

The Year of God's Favor 2021

by Annie Poonen

This sermon reflects on the past year's challenges and blessings, while looking forward to the new year with hope and faith in God's favor. It emphasizes the importance of spiritual poverty, humility, and dependence on Jesus to enter God's kingdom. The message highlights the good news of the kingdom of God, which includes righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. It encourages believers to remember God's past faithfulness, trust in His provision, and seek spiritual growth and freedom from oppression and spiritual blindness.

Scripture: Luke 4:18, Matthew 5:3, Romans 14:17, Psalms 50:15, 2 Peter 1:9, Luke 8:15

Topics: "Hope for the New Year", "Spiritual Growth and Dependence on God"

Description

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Transcript

Generally, at the end of the year, we have a chance to reflect on the year that has just passed, and then we think of the coming year. So that's what I did at the end of this year, last year, we were together with our family and I had a little more time to meditate on God's word. And I thought of the year 2020 and so many things which happened, which were unusual.

We all know this pandemic and all the challenges that came with the pandemic, changes in our lifestyle, in our husband's jobs, in our work, dealing with the children, their schooling, so many things. Each of us have a lot of things we can remember and the way the Lord led us so wonderfully. And then I was thinking of the coming year, as we all do, we say, Lord, bless this coming year for us, make it a blessing.

And in my reading, I read something which really, really blessed me. I was reading from Luke chapter 4 and verses 18. You can open your Bibles to Luke chapter 4 verses 18 and 19.

And we meditate on that. But this verse struck me, the year of the Lord's favor. And I said, Lord, is this going to be the year of your favor? Like every year since Jesus came is the year of the Lord's favor.

But Lord, make it specially favorable to us, if it is your will to do so. And I read the previous verses and that's what I want to share about. But before that, I want to share two wonderful promises which the Lord gave.

And we all, many of us have claimed those promises in the new year. That's found in Deuteronomy chapter 11. In Deuteronomy chapter 11 and verse 12, in the King James Version, it says, it will be for the eyes of the Lord are on this land from the beginning till the end of the year.

Deuteronomy 11, 12. And verse 21 says, you know, verse 21 is as long as the heavens above the earth. And it says the days of heaven on earth, verse 21.

It will be like the days of heaven on earth. And I said, Lord, please make it like the days of heaven on earth for me, even though there's so much of hardship and physically things we find it difficult to cope. But can you make it a little more like the days of heaven on earth? And I want to share those two promises.

Now, coming back to Luke chapter 4, meditating on those verses. It was the time when Jesus had begun his earthly ministry and his public ministry. He had taken baptism and he had the Holy Spirit had come upon him.

And he was led by the spirit to go into the wilderness fasting for 40 days and 40 nights. And there he was tempted and tested by the devil. After that, he came down and he went to the synagogue.

And he stood up there and they gave him the scroll from Prophet Isaiah. And he read that and he read these verses. Now, we think like after time of fasting and prayer, one would feel so tired and exhausted.

But that was like the beginning and the zenith of the ministry that Jesus had. And the Lord started using him mightily. The father started using him mightily from that day.

And he read these verses. He said, the spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. We stop at that.

Jesus said he came, the spirit of the Lord anointed him to proclaim. It was not just like a whispering to us in our ear. This is going to be a blessed year for you or something like that.

It was a proclamation loud and clear so that everybody in the world, the whole world could hear something great is going to happen from the time Jesus came into this world. To proclaim good news to the poor. Now we know just stopping at that to the poor.

Many of us when we are in times of poverty, we claim this verse. Lord, I'm really, I'm in need of this. My husband is in need of a job.

We are struggling financially. Please meet our need. And God takes us and answers our prayer.

But it's more than that. It's the spiritual poverty that I want to talk about. In Matthew 5, it says, blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God.

That's the poverty of spirit which Jesus must have been talking about. What is it to be poor in spirit? A poor person is always needy. He or she always has a sense of need.

I have lack of something. Spiritually, I'm in need. And when we come to the Lord like that, Lord, I'm in need.

You know, many times after we hear the teachings in the new covenant and we know and we begin to understand more and more and we think, yeah, I got it now. This is the secret. I just have to do such and such.

