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New Year's Eve

There has been no end to the jokes and comments that people are glad to be done with 2017 and all the troubles it brought to our world. But the fact is, flipping the page on the calendar will not make trouble and difficulty disappear.

The reality is a new year will bring new challenges, for Jesus Himself tells us: **In this world you will have trouble** (33).

And there is no shortage of trouble and challenge. Tension with North Korea, ongoing threats of terrorism, deep divisions in our nation, and the list could go on.

We can also be certain the devil's attacks on the church and our faith will not let up in a new year—like the every growing hostility toward what the Bible teaches, even as Bible knowledge among people seems to grow less and less.

*And* then there's all the personal struggles and problems we may face with health, job, school, finances, relationships. Yes, the year will bring new challenges.

But hardly any more challenging than what the leader of Israel, Joshua faced about 3400 years ago. The Lord had called Joshua to lead a congregation of some 2 million people who had just finished 40 years of wandering in the wilderness because they failed to trust the Lord!

They were now about to face war against hard hearted, stubborn enemies bent on fighting God's people to the very end. These enemies had greater numbers, greater weapons and mighty fortress cities like Jericho. Humanly speaking, it looked like they didn't stand a chance.

Joshua faced all this even as he was still grieving the death of his friend and mentor, Moses. Yes, Joshua could relate to the idea of a challenging year ahead of him.

And so the Lord came to encourage Joshua, even as he still encourages us today, speaking His powerful Word: **Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged.**

In one way or another God says “don’t be afraid” a lot in the Bible! There’s a good reason for that. He knows how easily we give way to sinful worry and fear. He also knows our challenges are real and greater than we can face alone.

But whenever God tells to not be afraid He does not say, c’mon knock it off, stop being scared or ‘don’t worry, be happy.’ No! When God tells us **do not be afraid** He always adds a reason and a promise.

We just heard it at Christmas. The angels told the shepherds, **Don’t be afraid...** and then immediately added: **a Savior has been to you, He is Christ the Lord.** At Easter the angels say the same thing with another amazing message that takes fear away: **Don’t be afraid, He is risen!**

And so today as we enter a new year with challenges, the Lord says to us what he said to Joshua, the reason and promise to put fear aside: **I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.**

We do *not* face the challenges of the New Year alone, but with the Lord who was His ancient

people, helping them and giving them victory as Jericho's walls came a tumbling down.

We go into the challenges of a New Year with our Savior who has conquered the powers of sin, hell and death and won for us the eternal victory, the risen Lord Jesus who has solemnly promised His people: **surely I am with you always to the end of the age.**

**The LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."** **Wherever...** even when you have to face death, He will be with you, your Savior by your side to carry you safely to the victory of eternal life.

The LORD will who has already defeated the greatest enemies of hell and death, will be with you to help you through every challenge, working all for your eternal good just as He has promised.

Therefore **Enter the Year with Courage** that comes from the Lord's promises to be with you always.

We read from Joshua 1: **After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to**

**Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: <sup>2</sup> "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. <sup>3</sup> I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. <sup>4</sup> Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Great Sea on the west. <sup>5</sup> No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.**

**<sup>6</sup> "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. <sup>7</sup> Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. <sup>8</sup> Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. <sup>9</sup> Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do**

**not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."**

*The Word of the Lord. We sing the hymn.*

This time of year you can find lists of the famous people who died in the past year, such as Tom Petty, Adam West, Mary Tyler Moore. But they are only the tiniest tip of the iceberg compared to the total 55 million people whose lives ended this past year. What a staggering reminder of our mortality--as members of a sinful human race we die.

Moses was familiar with such a reminder of sin and death. As he led Israel those 40 years in the wilderness he would have witnessed more than 600,000 funerals. It was the Moses, whom the Lord used to give us the words of Psalm 90 **to teach us to number our days aright.**

We do that by remembering we don't know the number of the days of our life. We have no guarantee that all of us, or for that matter any of us will see the year 2019. We need to know that because we are part of a sin fallen race, we are dust and one day we will return to dust.

But as we sing the Psalm, understand the main theme, like the main theme of God's Word is not despair, but hope! God wants us to see how our limitations so that we would turn to Him, our Lord who is without limit!

