

Blessed In Jesus

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[0:00] And we're talking this morning about the blessing of listening to God. The blessing of listening to God.

Thankfully, we have, if you want to hear the voice of God, someone said, read your Bible out loud. What we have is the Word of God.

And the words of God are inspired, they are inerrant, they are infallible, and they are trustworthy.

And for us as believers in Christ, it is an encouragement for us to listen to His words.

He speaks. We need to listen. I'm beginning in chapter 8 in verse 32. So if you find your place there, you can go ahead and stand as we stand in honor of the reading of God's Word.

Proverbs chapter 8, beginning in verse 32. And now, O sons, listen to me.

[1:16] Blessed are those who keep my ways. Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it. Blessed is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors.

For whoever finds me, finds life, and obtains favor from the Lord. But he who fails to find me, injures himself.

All who hate me, love death. Father, may you bless the reading of your Word. May you speak this morning. May your Holy Spirit stir us together.

Father, as we meet together on this cold morning, Lord, I pray that your Holy Spirit will stir the fire of our hearts, and that you'd send us out with renewed passion today, as we are a people who listen to your Word.

I pray, Father, that you would speak in such a way that if there is someone here that does not know you, that they would hear the truth of the Gospel and be saved. And if there are people here that know you, I pray that they would be encouraged to listen attentively to your words.

[2:38] And so, Father, we just pray that you'd be with us, encourage us, stir us up, challenge us today, and we pray this all in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Well, I love when we sing the hymns.

So many of our hymns are such a classic treasure of truth. We don't, we're not stuck to singing only hymns, but I think we would fail miserably if we did not take some of those great hymns of the faith and carry those things on.

There is an author by the name of Robert Robinson who wrote a hymn in the year 1749. And this was just a simple man.

He was learning to be a barber. And as he was living in London, he heard a sermon preached by the great George Whitefield. The sermon was entitled, The Wrath to Come.

And in 1752, Robert Robinson surrendered his life to Christ, and he started writing and wrote many hymns, one of which really resonates with his understanding of the gospel and how he turned to Christ.

[3:54] He said words like this, Jesus sought me when a stranger, wandering from the fold of God. He to rescue me from danger, interposed his precious blood.

And just given the vivid picture of the gospel and how he experienced Christ in hearing the preaching of the word and how God changed his heart and his life, he went on to say, and really just to illustrate the tension of being in this mortal body and trying to worship an infinite God.

He said, Oh, to grace how great a debtor. Daily I'm constrained to be. Let that grace now, like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to thee.

A fetter is a shackle. Let my heart be shackled to you. My wandering heart. Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love.

Here's my heart. Oh, take and seal it. Seal it for thy courts above. And in that, you just hear his wrestling and wrangling with God just over his mortality and what the gospel does in illuminating his heart and mind to the truth of who Christ is and how that elevates him above even the world he lives in.

[5:15] Shackle me to you, God. My heart is prone to wander from you. Let me be bound to you. And then he says it, you know, especially as you look at the beginning words of it, he really understood how much his heart needs to be instructed in this.

And he said, come thou fount of every blessing. Tune my heart to sing thy grace. Streams of mercy never ceasing.

Call for songs of loudest praise. Teach me some melodious sonnet sung by flaming tongues above. Praise the mount I'm fixed upon it.

The mount of God's unchanging love. Tune my heart. Teach me. The reality is the word of God has been put in our hands for this very purpose so that the Holy Spirit of God can take the word of God and implant it into our hearts and instruct us, mold us into the image of his son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

This proverb is coming in that vein of thought. It's instruction for our heart. It is instructing us in the words of wisdom, which are the words of God.

[6:39] In chapter 8, you see this overarching theme of the wisdom of a father. And you've heard this so often through the Proverbs.

It's listen, heed the words of your father and the words of your mother. These are the words that have been taught to you. And these, in context, are words about the wisdom of God.

It's not just random words. It's not just words of human wisdom and human understanding. This is really referring to the wisdom of God that's being passed to you.

So when he starts in verse 32, you see him address it this way. And now, O sons, listen to me. Hear me. Blessed are those who keep my ways.

Hear instruction and be wise. Don't neglect it. Neglect it. Blessed is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors.

