

Christians Enter The New Year With The Blessed Certainty Of Salvation.

Text: Rom 8:24-32

Suggested Hymns:
554, 556, 337, 282, 22

- 1) This Certainty Rests On God's Eternal Election
- 2) This Certainty Gives Power To Carry On Under All Conditions

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Romans 8:24–32, ²⁴ *For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?* ²⁵ *But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.*

²⁶ *Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*

²⁷ *Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.* ²⁸ *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*

²⁹ *For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.* ³⁰ *Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.* ³¹ *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?* ³² *He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

There can be no real “Happy New Year” greeting when uncertainty, doubt, and fear fill the human heart. No doubt, thousands of people will again enter the portals of the New Year without the cheering ray of real hope. They see only a blurred past and a dark future. We are thinking of the

many unfortunate people who are without God and Christ, and therefore without hope in the world.

There can be no happiness when the heart is filled with anxiety and uncertainty concerning the future. What will become of them if they should be called before the judgement-seat of God in the New Year? What will be their fate? Will it be heaven or hell?

Uncertainty, anxiety, and worry must finally drive them to distraction. At best, they can view the future only with pessimism.

How different the New Year is for the Christian! He can enter the New Year joyfully and securely. He does not know whether the New Year will bring wealth or poverty, health or sickness, honour or disgrace, life or death, and yet he is serene and calm. In the Word of God he has found peace and rest. He is assured of eternal salvation.

Our text pictures and describes this peace to us. Therefore, come what may, the Christian today faces a truly happy New Year. Our theme is *Christians Enter the New Year with the Blessed Certainty of Salvation*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. This Certainty Rests On God's Eternal Election

The average person believes, that the only certain thing in life is constant change and the uncertainty of life. True, a veil covers the future. We do not know in detail what the New Year will bring. But we do know that again in the New Year there will be no lack of sin and trouble. We know that change and decay will again be around us.

We know that the world will still hate us, for Christ says in John 15:20, *If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you*. And in John Chapter 16, *you will weep and lament¹ ... you will have tribulation.²*

But the Christian is not dismayed as he considers the dangers, the trials, and the uncertainty which lie immediately before him; for he looks far beyond these temporary trials, and knows, as our text says, *that all things work together for good to those who love God*.

In the hour of trial and affliction it is difficult to keep the gaze fixed on the final glory for which we have been called. Can we be certain that we shall reach

the goal of our faith? The temporary trials, the uncertainty of what lies before us, may at times dim our vision and obscure the final goal.

We know that changes have come over us in the past; we know that changes will surround us in the future; and the Christian is assailed by doubts whether he will reach salvation.

Unless you are certain that you will finally be saved, you cannot enter the New Year with lasting joy and happiness. The Christian knows that, just as surely as uncertainty, change, and decay will surround him in this life also during the New Year, so surely he will finally be saved.

This certainty of our ultimate salvation is based upon an unchangeable foundation, namely, God's eternal election. Our text contains the beautiful doctrine commonly known as the doctrine of predestination. The apostle says in our text, "***For whom He foreknew.***"

To be numbered among God's acquaintances is indeed a glorious privilege. God knows us in such a wonderful way that we actually become the objects of His love and affection. God's foreknowledge is not only an intellectual process, as when we know people, but it is a gracious foreknowing, whereby God claimed us as His own from all eternity and therefore engraved our names in the Book of Life and made us His own in the eternal council; for whom He foreknew, He also predestined.

Those whom God from all eternity had recognised as His own He chose and elected to be conformed to the image of His Son. In Ephesians 1:5 we learn that from eternity God had "***predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.***" Can you conceive a more glorious New Year's message?

Amid trials of life, when the very foundations seemingly slip away, you are built upon the solid rock of God's eternal decree. It has made us His children. No matter what may happen to you, child of God, during the New Year, that predetermined will of God that you should be conformed to the image of Christ cannot be altered.

No matter what may befall you in the New Year, you have the certainty that you will ultimately be conformed to the image of Christ, so that, as He through

suffering entered into glory, also our vile bodies will ultimately be fashioned like His glorious body.

