

## The Amazing Blessing of Almighty God

*Numbers 6:22-27*

**T**he blessing we find in our Scripture passage today has been called “The Lord’s Prayer of the Old Testament.” D.L. Moody was an evangelist in the 1800’s who appreciated very much the closing words of Numbers 6. He wrote:

Here is a benediction that can go all the world over, and can give all the time without being impoverished. Every heart may utter it: it is the speech of God: every letter may conclude with it; every day may begin with it; every night may be sanctified by it. Here is blessing—keeping—shining—the uplifting upon our poor life of all heaven’s glad morning. It is the Lord Himself who brings this bar of music from heaven’s infinite anthems.

Last week we began looking with detail at the blessing that God told Moses to give to Aaron and the priests. They were to pronounce this blessing over the Israelites, and every time they did, God said, He would put His Name on them and bless them. This blessing is known as “The Aaronic Blessing,” because it was given to Aaron to pass along. We pointed out that this blessing was used a lot in Scripture, and that it may even have been the very last words the disciples heard Jesus speaking, even as He was ascending to the Father. So we concluded that since these were the specific words God gave, and since Jesus spoke them as He was ascending, that these must be pretty special words indeed.

This was the foundational truth of the message last week: the only reason we have this blessing is ***because it is something God wanted to do!*** His love for us is of such magnitude that it cannot be contained—it must be expressed. All these long years later, His love for us has not diminished one bit. In fact, this promise He gave to them is for us today as well: “*So they will put My name on the Israelites, and I will bless them*” (Number 6:27). He was saying that through this blessing, and the giving of it, sinful human beings can have access to God Himself!

We were reminded from Scripture and from our own personal experience that we are sinners whose hearts are desperately wicked and beyond cure. Left to ourselves, we have no hope of obtaining forgiveness and eternal life, that our own righteousness is like a filthy rag that we would toss away as being revolting, compared with the greatness and holiness of God. Then we were reminded from Scripture that our God is a great and powerful God, the great King above all gods, that He is from everlasting to everlasting. With our sin we have no hope of approaching God for any reason, or any hope of being in His presence.

But then we learned the most amazing truth of all: that through Jesus we have access to God! And as I have studied this passage in great detail and prayed over it countless times over many months, I discovered that the concepts in this passage had great potential to transform my personal prayer life. I believe that the same thing can happen to you, as I said last week, if you will really “get” the truths of this passage. **You will never approach the amazing privilege of prayer the same way again!**

Last week we described ourselves as being outside the closed door to the throne room of Almighty God, Creator and King of the Universe. That image of the door to the throne room is important to the central theme of this message, so fix it in your mind. In 2 Chronicles 3:7 we read that when Solomon built the first Temple, he overlaid the doors of the temple with gold. For the doors to the inner sanctuary, Solomon used olive wood carved with cherubim, palm trees and open flowers, and overlaid the cherubim and palm trees with fine gold beaten down over the carvings (1 Kings 6:31-15). The purpose was to indicate that this was a very special place, that something awesome and incredible was on the other side.

Fix that image in your mind. Now imagine yourself standing outside the door, trying to get in, but you realize that even if you got inside, you are dressed in your own righteousness, which the Scriptures describe as being like filthy rags. Not only are you not dressed appropriately, but you have no way to open the door. You want more than anything else in your life to be admitted, but the door is hopelessly shut, and you are dressed in filthy rags.

In the Gospel of Matthew, we can read what is called “The Parable of the Wedding Banquet.” The parable begins, “*The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son.*” Then Jesus added details: servants were sent out to invite people and tell them to come—but they refused. More servants were sent to tell the people that all the food was ready and it was time for the banquet to begin. But the parable says that “*they paid no attention,*” even mistreating and killing the messengers. So at the king’s direction, the servants went out and gathered all the people they could find. But listen to the closing words of that parable:

*But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. “Friend,” he asked, “how did you get in here without wedding clothes?” The man was speechless. Then the king told the attendants, “Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside into the*

*darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” For many are invited, but few are chosen.(Matthew 22:1-14)*

Enter Jesus! He can open the door; in fact, Scripture says that He *is The Door!* But what to do about your clothes? Good news! Scripture has something to say about that, as well. We can read in the book of Zechariah about Joshua the High Priest: *“The angel said to those who were standing before him, ‘Take off his filthy clothes.’ Then he said to Joshua, ‘See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you’”* (3:4). The change of clothes represented his new standing before God.