[7:37] Whoever finds me, which this indicates that this is to be the pursuit of our life. We're to be students of the Word of God and the wisdom of God, so that we plunge into the Bible and let the Holy Spirit of God speak.

Because when God speaks, it overwhelms our human senses and draws us to divine things, enabling us to overcome temporal things. That's what was so great about the song that I read earlier.

And so really, I think this would be summarized just as the blessings of listening to God. We really need to listen to God.

We live in an age of competing voices. All day long, if you're watching television or watching the headlines on your internet feed of news, whatever it is, however it is you're getting it, social media feeds, where you're constantly bombarding your mind with all the thoughts of the world during the day, and what's happening in Israel, and what's happening in Ukraine, and what's happening with Biden, and what's happening with Trump, and all of the things that are going on, many of those things which are very important, obviously.

But we're bombarding our mind with all of these thoughts, and really, the message of the world right now is one of undermining truth.

[9:09] It's one of universalism and plurality, but not singular thinking about the God of the universe. And so our minds are just constantly under attack with the desires of the world, with sensual things, with greed, with a desire for more things and more stuff, etc., etc.

The wisdom of the world is just, it's not helping us get closer to God. There is actually blessing, according to Solomon, as we listen to God.

As we tune the world out for a little while, and learn to focus and listen to the words of God. When we listen to God, there is actually blessing for us.

Encouragement. You see the words for blessing and benefits here, when he talks about the advantages of hearing God.

Whoever finds me, finds life. Obtains favor from the Lord. Whoever fails to find me, injures himself. All who hate me, wisdom.

[10:26] Love death. So what are the things that are blessings? What are the blessings that come when we listen to God? Number one, blessings come when we give favor to God's plea, when we listen to the words of God.

He presents here a sincere plea in the first verse. Now, O sons, listen to me. You hear the relational plea here.

This is the relational plea of father to son. That's why the scripture refers to God as our heavenly father. There is a relationship that's intended in this relationship with God.

One where he is your father. You might be looking at your life and saying, you know, my father wasn't a great example of a loving father, or a wise father, or a great father.

My father was a terrible example. Maybe he was an alcoholic. Maybe he wasn't there. Maybe he was abusive. And as you think through that, you can't allow that to become an excuse to mischaracterize who God your father is.

[11:36] You should actually use that as a platform to realize the fallenness of man and say, you know what? My earthly father wasn't what he should be, but thank goodness God my heavenly father is everything that he should be.

O sons, listen to me. It's a relational appeal. It's talking about a relationship that you should have with the father. And you see the closeness that's intended here because you see a progression when he talks about, blessed is he who listens to me as his father, watching daily at my gates and waiting beside my doors.

And what you see is a progression from being outside the house, the gates in this context. Usually a house would have a courtyard and a wall surrounding some of that house units there, and there would be a gate that let you into the courtyard of this house, this area.

And then as you come in the gates, then you would come up to the actual house, and there would be a door there, and you would wait by the door of the house. You'd wait to be invited in.

And so you're seeing the closeness of somebody that has a relationship that gets them through the gates to the door and waiting, listening for the wisdom that's going to come through the door of the father.

[12:58] This is the encouragement of a sincere plea from God. There's blessing that comes when we give favor to God's plea, his words, his invitations.

Son, listen to me. I think of a coach, even this week, Nick Saban retired. Some of you are Alabama fans, I'm sure. Not in this part of the country, right?

If you live in Alabama, you bleed crimson, roll tide. But the reality is everybody else in the country probably despises him. But great coach, by any sense of the word, great coach.

You may not agree with everything about Nick Saban, but he retired seven national champions, winning his coach, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. And it's interesting to hear him talk about his relationship with his players.

And you can only imagine being a player under a coach like that, how attentively you would listen to a coach like that, the guidance that he gives. And a coach like that, for players, he becomes so much like a father figure in their life as they're learning to play not just on the field but off.

[14:20] And so you listen to his announcement for his retirement. He said, it is not just about how many games we won and lost. It's about the legacy and how we went about it.

We always tried to do it the right way. The goal was always to help players create more value for their future, to be the best player that they could be and to be more successful in life because they were a part of our program.

