

Grace, Mercy, and Peace are yours from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

[*Close of the Year*]

Here we are again. The end of the year. Now, I know that most of you don’t think of this as the end of the year, after all, we still need to finish up November and then get through December! But I promise you I’m not just getting ahead of myself. Today is the last Sunday of the church year.

So, how did it go? Did you keep your resolutions?

[*Resolutions?*]

Of course, you and I don’t make resolutions for the church year. That would be silly, right? Instead you and I choose to save our resolutions for the *actual* new year.

Resolutions are a funny thing. Some historians believe that the tradition of making new years resolutions dates to the ancient Babylonians. They would celebrate the new year by crowning a new king or reaffirming their loyalty to the old king. Further, they would make promises to the gods they worshipped to pay their debts and return any objects they had borrowed.

One must wonder how this ancient practice turned into what it is today.

Today, you and I set resolutions at the turn of the new year. Instead of promising some other god to do something, you and I make these promises to ourselves.

Some are for self-improvement

“I’ll lose 3 pounds a month.” “I’ll start a new hobby.”

“I’ll read one book a month”

Some resolutions are hopes to do something special that year:

“I’ll finally go on that trip to Europe,” or “This is the year I go to all 50 states”

There are countless motivational pictures shared to social media meant to encourage people to stick to their resolutions. Because we all know that most people make resolutions, just as we know that many people fail to keep their resolutions.

At the end of the day though, they all really say the same thing:

“I want the new year to be better than last year.”

[*Looking Around*]

Look around. It's November now, and the year is almost up. How have your resolutions gone? You haven't forgotten them, like I have, have you? Sadly, what often starts out as “new year, new me” turns into “same old, same old”.

Normally, and sinfully, this is the time we start to compare.

You and I don't mean to, but we can't help it. Thanksgiving is coming up, so there will be plenty of time to sit down and take stock of the things we're thankful for, but that's quickly followed by Black Friday, a time where Americans go out to buy more things they can *actually* be thankful for. Thanksgiving was great for getting stuffed, but now, it's time to get stuff!

But why?

Let me be clear, I'm not saying that I'm perfect or immune to the charms of getting more stuff. But haven't you stopped and thought about the “why” of it all? My phone works fine, but when I look around at all these ads, I can't help but think about how it might be time for an upgrade. When family travel overseas, I find myself looking at flights. You and I are constantly “looking”.

This “looking” makes it so much harder to show hospitality. When you and I do this, we spend so much time checking to make sure we are keeping up with each other, and we forget that Christ commanded us to show hospitality. At best, we forget, at worst, we actively choose to ignore Christ's command because we're so busy looking out for number one.

[*Saul eyed David*]

In our text today, Saul was looking. To be clear, the bible says that Saul “eyed” David.

He was jealous.

David had just struck down Goliath and saved the nation. But he didn't just take out a sword and shield and narrowly come from behind in victory.

David wasn't some trained veteran who had served under Saul for years. David wasn't even a full-grown man. He was some shepherd that wandered into camp.

But somehow, this youth won. He slew Goliath. As Saul is returning to His kingdom, he hears the women sing, "Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands." To this, Saul said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me the have ascribed thousands, and what more can he have but the kingdom?"

"And Saul eyed David from that day on."

Saul was jealous. Saul wanted what David had. He wanted the praise, and he saw someone else get it. Even though he was king of the nation, he was jealous of a shepherd. So, he kept his eye on David.

[Eyes on the Prize]

Who are you keeping your eyes on? The neighbor across the street with the new Ram truck. The sister-in-law who got a promotion. The other parents you meet who seem to have no problems raising their children. The friends on Facebook who have pictures of their relationships while you're alone. The past, which seems so much better than the present you're in. There are so many things we could be looking at. But only one person who deserves our attention.

Jesus Christ

There is no other name by which you and I are saved. All the things we have to offer as a church are useless if you and I aren't sharing Christ. There is no other person you and I should be watching other than Christ. You can want all the stuff in the world, but the only need you have is Jesus Christ.

Because Christ gave up everything so that you and I could find peace. Remember, now and always, "Grace, Mercy, and peace **are yours** from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ." These are gifts given to us by the Holy One of God that are far greater than any other gifts that we could receive.

[Resolved]

So, let's make a new resolution. Today. This isn't a rhetorical statement. I'm asking you, let's make a resolution. Let's keep our eyes on Jesus in this new Church year.

Only by doing this are you and I even able to begin to show hospitality. Because you and I can't be busy looking at ourselves if we're trying to look to Christ.

I'm sure Christ doesn't care if you have the iPhone 11, or an iPod shuffle so long as you care for the people that Christ has put in your life. Christ doesn't care if I'm in Iowa or Bangladesh so long as I am showing Christian hospitality to the people He has put in my life. Christ doesn't want me to look at the stuff people have, but the people. People who are hurting and broken. People who are doomed to an eternity apart from the Savior unless the Gospel is brought to them. People who need to have others look after their eternal souls.

This is the kind of looking Christ wants you and I to do.

Love others and show the same hospitality that you have received.

Otherwise, you and I start to look more and more like Saul. Someone who has received the entire kingdom and yet is still not satisfied.

You and I have received the gifts of God. Forgiveness of sins, salvation, and life everlasting. As God's dear children we have grace, mercy, and peace. These gifts should be shining through in the way we show hospitality to one another and the world outside.

This resolution isn't about simply doing something special this year or self-improvement. It's about soul-improvement. And it should be your most important resolution of the new Church year and the new year to come.

Look to Christ.

Show Hospitality.

So be it. Amen.

As followers of Christ, "Keep loving one another earnestly
And show hospitality to one another without grumbling." AMEN! (1Pt 4:8-9)
