

Bethany Presbyterian Church

7 January 2018

Philippians 3:13-14

God of the prophets, God of consuming fire, Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; in your covenant faithfulness send forth the fire of your Holy Spirit to accompany the reading and hearing of your Holy Word; that your truth and righteousness may be emblazoned upon our hearts. Set our souls on fire with a holy passion, that we may offer ourselves as living sacrifices of obedience and praise to you, the one and only True and Living God; through Jesus Christ who is our eternal prophet, priest, and King. Amen.

RECIPE FOR A HAPPY NEW YEAR

God is the giver of many wonderful new things. We come to him by faith in Jesus Christ and he gives us the New Birth. Then he gives us a new nature, a new heart, a new life, a new hope, and a new task. Finally, at the end of the way he will give us a new body in a new home called heaven. Nothing up there will ever be old or worn out. "Behold, I make all things new."

Now to you and to me God has given a New Year. For some this means a new start. For others a new hope. Still for others new obligations. Last New Year's Day you were not a Christian, but now you know and love the Lord and you want the New Year to count for him. Well, it is time for all of us to turn over a new leaf and to write a new story on a clean page. God help us to write well.

In our text we see Paul looking two ways. He looked backward and thought of all that he had suffered for Christ and all that he had accomplished for Christ. Then he said, "I am going to turn my back upon all of that, for there is something more important ahead." Then looking forward he said, "I am going to rededicate my life to Christ and redouble my efforts for him. I am pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." In like manner, it behooves us to look back over the past for a time. We are to turn all of that over to God and leave it to him. Then we are to look toward the New Year, resolving in our hearts that with God's help we will make it a better year for him. Let

me give you a recipe for a Happy New Year. This recipe consists of three “R’s” – Repent, Resolve, and Remember.

I. We are to Repent

Now we know that repentance is the first step to God. A man is never saved and can never get to God until he has repented of his sin. Then in connection with repentance he puts his trust in Christ and is saved. Every man who comes to God through Christ has repented of his sin. But there is also repentance for the Christian. Repentance has first brought him into good standing with God and that position can never be changed. He has become a child of God and that relationship will continue forever. However, his enjoyment of that position can be altered. He can sin and lose sweet fellowship (not salvation) with the Lord.

Adam and Eve walked with God in the cool of the evening, but when they sinned, that sweet fellowship was lost, and we hear God saying in the garden, “Where art thou?” (Genesis 3:9). They were out of fellowship with him. You can be saved and yet lose the joy of salvation through sin. David committed a great sin. He was still a child of God, but we hear him crying out, “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation” (Psalm 51:12). So, we see a Christian sin in some manner every day – in deed, word, and/or thought. He needs to come to God in repentance and ask for his forgiveness. We should never go to sleep at night until we have looked up to God, confessed our sin, and gotten everything right with him. And we should not go into the New Year until we have repented of all the wrongs that we have done in the old year.

1. *There are sins to repent of.* You remember when you stepped aside and did the things that were wrong in God’s sight. When David sinned, he kept still about it for a long

time. But he could not pray – he was not happy. He said that his bones waxed old and that God’s hand was heavy upon him. But when he broke the silence, when he cried out unto God, the floodgates were opened. He found his way back to the very heart of God. Joy filled his soul and he wrote a Psalm (Psalm 51) telling how happy a man can be when his sin is covered.

If you are a real Christian and if you sin, you are not going to have an easy conscience. You are not going to say, “Oh, that wasn’t anything.” You are going to be miserable until things are right between you and your Lord. If you can go on sinning day after day and year after year and feel no pang of conscience about it, it just means that you have never known Jesus as your Savior and God as your heavenly Father.

2. *There is neglect to be repented of.* You may not have indulged in open sin, but you have neglected your Christian duties. When you came to Christ, you vowed to be faithful. You kept your vow for awhile, then you let other things crowd Christ and his Church out of your life. The call of Christ is a clarion call. He never faltered in his duty – he went all the way for us. Now he calls upon us to be faithful. But some of us have listened to other calls. The world and its organizations have called you, and you have turned your back upon your Christian duties, and your time has been taken up with the things of the world.

