



The Lord Bless You

Numbers 6:22-27

November 30, 2011

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We're going to look this morning at Numbers chapter 6 and the promise blessing that God commands Aaron and his sons, through Moses, to speak over the nation of Israel and as we look at it, I want for us to think about it in the light of what we have seen over the last couple of weeks.

We've seen the steadfast, unchanging and eternal love of God for us in Romans 8, and the welcoming, forgiving, gracious, and pursuing heart of God for us in the story of the Prodigal. But why does God love us like that? For what purpose does God love us like that? We see the answer to that question in the text that we are going to look at today, an Old Testament text that is rich with meaning, Numbers 6. I want us to see this morning the heart of God to bless His people. This is the heart of God for His covenant people – that we would be the recipients of His blessing. That is the heart of God for His people, that he would bless us and give us Himself. Look at it with me:

(Numbers 6:22–27, ESV)

I want to set the context for this text that we are looking at today. National Israel had been delivered from slavery in Egypt by the mighty hand of God. They had been constituted as the people of God, having been given the Law at Mt Sinai -- the laws for their new life as a nation -- and having promised to obey all that the Lord had commanded them and entering into covenant with Him. God is dwelling with them in the Tabernacle. Israel is worshipping and drawing near to God according to the rituals and the sacrifices that He has ordained for them. They had been making preparations to leave for the Promised Land and as they are about to go, as they are about to embark on a journey that will be arduous and dangerous and trying, God

commands Aaron to give to the people these words of assurance, words which will be repeated to the nation when they come to worship, words of promise and of blessing from God. This is not a prayer, not a supplication, not a request by Aaron – these words are a promise from God to His people through His priest. God pronounced His blessing through Aaron and his sons to the nation of Israel as they began their journey to the Promised Land.

Now one of the immediate questions is this. How can God promise such blessing to people who are sinners? Doesn't God hate sin? Yes. He abhors and detests it. He turns his face away from sin so how can God bless sinners like this. The answer is found in the context for this blessing. When would Aaron and his sons pronounce this blessing over the nation of Israel? Well, the priests were given authority by God to lead the nation of Israel into the presence of God through the prescribed worship, and as part of that worship, Aaron the high priest was to speak a blessing to the people of Israel and OT scholars understand that formal blessing that he would speak to the nation of Israel from this day forward would be this one given in Numbers 6.

Leviticus 9 gives to us a picture of how this blessing would be given. Aaron comes forth from the Holy of Holies after sacrificing the sin offering, the burnt offering, and the peace offering in that order – an order that was very important. First, God dealt with sin through the sin offering; second, the worshipers confessed their devotion to God through the burnt offering and grain offering; and third, through the peace offering, fellowship and communion were established between the Lord, His priest and the worshipers. After these offerings were carried out, Aaron would stretch out his blood stained hands over the people and pronounce this blessing upon the Israelites.

This is an awesome promise from God to Israel, so what does this have to do with us. Simply this. This blessing is not only for Israel of old, mediated through Aaron and sons, the High Priests for the nation of Israel. This blessing, in fact, finds its true fulfillment in Jesus Christ, God's Great High Priest. It finds its fulfillment in the One who is both the Great High Priest, of whom Aaron was just a shadow, and who is the True Sacrifice which the sin offering, and burnt offering, and peace offering could all together only point to. From the book of Hebrews, we see it clearly that it is Jesus Christ who came as high priest (Heb 9:11) and as the mediator of a new covenant (Heb. 9:15) who entered once and for all into the holy places not by means of the blood of goats and calves, but by means of His own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption (Heb, 9:12). All the blessings of God find their source in Him who was cursed for our sake so that we might be blessed by God in Him.

This Aaronic blessing that we see in Numbers 6 finds its complete fulfillment in Spiritual Israel, in the church, through the ministry of the Great High Priest, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. God blesses us through our Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ who makes the full and final sacrifice for our sins. He, Himself. Jesus pays the penalty for our transgression so that God can bless us. Our Great High Priest speaks over us, who are Spiritual Israel, the unchanging blessing of God because He is our sacrifice. What Aaron and the sacrifices only foreshadowed, Christ has completely fulfilled.

