



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for New Year's Eve
December 31, 2021

A Happy New Year in Christ Jesus

Romans 8:31b–39

³¹ If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The words on many of our lips tonight and tomorrow will be the familiar greeting: Happy New Year! But what will make the new year – just a handful of hours away – happy? Will it be a big celebration tonight, watching the ball drop in Times Square? Will it be good times, good health, success, and prosperity in the months to come?

Or will it be something spiritual? I don't mean burning scented candles or practicing yoga. I'm talking about where God the Holy Spirit is actively doing His work through the Means of Grace. That's true spirituality. So, let's think about what will make the new year truly happy.

First, let's consider the word "happy." Spiritually speaking, "happy" means more than fun, laughter, or good times. As we use it tonight, still in the Christmas Season as we are, "happy" includes the peace that Jesus was born to give us. Even as time moves us forward into a new year, spiritually speaking, "happiness" includes the contentment and confidence that we're in the strong and caring hands of the God who loves us.

When we reach a milestone in our lives – like the changing of one year into the next – we often look back to reminisce, but we also look forward to the promising days ahead. Tonight, on this New Year's Eve, when we look back, we see both good and bad. And I don't mean in society – out *there* – I mean in *here*, within ourselves. We see love, kindness, and the giving of ourselves to others. Those occasions were good. But we also see anger, selfishness, and words and deeds that hurt others. Those occasions were not good.

We've spent time in prayer, we've been in God's Word, and we've taken the One who *is* the Word – Jesus – into our own bodies in the Holy Sacrament. We've spent time and energy in the life and work of the Church. That's good.



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But sometimes we've let the good that comes from God become empty, just routine. We've confessed our sins, saying true words, but our minds were far away, somewhere else. We've let the good and sound words of our Lord become stale. We've let the Lord's Prayer – the very words of Jesus – fall from our lips as dry, barren words, devoid of the life with which they were intended to fill us, because our hearts weren't in it. "These people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is [but] a commandment taught by men" (Is. 29:13).

And it's not like there's a problem with the words – as if our Lord would give us a defective prayer – or if confessing our sins is in itself an empty ritual. No, the problem is *us*. So the solution isn't to change the words, but to have the words change us. That's what the Church is, dear Christian. It's the house of God, where He meets us in His Word and transform us.

Beloved, we need to repent. We're not the people we should be. We aren't even the Christians we *want* to be when we're at our best. When we take an honest look at ourselves we find the works of our fallen flesh – envy, jealousy, greed, lust, or hatred, which have marched through our lives, wounding others in their wake. They've even left their marks on us in our thoughts and in our hearts.

And, with every sin, we have earned, once again, God's wrath and judgment. But what's new about that on the cusp of a new year? In the forgiveness we hear at the beginning of every Divine Service, the Church's liturgy has taught us not to think too much of ourselves. It's also taught us not to trust in our own good works to find favor in God's eyes.

How can we, who admit that we are "poor, miserable" sinners begin to imagine that our paltry works can merit even God's attention, let alone His good will? Indeed, we cannot. And why should we? The Church's liturgy rightly teaches us not to esteem ourselves, to get our sense of worth by what we do, but, instead, to find our value in what the Son of God has done for us. Don't you know that God already holds you in high esteem because of Jesus?

Apart from Christ, we either become bloated, self-important people who think more highly of ourselves than we ought, or, we fall into despair, seeing only the blemishes, selfish intentions, and darkened motives that color everything we think, say, and do. That's how it is for us apart from Christ, those are our options: conceit or despair, arrogance or depression.

So, don't puff yourself up. But, don't despair either. In other words, don't look at yourself apart from Christ. You are not apart from Christ. Christ is your Savior from sin, death, and hell. You belong to God.

The Apostle Paul, in today's epistle, tells us: "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32). Dear Christian, if God gave up His Son for us, that means we needed Him to. We have no cause for self-congratulations. On the other hand, since God gave up His Son for



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us, that means He considered us worth it. God holds you in high esteem, Christian. He loves you and would stop at nothing to see you with Him when this life is over.

John the Baptist cried out, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). God's work of salvation was in progress, even eight days after our Savior's birth in the first shedding of His blood in His circumcision. On it goes, relentlessly toward the cross, "where the Lord has laid on him the sins of us all" (Is. 53:6). The answer is in Christ. God holds you in high esteem because of Christ.

Now you can confess your sins with all your heart, knowing that, in Christ, God has forgiven you. Your sins no longer have any right to accuse you. As the Apostle says: "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies" (Rom. 8:33). This means the charges against you no longer stand. Why? Because Jesus died to pay your debt of sin. God holds you in high esteem because of Christ.

"Who is to condemn?" Paul asks. You can almost hear him pause as he waits for an answer. No condemnation can stand against God's judgment. Why? "[Because] Christ has died – more than that, [He] was raised [and] is at the right hand of God, interceding for us" (Rom. 8:34). That's how the old year is ending, beloved; it's ending in the mercy of God. Indeed, God holds you in high esteem because of Christ.

What a happy beginning that makes for the new year! "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32). Surely, we can include, among "all things" this new year, a new beginning, a fresh start.

With God's blessing and power, the new year will be better than the last – because, by His grace, we may grow in the fruits of the Spirit. We may grow in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control. By God's grace we may say with St. Paul, "Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Php. 3:13-14). The new year can indeed be better! We can be better, by God's grace.

We know from experience that life is a mix of sorrow and joy, sickness and health, loss and gain, good times and bad times, being up and being down. The new year will, no doubt, be more of the same. Paul mentions affliction and anguish, persecution and hunger, nakedness, danger, and violent death (Rom. 8:35). Some of these are spiritual, and some are burdens and cares of the body. Such realities are certainly possible in the new year.

We ask with Paul as he wrote just before our text: "What, then, shall we say to these things?" (Rom. 8:31a). We say this: None of these hard times can take the "happy" out of our new year, for none of the valleys of life can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Listen to our text, "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Rom. 8:37). Notice he doesn't say just "conquerors"; no, he says "more than conquerors!" "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." How can that be? Paul continues . . .



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“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38-39). Here Paul uses thoughts and phrases, repetition, one after another, to ingrain that truth on our hearts and minds. Nothing, nothing, *nothing*, can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus! God holds you in high esteem, beloved, because of Christ.

How true, then, is that opening sentence of our epistle: “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31b). Sin can’t be against us. Why? Because Jesus died for our sins. We’re forgiven. Our sins are gone – as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12). The devil can’t prevail against us. Why? Because Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). Even the troubles of life can’t get the best of us. Scripture says: “[Cast] all your anxieties on him because he cares for you” (1 Pet. 5:7). Death can’t prevail against us. Paul writes to the Corinthians: “Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!” (1 Cor. 15:57)

So, you see, as a saint of God, the “happy” in your new-year greeting centers on Jesus Christ. In Him you are forgiven. He’s taken care of your past. And He’ll take care of your future. Now, you can look forward to a Happy New Year, no matter what may come! For God holds you in high esteem because of His Son, Jesus Christ. In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen