

The Holy God who Blesses

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[0:00] Let's pray again. Lord God, Heavenly Father, as we turn now to your word, we ask you will speak to us again.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be now and always acceptable! in your sight. Pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. As many of you may know, our family spent some time in Nigeria. And in Nigeria, one of the most popular names for girls was the name Blessing.

And this was because the child was recognized as something wonderful from God, a blessing.

Now, our passage today, we're going to be considering God's blessing to us as his people and exploring a little bit of what that means.

[1:04] As you will have noticed, Numbers 6 has two very distinct parts. The first part deals with the Nazarite vow and serves as the end of a large section that we have been looking at from the start of chapter 1, talking about God's requirements of his people if he's to go with them as they journey from where they are encamped at Mount Sinai up to the Promised Land.

The second part of chapter 6 is a very short one. A few short verses at the end of the chapter, verses 22 to 27. But actually, it's there that I want to concentrate most of what we're doing this morning.

But we will look briefly at the Nazarite vow in the first 21 verses. So what was the Nazarite vow?

It's a vow of those set apart. It was a very demanding and costly vow that people would make in dedication to the Lord.

And the standards of holiness and ceremonial cleanliness that were demanded by the vow exceeded that even of the high priest himself.

[2:43] It was a very solemn and very high-standard vow. And yet, as we've read, even at the successful completion of that vow, a sin offering was needed.

Even the most holy and obedient person was in need of forgiveness of sin. You see, no one reaches God's standard of holiness.

We need someone perfect to do that. Now, the good news about the Nazarite vow is that we as Christian people don't have to go to these costly and all-consuming extremes.

Because we already have someone who perfectly fulfills all of God's holy standards. Jesus. Jesus. Now, of course, Jesus himself wasn't a Nazarite.

Nazarites didn't cut their hair. It was the sign, the symbol of their vow, that they would let the hair grow for the whole time of their dedication.

[4:17] And while we don't know anything of Jesus' preferred hairdo, we do know that it wasn't the first thing that people noticed about him, which would have been the case if he'd been a Nazarite.

It would have been very distinctive. That was the point of it. Nazarites didn't drink any alcohol or even touch anything remotely to do with grapes.

And yet we do know that Jesus did drink wine. He even turned water into wine on one occasion. And he passed around the cup at the Last Supper.

Nazarites were strictly not to have any contact with dead bodies. And yet Jesus not only touched dead bodies, but he brought them to life, didn't he?

Rather than them making him unclean, he made them clean. So although he made no Nazarite vow, Jesus was totally set apart for God.

[5 : 34] And his level of holiness was far beyond even the Nazarites. Rather than him needing a sin offering, he became our sin offering that we might be able to approach the holy God.

So this instruction for this very particular and very demanding vow is kind of a fitting end to this long section that we've had from chapter 1, verse 1, right up to chapter 6, verse 21, of instructions of how the people of God can go on their journey with a most holy God.

Chapters 7 to 10 will go on to describe what the Israelites actually did in preparation for this journey. But before we get to that, we have a kind of interlude with the blessing of verses 22 to 27 of chapter 6.

These verses are sometimes called the Aaronic blessing, not the Ironic blessing. That's a different thing. This is the Aaronic blessing, not because they constitute a blessing for Aaron and his sons, because it's not just them, but because Aaron and his family, the priests, were to say this blessing.

And they did say it. Often. Tradition has it that these words were declared on a daily basis from the door of the tabernacle by the priests.

[7 : 42] We don't know for sure about that, but it wouldn't have been inappropriate. Before we look at what the blessing says, let's look at who is saying it.

The Lord said to Moses, tell Aaron and his sons, this is how you are to bless the Israelites. And it goes on with it. It's the Lord who tells Moses to tell Aaron to tell the Israelites.

Sort of fourth hand. The point, though, is that it's a blessing from God. It's not from the priests.

And it's for all the people. Not just the priests and not just the Nazarites. No one section. It's the ordinary people.

It's everybody. And that's clear again in verse 27. We put my name on the Israelites and I will bless them. All of them.

[8 : 48] So what is it that God wants his priests to say to his people? Well, this is it. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace. Structurally, the blessing is three very simple verses, each one with two lines. The first is God's movement towards his people.

And the second half is what God would do for his people. The three verses are three different aspects of God's one relationship and one activity for his people.