So, this blessing is not just the heart of God for ancient Israel, it is the heart of God for His people today. It is as if Jesus, his hands stained with the blood of His own sacrifice of Himself, with outstretched hands raised over us, is blessing us and bestowing life to us. That is great reality behind this picture of Aaron and nation of Israel. So what is the promise of God to us, here? How do we understand these words? What is God promising to His covenant people, to you and me, if we are in Christ? Let's look at this blessing and feel the heart of God for us, for His people. Read the text again with me: (Numbers 6:22–27, ESV)

What do we need to see? Well, first, we need to see from the very beginning the emphasis in each of these phrases that the Lord, Yahweh, is the only source of true blessing. Five times in this very short God makes it abundantly clear that He and He alone is able to bless His people. The Lord bless, the Lord make, the Lord lift up, my name, I will bless... God wants to make sure that we understand that all that we need, all that we must have, all that is worth having comes from Him and through Him and is found in Him. Israel as a whole never seemed to learn that lesson. They were always searching for life in other places. Always chasing after other gods who were no gods at all. They sought for life and satisfaction and security and deliverance, it seems, in a myriad of other places rather than simply believing the truth of God. Life and satisfaction and hope and joy can only come from God alone. He the is source of real and true and lasting blessing and that is fact that we must not only know intellectually but we need to know in our souls and believe with all of our hearts. Yahweh is the only source of any blessing that is worth having and it is only in Him that we will be truly satisfied because as he described Himself to Moses He is "the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty..."(Exodus 34:6–7, ESV) God alones is the source of all true blessing and look at the words he commands Aaron to speak:

“The Lord bless you and keep you;” (Numbers 6:24, ESV) What does it mean for the Lord to bless you? That is a good question. When we talk about blessing, our tendency is to consider merely physical things but the blessing of God goes far beyond the doling out of the goods. The idea of blessing from God carries with it the promise of divine favor. Blessing is less about single individual, quantifiable gifts from God and more about your place, your position, your condition, as being one under the favor of God.

God is promising to hold his people in a position of favor in His heart and to bring all of His power to bear in order to bring about good for His people. That is the heart of this promise. It is the promise that God will bring all his might and power to bear in order to bring about ultimate, spiritual, and eternal good for His people – not always temporal good (we often think of a life of comfort and ease as good) but ultimate good.

No doubt, we have seen the evidences, gifts of His favor toward us in a number of ways already, haven't we? We have been blessed with electing, justifying, and pardoning grace, with regenerating and calling, and persevering grace. We have been blessed with forgiveness of sin. We have been declared righteous. We have been blessed with the promise of everlasting life and a glorious future. We have been blessed with the indwelling Holy Spirit, who seals us as the children of God. We have received the blessing of adoption as sons and daughters. We have been blessed with grace, mercy and peace. We have been blessed with the privilege of prayer and of abiding in Christ. We have been blessed with place in the family of God. We have been blessed with God's faithfulness and His steadfast love. We have been blessed in temporal ways too – no doubt, all of us to a different degree but all of us blessed. And the idea behind all of this is that God is not done blessing us -- it is not a matter of quantity but of place. God has placed his favor upon us in Christ.

The promise of God is that He will bless and keep His people, bless and keep you if you are His in Christ. Let me explain what that means. The word for keep is a word that means “to exercise great care over,” “to give great attention to” and “to guard.” It carries with it the idea of preciousness to God. Let me give you an example of what I mean. Gretch and I have moved quite a few times since we have been married. When we have moved, we've lost some stuff, even an animal or two, but we have never lost any of our kids – because they, above all of our possessions and whatnot, are precious to us.

The Lord keep you is God's promise and his active blessing that He is keeping guard over you, watching you, protecting you, keeping you safely in the palm of his hand. There is never a moment when God's eye is off you, when His attention is drawn away from you, or when His care for you falters. Psalm 121 is a picture of what I am talking about: (Psalm 121:1–8, ESV) The Lord keep you is His promise to keep you and preserve you, in all of you going and coming. It is God saying: I will keep you by my grace, strengthen you in your faith, keep you from unbelief, keep you from falling away, keep you from quitting the truth of God, keep you through life, keep you from evil and preserve you until the day of salvation. But there is more. This next promise is beautiful.

“The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;” (Numbers 6:25, ESV) You can almost picture the meaning behind these words can't you – a shining face? You know what it is like when someone's face shines toward you, right? It is the indication of a desire for your presence, for communion with you. When someone's face shines toward you, it means that they want to be with you. When God makes His face to shine upon you it means he desires to share Himself with you, to grant His manifest presence to you, and to commune with you. God's shining face represents intimacy with God and His delight in you – the evidence of which is his graciousness toward you.

