

The Blessing

Numbers 6:22-27

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Bible Text: Numbers 6:22-27
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Well, we hear God's word. Let's pray together.

Lord, our God, as the apostle had prayed for the church at Colossae, so we ask for ourselves that we may be filled with the knowledge of Your will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding so that we may walk in a manner worthy of You, Lord, to please You in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God that we might be strengthened with all power according to Your glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience. We ask it in Jesus' name and God's people said amen.

Our Old Testament reading this morning is Numbers 6 at verse 22.

22 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 23 "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them, 24 The LORD bless you and keep you; 25 the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; 26 the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. 27 "So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them."

And then in Ephesians 1 beginning at verse 3,

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight 9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

This is the word of the Lord.

Please be seated.

I may be showing my age here but how many of you remember the Dymo label makers? Okay, and how much....confess if you were a kid, you got one of those and you started making labels for everything and you'd make mistakes and you'd play with that thing and you would just, you'd label everything, and especially stuff that was yours. That was yours. Not your brother's, not your sister's, but it was, "Mine, O Lord. This is my thing. This is mine." You children, do you remember, those of you who don't remember the Dymo label makers, do you remember if you've ever seen the movie "Toy Story," you remember Andy wrote his name on the bottom of Woody's boot to show that he belonged to him? We mark things as belonging to us so that we understand this whole concept of property. The Lord has given us a command that, "You shall not steal," and that we respect the property of someone else.

Well, here in Numbers 6, we see the Lord marking out his people as belonging to him. One of the things that we have just observed in the sacrament of baptism, a sign and seal of God's covenant of grace, this sign is that we belong to Christ, we belong to him. Well, also the Lord marks out his people in other ways and one of the ways is through his blessing of his people. It distinguishes them from the rest of the world. "You alone of all the peoples," God has told Israel, "I bless." As we are in Christ Jesus, as God has brought from every nation and tribe and tongue and people out of the ruined mass of humanity and has brought us savingly to himself in the Lord Jesus, he has declared that we are his, his sign, his mark is put upon us, and one of the ways in which we realize this ownership of God is his blessing of us to the exclusion of others.

So as we see here in the book of Numbers, if we were to go through a study of the book of Numbers, up to this point there has been a great concern with holiness, that separation out. God was separating his people from the nations; that they were to be distinct; that they were to demonstrate that they belonged to him. So we see a lot of concerns about holiness, personal holiness and personal cleansing and so forth, as under the old administration of the covenant under the ceremonial law, the washings with water and all these other things that the people would go through and the sacrifices that they were to offer, all were to point towards this fact of this separation from the world and separation unto the Lord, and without this holiness, no one could see the Lord, as we find from Scripture. So it is in Christ Jesus, unless we have been separated out from the world by the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ, unless we have been separated from the ruined mass of humanity, that we were taken out from among the sons of disobedience and brought into his glorious light and separated unto the Lord by his grace and mercy, we could expect nothing, not blessing surely from God but condemnation and curse.

Well, as we see here in the passages before us today and our attention is just today to look at Numbers 6 and then, God willing, next Lord's day begin a series in the book of Jonah as we've just finished our series in Ephesians, I want you to notice as we open up

the text here the instruction that God gives to Moses to give to the priests. The priests, the sons of Aaron, the Kohanim, were those who were specially set apart by God to minister in the tabernacle; that they were there especially to draw near to the Lord, to offer up sacrifices on behalf of God's people. And as you go through the Old Testament and the ceremonial law, you see the many sacrifices that they were to bring and to administer and it was a hard work, it was a work that required attention to detail because God cut no slack. He gave to them this imagery of the sacrificial system under the Old Testament to point forward to the necessity of Christ. As the rivers of blood of the bulls and goats over the years, sacrifice after sacrifice year in and year out, day in and day out were offered, they were just a place-holder so that the people might see there was something better that was to come. And there are promises of this, there are hints of this, there are prophecies of this throughout the Old Testament looking forward to that final fulfillment which we now on this side of the cross realize is in Christ Jesus.

So the priests were there to help maintain and to supervise and to perform these duties, to have this Gospel, this message preached to God's people throughout the Old Testament, and so their work was a threefold work: they were to offer sacrifice for sin; and they were to represent God to the people; but then also as intercessors to represent the people to God. Well, it's in this aspect of their representing God to the people that we are seeing in this passage here in Numbers 6, that they are to bless the people of God; that by this the name of God is placed upon them.

