavors.
 - b. It is a time to consider what changes for the better one can make and choose resolutions to facilitate those changes.
 - c. Like a birthday or anniversary, it is a time to celebrate and be thankful with others for the span of life we have enjoyed.
3. It can impact our moral and spiritual lives, but only if we do the above.
 - a. We can increase our joy in life if we are thankful for the past.
 - b. We can better know ourselves if we remember the past and our choices and actions.
 - c. We can connect with one another if we share in the celebration of the day.
 - d. We can look forward to bettering our lives and the lives of others around us if we keep our resolves for the future.

B. Let us spend the present moment rejoicing in the blessings God gave us in the past and accepting the challenges of the future.

I. ACCEPTING THE BLESSINGS OF A NEW YEAR

A. Deut. 33:24-25 - "As your days, so shall your strength be."

B. Gen. 49:20 - "Bread from Asher shall be rich, and he shall yield royal dainties."

1. And yet historically, Asher fared little better than his brothers, and his tribe was no better off than any other tribe. What did prophecy mean?
2. The answer lies in verse 25
 - a. His shoes, a metaphor for his journey through life, would be tough enough to handle whatever path he took
 - b. Therefore, God said whatever a day brought to him, he would have what he needed to handle it

C. "Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day" is a book about a little boy named Alexander who is having one of those days. It is a day where nothing goes right, and everything goes wrong. He has back to back disappointments. When he wakes up in the morning, he comments:

"I went to sleep with gum in my mouth and now there's gum in my hair. When I got out of bed this morning, I tripped on my skateboard and by mistake I dropped my sweater in the sink while the water was running; and, I could tell it was going to be a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day."

After a terrible day at school, an awful visit to the dentist and an unpleasant stop at the shoe store, Alexander slumps in his chair at supper. His troubles continue:

"There were lima beans for dinner and I hate lima beans. There was kissing on TV, and I hate kissing. My bath was too hot, I got soap in my eyes, my marble went down the drain, and I had to wear my railroad pajamas. I hate my railroad pajamas.

When I went to bed, my brother Nick took back the pillow he said I could keep, the Mickey Mouse night light burned out, and I bit my tongue. The cat went to sleep with my brother Anthony, not with me. It has been a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day."

In contrast: After a Midwestern tornado in 2011, a woman hugging her family close after losing her home and everything in it, homeless, insufficient tornado insurance, husband's factory damaged and shut down for repairs... said, "I am so happy!" She had what was important; circumstances were not relevant.

1. It is about deciding what is truly important and being content with that alone; all other circumstances are changeable and do not add to or take from that contentment.
2. Matt. 5:3-12 - Beatitudes - these things are important to contentment. All other things have not the power to add to or take away from peace of mind and happiness.

II. ACCEPTING THE CHALLENGES OF A NEW YEAR

A. Joshua 3:1-17

B. Joshua chapter 3 tells us that Nation of Israel crossed the flooded river of Jordan. These people had a one major goal in their mind. To capture the city of Jericho that will prepare the way to conquer the Promised Land. However, There was a great challenge before the. The current of the Jordan is very swift at Jericho. Besides it was the harvest season and the melting snows in the Lebanon Mountains caused the river to overflow.

1. They had to face a challenge before they could face the challenge
2. Obstacles before overcoming obstacles
3. I need to plant the garden, but before I do that, I need to till it; but, the tiller's broken and I need to repair it; but, I can't repair it until I clear a space in the garage and find the tools my son-in-law borrowed.

C. Sometimes it feels like someone is complicating our lives unfairly.

1. How do we handle the challenges facing us when we are still dealing with issues from the past?

III. TAKE IMMEDIATE ACTION

A. Joshua's task wasn't easy. The flooded river was nearly a mile wide. Joshua was responsible for taking two million people safely across.

B. He could have waited and complained or felt sorry for himself. Instead he took immediate action - Joshua 3:1

1. Many, when confronted with difficult or unpleasant tasks, put them off as long as possible. It only makes it worse.

C. This year when you are faced with a challenging situation, don't procrastinate.

1. Trust in God's strength and wisdom and pray for some for yourself.
2. Then get up "early in the morning" and go to it. At the end of the day you will be glad you did.

IV. FOLLOW THE COUNSEL OF WISE LEADERS

A. Leaders announced God's order to follow the Levite priests - Joshua 3:2-3

1. The previous generation died in the desert because they despised Moses' instructions.
2. God appointed leadership in the church, home, and government for a reason. Leaders are to take responsibility to guide others in God's will

- a. Disobeying their authority is rebellion against God - Rom. 13:1-4
- B. Instead, consider your followship.

V. WAIT ON THE LORD

- A. The Israelites didn't know where to go because they had never passed that way before - Joshua 3:4
 - 1. They needed to be patient and carefully follow the Lord
- B. Psalm 27:14, 37:9, 34; Isa. 40:28-31
 - 1. Spend time patiently in prayer and be diligent in His word

VI. PURSUE SANCTIFICATION DAILY

- A. The people were ordered to put away anything displeasing to God -Joshua 3:5
- B. Sin will keep us from victory in Jesus every time - 1John 1:7-9
 - 1. Ask God to help you avoid the same self-defeating mistakes you made in the past.

VII. TRUST GOD'S PROMISES

- A. God promised that they will overcome the nations that occupied the land He promised them - Joshua 3:9-13
- B. What has He promised? It is less important than Who did the promising
 - 1. Heb. 6:17-19

VIII. WORK YOUR FAITH

- A. The river parted only after the people lined up and the priests waded into the water - Joshua 3:14-17
 - 1. Faith without work is dead - James 2:14-18
 - 2. Some lay back passively waiting for their faith to begin working. Take the initiative.
- B. Practical faith involves risk. We dislike risk; we want assurances of success and safety before we begin. It's our right as Americans!. Nonsense!
 - 1. We want the way opened before we move out for God. A risk is only a risk if God isn't going with us. Step out and trust God.
 - 2. Remember God's track record of bringing you this far and step out into the Jordan and get your feet wet.

Conclusion: Psalms 103:1-18

Invitation: In 2009 on a freeway in LA, CA, a driver slowed to a stop as the congested traffic ahead halted. All of a sudden his car was hit from behind and pushed into the vehicle ahead of him. A sickening, crunching sound indicated that additional vehicles had collided behind them. As the driver sat there shocked for a moment, he observed that the vehicle directly behind him that caused the accident was pulling back out into traffic. Obviously hoping to avoid an encounter with police, the escaping driver neglected to notice he had left something behind. When the police arrived, an officer picked up the hit-and-run driver's license plate from the pavement and said to the driver, "Someone will be waiting for him when he arrives home. He won't get away with this."

Scripture tells us: "Rest assured, your sins will find you out" (Num. 32:23), as this man who fled the accident soon discovered. We may sometimes be able to hide our sin from the people around us, but nothing is ever "hidden from God's sight" (Heb. 4:13).