For someone who does not know God as covenant Lord and gracious Father, to have the face of God turned toward them would be a fearful and terrifying thing. It would mean judgment and destruction and death. But God's face turned toward His people means grace from Him. God's face shines as, by His grace, you delight Him. God's face shines as He looks at you because you are the object of His overwhelming affection. God's face shines as He hears you call out to Him in prayer, by His grace, because He delights when you call on Him. God's face shines on you in that moment of gut-wrenching trial when, by His grace, you call upon Him and say, “I trust You.” God's face shines upon you as, by His grace, you hold fast to his truth and refuse to waver on the Word of God. (Psalm 119:135, ESV) God's face shines toward you as in faith and by His grace you obey His commands faithfully and fully even when it seems the hardest. The Lord's face shines upon us as we are restored after we have fallen and by His grace we return in repentance and have our sins forgiven. God's face shines upon you when, by His grace, you are returning the love He holds for you with trust and with faith His face shines on you. God's face shines toward you beloved and His promise is to be gracious to you. Then last we see:

“The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.” (Numbers 6:26, ESV) The Lord’s countenance is the same as His face but directs our attention more to the expression on His face and how He looks. Someone whose countenance is downcast shows his disappointment. Someone whose countenance is hard reveals anger. But the countenance of God is lifted upon us and a lifted countenance is one of approval and pleasure. God looks upon His people with pleasure, with satisfaction and He promises to give to them peace.

It is peace with God and that peace with God means more than merely the cessation of hostilities. The Hebrew word "shalom " describes the deep sense of peace and well-being, the contentment, the confidence, the security that is the heritage of the people of God. It is more than simply an absence of trouble for a little while. Shalom meant everything that makes for a man’s highest good. In the Bible therefore Peace means not only freedom from all trouble it means enjoyment of all of God’s good, all of God’s blessings. Look at verse 27:

““So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.”” (Numbers 6:27, ESV) What does it mean for God to put His name on the people of Israel? For God to put his name on His covenant people means for God to bind Himself to those that are truly His by faith. It is the idea of God marking you as His own and that ownership would be seen in His blessing upon you. If you are truly His by grace through faith, He binds Himself to you to do you good and it can never be undone. God is determined to bless those who are truly His people and the blessing of this blessing is the Lord God Almighty Himself, forever.

Do you see, beloved? Blessing is God’s idea, His desire, His plan. It is not something that we have to beg for; it is what He desires to give. The real question about all of this is:

Do we believe this promise of God’s blessing? Do we? When we look at the history of national Israel, it seems like one long line, one long story of God’s discipline upon the nation as a whole for the sake of the faithful few. Why? Because Israel did not receive God’s promises by faith, not as a whole. They did not trust God’s words to them, not as a whole nation. This entire nation that heard this blessing of God did not enter Promised Land and why? I like, the way the New King James translates it in Hebrews 4:2, when the writer of Hebrews says: “For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.” (Hebrews 4:2, NKJV)

Beginning with the nation of Israel's grumbling at God's provision, through failure to enter the Promised Land because of their unbelief, through the repetitive cycle of their history, once they were in the Promised Land, of idolatry – looking for the fullness of blessing and joy and the satisfaction that comes with knowing God in idols that can give no life, and then the discipline of God for their good and their repentance, through the eventual severe discipline of God in making them exiles from the Promised Land before graciously bringing them back again --- the whole things like one long story of scattered faith here and there, disbelief as a whole, disobedience for most, and the discipline of God on the nation as a whole for the sake of His purposes and for the sake of His true covenant people within the nation. They did not enjoy the promises of God to them because they did not walk in faith and so did not walk in obedience.

Do we believe the promise of God's blessing church? Do we really believe that it is God's desire and His promise to bless us? Look at the cross. Because it is in the cross that we find God not blessing His own Son, not keeping His Son but crushing Him because He had upon Him my sin and yours and became the object of God's wrath. It is in the cross that we see God the not blessing Him with His favor; God is not smiling upon Him, not being gracious to Him but pouring out the fullness of His wrath and fury on wickedness and sin. It is on the cross that Jesus Christ did not know the joy of God's countenance upon Him, when peace was ripped from Him. Remember the cry -- "My God, My God! Why have You forsaken Me?" It pleased the Father to crush Him. Christ gave himself up for us and it is in that gracious act, that faithful work, that broken body and shed blood, that Christ purchases this blessing for you and for me if we believe...if the promise is mixed with faith. It IS Christ's obedience that wins this blessing for us, but our enjoyment of His blessings, of His promises, is tied to our obedience and trust. The Scripture knows nothing of the perpetually disobedient enjoying and experiencing the fullness of God's blessing. We need to have the right view of the grace that is in Christ. Grace is not simply leniency when we have sinned. Grace is the enabling gift of God not to sin. The grace of Christ does not eliminate the call to obedience but instead enables a lifestyle of obedience so that we can enjoy, right now, the fullness of God's promises to us and not the discipline that comes with disobedience, not that lack of enjoyment OF God's blessing that unbelief and sin causes. (Although I thank God for the grace of His discipline so that we do not grow comfortable in our disobedience).