And we have some steps and we follow that and we think we've got it. Then we lose that. We lose sight of that poverty which we need to have.

But if we daily, if we have that sense of poverty, Lord, even though I know so much, I've heard so much. I'm such a needy person. Without you, I'm nothing.

I'm zero. As we heard, I can accomplish nothing. I'll be a failure.

I lose even the little which I had. My vessel will become empty. I'm in need of you, Lord.

We need to come daily at God's gate, knocking at the Lord's gate like that and say, Lord, I'm poor. I'm really a needy person. And that humility we cannot produce by ourselves.

You know, sometimes we can have a sense of humility. I'm nothing. But deep down, we feel we are somebody.

We are got some little bit of knowledge and experience and we can fool ourselves. But when we come to the Lord and we say, Lord, teach me humility. Teach me a poverty of spirit from you.

Jesus said in Matthew 11, 29, come and learn of me for I am meek and lowly. That poverty of spirit we can learn only from Jesus. I cannot teach anyone else.

But only the Lord Jesus can teach me and give me that poverty which I need. You know, being poor in spirit is like the key. That was the first verse, first word that Jesus said, blessed are the poor in spirit.

Theirs is the kingdom of God. It's like the key to enter into God's kingdom. The very first thing we need is to have that poverty of spirit.

Without that, we are nowhere. But we can, once we have that, we enter into God's kingdom and all of God's kingdom can belong to us. And Jesus said he came to proclaim the good news of the kingdom.

Good news is gospel. The word good news means gospel. And we know the gospel of the kingdom of God.

I mentioned once before in Romans 4, 17, it says the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. That's the kingdom of God. We think kingdom of God is some little better life or something.

But the kingdom of God is Christ's life, Christ's righteousness. First, let me talk about the righteousness. We think like we are righteous people and we reach somewhere because we see a lot of improvement after we come to the Lord.

We see that we're changing little by little. Not we, the Lord is changing us. We become more careful about our words.

We try our best to speak the truth at all times. We try our best to love everybody. And we see the Lord is changing us little by little.

That the beginning of the righteousness. But when we look at God's word, God's word is like a mirror. We look at God's word, the mirror of God's word, and we see ourselves.

Yes, we see a little bit of righteousness there. God's word says, don't steal, don't get angry. And we say, yeah, it's little better than what I was before.

And we can pat ourselves on the back, on our back. That's good. The Lord, thank God, is changing us.

But in that mirror, we also see Jesus, the glory of Jesus. Beyond ourselves, we see the glory of Jesus and we see him there. And we compare ourselves by looking at the mirror.

We compare ourselves with him. And we say, Lord, when I see your glory, I'm so humbled. I'm nowhere, Lord.

I want to become like you. Oh, I wish I could become more and more like you. That's the longing and yearning of our heart.

And that's what the Lord wants to do in us. It says from the beginning of the year till the end of the year. His eyes are upon us.

His eyes are on us and he wants to change us little by little to his glorious image. And we praise and thank God that we don't have to look at ourselves and condemn ourselves or have a low self-esteem of ourselves. No, but we look at Jesus and we're encouraged.

We're challenged and say, Lord, I want more of you. I want more to be more like you. I'm not satisfied with what I am.

I want to press on to greater glory, greater heights. That's what was challenging me in the beginning of this year. And we read that we also know the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace and joy.

That peace is not what the peace that the world gives. You know, Jesus, just before he left this earth, he said, My peace, I leave with you. In this world, you'll have tribulation, but I give you my peace.

And also in John, that's in John 16, verse 33 and John 15, verse 11. It says, I give you the joy. I give you my joy so that your joy will be full.

I was thinking of an example. Suppose we are coming to the bedside of a mom or dad who's dying, who's passing away and leaving this earth. And my mom says, I want to give you this ring.

It's a special ring. I wore it all my life and I want you to have it. And we treasure it so much.

We are so careful that we don't lose that. We keep it in a special place. Even if we have to leave somewhere, we see that that ring is in our handbag.

