PREACHING & TEACHING

New Year Sermon

A New Year sermon framework that does not run on resolutions. Built for the first Sunday of January, when the congregation is tired rather than inspired, and the honest thing to preach is not self-improvement but what carries over from a year that did not go to plan.

20 min preached · 6 segments

Six movements, twenty minutes. The anti-resolution framing is written out; your congregation's particular year is yours to name.

BEFORE YOU RECORD

- Resist the resolution sermon. Every congregation has heard it, most people have already broken theirs by the time you preach, and it quietly teaches that faith is self-improvement with a religious accent.
- Attendance is usually low and the people present are often the most committed. That is an argument for preaching something meatier than you would on Christmas Eve, not thinner.
- Name last year specifically. A church that went through something real in the last twelve months and hears a generic new-start sermon will feel unseen.

01. The hook: what did not reset

2 min

[start with the thing the calendar does not fix]

Everything that was true on the thirty-first was still true on the first. The same job, the same diagnosis, the same silence from the same person. A calendar changed. Nothing else did.

[name two or three things your congregation carried across the line, without naming people]

02. The text

3 min

[Lamentations 3 or Joshua 4 - both are about memory, not fresh starts]

[read Lamentations 3:19-24, or Joshua 4:1-9 if you want the stones]

Lamentations is a funeral poem for a destroyed city. The famous line about mercies being new every morning sits in the middle of it, written by someone watching the worst thing he could imagine having already happened. That context is the whole reason the line is worth anything.

03. The tension: the resolution trap

3 min

[say the quiet part - most of the room has already failed at something]

January preaching usually offers a fresh start, and there is a version of that which is genuinely cruel. It says that if this year goes badly too, that is on you. It turns grace into a productivity system.

And most people in this room have already broken something they promised themselves, six days in.

[pause]

04. The turn: mercies, not resets

5 min

[the claim - daily, not annual]

The text does not say mercies are new every January. It says every morning. Which is a much smaller unit and a much more demanding one, because it means you cannot bank it in advance and you cannot fail at it for a whole year.

A year is too big a thing to be faithful in. A morning is not.

[your material, 450 words spoken - one illustration]

05. Application: build a marker

4 min

[Joshua 4 pays off here even if you read Lamentations]

In Joshua, twelve men carry twelve stones out of a river and pile them on the bank, for one stated reason: so that when your children ask what these stones mean, you have to tell them the story.

That is a better January practice than a resolution. Not a list of what you intend to become, but a record of what actually happened and what carried you. Write down one thing from last year you would otherwise forget.

[your application, 200 words - make it something doable this week]

06. The close

2 min

[short - and do not promise a good year]

I am not going to tell you this year will be better. I do not know that, and neither do you, and a preacher who promises it is writing a cheque on an account he cannot see.

[your one closing sentence, then silence]

USAGE

Free to use. Preach it, adapt it, record it, publish it under your own name, and keep whatever you earn from it. No credit required.

Record it with Hilite — hellohilite.com
Studio-quality audio from your laptop mic. Free to start.