How shameful that we give him less than our best! How shameful that week after week we neglect to give our time and our lives to the things for which Jesus gave his life.

3. *There is a wrong spirit toward others to be repented of.* More Christians are guilty of this sin than any other. They dare not go to a wrong place, they would be furious if you accused them of stealing. Their lives are pure morally but their hearts are filled with

hatred, jealousy, malice, and envy. I say to you upon the strength of God's Word that one who has such a spirit is just as guilty of sin as any immoral man or thief or murderer. When there is something between you and somebody else, there is something between you and God. How can a Christian go on with such a feeling in his heart? If you leave this feeling there, it will eat away the happiness of your heart and the power of your spiritual life.

So you see that the first part of the recipe is to REPENT.

II. We are to Resolve

It is a good thing to say, "I resolve in my heart." You may not keep this resolution all during the year, but it is better to make this resolution and keep it for awhile than never to say, "I want to be a better person. I will try to be a better Christian."

Let us look at some biblical characters and the resolutions they made.

1. *Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself.* He was carried into captivity when he was a boy. With other boys he was put in training to become one of the king counselors. The king not only prescribed his studies, but his food. He was required to eat pork and drink wine – and the Lord forbade this. Rather than disobey God, he vowed not to eat pork and drink the wine. He kept that vow and lived a holy life for seventy years.

You would think that he would have lost out by keeping such a vow. But instead he won the hearts of King Nebuchadnezzar and his successors. He became a great man in the kingdom. God blessed him because he made a resolution to live a holy life and he stuck to his resolution. You, notice, too, that Daniel was a long way from home. Some people say, "When you are away from home, it is all right to do those things which are

questionable. When you are in Rome, do as the Romans do.” But Daniel would say, “God is present here just as he is at home. I have resolved to live for him wherever I am.”

God blessed Daniel because he vowed to live rightly for God regardless of the cost. In the New Year he will bless you if you make the same resolution. Won't you say, “In this coming year I will live for the Lord”?

2. *David made two resolutions.* First, he resolved to read the Holy Scriptures, and adopt it as a standard of life. Some Christians read *Time* magazine every week; they read *Reader's Digest* or *Sports Illustrated* from cover to cover every month. But they never read the Bible. They are guilty of gross neglect in the matter of reading the Word of God. But here is David's resolution: “I have rejoiced in the way of your testimonies, as much as in all riches. I will meditate on your precepts, and regard your ways. I shall delight in your statutes; I will not forget your Word. Deal bountifully with your servant, that I may live and keep your Word” (Psalm 119:14-17).

Then David made a resolution about prayer. We find that resolution in Psalm 116:2: “Because he has inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live.”

David had many experiences with God and he knew that God answered prayer. So he said that he was going to keep calling on God as long as he lived. Every Christian knows that God answers prayer – the same God who heard David hears you and me. But we fume and fret and worry, instead of taking our burdens to the Lord and leaving them there.

What ought we to pray for? We ought to pray for our own lives that they might be good lives for God. We ought to pray for the members of our family. We ought to pray for

God's help in our jobs, business or profession. We ought to pray for our friends, especially those who are lost. We ought to pray for our church and those who lead its work.

A servant girl said that she prayed all the time. The preacher asked her how she did this. She answered, "When I open my eyes in the morning, I ask God to open the eyes of my understanding. When I am dressing I ask God to clothe me with his righteousness. When I wash my face, I ask God to wash all my sins away. When I begin my work, I pray for strength equal to my tasks. When I kindle the fire, I pray for God to revive the fires of my soul. When I sweep the house, I pray for God to cleanse my heart of all impurities. When I prepare a meal, I pray for God to feed me with the manna from heaven. When I am busy with the little children, I pray for God to give me the spirit of a little child." She had indeed learned how to "pray without ceasing."