And yes, we want to keep it because it's something which our beloved mom gave us just before she left the earth. How much more it is when Jesus, just before he left this earth, he said, My child, he told the disciples, my children, my friends, I want to give you my joy. Even though I'm going to the cross, it's a special type of joy.

You'll have a lot of troubles and trials, but it's a special joy which will see you through this trial and give you my peace. In this world, you'll have a lot of tribulation. In this world, there's sickness, there's pandemic, there's poverty, there's need.

There are so many challenges, but I give you my peace. I'm going to the cross, but I look, I have a peace. That type of, that peace is the peace I'm going to give you.

How much we need to value that which our precious Lord wants to give us and has given us. We hold on to that. That is the good news that Jesus proclaimed.

He just didn't come to whisper in our ear. Oh, you're struggling. Let me give you this peace.

Let me give you this peace. No, he proclaims it. You know how the proclamation is like on a big PA system, loud for everybody to hear.

He proclaims it and he says, this is the good news to the poor. Those of us who are poor and who come to him in that poverty of spirit, this is the good news, good news of that kingdom. There's righteousness, Christ's righteousness.

There's peace and joy. And Jesus came to proclaim that to us, to each one of us. And that's the proclamation we are going to share with others, to our children.

My child will have trouble in the school. You'll have challenges. People may laugh at you.

You'll be struggling. You'll have to look at the screen all the time to learn your lessons, but it doesn't matter. Jesus has given us peace.

Jesus has overcome. He's given us his joy. He'll see us through.

Just like you say, mom is with you when you go to a dark room. Mom is holding your hand. Mom will see you through.

Just like that, we say Jesus is with you. Even if mommy's not there, Jesus is holding your hand. His peace is there.

His joy is there for you. And that's the proclamation we can give to our children, our loved ones, and anyone who's struggling, our dear sisters in Christ. In Hebrews 8, it says about the new covenant.

On one side, we see our wretchedness, but when we look at the mirror, we see our wretchedness and we see how slow we are in progress. But in Hebrews 8, 10, the Lord says, I'll give you a new covenant. This covenant is not like the old covenant, where you have to work hard and hard and you have to pay your tithes and you have to do this and that.

And still, you never know whether you'll come up to my standards. But in this new covenant, it's different. I will put a desire in you.

Hebrews 8, 10. I put a desire in your heart that you'll want to be my child. You'll want to be Jesus.

And not only that, I'll put a will and I'll work in your mind. I'll work in your heart and I'll work in your mind. And I'll make you have that will to do this, to take this, to walk this new and living way, to follow me.

I'll give you that will. And more than that, I'll give you the strength because I'll give you the power of the Holy Spirit to walk just as I want. How much more, what more do we need? If he gives us the desire, he gives us the will, he gives us the strength to walk this way.

That is the good news that we think that just accepting Jesus and we are on our way to heaven. But dear sister, there's so much more. The good news is that Jesus can help us to have more, more than what we had in the last year, a much better life than we had last year, a more fulfilling life, more like heaven on earth for us.

All that we have to do is ask him. In Psalm 50 verse 15, there's a wonderful verse. Let's read that verse.

Psalm 50 verse 15, and call upon me in the day of trouble. I will deliver you and you shall glorify me. All that we need to do is call him.

Lord, I need your strength at this time. This temptation which I'm facing, I've never faced before. Will you please help me? I call upon you and his promises, he will deliver us.

And there's a wonderful verse in verse 23. The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me. The one who orders his way rightly, I will show the salvation of God.

We call upon him and we offer to him a sacrifice of thanksgiving. Lord, I thank you that you're there near me when I want to call upon you. When I've called upon you, you'll answer me, offer that thanksgiving and he'll take care of us.

Now we come to the next part of that Luke chapter four, the wonderful passage where Jesus came to proclaim. The father sent him to proclaim liberty to the captives. And I thought of the captivity that the Lord delivered us when we were born again, when we had a sense, a little bit, a glimpse of what wretched sinners we were.

And the Lord saw us bound in our shackles and we could not free ourselves. He came to proclaim and he gave us this wonderful message. I have died for your sins.

I've come to set you free. And he set us free and gave us the gift of salvation. Praise God for that gift of salvation.

