

“What’s the Deal with Blessings?”

Scripture: Numbers 6:22-27

Graphic: sneeze, blessing,

Key Verses: 27 So they shall put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.

Theme: God desires our lives to be filled with shalom as the blessing from Him, as a result of our obedience to His word and commandments. We are then called as royal priests and a holy people to bless others. But a blessing from a Christian is not some weak good luck charm for someone else. It’s calling down the power and mercy of God in His Name to bestow God’s favor and shalom in their life as well.

1) Introduction

- a) Open your Bibles with me to the OT book of Numbers, chapter 6.
- b) Let’s pray...
- c) I assume that most of you probably read through Numbers in your personal devotion time and bible study this past week, but just in case you didn’t, let me give us some background about the book of Numbers.
- d) Numbers is the fourth book in the Pentateuch, the five books of the Jewish Law (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, **Numbers**, and Deuteronomy). Numbers gets it’s name because Moses was commanded by God to count the Israelite men who could “go to war.” Pretty soon, they will attempt to enter the land that God had promised the people when they left Egypt and entered into exile in the desert.
- e) So the people are on a camp out in the wilderness. They were worshipping God in the Tabernacle, which was a tent that held the Ark of the Covenant and the Ten Commandments. They had their priests and the twelve different tribes of Israel all with the allotted land around the Tabernacle.
- f) And now, God is asking them to break camp and move toward the Promised Land in Canaan. And when they get there, they may have to fight for this land God promised them. And so now they know how many men are able to do that.
- g) Question. Has anyone ever gone on a long trip with someone who made the trip miserable? I once had to drive from Buffalo to Columbus, Ohio with a guy who was so impressed with himself that I wanted to throw myself out of the car and onto the Thruway before we got to Dunkirk.

- h) Or maybe you've been on a plane with the person that has every bad habit known to humanity and there are two of them and you're in the middle seat. Anyone?
- i) Right? For the Israelites, moving THAT many people from one place to another, under already difficult circumstances – lack of food and water, large group of people, having to carry the Ark and the Ten Commandments (which, by the way, if you DROPPED, you were instantly smoked by God) – was not an easy task.
- j) But what made it even worse was the fact that there were people in the camp who were openly practicing sin and God knew it. And so not only is the trek difficult because of the conditions, but the fact that there were unfaithful spouses, unclean people, and brokenness in the camp made it all the more challenging.
- k) So God set up a system of rules whereby those who were unclean would be PUT OUT OF THE CAMP. Those who were unfaithful would have to repent and restore their relationships.
- l) And God set up a certain group of men and women who would be holy, set apart for Him, and would do certain things to show their obedience and allegiance to God – like not drink any wine, or cut their hair.
- m) The purpose of all these rules and this group of Nazirites was to keep the nation of Israel pure. To strive to be a pure and holy people who would then be BLESSED by inheriting the Promised Land and living forever in a permanent home. God wanted them to understand what His ideal was and be fully in tuned with it.
- n) They couldn't do that if there was all this discontent, and sin, and folly, and uncleanness in the camp.
- o) And then at the end of chapter 6, after God has just finished telling Moses all this stuff that He wants the people to do...God gives the people a blessing. Like a final stamp on the process...
- p) And I don't think we really understand what it means to be blessed by God and I don't think we understand what it means to bless other people.
- q) Oh sure, we say "God bless you" when someone sneezes, and we tell people to count their blessings, but what's the deal with blessings?

- r) Let's find out...
- s) Look at chapter 6, verse 22...

