

Occasion: New Year's Eve

Text: Numbers 6:22-27; Galatians 3:23-29; Luke 2:21

Title: "Blessed to be a Blessing!"

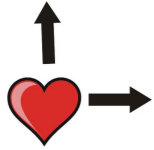
Date: 12-31-2009

Introduction:

A young couple went shopping to buy furniture for the apartment they had just rented. They needed everything, from kitchen to living room to bedroom furniture. The husband had just graduated college and the couple had gotten married before they relocated to the city where he had been hired for his first job. Their shopping adventure began at the second hand store, since they had very limited resources. They came upon an old kitchen table that definitely showed its use. But it was made of solid wood and still very sturdy. The husband was a bit reluctant to buy it because of its well worn appearance. But his anxious bride assured him, *"It's Okay dear. It's a good sturdy table, large enough to seat many guests. I'll just throw a table cloth over it and it will be fine!"* Since the price was a real bargain, the husband conceded to his wife's enthusiasm. It's amazing what a nice new tablecloth can do for an old beat-up table.



Setting:



When God finished creating everything, all that He had made was perfect, pure, and working as it was suppose to. The birds were flying, the fish were swimming, the reptiles and mammals were crawling or walking. And the first man and the first woman, well, they loved God with a pure and undivided heart, and they loved each other with a pure and selfless devotion.

But, you know how the story goes. The first man and first woman did not stay perfect and pure. When they turned away from God to go their own way and pursue their own desires, their love was corrupted. Instead of remaining a love that was directed outward, toward God and to each other, their love turned inward, to a love of self above all else. Self interests replaced God's Will for their lives. Selfish ambition replaced humility, kindness, and godness for others above self.



How quickly what was new, perfect, and desirable had become old, corrupt and despised. What God had made, man had ruined. The Good News that we all celebrate is God is mercifully willing to go into the "second hand shop" and to buy what is imperfect, scared, and in poor condition.

I. ISRAEL: A PEOPLE COVERED WITH GOD'S NAME:

In the Old Testament Lesson, we see God at work, having bought an old table and getting ready to use it for His glory. What is that old table you ask that God bought and paid for? The answer is not a what, but a who -> the answer is Israel.

After God brought Israel out of Egypt under Moses, Moses tells us in Scripture:

¹In the third month after the Israelites left Egypt—on the very day—they came to the Desert of Sinai. ²After they set out from Rephidim, they entered the Desert of Sinai, and Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain.

³Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: ⁴'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself.'" - *Exodus 19:1-3*

When Moses went up on Mt. Sinai God instructed Moses to go and tell the Israelites that they had just been bought and paid for. God had afflicted the Egyptians with the 10 plagues and at the Red Sea, delivering the Israelites from slavery so they may live as God's people. God both fought against Egypt and for Israel. In the end, Egypt lost possession of the Israelites as slaves and God gained possession of the Israelites as His people. So God instructs Moses to go and tell the Israelites, *"You yourselves have seen that I fought against Egypt, and I fought for you. I have brought you to Myself. You are mine! I have a plan to use you for My glory."*

Now the thing that distinguishes an old table from people is that when you buy an old table, and it's yours, the table is not going to resist you, go its own way, or reject how you plan to use it. A table is inanimate, not alive. You buy the table, take it home, put it where you want it, throw a table cloth over it, and it's good to go, it's ready to use! No fuss! No arguing from the table about how you are using it!

People, however, are not a table. God bought and paid for Israel. Israel belonged to God. But was Israel ready to be used according to the purpose for which God bought and paid for them? Or, would Israel say to God, *"Thanks God! But, 'No' Thanks! Thanks God for bringing us out of slavery. But 'No' Thanks! We don't want to be used in the way You want to use us. We have other plans for ourselves! So long!"*

What was God's plan for Israel, whom He had just bought and paid for? God continued as He spoke to Moses:

⁵Now if you obey Me fully and keep My Covenant, then out of all nations you will be My treasured possession. Although the whole earth is Mine, ⁶you will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites." - *Exodus 19:5-6*

In effect, God said to Israel, "I have bought and paid for you, brought you to Myself, and you can be for Me a treasured possession. Are you ready to be used according to the plans I have for you?"