There is no variableness with God, and His gracious decree to save you must stand from eternity to eternity. The enemies of your soul, the trials of life, the changes in circumstances that come to you, cannot alter God's foreknowledge and predestination.

But you may immediately say, *Can I be sure that God has elected me?* You may say, *"Oh, how joyfully I could go into the New Year with all its uncertainty if I could be sure that I am predestined to life everlasting!"* Our text answers, *"³⁰ Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called."*

The Lord has preached the Gospel to you, has invited you through His Word of grace to come unto Him. This is not an empty call, for *"whom He called, these He also justified."* Through the call of the Gospel God offers to you the forgiveness of all your sins and enlightens your heart, creates faith, whereby you receive the forgiveness of sins unto life everlasting.

There is only one short step to life everlasting, for *"whom He justified, these He also glorified."* God has done everything for you already, and through the same Gospel through which He has brought you to faith He will also keep you.

Has God called you by the Gospel? Has His holy Word been preached to you and offered to you the forgiveness of sin? Have you through Baptism come to faith? Have you through the preaching of the Gospel accepted the forgiveness of sins? Have you been kept in faith to this day?

Since you have been called, and since you have been justified, and since you have been sanctified through faith, therefore you must believe that God has from eternity predestined you to eternal salvation. The eternal election of God is your guarantee that nothing shall separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus as our epistle says in Romans 8:39. No matter what the New Year may bring for you, keep your eyes fixed upon the gates of heaven, which stand open for you.

Your salvation is certain because God has done and will do everything and will not permit your salvation to be dependent upon your own feeble efforts. In fact, there is absolutely nothing that we can do. God alone could foreknow and predestine us. He alone calls us, justifies us; and He alone will glorify us.

Our works, conduct, and character can in no way be the cause of our salvation; they have not influenced God in choosing us. Not even our faith is the ground on which God has elected us. We have not been chosen because we by nature are less sinful and guilty than others, for there is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.³

We are chosen only through Christ Jesus. This blessed truth removes every element of uncertainty in our final salvation. If our election was in the least dependent upon anything in us, we would always have to ask whether we had rendered sufficient good works.

But since we are elected in Christ, and since our salvation rests upon His work, therefore our salvation is assured. Christ's work is sufficient and complete. What a blessed thought, as we enter the New Year, that our salvation has been taken out of our feeble and weak hands and is placed entirely into the almighty hand of the eternal and unchanging God!

We can now joyfully enter the New Year. And since God loved us so much that He predestined us to salvation from all eternity, since He was willing to give up His own Son to carry out the eternal decree of our salvation, how shall He not, with Him, freely give us all things as our text says?

We have the assuring message that God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son,⁴ and we have been assured that Jesus is the Saviour of mankind.

With this cheering message ringing in our ears and resounding in our hearts, we exclaim today, "***If God is for us, who can be against us?***" If God chose us from eternity to be conformed to the image of His Son, if God elected us to be His beloved children, then God certainly must take care of us.

We do not know what the New Year will bring. Our best friends may forsake us; misfortune may deprive us of our income; death may enter our home and cause deep grief and sorrow; Satan may tempt us and cause us deep spiritual anxiety.

And yet we enter the New Year confidently and joyfully. We know that our final salvation is absolutely certain, because it rests upon the unchangeable decree of our loving God. God is for us. Then no one can prevail against us. With

God we are stronger than the entire world. This certainty gives us strength to carry on successfully in the New Year under all conditions.

We shall not enter the New Year in carnal security, but turn constantly to God's Word, where we find our names written in the Book of Life, and frequently go to the Lord's Table to find assurance that we are God's elect.⁵

2. This Certainty Gives Power To Carry On Under All Conditions

As we enter upon the New Year, we are taking a road which we have not gone before. The future is shrouded in mystery.

We are like Abraham, whom God called out of the home of his fathers to go into a land that God would show him. He did not know where God's call would lead him. He did not know what would happen to him there. He did not know with what difficulties he must cope.

