

A New Year Calls for Faith-born Love

✦ **Respect God’s Son. (vv.33-41)**

✦ **Give God the glory. (vv.41-43)**

In the name of Jesus, the unchanging Son of God, dearly redeemed fellow tenants:

As you got up this morning, did you thank God when you opened your eyes? As far as I know, we were all able to see again today. What about your feet? Did you thank God that you could stand and walk? Maybe you did, but I generally forget these “natural” things until some strange, sudden pain makes it hard to walk or stand. Then I quickly ask God for mercy and good health to stand and serve. It seems as if something needs to go wrong to remind me that God is my Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier.

That’s another reason I’m grateful for worship services like this. Our Lord Jesus is well aware of our gratitude problem. He saw it first in the Garden of Eden when our first parents believed the devil’s lie that God was somehow holding out on the full experience of living. They didn’t just want to be human, they wanted to be god-man and god-woman in charge of their own destiny. How many sad New Years have followed with more grief and heartache since then? But Christmas brings us the one true God-Man with all God’s loving kindness and tender mercy. In Christ, **A New Year Calls for Faith-born Love.**

✦ **Respect God’s Son. (vv.33-41)**

Have you ever wondered why technology has not yet found a way to include in our HD sound and video packages some kind of High Definition smell? An episode of Gold Rush yesterday, answered that question. If you’re following the show, you know Todd Hoffman’s crew left the Klondike of last year’s season for the jungles of South America. This year instead of freezing cold they have searing heat and humidity. The men are complaining about the smell. Would you want that piped into your living room?

When it comes to Christmas, most of us just don’t get it. The stable looks so sweet and clean with Baby Jesus in the manger and the oxen standing by Mary and Joseph. But would you still think so if you had HD smell? My first trip to a classmate’s dairy farm taught me a very different lesson. We had cows – out in the pasture. Not closed up in a barn where their indoor lifestyle requires large shovels, wagons and tractors to haul away the fertilizer. Boots in the farmer’s mudroom take on a life of their own.

All this helps explain why we sinners have so little **Respect for God’s Son.** In our wildest dreams we cannot imagine the glories of heaven Jesus left behind. Nor have any of us experienced the kind of poverty that made a smelly manger His bed. It’s hard to realize how the rest of Jesus’ life only got worse and worse. By the time our New Year’s Eve text comes up, it’s Tuesday of Holy Week. Jesus’ fellow Jews have been plotting to kill Him for quite some time. Of course, they didn’t want to look bad, so they spent all day Tuesday trying to make Jesus look bad. They wanted some justification for putting Him to death. But how do you kill an innocent man and make yourself look good?

On Palm Sunday, Jesus rode into Jerusalem as a King, but in deep humility on a donkey. His enemies still don’t know what they’re up against. They think they can beat the Word of God Incarnate in verbal battles and mind games. But Jesus is already on offense. He just told the *Parable of Two Sons* in which He compared the Jewish religious leaders to tax collectors and prostitutes – only they **“are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.”** The reason is very simple: **“You did not believe [John the Baptist] when he “came to show you the way of righteousness..., but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.”** (Matthew 21:31f)

As regular church people, that should make us sit up and take notice. *“Listen to another parable...,”* Jesus says. He is shining the light of God’s Law even brighter. Again, this really stinks, but you need the Holy Spirit to give you HD sensitivity to get it. Jesus put it something like this. Everyone thinks mortgages should be free except land owners. Free rental cars? Great! Unless you make your living renting cars. It’s a despicable thing to hear Jesus tell about tenants in this landowner’s vineyard. First they refuse to pay the rent. Then they torture and terrorize the man’s hired help coming to collect.

He could destroy them. but finds another option: *“They will respect my son,” he said.* That’s strange, but it really is all the heavenly Father wants. He sent Jesus to collect respect or honor and glory we owe to God. **Respect God’s Son.** But do we pay what we owe? My dear friends, God has records of the whole last year: Every word we spoke, every kind word left unsaid. Every good deed left undone, or evil deed carried out. Every evil thought where we wanted to do or say something bad, but didn’t. Our sinful desires are like the knives that stabbed the landowner’s son, the stones that crushed his bones, the hatred that threw him out of the vineyard and left him to die in the dirt. We fail to **Respect God’s Son.**

What we deserve we hear in the answer to Jesus’ question: *“When the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end...and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.”* How could we escape God’s wrath if He kept track of one day’s sin, much less our entire year?

✦ Give God the glory. (vv.41-43)

More illogical than the stench sin is the mercy of the landowner. He keeps sending His servants. And they keep coming in spite of the violence against them. Their courage is a shining testimony of how good and great their Master is. The fact that God would send His Son after all the prophets his tenants killed and pastors they despised is a testament to God’s pure grace in His New Covenant. God found a way to give full and free forgiveness of sin, to wash away the stains and the stench. God found a way to make a people for His own **glory** to live close to His heart. They *“will give him his share of the crop at harvest time,”* not in stingy offerings of guilt, but in **Faith-born love.** God’s **love** found a way.

Did you ever built something out of stone? I’m not very good at it. In fact, even bricks and cement blocks get the best of me. After twenty minutes, I’ve had to pull the block and re-mud the crack to start over again. Wood is more to my liking because I can cut it to size – height and width and length, square. A pile of lumber looks like a good friend. A pile of stones? That’s frightening!

Ancient builders could look at a pile of rocks like stone masons today. They could see where all the pieces should fit like a puzzle. The odd shaped stone which would not fit in the walls they could put to good use as the *cornerstone* or a *capstone*. It’s the same Hebrew or Greek word for both in the Old and New Testaments. The *cornerstone* set the lines of the building; everything followed its directions. And the *capstone* or keystone held up the arch that held up the rest of the building.

That’s the picture Jesus used for Himself. It comes from Psalm 118, about 1000 B.C. Jesus asked the religious leaders *“Have you never read in the Scriptures...?”* Like us, they needed to pay closer attention to their Bible reading. *“The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.” “Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.”* God will not let His *kingdom* of blessings be despised by self-righteous sinners who have no use for Jesus. **Respect God’s Son** in heartfelt repentance. His gift of Baptism not only makes us clean like a baby fresh from a bath, but His Holy Supper cleans us on the inside too. When we pray, “Thy kingdom come,” God makes sure His blessings all come our way so we can *“produce its fruit.”* You **love** God as your Creator; all good comes from God. You **love** God as your Redeemer; He sent His Son to live and die and live again for us. You **love** God as your Sanctifier; He soothes your soul in loving kindness and tender mercy. **A New Year Calls for Faith-born Love.** And our hearts in gratitude say, “Amen.”