2) Scripture

a) Read 6:22-27

b) So here's the pattern:

- i) You have God speaking to Moses saying, "Tell the priests – the Levities, the sons of Aaron – that they are to bless the people in this specific way."
 - ii) God didn't just tell Moses to send up a blessing in some willy-nilly fashion because they've been good little children. God told Moses to bless them SPECIFICALLY because of and in response to the circumstances in which they found themselves. They were in the desert, they were scared, they were uncertain about the future, and God had called them to yet another higher standard.
 - iii) And when God challenges his people, He doesn't just leave us out there somewhere or give us vague assurances of His love and mercy and presence. God speaks specifically to our situations and addresses our fear and uncertainty. Not always in the way WE want, but God knows our needs.
 - iv) And so God told Moses to tell Aaron and his sons...because I have set the ideal for this group of people on this journey...and because I know that there will be unity among the people, modeled by the Nazirites and priests, I will be giving this blessing to the people.
- c) And then the Lord rolls out this three-fold, paired action and response blessing. Let's look at each part...
- d) First, bless them by saying, "The LORD bless you and keep you."
- i) Now, notice that each of the parts of the three-fold blessing has an action from the LORD and a resulting thing that happens to the people being blessed.
 - ii) The LORD will bless you...and keep you.

- iii) The LORD will bestow on you all manner of temporal and spiritual gifts and will keep you there, securely in His care. God will be steadfast in your life to hold you in the state of being blessed. This results in security and being protected and surrounded by God's favor.
- e) Secondly, tell them in this blessing, "The LORD make His face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you."
 - i) When Stacy and I are communicating well, we have the pleasure of talking face-to-face...her face is shining on mine and vice-versa. We look each other in the eyes and all that. Now, when I do something stupid or say something hurtful...I don't get the shining face. I might get the back of the head, if I'm fortunate or most likely the wall or door.
 - ii) Having God's face shine on us means that we want God to be well-disposed toward us. To see us. To be pleased and to offer an acknowledging glance or wink.
 - iii) And the result of that – the second part of this pair – is that God would temper His judgment against me. That He would be gracious to me – show grace and mercy even though I may not be perfect in all I do.
 - iv) Again, as the people of Israel were called to a higher standard of living for God – like we are today – we have to fall into the arms of a loving and grace-filled God who wants us to seek His face and receive His mercy. This BLESSING is telling us just that...
- f) Finally, God said to Moses, "Tell them the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace."
 - i) I'm not always too smart, so I had to look up the definition of countenance. It means: appearance, especially the look or expression of the face. And the key there is THE EXPRESSION of the FACE. We want God to pay attention to us as you might gather from someone's expressions or body language.
 - ii) Not only does God want to look at us with an acknowledging look, but He wants to pay attention to us.
 - iii) On this Mother's Day, I think of all those times that I had a million questions and stories after a day at school. And when I got home, my

- Mom would be waiting for me, ready to hear the stories and tell me that my Dad would answer any questions I had ;)
- iv) But when I looked into her face, I didn't see a distant, distracted sort of listener who, even though she was looking at me, wasn't really paying attention. What I saw was someone who truly was looking AND paying attention to me, even though the stories had to be annoying and silly.
 - v) And I've seen that in the mother of my own children...I think women are way better at modeling this characteristic of God than men.
 - vi) This God, who created the universe and who sets up rules for holiness, and who has to relate to billions of people that He created unique and special, has a desire to not only see you, but to pay attention to you.
 - vii) This blessing, this set of gifts that God is saying, "I WANT TO GIVE THIS TO YOU" is for US as the body of Christ...is for this church...and for YOU individually, operating as agents in this body.
 - viii) And the last part of the last blessing is critical. The result that God is aiming for through the rules...through the blessings...through the attention and desire to love us and give us grace is this:
 - ix) Shalom. (say Shalom) God wants us to have peace in our lives.
 - x) With so much talk about war and killing the enemy and young people in our community dying...we tend to get confused by this term peace. It's not, in God's economy, an absence of war. Peace does not come by the hands of humans.
 - xi) Peace – *shalom* in the Hebrew here – comes only as a free and willing response from the LORD blessing us, keeping us, seeing us, being merciful and gracious, and paying attention to us. When those things are in our lives and we have made the commitment to be holy people living for Christ, the shalom comes. We are blessed.
 - g) Finally – look at verse 27 – SO...they (the priests) shall put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.
 - h) There's power in the NAME of the LORD. There's power in the I AM. There's power in the name of JESUS, the CHRIST.