And still Abraham knew that his journey was carefully planned, that God would be with him, lead him safely through this life, and certainly into the life to come.

Likewise, God will lead us out of the old year and invites us enter the New Year. It may bring us days of comparative ease. It may, however, bring us into dark valleys and lead us into rough mountain paths. When days of adversity, of sickness, of financial reverses, of dashed hopes, of sorrow and heartaches, descend upon us, shall we think that God has forsaken us, that He no longer loves us?

By no means. Our text says, "***We are saved.***" That fact remains. Even if heaven and earth should pass away, we are saved! But we are saved in hope. We do not as yet have the full enjoyment of our salvation. Even the strongest believers experience moments of weakness.

Luther, in the midst of his many struggles and disappointments, became downcast and gloomy. It was on one such occasion that his wife dressed in mourning acted sad and despondent. When Luther became concerned and asked her to explain her strange conduct, she replied: "*Haven't you heard as yet that God is dead?*"

This was enough to cure the Reformer. He remembered that he was saved even though he could not see the constant proof. "***We were saved in this hope.***"

Even though we are perfectly justified and are now heirs of salvation, yet, as long as we are in the flesh, we are not always conscious of our ultimate bliss, nor can we understand the Lord's ways in leading us to our goal.

We read in 1 Corinthians 13:12, ¹² *For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.* If, then, we are unable to grasp God's marvellous manner of leading us in the New Year, let us keep in mind our limited understanding and look to God in the blessed certainty of salvation. *"We are saved."* That is the hand reaching out to us in the darkness of distress to lead us safely through another year.

There may, however, be more serious problems than financial reverses and failing health. Spiritual afflictions are the real trials. How shall we approach God when such difficulties arise, and what shall we pray for? Because we are God's elect, the Holy Spirit will come to our aid in times of spiritual afflictions, as our text says, ²⁶ *Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*

Our Lutheran Confessions explain this comforting passage as follows, *"The Spirit of God gives to the elect the testimony that they are children of God; and when they do not know for what they should pray, as they ought, He intercedes for them with groanings that cannot be uttered."*⁶

When we are confronted by problems so great that we do not know how to express our wants, yes, when it is not even clear to us what is best for us, it is then that we must cling to the fact of our eternal election. We may rest assured that our imperfect and halting prayer is taken by God's Holy Spirit and couched in words acceptable to God and that He will so direct and guide our thoughts and desires that they are according to the will of God.

Because the Holy Spirit makes intercession for us according to the will of God, we enter the New Year with joyful certainty. ²⁸ *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*" All things, without any qualification, must work for our good.

At times these are the darker moments of our lives. Luther's enforced detention at the Wartburg gave the world the German New Testament. Illness

caused the youthful Walther to pull out of his school-work for a season, but it led him into the Bible and Luther's writings, and thus God prepared him to become a great leader in the Lutheran Church.

Church history is overflowing with examples showing that God turned dark hours into days of dazzling sunlight. We must trust implicitly that in our own instance all things must work together for good.

The blessed certainty of our salvation assures us that, inasmuch as God from all eternity has chosen us to take us to heaven, all things that happen to us only have the purpose to carry out His gracious plan.

From this point of view we are to consider the coming year. If our days are to be filled with happiness in our home and success in our business, thank God; that is just what we need on our way to heaven. If the road be difficult and the going hard, still thank God; that is the best for us on our journey to the eternal home. But under all circumstances we have power to carry on in the New Year.

Happy New Year! Happy for you Christians, whom God has called by the Gospel and justified by His Word. Thereby you have the firm assurance that in Christ, the new-born Saviour, God has foreknown or predestined you to life eternal.

How could you falter with this hope before you, the Holy Spirit within you, and a blessed Providence over you? Each day will bring you new victories. Yours will be a happy New Year. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ John 16:20

² John 16:33

³ Rom. 3:23

⁴ John 3:16

⁵ See Trigl., p. 1084, §70 ff

⁶ F. of C., Thor. Decl., XI, 31, Trig P 1072, Para 31, Romans 8:16, 26