Hopefully we've done that. And as he refers to these players, he refers to them as my boys, my sons. These are players that have endeared themselves to him because of the instruction that he gave in their life and the success that he brought to them as a coach.

And all of us have somebody in our life, a teacher, a coach, some adult figure in our life, a parent who was so influential in our life that it directed us down a certain path in our life and sent us with momentum in a certain direction.

And so when God is giving us this instruction, he's couching it in those kinds of terms so that when we hear the instruction of God, you're not just reading it as if it's just pages on a book, but you're hearing the heavenly Father of the universe, the Father of your life, speaking wisdom to you.

[15:39] It should be heard with an endearment on your part, like it was the successful coach that led you to victory, or the boss that led you to success in your business, or the parent that led you to success in life.

There should be some endearing quality to this that you sense in the voice of the Word of God that draws you to God, your heavenly Father. The message of Scripture is that we have an opportunity to have a relationship with God.

It's through His Word. John 1.12, But all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave them the right to become children of God. We have to see ourselves not as the adult in the spiritual room, but God is the adult in the room, and I'm always the child.

Galatians 3.26, For in Christ Jesus, you are all sons of God through faith. Paul went on to say in Galatians 4, this is why Christ came, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

And because you were sons, He said, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father, so that you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

[17:05] So that your heart is crying out to God like a small child saying, Abba, Father, like one that would cry out, Daddy. I mean, a new dad, you hear that?

Your baby girl call out, Daddy. And oh my goodness, that just melts your heart, you know? And now as a grandfather, I see that too, just as Alana, when she sees me, and she says, Paul!

And it's that little voice, and I'm like, you're going to get a pony. I'm bringing a puppy to Chandler's house. I'm getting whatever you want.

It's yours. Because of the endearment in that relationship, when you're listening to the words of wisdom, oh, sons and daughters, there is a relational plea, and there's blessing in it.

There's blessing in it when you give favor to the pleas of God. Number two, not only blessings come when we give favor to God's plea, but blessings come when we follow God's plan.

[18:19] And this is where he gives a specific plan. He provides us with a plan. And here, you see it just in the urgency, in the listening attentively that he describes here.

Oh, sons, listen to me. This word, listen, is an urgent plea. It's not just a simple, hey, listen to me. You know, people might say something in passing, and I'll forget it.

Sometimes you guys will tell me something. Hey, we need to remember to announce something this morning. And I'm trying to think of a thousand things as I'm getting up to the podium, you know, and trying to remember the message that's coming, trying to remember what's coming after, what's happening this week, and all that I'm trying to keep in my head and somebody says, hey, don't forget.

And by the time I take two steps, it is gone. Absolutely gone. But sometimes when Brandy is going to say something to me, she might put her hand on my shoulder and say, hey, I really need you to listen to me.

And she'll say, hey, don't forget this. And I've done that with my own kids, you know, because sometimes they would forget when I tell them to do stuff, right? And I'd say, hey, I really need you to listen to me.

[19:31] Chandler, I really need you to listen, you know, whatever the instructions were. You know, as teenagers, they're going a million miles an hour, they're not paying attention, and finally, I have to stop them and say, listen.

And usually, it's something important, it's something intense, and here, this is what Solomon is saying. Oh, listen to me. Listen. Blessed are those who keep my ways.

Hear instruction and be wise. The listens here is the same word that he uses in what's referred to as the Shema, the hero Israel, the Lord our God is one.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, et cetera, et cetera. It's the emphatic. It's a command for you to listen. It's a demand on your life.

When we talk about the commands of Christ, and I remember that vividly reading through John Piper's book talking about God's demands on the universe, I think is the title.

[20:33] And basically, he's going through the commands of Christ, and he argued why he used the title demands. He said, I intentionally chose that phrase demands because it goes against our nature.

Because we don't want to think there's a God demanding something of us. And he does. The demands of Christ.

God actually has a plan for us, and he has spoken to us. And he describes it in terms of here in verse 32, keeping my ways.

The ways of God. So you can think of it in terms of the commands that he gives so that you keep his ways, that you follow his ways, the ways that he does things.

