

Numbers 6:22-27

New Year's Eve and Day, January 1, 2017

Theme: The LORD puts his name on you

- I. Blessing you
- II. Making grace shine on you
- III. Giving you peace

INJ If you think you have had a rough year, perhaps you should consider the year the Israelites had. And if you think the coming year has the potential to be crazy for you, don't forget what was in store for God's people in our lesson. They faced events that surely outrank our troubles, yet the LORD assured them that he would not leave them or forsake them. He gives us the same promise. In the familiar words of the Aaronic blessing the LORD puts his name on you, blessing you, making grace shine on you, and giving you peace.

The Israelites had a tumultuous year. When it began, they were enslaved in Egypt, miserably oppressed. Moses came announcing an escape plan, but Pharaoh's backlash was harsh. God sent 10 plagues, and it seems a normal week never happened for them. Then they hurriedly left their homes one night and headed for the land God promised them. The Egyptian army pinned them against the sea, but the LORD divided the waters and they walked across on dry land. With the enemy threat eliminated, the people needed bread and water in the wilderness. At the foot of the mountain they saw the glory of the LORD. I don't think anything you experienced in 2016 compared to what they went through!

And the new year for the Israelites would have them dedicate the tabernacle, their new worship space, and begin the rituals God commanded them. People would be impatient and complain, rebel, and face God's direct intervention. Manna every day. Life in a harsh environment and the difficulty of waiting for God's promises to be fulfilled. I don't think our concerns for the future are much different than theirs!

God's words to Aaron and the Israelites are also spoken to us, to comfort us and to strengthen us in our trials and hardships. "The LORD bless you and keep you." What kind of blessing do you desire? It would be nice to have more income. To fix those things that have not worked right for a while. To finally arrive at one of those goals you have set for yourself. Is that all you desire? God's blessing is so much more than successful plans and a comfortable life.

Think about the Father's continual work of preserving the world so that crops grow and commerce works and the laws of nature remain steady. It is a blessing from God that you have life and breath and the ability to do the things you are good at.

God also "keeps" you, that is, he protects you from harm and danger. You don't even know the disasters averted because the LORD kept them from you! And the burdens you did face, the agony and uncertainty and exhaustion you endured, the LORD worked in them for your good. That is just what he promised to do in Romans 8: "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

The blessing of God the Father extends beyond the physical and temporary items in your life to the spiritual and eternal life he has given you. God has blessed you by connecting you to your Savior, by putting his words before you and working them into your heart. He has kept you in the Christian faith and will continue to preserve you in it. I know your spiritual blessings often get lost among all the riches and all the rich experiences that fill your life, but this truth stands above them all: the LORD puts his name on you. Even though you have pain and uncertainty and fears, you are his dear child. The LORD bless you and keep you.

The words we are considering are sometimes called the "benediction" – the "good word" from God. It comes at the end of every worship service, and I fear that sometimes it becomes just a formality – the last thing the Pastor says, kind of like "The end." The Blessing is not merely a pious wish, that God might hopefully somehow do nice things for you. This is God's proclamation that he is blessing you. He uses his special name, the LORD (in all caps). He steps into history to accomplish his promises. He puts his name on you, giving you his blessing.

Even when life seems impossible, you can count on the Father's blessing and keeping you. He will not fail to watch over you and to connect you with his words. He will not fail to work for your good. He will certainly call you to repentance for your sin, and he will announce his forgiveness in Christ Jesus. The LORD watches over you – never sleeping, never being distracted. His name is on you. You have his blessing.

Three phrases make up this proclamation from the LORD. They correspond to the three persons of the Triune God. The Father protects and keeps us, and the Son makes God's grace shine on us. Can you see the image of his shining face, smiling and speaking loving words to you? This is the way the LORD makes grace shine on you. He gives you a Savior.

