

## New Year's Eve - 12/31/23 SM, SJ

1Cor 6:2b - I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.

In the name of our Lord of time and space, in the name of our Triune God, dear fellow redeemed:

Human beings have a fascination for certain combinations of numbers. We notice when the odometers in our cars reach certain numbers – like when it turns over from 99,999 to 100,000 miles. Some place significance on a date like February 22, 2022 (2-22-22).

Think about the significance we attach to certain birthdays. A girl's "sweet sixteen" birthday, or when someone turns 18 and becomes an adult, or twenty-one, and can legally drink. We attach special significance to birthdays and anniversary's that end in zeros, like the 50<sup>th</sup> birthday or the 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. And a person's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday is considered very special indeed.

In a sense, today is just like any other day, but today we flip the page of our calendars from 2023 to 2024, and since we attach a certain significance to that change of dates, and so today we want to look at God's gift of time, as we ponder tonight how to:

Make Use of God's Gift of time

1. Realizing the favor God has shown us
2. Making use of our time of grace

### 1. Realizing the favor God has shown us

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians that *now* was the time that they were experiencing God's favor.

Certainly, we can look back at the past and be thankful for the God's blessings this past year and over our entire lives. Parents who taught us about our sinfulness and our need for Jesus as our Savior. Parents or grandparents, who brought us to church or Sunday School, who encouraged us to come to Vacation Bible School and Confirmation Class. We can be thankful for pastors and teaches who taught us stories from the Bible, who taught us the unchanging truths of God's Word in a world that changes so often.

During this past year, we have experienced some changes. Among many other things, we moved here and Little Lambs closed.

But when Paul talks about **God's favor**, he's not thinking primarily of such things of such things as food and money. No, he's thinking about God's mercy to sinners. Paul's thinking about the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the great act that took place there, where the eternal God gave his life for undeserving sinners. Paul's thinking of all the blessings that we have gained in Christ, all which come to us through **God's favor**.

All the spiritual gifts that we have from God come to us by the power and grace of God. Baptism and Lord's Supper, prayer and Scripture, confession and forgiveness, these are God's gifts to the people of this world. Having our lives watched over by God and by the angels of heaven, adoption into the family of God, these, too,

are the result of God's mercy to us.

Not only have enjoyed God's favor in the past and in the present, but we will also enjoy them in the future – and how different the future is going to be for us because of Christ! Without Christ, we could look forward only to an eternity of suffering, an eternity separated from God and all his blessings.

Without Christ, an eternity in hell would mean an eternity with never a moment of happiness or joy. Eternity would be filled with pain and suffering without end. But with Christ, eternity for us as God's people will be filled only *with* happiness and joy. In heaven, we will never know a single moment of pain and suffering.

Another blessing of God that we experience is the comfort and peace that comes in being able to place all that we have and all that we are into his hands. What a blessing from the hand that we have no reason to be afraid, no reason to worry, because our heavenly Father has promised to see to our every need, whether that need comes from our physical needs or our spiritual needs. God will take of them today and always!

### 2. Making use of our time of grace

But looking at the blessings that God has given us is only one way that we can wisely make use of the time that God has given us in this life. The second way is to realize that **now is the day of salvation**.

This life is the time that we have been given by God to come to faith and be given the gift of eternal life. We don't know how our individual time of grace will last. Through the deaths of those around us, we are occasionally reminded that we can go to sleep and never wake up. Or we can be visiting with company and have a massive heart-attack and die almost instantly.

The end of a year is typically a time when we think about those who have died in the last year. This past year, as per usual, many famous people died: Norman Lear, Rosalyn Carter, Matthew Perry, Lisa Marie Perry and Tina Turner, to name just a few. These are people whose names we might know but we didn't know them personally. Likely there were people that we knew that died this past year: friends, neighbors, family, people that perhaps we use to go to church with entered their eternal rest.

Over the years, I've had a lot of funerals and I've realized that most of them were very sudden. By that I mean, that the person appeared relatively healthy, and then was dead within a day or two. Some died within seconds. As this year ends, the question that comes to mind will any of us during the next year will be called to our eternal home? Perhaps none of us, perhaps several of us. But the real question is this: *Are we prepared for eternity? Are we ready to stand before God and face the final judgment?*

Faith alone in our Lord Jesus Christ makes us ready for eternity and Judgment Day. Faith in his holy life lived for us, his innocent persecution and execution for our sakes, that's our hope for eternity. Our faith in the promise that his blood washes away all the guilt of our sins, that's what makes us ready to stand before God on the day of our own deaths.

We get prepared for things all the time. When it's time for school, we need to make sure we have all our papers, books, assignments, etc. When we're going on a trip, we may change the oil in the car and fill up the gas tank before we leave. This time of year we might also make sure we have emergency supplies in the car.

The third chapter of Ecclesiastes talks about time in a very memorable way. Perhaps you've seen it and didn't even know it was from the Bible. It tells us **There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.**

Within a matter of hours, the calendar will make the significant change from 2023 to the year 2024. And we don't know exactly what it will bring. This past year brought us some divisive politics, unrest in the Middle East between Israel and Hamas, a strange incident with a balloon from China, an implosion of a sub exploring the Titanic wreck and a new state flag. Who knows what 2024 will bring?

Yet we know how we should wisely use the time given us in the new year – to recognize the blessings that God has given us in the past and in the present, and will give us the future.

And more importantly, we realize that by faith we are prepared for eternity. We may not know what will happen to us in the year to come, but we rest secure in the hands of our loving and merciful God. We know that indeed, **now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.** Amen.