What was God's plan for His treasured possession? **"You will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."** A priest offered sacrifices to God on behalf of those who brought them. A priest was a mediator, a "go-between". Israel was to be the people on earth through whom the other nations would be brought to God. Israel was to be a holy nation, that is, a nation set apart from all the other nations – a nation set apart from corruption and set apart unto God. As the other nations saw God blessing Israel through the special relationship they had with God, so the other nations would seek God's blessings and be brought to God through Israel. You might say that **"Israel was blessed by God, to be a blessing to others."** (Genesis 12:2-3).

In the Old Testament Lesson, from Numbers chapter 6, we have what is known as the "Aaronic Blessing" – that is, the blessing that God had the high priest Aaron and his sons as priests, put upon Israel, – a blessing in which God put His Name on Israel as His people, called according to His purpose. In the "Aaronic Blessing" Israel was blessed by God, to be a blessing to all. You know this blessing well:

²³Tell Aaron and his sons,
This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them:

²⁴The LORD bless you and keep you;
²⁵The LORD make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you;
²⁶The LORD turn His face toward you and give you peace."

²⁷"So they will put My Name on the Israelites, and I will bless them." – Numbers 6:23-27

II. THE CHURCH: A PEOPLE COVERED WITH GOD'S NAME:

Now, you may be thinking, "So far, pastor, you've been talking about Israel. You've been talking about a people who lived thousands of years ago in a land thousands of miles away. What's that have to do with me? Why do I care about something that is so distant in time and place?"

What is true of Israel is true of you! What is true for what God did for Israel is true for what God has done for you! God has fought for you! God has delivered you from slavery to sin! God has brought you, not to Mt. Sinai, but to Mt. Calvary! God has called you to be for Him part of "a Kingdom of priests and a holy nation!" (1 Peter 2:9-10). God has blessed you! God has also put His Triune Name upon you! Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He told His disciples:

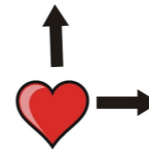
¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. – Matthew 28:19-20

When you were Baptized, God did for you in His Triune Name all that God did for Israel when He brought them out of slavery in Egypt to Mt. Sinai! You are the old, scared table that God has chosen, brought to Himself and God has covered with His Name. You have been blessed by God to be a blessing to others. The apostle Paul put it this way in the Epistle Lesson:

²⁶You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, ²⁷for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. – Galatians 3:26-27

God has thrown the pure, white, unspotted sheet of Christ's holy life and sacrificial death over you, to cover all your sin, all your guilt, all your shame. God has delivered you from slavery to sin, that He may use you to His glory, according to His plan. **You have been blessed to be a blessing!**

How can you be a blessing? A blessing to God? A blessing to others? Very simple! Be what God originally created you to be! Be what God recreated you in Christ to be!



⁵"May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ." – 2 Thessalonians 3:5

⁵"But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." – 1 Timothy 1:5

How can you be a blessing? Love God with an undivided heart. Love others with a selfless, unconditional, sacrificial love.

Conclusion:

Ten years ago tonight we and the world were on the Eve not only of a New Year, but a New Millennium. I don't know about you, but for me, I can hardly believe that 10 years have passed since all the preparation and all the hype about Y2K. Yet, here we are 10 years later. Tonight, we are on the Eve of a new decade – 2010 (the year TwentyTen). As I look back over the past year, the past decade and over my life time, I know I have been **Blessed by God**. I know you seen God's hand of Blessing upon you! How thankful I am for the gift of life and the gift of a New Life in Christ! What a blessing!

Yet, as I have been Blessed by God, I look back over the past year, over my life, and I know that I have not always been a Blessing to others. I have said things I should not have said, I have done things I should not have done. Sad to say, this table that I am is scared and scratched, nicked and marred. Thank God that over my failures and my faults, God has thrown the table cloth of Christ, covering my guilt and my shame with His forgiveness and His righteousness. Only as I trust Christ, only as I live Christ, can I go forward in life and into the New Year, hoping that in my life God may use me to be a blessing to others, to my wife, my children, this church, the community, and the church at large. What is true for me in Christ, is true for you. May 2010 and every year of life with which God blesses you, be a time that **as you have been blessed by God, you may be a blessing to others, covered by God's grace and God's love in Christ.** AMEN