Now the context of this as Leviticus 9:22-23 tells us, "Then Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them, and he came down from offering the sin offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings. And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting, and when they came out they blessed the people, and the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people." This benediction followed the offering to God of the sin offering, the burnt offering, and the peace offering, and so it is in that context of these three offerings that this blessing is to be pronounced upon God's people.

Now the priests, we're told, would stand and bless God's people and they would put their hands somewhat in a representation of the Hebrew letter Shin, and if you are a Trekker or a Trekkie, you know that sign. Guess where they got it from? It was what the rabbis did in the synagogue and they came up with that, we would call it a Vulcan salute, but actually they ripped it off from the blessing of the rabbis in the synagogue and that was taken from the priests and they would stand and bless God's people in this way.

Having offered the sin offering, the first stanza of this benediction would be, "The LORD bless you and keep you." Having offered the consecration or the whole burnt offering, they would pronounce the second stanza, "the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you." And finally after the peace offering, the priests would pronounce, "The LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace." All of these offerings have the purpose of bringing men into fellowship with God, into communion with God. Sin had to be dealt with first. Our sins separate us from God and so dealing with first things first, the sin offering is a priority. There can be no fellowship with God without this shedding of blood. There can be no fellowship with God without him taking the

initiative and making things right between us and him. So this next step of fellowship, then, would be the consecration or the whole burnt offering before the Lord, the offering up of, representing the offering up of our lives in totality to the Lord. So as the burnt offering is offered up whole, reserving nothing, it was a symbol that the life of the offer was given over to God in whole. And then the peace offering represents the real fellowship, the real communion with God. The issue of my sin is settled. My life is now wholly his. I now sit down at fellowship with him and enjoy peace with God. That is what these sacrifices all represent and they find their fullness totally in Christ Jesus.

Now as we get into the content of this blessing itself, I want you to notice here in verse 24, "The LORD bless you and keep you." Notice who is doing the blessing here. Now the priests are standing here and pronouncing this blessing but it is not their blessing. It is the Lord's blessing, they are but the conduit, they are but the messengers of this great news, this Gospel to them. It is the Lord, this Lord here is that covenant name of God, that Yahweh, the "I Am that I Am," the everlasting God. He is the one who blesses you and keeps you.

Five times in this passage we see that it is Yahweh God, the Lord God, who is doing the blessing. Well, what is that blessing? It is his favor and protection; that he alone is the source of this blessing; that he is that fount of every blessing. One of the things we find throughout Scripture is that God loves to bless his people. He gives blessing over and abundantly to us, and without his blessing all of our lives are frustrating, they are meaningless, they are pointless.

Henry Law, writing of the blessing of God, "When is this blessing? When is it needed? Now and ever, throughout the moments which are and shall be, when you go out, when you come in, when you sit down, when you rise up, through all your living space, and when the last breath flutters on your lips, the Lord bless you. Where? In every place in which you tarry or to which you move. In the closet, at home, abroad, in still retreat and in the busiest haunts, in the publicity of open work and in the sanctity of holiest spots. The Lord bless you. How? By causing all things to minister to your true good by crowning your lot with all real happiness. The Lord bless you."

It is our covenant-keeping God who blesses us in Christ Jesus with everything necessary, everything, Peter says, pertaining to life and godliness. This is that one who daily loads us with his benefits. All things materially, all things spiritually, everything necessary and needful for us to live for him and to do his work, he gives us as we pray, "Lord, give us this day our daily bread." A better translation is, "Lord, give us our bread day by day." And he is there blessing. He is there giving. He is there providing us. This is the God who blesses us.