Hear these beautiful words from Isaiah 61:10—*“I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For He has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.”*

And just to seal it for us, hear Revelation 7:9—*“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing **before the throne and in front of the Lamb.**”* And what were these standing before the throne actually wearing? *“**They were wearing white robes** and were holding palm branches in their hands.”*

So here’s what we have so far: we are desperate to get into the throne room and presence of God, but the door is closed and we are filthy with sin. Jesus, through His blood shed on the cross, cleanses us from all sin and opens the door, giving us complete and unhindered access to our Heavenly Father. Now what? How does this transform our prayer lives? That’s what we’re waiting for, right?

Let’s look at the blessing itself, found in Numbers 6: *“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace.”* Those are precious and powerful words. Just hearing them brings a sense of comfort and well-being. But let’s break them down a little.

You will notice right away that the blessing covers three verses, each of them beginning with the words *“The Lord.”* The Lord do this, and do this, and do that—so it is seen as a triple blessing. Some Bible scholars see in this a reference to the Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) and there may be some parallels in Scripture for this. Paul ended his second letter to the Corinthians by declaring a three-fold

blessing over them: *May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.* (2Co 13:14).

Verse 24 reads, *“The Lord bless you and keep you.”* What does it mean when we say “The Lord bless you”? In the Old Testament, if you were blessed, your land was fruitful, you had plenty of children, good health, long life, protection from your enemies, and so on. But these are only indications that you are blessed—not the blessing itself. It also included the presence of God in your life.

We have a God who absolutely delights to bless His people! He does it in so many different ways that we sometimes overlook them or even take them for granted. We might think that someone is blessed if he drives a nice car, has a big house, respect, a loving family, classic good looks. We need to understand that all true blessing comes from the Lord. I wonder how many times have we settled for happiness or comfort or even wealth, when God wants us to be *truly* blessed? Charles Spurgeon observed that being blessed by God

“puts a gracious flavor into all things. If we are blessed, then all our possessions and enjoyments are blessed; yea, our losses and crosses and even our disappointments are blessed. God’s blessing is deep, emphatic, effectual. A man’s blessing may begin and end in words, but the blessing of the LORD makes rich and sanctifies. The best wish we can have for our dearest friend is not “may prosperity attend thee,” but “the LORD bless thee.”

Another has written, “The blessing of God is the goodness of God in action.” Being blessed by God involves so much more than the things you have. The blessing of God is rarely related to anything you can hold or touch with your hands. Gordon MacDonald wrote a book called *The Life God Blesses*, in which he said, “If blessing means...receiving the love of God, then I have a life God blesses. And if blessing means receiving the mercy and restorative grace of God, then I have a life God has blessed...If, in a period of solitude, there has been an unforgettable sense of insight, an indescribable awareness of closeness with the divine, a sudden feeling of liberation to praise and worship, then I have a life God has blessed.”

When verse 24 says, *“The Lord bless you and **keep you,**”* it is referring to the protection of God on their lives. This was the word used to describe a soldier guarding his post. It literally means “to build a hedge around,” and described the way shepherds would use thorn bushes to build a protective enclosure for the sheep. It means “to exercise great care over.” Surely that pictures for us in a

wonderful way how God keeps us. Again, I have to wonder, “What is it that keeps me?” Some people are kept by idolatry, greed, bitterness, and an unforgiving spirit. Some are kept by an unholy desire to control others, or lust, or even fear of the future. What keeps *me*? What keeps *you*? It is a true blessing to know that we are kept, protected, surrounded by the Lord God Himself!

Now look at the phrase in verse 25: “*The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you.*” Twice in this blessing do we see a mention made of the face of God. Here, when it talks about His face shining on us, it refers to receiving the favor of God. It means that God takes pleasure in His people, that God *smiles* on us!

