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Text: Galatians 3:23-29  
Date: December 31, 2016- January 1, 2017  
Setting: Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

### New Year's Goals

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

New Years Eve and Day can bring about different emotions when coming into the New Year. Perhaps this past year was a very joyful year and you are hoping and praying it will be joyful in the year to come. Perhaps it was a very sad year and you hope and pray that you will be encouraged and find comfort in the Lord. Perhaps, it was a very frustrating year and you want a new start. A new start. Many people strive to make resolutions that will help them in the future. For some people, their goal is fitness related. If I can lose this weight or run that far by next Christmas that would be great. For some people, their goal is financial related. I want to pay off this loan or that loan. I want to have X amount in the bank by the end of the year. The list of goals that people have go on and on. You name it, there might be a goal of some sort that someone is working on.

To achieve our goals, we usually set plans. If fitness is your goal, then you have a training plan week by week to follow. If a financial goal, then a detailed budget is the tool of choice to accomplish the goals. We have plans that we want to follow. These plans serve as a guide to help us achieve our goals.

There were plans for the Jews to follow that God had given them. Of the plans that God set out for the people, circumcision was one of them. From the time that God told Abraham: "This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you:

Every male among you shall be circumcised. 11 You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. 12 He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised.” (Genesis 17:10-12) This was a recognized and followed custom of the day. If you were Jewish and your wife bore a son, they would be circumcised on the eighth day. This happened generation after generation and generation all the way to Jesus.

Jesus was part of the offspring that God was talking about. This covenant between God and his people. Our Gospel reading today describes this event. It was under the law that Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to be circumcised on the eighth day. They were required to follow the law that God had given the people. The circumcision was a sign. It was a sign of being a part of the people of Israel. It showed who they belonged to. Who they followed. This was important. It was one of many things on a large list that a Jew had to do.

When we set our own goals, we work to accomplish them. While we may have the best intentions to curb our bad behavior, the law does bear down on us. When we sin, the law tells us that we are in the wrong. The law shows us our sin. We set the goal of not committing that one sin that we fall into. We make plans to avoid anything that reminds us and tempts us to do that sin, but we inevitably fail. No matter what we do, we will sin, we will fail. The law bears down on us, reminding us of our failures.

The Ten Commandments were given to Israelites for their own good. Not only was it given to keep them right with God, if they could even do that, but also to keep them out of trouble. Following the commandments meant less drama in your life. If you murder someone, you end up in prison, if you don't murder you don't end up in prison, therefore less drama. If you commit this sin, this is the consequence and so on. The Ten Commandments were meant to guide the Israelites in what they were supposed to do.

God's plan was so much bigger than anyone could have imagined. Circumcision showed who were the people of God. After Christ's death on the cross and resurrection, circumcision no longer counted as anything. As we heard in our Epistle reading from Galatians: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise." (Galatians 3:28-29).

Circumcision was very important before Christ's death on the cross and resurrection. The point of circumcision was argued later between Peter and Paul as to if Christians should still circumcise. But as we see in Galatians, there is no longer a distinction. It is no longer only Jew nor Greek, but both. There is no longer slave nor free, which the Israelites would have had experience with having been enslaved. There are no longer male and female, both are saved. For all are one in Christ Jesus. Those differences didn't matter in terms of standing before God with regard to salvation. As we are heirs of Christ, we are the heirs of Abraham. Abraham believe and it was counted to him as righteousness. It was based on faith. Not based on the law, but what faith had been given.

You are heirs of the promise. Heirs of the inheritance promised to you by God. The promise to Abraham and to all generations after him. Heirs of the inheritance that is promised to you. The sacrifice of Christ on the cross and resurrection for you. As heirs of Christ, we receive the inheritance promised when Christ died, forgiveness of sins and eternal life with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

"Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine... to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen."

Ephesians 3:20-21