This is about the dedication of God's people to God himself, by the Lord, and that's one of the things you see throughout the book of Numbers but there's another theme that you find running throughout the book of Numbers and it's not a pleasant one, it's the constant grumbling of God's people. You see that in Numbers 20 where the people are complaining, "You know, Moses, you've taken us out of Egypt. Lord, you've done this,

you've brought us here. We wish we had all the things we had back in Egypt. All we've got is this manna. Manna, manna, manna, all this time." And what is it that we find about the people? They don't trust the Lord. They don't believe his promises. They don't think his provision is sufficient. They don't think he is powerful to keep his word toward them. They look for favor and protection elsewhere. But if they had simply gotten this truth worked into their minds and into their hearts, that God is the giver, that he is the source of blessing, that he gives us what we need, and in his giving us of what we need, he gives us all that we need, if they had gotten this into their hearts and minds, the book of Numbers would have been a different story and we would have to testify in our own lives if we had gotten this work into our hearts and minds on any consistent basis, our lives would be a different story as well, that, "my God shall supply all of your need according to," what? "His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." This is our covenant God. If we could grasp that he alone is able to do exceeding, abundantly more than we could hope or even ask, our lives would certainly read much differently.

So it is the Lord who is doing this. Now what is it that he is saying? Well, first is, "The LORD bless you and keep you." In Psalm 121, "I will lift up my eyes to the hills. From whence comes my help? My help comes from the LORD, Who made heaven and earth." This is not some God who is having to put in requisitions. This is not some God who is waiting on, you know, who is working shorthandedly. This is not a God who is having to deal with supply chain problems. This is the Lord of heaven and earth. He is the one who keeps us. "He will not let your foot be moved. Behold, He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD is your keeper; The LORD is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, Nor the moon by night. The LORD will keep you from all evil; He will keep your life. The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore."

We can be confident that he is always there, that he is always continually keeping us, and this is what the priest is calling down upon the people, "The LORD do these things for you," and this is not a wish, this is a pronouncement. This is a telling of them, "No, I hope God blesses you." No, "God blesses you." No hope to it, it's done. He blesses his people. "The LORD bless you and keep you."

Then, "the LORD make his face shine upon you." Literally, "the LORD lift up his face to you." It's a metaphor of God looking favorably upon someone. The flipside of this is where we see passages where the Lord hides his face. That's an illustration of God's disfavor, of his withdrawal of support. Shining the face on someone indicates an attitude of love, of lovingkindness, of mercy. It's the message that the lampstand there in the tabernacle communicated to God's people. By the shining of his face upon them, by his giving of his light to them, and of their being light in return, the whole concept entails this whole work here of the saving of his people and one of the things that God has sought his people to do was to be a reflection of his light, of his shining favor upon them; that they would be saved by his covenant love as they would be taught his commandments and statutes and ordinances through which they would see light, and because of this they would be witnesses to the nations of God's saving power. The word

of the Lord is going to go forth, it's going to accomplish everything intended by God for the spread of this Gospel, as Isaiah 55 tells us, "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."

So then to have this glorious favorable face of God shining upon us is the greatest blessing that anyone can have but it's a blessing that is also reflected out to the nations as well. As we behold the glory of God in Christ Jesus, as we have that new and living way opened up for us that we may enter into this throne room of God, that we may experience this grace of God in Jesus Christ, we will be like Moses as he had beheld just the hindmost parts of God as God had passed by in Exodus 34, pronouncing his name, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God abounding in lovingkindness and truth," and Moses was there in the cleft of the rock and even that effulgence, even that glory of God shining forth, he is transformed and he goes down the mount and the people can't stand it. They say, "Moses, put a veil on it. Moses, we can't behold this. We cannot see this." So in the same way as we have been blessed by God, as we have had this countenance of his favor upon us, as we experience this in Jesus Christ, our lives, our countenances are going to be transformed and shining forth that same light to the people around us.

So for us to have this glorious favorable face of God shining upon us is the greatest blessing that anyone could have. To know that God looks upon you and what he sees, yes, you are a sinner, yes, you are deserving of hell and condemnation, yes, you're deserving of that wrath and curse and that full weight of his law against you, but in his glorious sovereign mercies, he has given his Son in exchange for you, that he beholds you now justified and sanctified and his glory put upon you. He beholds you now and is well-pleased not because of who you are and what you have done, but because you are in Christ Jesus. There is no greater source of peace and power in life. Paul speaks of this in speaking of justification therefore having peace with God. We are justified with him. We have this peace. Spurgeon said, "Why should he fret when God smiles? What matters though all the world should censure, if Jehovah countenances his servant, a look of approval from God creates a deep delightful calm within the soul."