So not only is there a relational appeal here, but there is a universal appeal of principle. The ways of God. I mean, I think of ways, and I think of going hiking, and there's a path to follow, and I remember being with a group that went hiking when I was a teenager, and we decided to get off the path and go a different way, right?

[21:46] So we, you know, moved the brush aside, and we were going to, you know, trek through the wilderness. And so we took the way, and we had, there were thorns everywhere, and we're, you know, you're getting cut up going through, and there's ravines that we have to cross that are impossible to cross, so we have to go a long way around.

And you face that a few times, and you realize, maybe the path was there for a reason, right? Maybe that was actually there for a reason.

Maybe there was a purpose behind this path that actually makes it easier to go and more successful. That's what a path actually is. In fact, if you think about it in our road system, you have to think that we haven't always had good highway systems in America.

Before 1950, we didn't have the highway, the federal highway system that we have. In order for you to get from New York City to Los Angeles, it could take you weeks, or a month, or more to get to, from there to there.

And it's because you would have to go through every small town. There were some highways along the way, but you would end up going on average 35 miles an hour from one end of the country to the other and would have to stop along the way many, many times.

[23:08] The reality is there is a reason we have a highway system. It makes it more successful for us to get from one place to the other. So when Eisenhower was in Germany and saw Hitler's Autobahn and looked at this highway system that enabled them to get the military across one end of the country to the other rapidly, that's why they came up with the plan for our highway system, not just for commerce, but for military purposes.

It was actually the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act that enabled us to begin our federal highway system. It was for us to get our military from one end of the country to the other when we need to.

to get from one place to the other and then you lose. And what we see here is the ways of God, the ways, the highway of the King for us to live a successful life, for us to get from one point in life to another successfully and prosperously and rightly.

The ways of God. God's way the rest of us will find that to be true.

I promise. Proverbs 4:11, I have taught you the way of wisdom. I have led you in the paths of uprightness.

[24:47] Or the verse that we memorize so often, Proverbs 3, 5, and 6, we're reminded, trust in the Lord with all your heart. And don't lean on your own understanding.

In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make straight your paths. Your paths. Your ways. It's going to make your life easier if you listen to the wisdom of God and His words.

If you listen to the Father who cares about you and wants to direct you through life successfully.

That's why Jesus said in John 14, 6, I am the way, the truth, and the life and no one comes to the Father except through me.

I am the way. The ways of God. You want to get to God? Come through Christ. Allow His Holy Spirit to speak through His Word and direct you and give you direction for the way.

Hear these things. Listen to these things. Apply these things. We're reminded in James 1, 22, we are to be doers of the Word, not hearers only, deceiving ourselves.

[25:56] Do you realize that there is a possibility if you don't direct yourself according to the ways of God that you are susceptible to deceit? you can deceive yourself?

Your inner voice is not the voice you're to be listening to. Your heart, according to Disney, is not going to lead you to God.

It's not going to lead you to a successful life in Christ. Be doers of the Word or you'll be deceived. If we're going to build a church that's going to be successful, how are we going to do that?

We're going to build it according to His Word so that we act in His ways. If you're going to build a successful marriage, you're going to do it according to His Word so that you can together, husband and wife, act according to His ways.

If you're going to get through life and be successful, it's going to be because you do it according to His ways. You're going to listen to His Word. Apply the principles of His Word to your life so that you can get to the other side successful.

[27:09] He relationally appeals to us. Blessing come when we give favor to His plea.

Not only does blessing come when we follow God's plan, but blessing comes when we find God's promise. And what does He promise? Blessed is the one who listens to me, finds life, obtains favor. The reality for us as He uses this Hebrew word for blessed, it signifies actual happiness, fulfillment, well-being, prosperity.

Not prosperity, gospel kind of prosperity, although you follow God's principles, it makes you prosperous in many ways. You find life.

You find quality of life. You find strength. How many of you need quality of life for happiness? We all do. How many of you need strength for quality of life?

[28:21] We all do. In fact, not only do we find life, but we obtain favor. How many of you want favor? You want God's favor in your life.

You want God behind you. You want God within you. The Holy Spirit inside of you moving you down this road of life so that you're going to be successful. Nobody doesn't want that, right?