But there's more to that. We know that as we have come to see more and more, that it's not just that Jesus has forgiven our sins, but Jesus can give us victory over our sins. So the times that we were people who were bound by our temper, by our anxieties, by our moodiness and by irritable nature, so many things we were bound by and the Lord forgave our past.

And the Lord says, I can set you free. There's more freedom for you. You don't have to be anxious anymore.

There's victory for you. Romans 6.14 says, sin shall not have dominion over you. Your anger won't rule over you.

Your irritable nature won't. You don't have to flare up. I'll see to it that you are done with that, that flaring up nature, that moodiness, that snapping at people, that not wanting to talk to people out of anger, whatever it is, anxiety about the future, can't cope with our circumstances.

All those things the Lord says, you are a captive to that. I'll set you free from that. Praise God for that wonderful message of the new covenant.

And you know, the devil always wants to bring us to captivity. We think, oh, now I've got the secret. I've learned the secret.

I'm going to have a treat today. I'll do this, this, this. I'll try to call out to the Lord.

But the devil has got more cunning ways to bring us into captivity. The Lord says, doesn't matter. I'll still set you free.

You be on the alert. Pray. Hold fast the shield of faith.

Don't give in to the temptations. Be vigilant and I'll take care of you. I'll still, I'll continue to see that you don't fall into captivity and our life will be more and more glorious, better than last year.

This year we'll have more areas where we have conquered by faith, by God's grace. And also it says that he came to proclaim and he set liberty those who are oppressed. Verse 18 says, he sets free those who are oppressed.

The word oppressed makes us feel like we are pressed under pressure. So much pressure because of all the new things that are coming up, the new challenges. Our children have gone one grade higher.

They have to study harder. The teacher may not be so understanding. And we have to cope with our health problems.

We are growing older and weaker. We have to deal with our health problems. We have to deal with our husband's jobs.

They have to work harder because they are working from home. They have to show that they are really working. They have to be in the radar that they are working.

Otherwise they may lose their job or somebody else may get the job. So, so much of pressure and the Lord says, I have come to set at liberty those of you who are oppressed. So there also we have hope for this year.

Whenever we feel that we are oppressed, we can say, Lord, by your grace, I can be set free. Your mighty power will set me free from all this oppression that I'm facing. We do our part, call upon him and we obey him and do our part, not go in the rear, go anywhere near where we are going to be tempted and be true to him and he'll do his part by setting us free.

And talking about oppression, I sometimes have to ask myself, am I oppressing someone? Am I oppressing my children in any way? Because of the pressures which I'm facing, am I oppressing my children? Am I oppressing my fellow sisters? Am I oppressing my husband because I'm having some weakness or struggles and he's under pressure? Or my wife, can she handle this? And say, Lord, I cast all my cares on you. This burden is too much. I don't want to cast it on anyone else.

I cast it on you, Lord. You said, cast your burden on the Lord for he cares for you. I just do that and the Lord, we can trust the Lord to take care of us.

Then we come to, in the middle of that verse 18 says, he's come to proclaim recovery of sight to the blind. Physically also, I find that my eyesight is getting weaker and I say, Lord, I want you to help me to cope with this and help me to cope with it. So I get Bible with a big print and I try to read it and do things which are easier for me.

But more than the physical blindness is the spiritual blindness that I want to talk about. Lord, am I spiritually blind to anything? When I look at the mirror, I see a little bit. But show me a little more clearly.

Put that eye salve which you spoke in Revelation in my eyes so that I can see more clearly where I am and what you want me to be. Don't let me be discouraged thinking of my wretchedness. But let me have hope when I see you.

Just open my eyes to see more of your glory. Open my eyes to see the riches of your kingdom. Open my eyes to see what wonderful things you have for me and my family and my loved ones.

Take away all the spiritual blindness. Help me not to be content with what I am, but to long for greater partaking, partaking more and more of your glory. You know, in 1 Peter, in 2 Peter 1, it says that, 2 Peter 1 verse 9, it says, don't forget your former purification.