He also, the priest also says, "and the LORD be gracious to you." This is a prayer that God would come and show his tender mercy and care for his people. It's a call on him to exercise his own compassionate activity on their behalf. If God did not reveal his love toward us in Christ Jesus, where would we be? Without his gracious activity, all of our efforts, all of our striving, all of these things would be meaningless. Without him, we can do nothing.

"The LORD lift up his countenance upon you." That's a parallel to what we've seen to make his face shine upon you, but it's slightly different. It's a prayer that God would be paying attention to us, his favorable attention. The priest is praying that God would look

upon his people and when he blesses, he keeps, he shines and is gracious towards his people, any look he casts towards his people is filled with nothing but blessing.

Maybe you've been at home and you've been reading a paper or you've been looking at the computer, whatever, and your child comes up to you, "Dad, mom, see what I've done with my Legos?" And they bring that out and you turn around and you're not irritated but you're beaming. "Oh wow! Let me see what you made. Oh, that is so cool! That's great!" Don't you know that that child has just been filled to overflowing with the sense of your love and your delight in him or in her? Am I right? Yes, and in this way our Father's face, his countenance is lifted up upon us and gives to us that attention, gives to us that sense of his delight. It puts gladness in our hearts. We know that our Father is watching over us and keeping us.

"And the LORD give you peace." This is more than the absence of hostility, it's that's wholeness, it is that goodness, that total satisfaction in every area of life. Jesus said, "My peace I give you, not as the world gives it." This is that life abundant that he has promised.

So it is, "The LORD, the LORD, the LORD bless you and keep you, the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you, the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace." Now looking at this, this side of the cross, we can see somewhat of an echo of the Trinity. God the Father is the one who blesses and keeps his children. God the Son makes God's face to shine upon us and brings us grace. God the Holy Spirit communicates God's attention to us and gives us peace.

But notice not only do we see three times the Lord's name mentioned here, but notice six times we see the word "you." "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." God blesses you if you are his child. Spurgeon again said, "So long as you are resting upon Christ Jesus, the great High Priest speaks from eternal glory and he says, 'The LORD bless thee.' Oh, but I do not deserve it. Just so, but the Lord bless thee." I'm so unworthy, I'm so backsliding. Yes, but the Lord Jesus Christ knows all, covers all. This is that one who intends and seeks and indeed does bless you, believer. You see, we tend to think of the blessing of God over there, somebody else, kind of in generalities, but this is very specific, "The LORD bless you. The LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD bless you and make his face to shine upon you. The LORD bless you and be gracious to you. The LORD bless you and lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace." You. You. Your name there if you are in Christ Jesus.

The Lord blesses you and as God bestows his blessing on us, we must receive it by faith. You see, it's hard for us, one, to think that God would bless us if we have a right sense of our sins, but by faith we also see his mercies in Christ Jesus, we know that God is not giving us some hollow blessing but he's giving us everything in his Son; that he is ours, and by faith we grasp that. "Even in the weakness, Lord, I believe but help my unbelief. Help me to believe that you are that one who blesses me, you are that one who calls me yours."

"So they shall put my name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them," as we see in verse 27. By this blessing of God's people, the priests are putting the Lord's name on the children of Israel, this is marking us out as belonging to him. He is not just kind of spreading this out in generalities for everybody, this is for you. This is for you. This is for you. This is for you in Christ Jesus. Not that you were any great shakes, not that you were anything really deserving of this, "it is not by works of righteousness which we have done," as we heard earlier, "it is by his mercies that he has saved us."

This is the command that was blessing God's people, "and I," notice here, "will bless them." God promises to bless in response to this blessing and we have a high priest in heaven, our Lord Jesus Christ, who ever lives to intercede for us and to bless us. It is no longer the Aaronic priesthood who stands and blesses us, it is our Lord Jesus Christ who blesses us, and when our pastors, when our ministers of the Gospel pronounce this benediction of God's people upon us, don't see it as the preacher, he is but the messenger boy. It is the Lord Jesus Christ himself who blesses you.

Do you have that understanding of this? We often tend to think of this benediction as just kind of the last sign-off, you know, as kind of like the playing of the national anthem at the end of the day on the tv, and we see that and it's over with, and thus ends our broadcast day, and here we go and we're out the door. No, it is that blessing of God. It is God putting that seal, that stamp on all these things and we find as he gives to us real blessing in him, that we need this blessing. It's something that we need reminding of from time to time. We become distant from him but we must draw near each Lord's day. We must draw near to him in worship. We must have him work upon our hearts, open our hearts and minds to these realities to give us his help, his grace, his mercy.