When the Apostle John writes about the birth of Jesus at Christmas,

he uses the picture of light and darkness. This world is enshrouded in darkness because of sin. The wickedness and godlessness of our society is no different than that of ancient times. We read today of the way Herod pursued baby Jesus to kill him. An angel directed the new family to flee to Egypt for safety, and to return, not to Bethlehem, but to Nazareth. Jesus is light for the world, but the world doesn't understand it, doesn't want it. The darkness does its best to extinguish the light.

Jesus is the bright face of God to this sinful world. There, in the manger, is the Almighty Creator. There, with eyes, ears, nose and mouth, is the LORD God. He has come not in anger to crush you, but in love to save you. This baby is your substitute, your holiness, your payment for sin. Jesus – the Savior. Immanuel – God with us. Alpha and Omega, Christ/Messiah. These names make grace shine on you. The light shines in the darkness. God gives you rescue from condemnation. He forgives your sin.

Consider the brilliance of the light. Jesus: this baby, the teacher, the leader of 12 disciples, the feeder of thousands, the one despised by religious authorities – He lived perfectly. He was holy and pure for you in all his words, thoughts and actions. God's grace is his undeserved love for sinners. In grace, the LORD supplied the only one who could provide you with the holiness demanded from the law.

Jesus was beaten and mocked and crucified. He was despised and rejected. For you. His blood is the only thing that could pay the debt of sin for the whole world of sinners. Grace is Jesus willingly enduring Hell and the whole curse of God in your place. To set you free from sin's condemnation. To forgive you completely.

When you hear the words of the Aaronic Blessing, the LORD makes grace shine on you. You have a Savior, Jesus. God has given you his own Son, to save you. It is a personal and powerful statement of God's love. The LORD puts his name on you!

When I speak the Benediction at the end of the service, I raise my hands to say it. With this motion I express that God is actually delivering the promise to you. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to give you the benefit of God's blessing and his grace. He puts the name of the LORD on you, giving you peace.

When the Good News of God's love in Christ is spoken, there the Holy Spirit is working. The memory passage from Romans says " Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." You have Christian faith because God did a miracle in you through the message you heard. The Holy Spirit showed you God's favor by working faith in your heart.

By faith you have valuable gifts from God. First among them is the forgiveness of sins that is yours through the death and resurrection of Jesus. We began the service with the clear proclamation: " I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." When you come forward to receive the Lord's Supper, Jesus himself assures you that this is his body and blood, with the bread and wine. It is for you. " The LORD look on you with favor ..."

As we conclude the service, the blessing repeats the message one more time. The LORD gives you peace as he puts his name on you. The peace comes through the message, and even though you are leaving this place where the gospel is taught, you do not leave the message behind. You are not separated from God's peace because you aren't in your pew, or when you are no longer hearing my voice. God has put his name on you, and you have peace in the gospel words you know, remember and speak.

Peace is yours in Baptism. God called you his dear child, and he does not forget who you are. You have been washed clean of all your guilt and you are connected to Jesus your Savior. Every moment now you live in sorrow over your sins and in trust that the LORD forgives you. You love to draw near to the words that expose your sin and assure you of peace. The words are what Holy Spirit uses so that you actually do have peace with God. The LORD has put his name on you.

At the turn of another year, our needs are similar to what they are at the end of our worship services. We are thankful for the words of God that we have heard, and we have been refreshed by them. We go out into the future with God's name on us, confident that he is with us. We bring his words with us, and he will be our joy.

So go ahead and review the major events of 2016. See in them the blessing of the Father, and the grace of the Son, and the peace given you by the Holy Spirit. Look ahead to what 2017 brings, and make it your determination to stay close to the words of the LORD your God. You are his dear child. He has put his name on you. Whatever the things are that happen – whether exciting and positive or tumultuous and heartbreaking – you don't face them alone. The LORD is blessing you. The LORD is making grace shine on you. The LORD is giving you peace. The LORD has put his name on you. SDG Amen.