- i) And when the blessing comes from God, the identification WITH God comes as well. You can't be blessed by God unless you are willing to be identified with God.
- j) When the priest sent this blessing to the people, it was all those things we talked about, and it was a mark from the God who gave it! And a promise: I WILL BLESS THEM.

3) Application

- a) In our lives, we are so used to throwing blessings around. I'm not saying that's a bad thing, because in other places in the Bible, a simple greeting might be, "The Lord bless you, friend."
- b) When people sneeze, and you say "gazuntight", it means, "health to you". The English and Americans have sort of morphed that phrase into God Bless You. That's a polite thing to say, but what does it really mean, right?
- c) Think with me for a minute...look up here...can you imagine what could happen, if every time we decided to bless someone or call on God to bless someone, we had the words of Numbers 6 in our minds? Or if we remembered the words of Jesus in Matthew 5, that Jen read?
- d) Or how about the words in 1 Peter 2:9-10 which say, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."
- e) Because of Jesus Christ, we are that royal priesthood! And if we are that royal priesthood, are we not commanded by God to also bless the church, and the people of God with the words of security, and mercy, and shalom that are included in Numbers 6?
- f) Wouldn't we be, every time we blessed someone, be unleashing the powerful favor of God onto unsuspecting blessees who might not be braced for the impact that would have on their life? Is that even legal?
- g) Shouldn't we tell them before we bless them that doing this in their life might have the unwanted consequence of revealing their sin? Or that they

might suddenly feel that lifestyle that is tearing apart their family might not be the best lifestyle?

- h) Would we have to walk around telling people who have colds and allergies that it would be best if they didn't come near us because, can you imagine the problems it might cause if they get stuck in a room full of Christians who just read Numbers 6 and they had to sneeze? You'd have a hundred people placing the name of the LORD on them and saying, "God, look at that person, pay attention to her, and give her fullness like she never felt before!"
- i) This is a little silly in some ways, but is it?
- j) God doesn't mess around and we shouldn't either. If we're serious about who God is and that he's omnipotent, then the blessing we give to someone might heal them by the power of the Holy Spirit. It might cause problems with their friends and family. It might cause them to sell everything and give it away or leave a career to follow a calling!
- k) A blessing with that kind of understanding has independent power that can be unleashed in our congregation, or in our families, or even in the community. Wait 'til the gathering of people at the Rowdy Rooster gets wind of this tomorrow morning...
- l) As royal priests and holy people of God, we are responsible to unleash the power in the blessing of God with great passion, reverence, and care.
- m) A blessing from a born-again, faithful Christian is not some weak good luck charm that we say from rote every time we want to tell someone we're thinking of them or when someone sneezes. A blessing is calling on the Name of the LORD, and the power that comes with it, into someone's life, at a specific moment, in order for God to show favor, undergird them, show grace and mercy, and give fullness and wholeness.
- n) This is not something we should enter into lightly...because God will hear our prayer and mess with us. He will call us to account for sin. God will call us into a deeper level of relationship with Him.
- o) And if we do that in the context of the church congregation, then we will most likely see a bunch of work-a-day, rubber-meets-the-road royal priests who then go out into the community and carefully and strategically – maybe even when the person's not ready for it – bless them like God intended.

4) Conclusion

- a) God's ideal is lived out when we understand that He is paying attention to us, where His blessings and security drive out the power that death has in our lives, and where the achievement of wholeness and peace are possible.
- b) Where the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who seek after righteousness and mercy, those who are pure in heart – these are characteristics of those who are blessed...our characteristics.
- c) If I were you, I'd be careful how much you spend time around people who have allergies this time of year. But if you do, understand that the blessing that God so desires to give us is powerful and can transform lives instantly.
- d) So, do what you must...find people to bless right here in this church...out in the community...but warn them ahead of time that it may have significant consequences in their life.
- e) And when they look at you with that perplexed LOOK of confusion, that's your opportunity to tell them about the blessings of Jesus Christ at the very core of who you are, the One that is the bringer of peace and wholeness.
- f) Shalom...and Happy Mother's Day!
- g) Let's pray...