Rob Rayburn has said, "In any well-ordered worship service, everything that is done is important and valuable. Everything renews faith, hope, love and our lives in some way. Everything addresses our need in some significant way but not everything every Sunday has subjective power over our hearts. Our sins may be forgiven because we have asked for that forgiveness in Jesus' name and that is the truly important thing, our sins may be forgiven, but we may not feel the freedom from sin and guilt that is the appropriate consequence of such forgiveness. We may have sung God's praise and glory and that is absolutely important for us to do, but we may not have felt the divine majesty in our hearts. Sometimes when we come to the end of the service and still our hearts have not been lifted up and our spirits raised, however we may have heard the word of God and traversed the Gospel ground once more and for the real believer whose face is often downcast because of his own sins and failures and because of the afflictions of life, that blessing being granted to him at the end of the service and resting upon him, the Lord's name being put upon him in that way, is a matter of the greatest conceivable importance whether or not we feel the effect of that blessing in our spirits." We have to receive this by faith and if the Lord is indeed blessing me."

Rayburn again, "Who can possibly say what difference it would make to our lives not to have the blessing that has come to us from the sermons we have heard, the prayers we

have offered, the Lord's Supper's we have participated in. We cannot know how God pours his help, his forgiveness, his strength, his provision into our hearts by the means that he has appointed to communicate his favor, so many of which are concentrated as parts of the service of Christian worship on the Lord's Day. And the benediction is another of those parts. No one can say what a difference it has made to countless multitudes and generations of Christian people through the ages to have the Lord blessing them, to have that benediction granted them in that divinely appointed and ordered way, that way the Lord himself promised would be his way of smiling upon, keeping, being gracious to, and blessing his people. Must we not believe, can a believer of the Bible here in Numbers 6 not believe that this benediction as often as it is offered by a minister and received by a congregation is a means of some blessing granted by God to his people every time it is uttered? Have you so much of that blessing that you care to have no more? Are you sated with God's blessing? Or, rather, do you want as much of it as you can possibly obtain and so are jealous to take the fullest advantage of every opportunity to obtain more of that blessing? Even if we leave the service unmoved; our hearts not yet stirred with a sense of the Lord's favor, kindness, smile, and peace, the benediction is at least the objective reminder that such blessing is coming to us and must come to us because God will be true to himself. This benediction is both, therefore, an objective means of grace and a subjective reminder that the Lord will not fail to smile upon and to keep his children, no matter the trials they must face and the disappointments they must endure. The great English poet, John Donne, put it this way:

'Though thou with clouds of anger do disguise
Thy face; yet through that mask[e] I know those eyes,
Which, though they turn[e] away sometimes,
They never will despise.'

This is the confidence of one who hears the Lord say over and over again to him or to her, "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."

Young folks, what is it that you are hoping to find your blessing in? Your success? Your happiness? Your fulfillment in life? What is it that you are or who it is you are, that you're really counting on? Take time to examine yourself and here's the way to do it. Think about what makes you angry. What causes you anxiety. Consider your daydreams, what do you think about imagining yourself to be happier later than you are now? And from there, work your way back to what you're really hoping for and counting on. Am I now much nearer the end of my life, yes, than the beginning. My daughter delighted to the day of my birthday, said, "Dad, you are now closer to 100 than you were to the day of your birth." I said, "Thanks."

I can tell you for a certainty that the world and the things of this world can never give or take away the peace that comes from God, that shalom that comes from him and is the gift of his love. Seek that Lord who seeks to bless you, who blesses you in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. There alone you will find true hope. There alone you will find true joy. In him alone we have peace.

Let us pray.

Lord, as we now come to Your table, we have another reminder. We've had it in baptism and looking at this benediction, this blessing, and now as we come to Your table, You give us over and over again reminder after reminder of Your grace and mercy and love towards us in Jesus Christ. And so as we come to this Your table now, we ask that You would give us eyes of faith to behold these great realities of Your blessing and mercies towards us in Jesus Christ, and it is in His name that we pray. And God's people said amen.