What is the thing that counts most in our prayers? It is not the arithmetic of prayer – how many prayers we pray. It is not the rhetoric of prayer – how eloquent these prayers are. It is not the geometry of pray – how long they are. It is not the music of prayer – how sweet the voice is. Is it not the method of prayer – how orderly the prayers are. But the thing that counts is the prayer fervency. The Bible says, "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (James 5:16). So like David, let us resolve to read the Bible more and pray more.

3. *Paul made a resolution to win souls.* "I am a debtor to all men. I am become all things to all men that I might save some. My heart's desire and prayer is that Israel might be saved" (I Corinthians 10:33).

What a marvelous thing it would be if every church member resolved to win someone to Jesus in the New Year. It would make the Church over; it would make you over. And it would make a new life for the person you win to Christ.

You do not have to be a preacher or a theologian to win souls. A simple word, spoken in love to a lost person, may be the means of turning that person to Christ. When all the days of this New Year have passed into the tomb of history, may God grant that you will be able to say, "This year I have laid one sheaf at the Master's feet."

III. We are to Remember

1. *We must remember that we never can repay Christ for all that he has done for us.* What has he done? He knew that you and I sinned and that the wrath of God would fall upon us. So he went to the cross and took our place and died in our stead. He saw us sinking into hell – he reached down and lifted us up, put a song in our mouth and planted our feet upon the rock of Ages. He has given us everything good we have. All our hope for the future is centered in him. We will spend the eternal ages in heaven instead of hell because of Jesus. If we had a thousand lives to live and could live every one of them for him every minute, we could never repay him for all he has done for us. Remembering all that he has done, won't you say, "In this New Year I will do my best for Christ!"?

2. *We must remember that the greatest happiness and the richest rewards come to those who are faithful.* This cannot be a happy New Year for you unless you are living for Christ. The trouble with people today is that they are looking for happiness in the wrong places, when true happiness can be found only in Christ. If we keep Christ above all else in the New Year, it will be the best and happiest year of our lives.

3. *We must remember that this may be our last year.* Because of that we surely want to make it a good year in every way.

Jesus said that a certain man planted a fig tree. He dug about it, fertilized it, and cared for it. He expected fruit from the tree, but year after year, it was barren. Finally, he said to the keeper, "Cut down this tree – it combers the ground." The keeper interceded, saying, "Give the tree another chance. Give it just one more year and then if it does not bear fruit we will cut it down." The man agreed to spare the tree for another year (see Luke 13:3-9).

Maybe you are like that tree. Once you had a great experience with God. You promised to be faithful and fruitful. He has watched over you, cared for you, and blessed you down through the years. But you have disappointed him. You have not been faithful – you have not borne any fruit. Who knows but that you may be cut down before another year is over if no fruit comes from your life. But thank God, he is giving you one more chance. He is eternity – the God of the second chance. Just remember that he has given you another opportunity to make for him.

God help us live in the New Year that the world may know that there is something of reality and wonder in the religion and faith of the Lord Jesus Christ.

LET US PRAY

Most merciful God, whose love is as constant as the shining of the sun beyond the clouds, and whose ways are deeper than any ocean depths, we bow before you at the beginning of a new year to ask that it may be a year lived in your will and your grace. Let your Spirit come freshly upon us, that we may be different in the days ahead. Teach us humility, that we walk not in our own conceits. Give us love for every creature and every creation, that we may walk reverently in the world. Instill in us a sense of wonder, that we may see your presence everywhere. Impart to the worried new confidence, and to the fearful a sense of trust. Raise up the sick and distraught with an impulse to praise. Comfort the mournful heart and reveal fellowship to the lonely. Quicken our sensibilities, deepen our compassion, and stir up our commitment, that we may live this day and through the year as children of the covenant, created, called out, and commissioned by him whose name is above every name, even Jesus our Lord, who instructed us to pray: "Our Father . . . Amen."