So the great question is “Do I really believe this? Do I trust Christ who bought it for me? Do I trust Christ who endured the withdrawing of these blessings and promises so I could have them? Will I believe it and live like I believe it? Will I live, walking in a pattern of trust and obedient faith and, so that I can enjoy these promises of God?”

If we really believed this blessing, we would live like it and that would change everything, wouldn't it? If I consciously lived believing this truth about God's heart toward me, it would change everything. If I really believed that it was God's desire to bless me like this and that He really is the source of all blessing, all blessing that matters, I would stop looking for satisfaction, stop looking for blessing in the idols of my own making – in certain people, in certain possessions, in a certain standard of living, in certain experiences, in food or drink, in sexual sin, in materialism, in my own wisdom.

If I really believed God's promises, it would change the way I love Him, wouldn't it – it would be deeper, stronger, and more personal. It would change the way I worship. If I really believed that God desired to bless me like this and that Christ died for me so that I could have this blessing of God, it would change the way that I related to my brothers and sisters in Christ, wouldn't it – I would be my brother or my sister's keeper, desiring the fullness of joy for them. I would serve them freely and joyfully, desiring to be a blessing to them rather than demanding that they bless me and why? Because I have been blessed beyond measure in Christ and having been blessed I want to be a conduit of God's blessing.

If I really believed God's promises and that Christ died for me so that I could have this blessing of God, it would change the way I obey Him. (1 John 5:3, ESV) If I believed that God desired to bless me like this, I would desire to bless God with my obedience so that people “may see (my) good works and give glory to (my) Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16, ESV) I would really believe that His commandments are for my good and I would seek hard to obey them so that I could fully experience the grace of fellowship with Him instead of being under the grace of His corrective discipline so often. In fact, it would make me quick to repent of my known sin and continued disobedience to His clear commands, knowing that God is gracious, that God's face is turned toward me in Christ, and that He longs for me to walk in His peace and enjoy the fullness of His favor and His blessings. If I really believed that God desired to bless me, to bless His people like this and that Christ died for me so that I could have this blessing of God, it would make rebelliousness and sin seem so utterly foolish.

If we really believed God's promises, it would change our homes. It would change the way that we looked at our spouses, at our children. It would change the way that we served them and loved them and sought to bring them in to the fullness of joy in Christ.

If we really believed God's promises, it would change the way that endured trial, difficulty, testing, hardship, reversals, you name it. We would not understand them as a judgment from God, but we would see His faithful hand in them, drawing us ever closer to Him and we would respond with trust in His sovereign care and purpose.

If I really believed God's promises and that Christ died for me so that I could live in the blessing of God, it would change the way that I give. The tithe would not be a burden. It would not be a fearful thing or a weight. If I really believed that it was God's desire to bless me, I would delight to tithe and look for ways to give more because I would believe the invitation of God to: "Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the LORD of hosts." (Malachi 3:10–11, ESV) It would change the way that I give because I would have eyes to see that this is all bigger than me.

If I really believed that God desired to bless me like this and that Christ died for me so that I could have this blessing of God, it would change the way that I serve. I wouldn't do it begrudgingly or haphazardly or lazily or for the applause of anyone at all. I would pursue service in Christ's name because He has served me so greatly, so completely and it would be my pleasure to serve the Lord, knowing that I already have His approval and having that I need nothing else.

If I really believed that God desired to bless me like this and that Christ died for me so that I could have this blessing of God, it would change the way that I related to people outside of the body of Christ. I would pursue them for Christ, speaking well of God before them, living well for Christ before them, and wanting them to come to know Christ and share in the blessing of God's presence and favor and care that I have in Him. If I really believed that God desired to

bless me, to bless His people like this and that Christ died for me so that I could have this blessing of God, it would motivate my heart to see that the message of the gospel go to every tribe, every nation, every tongue, and that the fame of this God be made known to all the nations.

The truth, beloved, is this. If we truly believed these words, it would change everything. Do you believe? “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.” (Numbers 6:24–26, ESV)

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