Think first of some negative examples from Scripture. Psalm 30:7—“*O Lord, when you favored me, you made my mountain stand firm; but when you hid your face, I was dismayed.*” In Psalm 102, we find a desperate plea: “*Do not hide your face from me when I am in distress.*” In Isaiah 59:1-2 we learn that our sins have caused God to hide His face from us. And at one point in the book of Jeremiah, God talks about the wickedness of the people, and says, “*They have turned their backs to me and not their faces.*”

But on the other hand, Proverbs 16:15 reads, “*When a king’s face brightens, it means life; his favor is like a rain cloud in spring.*” David prayed, “*Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your unfailing love*” (Psalm 31:16). Psalm 67:1 reads, “*May God be gracious [a word found in Numbers 6:25] to us and bless us [a word found in Numbers 6:24] and make His face shine upon us.*” Three times in Psalm 80 do we read these words “*Restore us, O Lord God Almighty; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved.*” So in Scripture, having the face of God shine, or smile, on us, means that we have found favor with God, that He has extended His grace and mercy to us.

When God’s face shines on us, it is because He is well-pleased, not because of who you are or what you have done or what you have, but because you are in Christ! Second Corinthians 4:6 tells us “*For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.*” Do you see how Scripture agrees with Scripture, from one end of it to the other?

Now take a look at verse 26, where we see another mention of God’s face. “*The Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace.*” Some versions read, “*The Lord lift up his countenance upon you.*” Our faces tell a lot about us. Some people

have scowled so much they seem to have permanent frowns etched in their faces. Others have laugh lines around their eyes, because they have spent so much time laughing. And you can usually tell by looking at a person's face whether or not that person is happy, or angry, or is preoccupied with something. A good example is found in Genesis 4, where we read that God *"looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast"* (vv. 4b-5).

When someone was granted an audience with the king in the ancient Middle Eastern courts, the king might not even look in that person's direction. He might hear what the subject has to say, and even grunt a response, without ever looking at him. For us, it is an amazing thing just to stand in His presence, and to be able to make our requests known, but to know that He is listening to the cries of our hearts is wonder upon wonder! Now, the blessing escalates to the point where we are told that *God will actually turn in our direction, and look at us, paying us full attention!* Proverbs 15:29 tells us, *"The Lord is far from the wicked but he hears the prayer of the righteous."*

Okay, so what does this have to do with forever changing my prayer life?

For this, you're going to have to use your imagination—not just now, but every time you go to prayer. The more you do this, the easier it will be to do. Imagine a father sitting in his chair, perhaps reading the paper or a book. The door opens and in walks his little girl, who calls out, "Daddy!" Hearing the sweet, precious voice of his daughter, the eyes of the father light up with love and joy, even as he turns to look at her. He reaches for her as she runs to him and jumps into his arms. It may be because there is something she needs, or perhaps just because she loves him and wants to spend time with him.

Take that scene, and gather all the information about this passage we've shared last week and today, and walk with me a bit. Think of the words of the blessing:

***The Lord bless you and keep you...***

When you quiet yourself to pray, first imagine yourself approaching the throne room of Almighty God. As you walk up to the intricately-carved, gold-covered door, you're dressed in your fine white robe, which represents your right standing before God. As you step up, you see that the door is standing wide open! And there is Jesus, with His smiling face, and outstretched arms, welcoming you inside. It is a blessing to be kept in the presence of God!

***The Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you...***

You step inside the throne room, and there in front of you is The Everlasting Father, the Great I AM, the Most High God! You call out, “Father! Heavenly Father!” and something absolutely amazing happens. The all-seeing eyes of God instantly light up! He’s been waiting for you, and now He is overjoyed and delighted to hear ***your*** voice!

***The Lord turn His face toward you, and give you peace...***

Though the Lord sees all things at all times, the Scripture uses language we can understand. So now imagine that as the face of God lights up at the sound of your voice, now see Him turning to face you full on, reaching out for you as you run to Him. You may have something in particular to talk to Him about, some special need or burden. Or you may just want to spend some time with Him, merely enjoying being in His presence.

Combine all that with one more Scripture, this time from 1Jn 5:14-15—“*This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.*”

*There is sunshine in my soul today,  
More glorious and bright  
Than glows in any earthly sky,  
For Jesus is my light.*

*O there's sunshine, blessed sunshine,  
When the peaceful, happy moments roll!  
When Jesus shows His smiling face  
There is sunshine in my soul.*

Your Heavenly Father has made it possible for you to have your sins forgiven, to have access to the throne room of Very God! And even now He is eagerly waiting to hear the sound of your voice, to delight in you. Will you approach, and call out to Him?

*This message follows “The Amazing Privilege of Approaching God.”*