So let's look a little bit more closely at these three verses. First of all, the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord bless you.

What does it mean for God to bless us? Many people would say, well, blessing just means that God will give us all the good things.

[9 : 55] And it certainly does include that, actually. But I think blessing means much more than that. God blesses his people by giving them all they need in life, by giving them a place to live.

Now remember that these were people who were heading towards the land that God had promised them. They were homeless. By blessing them with children.

And we've already seen that these people had become a numerous people. And by showing his favor to them.

They'd been delivered out of Egypt. They'd been brought and kept thus far. That's also part of God's blessing. They'd already seen God's blessing, actually.

But let's just remember the context here. God, the mighty, the holy, all-powerful God, was going to be with his people.

[11:08] You see, he promises his presence, a relationship with him. Of course, it has to be a relationship on his terms.

He is a holy God after all. But his presence is the greatest blessing for his people. God's blessing is much more than God's goodies.

It's God himself. God himself and this is fulfilled for us in Jesus. He is God with us.

Emmanuel. He's God come near. He's God's ultimate blessing for his people. As Ephesians chapter 1 verse 3 says, praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

We are richly, richly blessed in Jesus. The Lord bless you and keep you. You see, God is not going to just go with them as kind of a passenger on their journey to the promised land.

[12:31] He's not even just a good luck charm, a divine talisman but he will keep them. He's going to be active for them.

He will be their protector and their provider. His people are in his keeping. What a reassurance as they go into the unknown.

unknown. What a reassurance for us. We go into the unknown.

We don't know what's ahead of us on our journey. We do know that we are held, we are kept by the holy God.

Amen. Both verses 25 and 26 use this image of the face of God.

[13:40] It's a very intimate image of God's relational presence. When a mother holds a baby, what does the baby see?

Others face. That's right. And of course, the Israelite people would have the experience and the stories of Moses in the tent of meeting front of mind when they heard these words of God's face.

Because remember, Moses spoke to God face to face as a person speaks to their friend.

Face to face. means friendship. The face of God signified friendship with God. But the face of God was also very holy.

Remember when Moses came down from the mountain, his face was radiant because he had spoken to the Lord. He didn't even know it and everybody else couldn't stand it.

[14:53] And even the reflected shining of God's face was unbearable to look at.

God is holy and he shines with a mighty light. So there's this image of friendship with the holy one.

Both wonderful and fearful, intimate and totally awe-inspiring. it makes us excited and nervous to think of God's face shining on us.

Imagine it, face to face with the smile of the perfect and all holy God. We read this in 2 Corinthians 4.

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 God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

[16:22] Jesus' face shines on us as Christian believers. The blessing of God's face shining on us is ours in Christ Jesus.

The holy one is our friend. The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

If that's how God turns towards his people, by making his face shine on them, grace. God gives us what we don't deserve.

He knows what sort of people we are, and yet he lives in the midst of his people. And of course, we as Christian people know more of the extent of God's grace towards us than the Old Testament people of God did.

We know of God's gracious gift of his Son for our salvation. Ephesians 2 reminds us that the only way we can be right with God is through the grace found in Christ.

[17:47] Christ, we need that gift of access to God through faith in what Jesus did for us on the cross.

Otherwise, we have no hope of friendship with God. Our own efforts cannot ever do it. So, the Old Testament people relied on God's grace to be able to enjoy his friendship.

And so do we. We all need God's grace to approach him. Without it, we are lost, alone in the desert if you like.

The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace. Again, in verse 26, we have this image of God's face turn towards us.

Now, to really understand this, I think that it's helpful for us to try and imagine the opposite. What would it mean to say that God hides his face from us?

[19:02] awful thing. It would be rejection. It would be enmity and shame from God himself.

And yet, that's what Jesus bore on the cross for us. we sing it in one of our songs, the father turns his face away.

And Jesus on the cross cried out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Quoting from Psalm 22. 22. So here we are, face to face with God, knowing his acceptance, that is his face turned towards us, knowing his pleasure, his face shining on us.

what kind of favoured people are we? We are surely blessed. And give you peace.

The activity of God that's described in this verse is that he gives peace. Now, the word for peace that's used here is the Hebrew word shalom, which many of you will know.

[20:40] And where our English word peace can be quite weak, it just can mean the absence of war. We pray for peace in those places where they are experiencing war.