Don't forget the pit from which God has picked us up. We need to sometimes look back on that and say, Lord, what was I? I was living in sin. There are so many hidden things in my life which others don't know, but you graciously covered it all up.

And I live like a hypocrite. But you've been so gracious. You covered it up.

Help me never to forget that. Help me never to be unthankful. Help me to be always thankful that you have been so forgiving.

I want to remember my former purification. And we should not be blind to the needs of others. Say, Lord, open my eyes to see the need of my husband.

He needs encouragement at this time. Open my eyes to see the need of my children. She's my daughter, my son who's struggling.

Open my eyes to see the need of my fellow sisters. They have their own challenges. Help me not to be content with what I am and where I am.

Open my eyes so that I can do what you want me to do. Maybe send a meal. Maybe just send a text message or a phone message encouraging our dear sister who's going through some trial at this time.

So may the Lord open our eyes to see the need of others. And sometimes when I look back at my life and I think of the ways, some of the ways in which God did wonderful things for me, that lifts up my spirit and helps me to be thankful more and more. So one or two things come to my mind.

One, I can say a few years ago, we were traveling. We were going to a village, a town called Hubli from Bangalore. We were going to take a train and go there.

And we had to cross the railway bridge, cross the many platforms to go to this platform where this train to that place where we had to get the train. So instead of crossing all those bridges, we thought we'd go by a back gate and go to a small, go to that platform through the back gate. And that was the wrong decision

we made because the light, it was night and the light was very poor.

And that platform was a platform where they load and unload big bags, sacks of grain or cement or something onto trucks. So we had to sort of, and it was uneven ground. So we had to walk very carefully in the dim light and try not to fall, not to trip over and go past these trucks to find our train and our seat.

So my husband was walking a little bit ahead of me and I was walking with a brother who was carrying our luggage. We were just going for the weekend. So we were walking in that dim light and we've just passed a truck and all of a sudden a very heavy bar, iron bar fell just between me and my husband.

My husband had just passed it and it brushed my hair and my clothes and fell at my feet. It was so heavy that it vibrated the ground and I thought it hit my toe, but it didn't hit my toe, only the vibration was there. So powerful was the vibration and I was so struck by thought in, I just missed death and my husband missed death just by a few inches or millimeters.

If that iron bar had hit him, he would have died, if it had hit me. I mean, I could feel it just going in front of my face. If it had hit me, that would have been the end of me.

And when I got into the train and my toe was hurting, but it was maybe imaginary or maybe that vibration. So I put a bandage on my toe and I sat and throughout that journey, that night journey, I was sort of trembling with amazement and said, Lord, how wonderful, how good you are that you saved my life by a breadth of like a quarter of an inch, the breadth that much. You care for me and you care for my husband.

How will I ever forget this incident in my life? And sometimes I look back on that incident and I say, Lord, you said that you care for the, even the hairs on my head are numbered and you care for the birds, but this incident is so vivid, I can never forget it. And so I know that every day of my life matters to you. Every day of my life, whether I'm going to be sick or whether I'm going to be healthy, everything will matter to you because you are taking care.

You took care of me so wonderfully and you showed me that you are there for me and you are holding me and you're going to take care of me. So that every now and then I look back on that incident and I thank God and say, Lord, you take care of me. And I know instances like that in my children's lives, my grandchildren's lives, where God has protected and many of our sisters where God has protected.

Dear sisters, sometimes think of some incident which God has done. Then all these trials that we face now will become so small. Right now we have some trials, maybe they are big, but they will be so small when we think of some life and death experience where God has saved us from life, from death and brought us into life.

I think of big things like that sometimes and at the end of the year, I think of that and say, Lord, so many years back, you kept me alive. You saved my life. I want to continue to live for you.

Then sometimes I think of mundane things, you know, everyday things that happen to us. Everyday we get up. We have to cook for our family.

We have to do the dishes. We have to do the laundry. We have to check our children's studies.

We have to be alert. We have to make sure that we are fit enough to do our work and other things. All these mundane things come to us.

And then I sometimes think of that and I think life sometimes is so boring. And then I think of another incident, not incident, something happened in my life. And, you know, you all might know, some of you might know that I love gardening.