So let us lean on the everlasting Lord. Understand your sins and mine deserve the wages of sin: death and eternal death, but also trust that with the Lord there is **unfailing love**. Love without fail that sent Jesus to count His perfect life as ours. **Unfailing love** found in the body and blood of God's Son sacrificed on the cross to remove our sins forever. **Unfailing love** that gives us the gift of God: **eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord**.

From the eternal Lord's eternal love in Jesus, learn to **number your days aright**. Know that through faith in Jesus Christ our risen Savior who conquered the grave, we have days without limit in eternal life with the everlasting Lord, our dwelling place.

*We enter the year, numbering our days aright as we sing the Psalm.*

Our first lesson spoke to the sinful weakness of fear and worry. Our next lesson warns against

opposite, yet just as destructive sins of pride and self-reliance, that forgets about God. The sin of thinking we've got our plans, we're good to go, never mind what God might have to say about it! Even human history and our own experience should show us how quickly human plans can fall apart!

God's Word does not forbid making plans. But it does warn against making our plans without the Lord.

Making plans can be God-pleasing way to manage what the Lord has given us. But even then, we are to do our planning with a healthy dose of humility.

Remember we don't control the future, only God does. We may make our plans, but we need to understand God may have different plans for us.

Instead of boasting and bragging about what we accomplish, let us pray and recognize all we have and do is a gift of God's goodness to us.

Let us carefully plan, faithfully work, but *also pray: **your will be done, Lord.*** Ask God to bless our decision making, use our plans for the good others



and ourselves. And then let us be ready to be content if the Lord's **will** is different than our plans—different but always better in the end for his believing people.

Let us remember it is the Almighty Lord who is control and not us, and let us **enter the year in humility.**

We read from James 4:13-17 **Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." <sup>14</sup>Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. <sup>15</sup>Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." <sup>16</sup>As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. <sup>17</sup>Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins. *This is the Word of the Lord.***

*We sing the hymn*

Every day of the year we ought to have courage based on God's promises, humility based on our

limitations, and constant, confident prayer that recognizes both truths.

But sadly that does not perfectly describe you and me. How easily we can swing from one sinful extreme to another: from doubt to overconfidence, from arrogance back over to anxiety.

Then add in all the sins we're not even aware of and we start to see how our hearts and lives are filled with more sins than we could ever count, each one deserving God's eternal punishment.

So thank God tomorrow/today is not only New Year's Day, but is also 8 days after Christmas when we celebrate the Savior's birth.

8 days after the Christ child was born in Bethlehem, he was named Jesus—the Name God had given in advance, through the angel. .

Jesus is truly a wonderful name! Jesus tells us who He is and what He does. What we say as "Jesus" would have been pronounced *Yeshua* in His native Aramaic.

*Ye* or *Je*, as we say it, stands for the name of the Lord. It tells us the child born of Mary is by the Holy

Spirit and the virgin birth the Lord, the one eternal God, whose life and death does save the world.

And the last half of the name: *Shua* or in our language “sus” is the Hebrew word for salvation or rescue. Put it together, and Jesus means: The LORD is salvation, or “The LORD saves!

This Jesus, true God born as man in Bethlehem is the LORD who with His holy life, innocent death, and glorious resurrection saves you and me from every single sin: pride and fear, arrogance and anxiety, every sin known and unknown.

And already that 8<sup>th</sup> day when He was named Jesus, He backed up His saving name with action. On that day, He who gave the law to Israel on Mount Sinai, He himself submitted to the Old Testament law of circumcision.

Some of Jesus’ holy blood was spilled on the eighth day, but not because it was forced. Remember this baby made the universe, and so He willingly chose to do this just as He willingly chose to keep every commandment and to finally stretch out his arms on the cross to die in our place!

Jesus our Savior is the reason we can enter the New Year knowing we are God's dearly loved children. Though our sins are countless they have been covered in Jesus' holy blood shed for us. Though we lack the perfection God requires, Jesus' sinless covers us with His own perfection,.

The wonderful name of Jesus and the Savior it stands for is the reason we can enter the New Year in peace. We leave our sins behind because Jesus left them behind, nailed to the cross. And this same wonderful Jesus is the reason we will finally enter the timeless joy and peace of heaven. Enter the new Year, and every day **with Jesus**, your Savior.

*Please rise for the Holy Gospel from Luke 2:*

**Luke 2:21 On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived.** This is the Gospel of our Lord.

*We sing the hymn*