The way to find that is through God's word and His wisdom, and as we follow His word and apply it to our life, that's how we get there. And what we end up with is the promise of God.

We end up in a superior position. I'm standing on more solid ground than the rest of the world. The wind and the waves come for everybody, but they're not standing on the rock.

And so Jesus said, the wind and the waves come and the sinking sand beneath them shifts and they fall. And the fall of that house, Jesus said, is great.

[29:26] That He whose life is built on the rock, and that's where I want to be. A superior position. I want to be in a position of blessing with God.

That He's blessing my life. That His hand is on my life. I want God's favor in my life. You see in chapter 1, the whole purpose of these Proverbs as the Holy Spirit is inspiring Solomon.

He said it's, in chapter 1, verse 2, He said, this is so that you'll understand words of insight. To receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, in justice, in equity.

to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to youth. Let the wise hear and increase in learning. And the one who understands, here he'll obtain guidance.

Hear, my son. Hear your father's instruction. Do not forsake your mother's teaching. They will be a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck.

[30:34] You're blessed. You find favor. His hand is on you. I think of success in people like, somebody like Eric Liddell, you know, if you've ever seen the movie Chariots of Fire, a lot of people in this generation may not have seen it.

It's kind of an older movie now. I remember seeing it, but it's kind of dated. They need to do a remake of that movie because it is actually quite an inspiring story. Eric Liddell, 1924 Olympic runner.

They called him the Flying Scotsman. I mean, the guy was just blazing fast, predicted to win that 100 meter race. But the race fell on Sunday.

And he said, because it's the Lord's Day, I won't run. Shocked the nation. I mean, everybody was so disappointed in him because it was letting his country down or whatever.

And so he said, no, it's the Lord's Day and I'm not going to run. And he made that decision to not run. And I don't remember what happened in the race if somebody else ended up, a different country ended up getting the medal.

[31:40] But he was then rescheduled for a 400 meter race instead. It wasn't his race, but they scheduled him for that race. Just before he goes up to run the race, another American comes up to him and hands him a piece of paper.

And written on the paper is 1 Samuel 2, verse 30, that says, those who honor me, I will honor. And Liddell ran that race with that verse in his hand. And in the 400 meter, he won the gold. That was not his race.

He wins the gold in that. So afterwards, they come and they ask him, you know, what was your plan for the race? He said, the secret of my success, I'm not going to do my Scottish voice or my kids. I did my rap voice a few weeks ago. I still have not heard the end of that. So, the secret of my success. No, I won't do it. The secret of my success over the 400 meters is that I run the first 200 meters as fast as I can.

[32:54] And then for the second 200 meters, with God's help, I ran even faster. He found favor with God. But what I saw even in his testimony is that he didn't win favor in God by winning the gold medal.

He won favor in God when he decided to put God first. Blessed is everyone, Psalm 128, 1, who fears the Lord and who walks in His ways.

The conscious decision that you're going to live the blessed life in Jesus means that you are going to follow God's Word and His ways. And when you do, there's going to be blessing and favor in your life.

God's going to be with you. He's going to, even when you fail and when you fall, you say, James, has God been with you in all the stuff that you've been through? And I would say, emphatically, yes. When my father died, God was with me. And when Brandy's mother died, God was with us. And when Chandler got cancer, God was with us.

[34:06] And when Carly got cancer, God was with us. And when I changed jobs and went all through all that stuff, God was with us. And when my wife had a stroke, or my mother had a stroke this last week, not saying, not wishing anything upon us.

But it would not be surprised. But if it happened, I'm telling you right now, God would be with us. There's blessing for us in Christ Jesus.

And this is not just an Old Testament concept either. James reminded us in James 1.21, but the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres.

Being no hearer who forgets, but a doer who acts. He will be blessed in his doing. Blessed.

We're blessed when we give favor to God's plea. We're blessed when we follow God's plan. We're blessed when we find God's promise.

[35:22] And it's all because of Jesus. It's all in Christ. We're blessed in Christ. I'm prone to wander.

Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love. Oh, Lord, take my heart and seal it. Like a fetter, chain me, shackle me to you. Don't let me go.

Let me be faithful to your word. Let me find you in it. And may the Holy Spirit of the living God give us strength to carry on.