I don't have much of a yard to garden. I have a little patch, but there I plant on one section. I plant some edible things, you know, greens and some vegetables.

But most of those get eaten up by rodents and caterpillars. So that I get frustrated with that. Then in another section, I plant some medicinal plants like lemongrass and aloe vera and some Indian herbs, which are good for cough and cold and things like that.

They have got Indian names. So then the sister who used to stay in our house, she planted aloe vera. And we all know the benefit of aloe vera, how good it is for burns and for the skin.

And so the aloe vera plant became bigger and more baby plants came and we transplanted in pots and more and more aloe vera. And then the one thing wonderful about the aloe vera is it doesn't need any fertilizer, doesn't need much water, and it grows in sandy soils. So that was so easy to have this aloe vera.

And it looked like I was having a plantation of aloe vera. It was just growing and growing. I didn't have a place to keep it.

So I planted it on the ground and they became so big. And then I thought, oh, I'm tired of this aloe vera. And all that I can see is this fleshy leaf and these thorns.

And anybody who comes into the house, the first thing they see is this aloe vera. They don't see anything interesting. So let me pull out this aloe vera, at least some of it and throw them away.

But then I scooped out some of the flesh and kept them in the gel, kept them in the fridge and preserved it like that. But still, this aloe vera was getting so boring for me. Then every morning I used to go look at my plants and enjoy the dawn and do water the plants.

So one morning I looked at the aloe vera plant and I saw something different coming out of it. And I thought, this can't be, this is another plant which I planted. When did I plant this one? I looked, no, it was coming straight from the aloe vera, a tiny shoot coming up, straight up.

And I tugged at it, it was connected with the aloe vera. I thought, okay, let me see. And I waited and that shoot became so tall and stiff, straight up it grew.

And in a few days time, a cluster of the most beautiful flowers, pink like the sunset color, little bells, that cluster of those flowers stood up there. And I said, oh my, this is really a lesson for me. I was tired of the aloe vera, just like my life must be so tiresome to the Lord.

But the Lord says, no, there's hope for you. There's something beautiful that's going to come out of your life, which is not only medicinal, but will give joy to others, encouragement to others, healing to others. There's something more beautiful.

And I read this verse, which I want to share with you in closing, Luke 8, 15. It's about that seed, which is planted on good soil. When the Lord said about the parable of the good seed, which fell on good soil.

He says, there are people who hear the word, hear the word, they hold fast in an honest and good heart. And bear fruit with patience. Yes, patience, that's what I needed with the aloe vera plant.

And that's the patience which God has with me. The soil, the seed which falls on good soil, they hear the word of God. People who hear the word of God, hold fast to it in an honest and good heart.

I want to memorize it. Hear God's word, hold fast to it in an honest and good heart. And you bear fruit with patience.

Praise the Lord. In this year, we have hope. It's not going to be a monotonous year.

It's going to be a glorious year by faith. Days of heaven on earth. When the Lord cares for us from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.

And he's patient with us. And he'll bring something good out of our lives. Something beautiful, something that will bless others.

Something that will give joy to others and joy to our Lord. Praise the Lord. Amen.

So in the closing prayer, our Heavenly Father, we praise and thank you for the wonderful life you've given us, living in the new covenant. Thank you, Lord, that we didn't live in the Old Testament days. But you allowed us to come to this earth in the days after you came into this world, Lord Jesus.

Thank you for the glorious life which you have for us. Thank you for the last year with all these challenges that you saw us safely through. Our pain and our sorrow.

You gave us comfort and joy. Lord, we thank you for this year. You helped us to begin this year.

We want to commit this year and we commit ourselves on the altar. We pray that you will take our lives and make us a blessing. Make it a joy to you, Lord.

Help us to be diligent to take up the cross and follow you. Help us to be diligent to please you, not to live for ourselves, not to live in self-complacency, but to have faith in you. Not to have low self-esteem, but to have confidence in you, Lord, that through you, we can do great things.

Through you, our children can do great things because they are trusting in you. Yes, Lord, we and our families and all of us, we trust in you to lead us each day of this year. We ask these things in Jesus' precious name.

Amen.

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