And yes, it is the absence of war, but it's much more the shalom means, has a positive meaning of wellness, tranquility, satisfaction, completeness, wholeness, being known by God.

It's the sum of all God's good gifts. It's the word that describes life as it's meant to be, as we were created to be. it's not just the absence of war, it's the absence of sin and all of its effects as well.

And this is saying that God, in blessing his people, would give us that thing, that peace, that shalom.

now, of course, you are not going to be surprised, probably, to hear that I'm going to claim that this is fully realized in Jesus.

[22:05] But it's not me who's going to say it. Jesus himself said, peace, I leave with you. My peace, I give to you. I do not give as the world gives.

Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid. And again, in Ephesians, Paul writes that Jesus made peace, in verse 15, and then Jesus actually is our peace.

What blessing? But why? Why does God want his priests to say all these things?

What's the point? Well, I think there are at least two reasons that are stated in verse 27.

First of all, so that in the words of verse 27, they, the Aaronic priests, would put my, that is God's name on the Israelites.

[23 : 27] Putting a name on something is a mark of ownership, isn't it? God is claiming these people as his own.

Now, not owning them as slaves, but owning them in the sense that they belong to him relationally. It's belonging in the same way as I say, this is my wife, or this is my family.

It's not that I own them, but in the sense that these are the people with whom I have that kind of relationship. relationship. And that's what God says to his people.

These are the people with whom I have this kind of relationship. When we say he is our God, we are saying he is the one with whom we have the God relationship.

we are his people and he is our God. And as we read in 1 Peter that for Christian people, we are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession.

[24 : 52] Then verse 10, which I don't have on the slide, goes on to say that once you were not a people, now you are the people of God. We are to declare his blessings.

He has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. His face shines on us. We are his.

The second reason the priests were to say this blessing was because God was actually going to bless his people.

You see, these words were not just a wish expressed by the priest, hoping that it might happen. God says, say this to the people because I'm actually going to do it.

God's determined to bless his people in this way. And he wants his people to know that. He wanted them to know that when they experienced blessing, it was not just good luck, but it was from him.

[26 : 08] The words of the priest didn't make it happen. They didn't convince God to do it. they were told to declare it because God had already determined that that's how he was going to do it.

That's what he was going to do. He's going to bless his people. Each line of the blessing uses the word you and the word is a singular.

So it's the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.

Each promise, if you like, is directed to the individuals. And yet, in verse 27, I will bless them.

So do you see what it's saying? Each individual of all of God's people are blessed. We are blessed as a people and we are blessed individually.

[27 : 31] He calls us to be his people and yet he knows each of us by name. God's blessing is not just a once done and dusted thing, but it's an ongoing action by a God who dwells with his people.

So this instruction isn't an instruction that Aaron should get up and say this blessing once and then forget it.

In fact, God knows that we forget. And so it's important that we are reminded it's entirely right that these words should be said daily because God's blessing continues.

So what about us? What should we do with this blessing? Well, we can be declaring these truths.

What God has done, what he is doing and what he will continue to do. And we should be immensely grateful.

[29:02] You see, God is blessing and has blessed us in incredible ways. Pause to think about it. Words, songs, attitudes, lives of gratitude are entirely in order.

1 Peter 2 tells us, reminds us that we are all a priesthood called to declare his praises.

Part of being a priesthood is that you declare the priestly blessing. We're to declare these truths to each other, to God's people.

Say to each other, this is who God is and this is what he has done and this is how he blesses us. Know it, remember it. you have a ministry to all those around you to declare this blessing.

And we can live in the reality of God's determination to bless us. Yes, there are hard things.

[30:39] Yes, there are disappointments. Yes, there's suffering. Yes, there's hardship. Yes, there's grief and heartache. We all know that.

But we can know that even in all those things, God is for us in Christ, pouring out his blessing. we're in the presence of a holy God with humanly impossible standards.

But we're also in the presence of a God who has provided all we need for life and godliness. A God who has drawn near to us in Jesus.

A God who makes his face to shine on us, giving us grace and peace, protecting and providing for us. How can we not?

Let's pray. Lord God, what can we say? We are just so grateful for your many, many blessings to us. Keep them in our minds.

[31:51] Keep our hearts close to you. Help us always to remember that you are for us. In Jesus' name, Amen.