

Text: Isaiah 61:2.

New Year's Eve.

December 31, 2015.

Grace and peace are yours in this New Year and always. Amen.

New Year's. What's going to be the same? What going to be different? Maybe a better question is, "What do you want to be the same? What do you want to be different?" For some people, New Year's is a chance to start all over, make some changes. For others New Year's is a depressing reminder, "Another year old and deeper in debt." But maybe, just maybe, this New Year's celebration can be a time to remember what has always been the same: you have God's favor. And maybe, just maybe that unchanging favor of God can help you see that if things stay exactly the same, that's great. I still have God's favor. And even if many things change, one thing will not change: God's favor, God's undeserved love for you that he has shown you in Jesus. This New Year's is a time to proclaim the Lord's favor. This New Year's is a time to relish God's favor. This New Year's is a time to celebrate God's unchanging favor.

But what is favor? Now this isn't the do me a solid kind of temporary favor. This favor is God's undeserved love. We sometimes use the word grace to describe it. Love given. Love freely given. Love given to those who did not, do not, and never will deserve it. In order to appreciate God's favor, we have to understand, yes even be convicted of why we don't deserve it. Maybe you already were convicted before you got here. The family fight erupted once again over the holidays and you could barely drag yourself here because you are so weighted down by guilt. And those words you heard a few minutes ago were the sweetest you ever heard, "In the name of Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins!" Ah! What relief! Ah! What forgiveness! Ah! What a burden lifted off the soul. I have God's favor. I have God's forgiveness.

But maybe you weren't listening for the last 30 seconds because you are ending the year feeling pretty good about yourself. I met my financial commitment to church. Can't remember a Sunday I missed. I'm here tonight and even pastor isn't! I don't need to be convicted. I need to be congratulated! Yes, congratulations, self-righteous Pharisee. Congratulations. The devil has convinced you, "You don't really need God's favor. You don't really need Jesus." You know, there's a place for those who don't need Jesus. It's called hell.

Only when we see our need for Jesus can we appreciate God's favor. Only when we are convicted of our sins can we celebrate God's salvation. There is one thing that will never change, new year, old year, next year. Jesus always forgives broken sinners. Jesus always welcomes sinners. Jesus always shows his favor he won at the cross for sinners. This is a year to celebrate God's favor. This is a year to proclaim the Lord's favor. This favor is always there for you and always new each morning of each day of each year.

There's something cool about this phrase, "proclaim the year of the LORD's favor." The people who first heard this would almost certainly have thought about the year of Jubilee. This was a special, year-long celebration that God decreed in the Old Testament. You can read the details in Leviticus chapter 25. This year happened once every fifty years, so for most people it was literally a once in a lifetime celebration. This year was a special year that showed God's unchanging favor, his undeserved love, to his people. We will highlight just three things from the year of Jubilee. Here are the three things. One year of vacation. Freedom for slaves. Return to your home property.

Hey, you had me at one year of vacation! One year of vacation! Yes, one year of vacation! Could we reinstitute this? For a whole year, you did not work. You were not allowed to work. If you worked even

fifty years at your job, would you get a whole year of vacation? Yet the LORD, to show his favor, gave his people a whole year of vacation! What a sign of his blessing and favor! And if you were concerned that by not working your fields or harvesting crops you wouldn't have food to eat or money to pay the bills during the year of Jubilee, don't worry. God promised enough blessing in the years leading up that there would be enough food. There would be enough to pay the bills. You could take a whole year of vacation and be just fine. You have God's favor. This one year of vacation pictured perfect and eternal rest in heaven. The everlasting rest in the arms of Jesus.

One year of vacation, freedom for slaves. It would happen that people would get into debt. Sometimes their debts would be so severe that even after they sold everything, they would have to sell themselves and their services. It was almost kind of a slavery. But in the year of Jubilee, everyone went free, whether or not their debts had been paid off. God even said in Deuteronomy 15, "If someone has to sell you his services, don't be stingy and think, 'The year of cancelling debts is near. The year to let slaves go free is close. I'm going to have to let him go free.' No. Instead, let him work for you, but when it's time, let him go free. Send him away with gifts to help him start his new life."

Talk about the freedom we have in Christ. We were slaves to the devil, wanting to do only his will, trying to convince ourselves sin was really living. Then Jesus came and freed us from our sins by his blood. Now we are truly free, free forever, free through the Lord's favor.

Right, we said three things: one year of vacation, freedom for slaves, return to your property. In the promised land of Israel, no one really ever sold property, you really only rented property until the next year of Jubilee. In fact, God even said, "If someone has to sell property, what he is really selling is the number of crops that can be harvested. Lower the price as the year of Jubilee gets closer." You see, the land really didn't belong to the people. The land belonged to the Lord. The people were just renting it from God. There's a good lesson for us that everything is the Lord's and he is just letting us use it for a little while.

Now, can you imagine the jubilation when everyone got to return to their own property, go home? The land that belonged to grandma and grandpa, the land where you played as a kid, returned to you. You got to go back. It was yours again. Better than going back home for the holidays and finding out the backyard wasn't as big as you remembered it and grandma isn't around anymore and your fun uncle is kind of old now. You can always go back to Jesus. If this year was a year of straying from God, that's ok. You can start over, start off this New Year in the arms of Jesus, certain of his favor. His favor isn't just for one year every 50, but for every year and every day. You will go home to heaven. Maybe this year, maybe next, maybe not for another 50. But God's favor will take you home to heaven. That's something God will never change. Proclaim the year of the LORD's favor! Amen!