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Numbers 6:22-27

“Blessed”

Growing up, our pastor concluded every worship service the same way. Following the invitation, he would make a few comments and conclude by reciting, from memory, Numbers 6:22-27. No doubt we’ve all seen framed artwork featuring this poetic blessing which, some scholars believe, may have been the oldest poem recorded in Scripture.

This priestly blessing has been traced to a significant archaeological find. Known as the Ketef Hinnom Silver Scrolls, they are the earliest physical evidence of Scripture predating the Dead Sea Scrolls by several centuries (7th century BC). This was during the ministries of Nahum, Habakkuk, Jeremiah, and Zephaniah and the reign of King Josiah in Judah.

But what does the word “blessing” mean? In the south, few words have had a richer application. “Bless your heart,” for example, has about 1,000 meanings. It could be good, bad, sympathetic, or a word of condemnation. It is equally rich in Scripture. Compare, for example, Genesis 1:22 (the first use of the word), Genesis 12:2, and Psalm 103:1.

What does it mean to be “blessed?” Due to the rich meaning of the word, scholars have searched for another word to help grasp its full meaning. These include, “happy,” “joy,” “prosper,” or even “flourishing.” These words, though helpful, fail to fully catch its full. Part of the problem is that “blessed” is a single English for multiple Hebrew words. So, if we want to be blessed, we had better pause and explore what it is we’re actually seeking. Otherwise, how will we find it?

First, **Blessed are the Redeemed**. The first Hebrew word describes vertical, covenantal favor. It is used primarily in the first books of the Bible where God establishes Israel as his covenantal people (see Genesis 12:2). Israel was blessed, not because they were righteous, but because they were loved with an eternal, binding love. God chose them through Abraham, redeemed them through Moses, cleansed them through the Priests, established them through Joshua, protected them through David, prospered them through Solomon, pursued them through the prophets, rescued them through Nehemiah, and saved them through Jesus.

As God’s chosen people, they were, by grace, blessed. This relationship was initiated, secured, and protected by God himself. All the saints had to do was receive the blessed grace of God by faith. It sounds simple, but most people rob themselves of God’s covenantal favor by refusing to receive his grace by faith. When we walk by faith and are saved by grace, we are, then, blessed. Notice, this is a matter of definition, not feelings or circumstances. By faith, we are sons and daughters of God the Father. We are, therefore, blessed.

Secondly, **Blessed are the Wise**. Being “blessed” is not just a matter of faith, (that is, a vertical relationship), but is also a matter of wisdom, (that is, a horizontal relationship). The first meaning regards our faith while the second regards our choices and behavior. In other words, the Wise are blessed. Think about it, a man can be blessed due to his redemption, but due to foolish decisions and poor virtue, he may suffer the consequences of his foolishness.

While the first usage dominates the narrative portion of the Old Testament, this latter usage dominates the Psalms and Proverbs (see Psalm 1:1-2, for example). The Blessed man or woman is one who enjoys the benefits of virtue and wisdom. This should be common sense. Much of human suffering is human caused. A life lived apart from self-control, humility, patience, sacrificial love, selflessness, and faith is often riddled with conflict, vice, and suffering. Keep burning bridges and see if it produces joy. Keep fighting for entitlements and see if it produces personal gratification. Stay angry, refuse to forgive, and complain constantly and see where it ends. The Wise enjoys a more fulfilling and happy life.

This requires a significant commitment to godliness, overcoming temptation and sin, and gleaning from the Wise in order to experience another level of blessedness. Therefore, if we want to be blessed, our focus needs to change. We should focus less on our careers, wealth, entertainment, politics, or self-help nonsense. Likewise, we should focus less on our wants, desires, and pain. Instead, let us prioritize virtue and wisdom. This will take work, but the benefits are incredible.

Finally, **Blessed are the Blessers**. The redeemed and the wise, full of the blessings of God, will be a blessing to God and to others (see Psalm 104:1, 134:1-2, 135:19-20; 1 Chronicles 20:20; Nehemiah 9:5 for starters). The idea is that those who experience the blessings of God respond by returning to him the gift of blessing. God’s blessings are overwhelming and, by faith, our cups run over. We, the Blessed, become a blessing. The blessed bless.

This is done primarily in two ways. The first is WORSHIP. Worship requires us to look beyond ourselves, our desires, our accomplishments, and our problems and toward the Lord. Worship reorients how we think and what we care about. A foolish life of selfishness will be anything but blessed, but one that is directed toward the Lord will experience the blessings of God. Worship keeps the Lord at the center of our lives. The chief end of man is to glorify God. The secret to being blessed is to bless the Lord.

The second is SERVICE. Scripture commands we love the Lord with our entire being and then love our neighbor as ourselves. Nothing secures a life of misery more than selfishness. Against our natural inclinations, a life dedicated to the wellbeing of others produces blessing and joy. In your service of the Lord, don’t forget your neighbor.

Shortly after sharing a parable without explaining its meaning, the crowd was confused. Jesus later clarified to his disciples that there are some who will hear him but not listen. They will see him but not perceive who he really was. But the Disciples of Jesus are not this way. They are blessed. “Blessed are your eyes,” Jesus stated, “for they see, and your ears, for they hear” (Matthew 13:16). Find blessing in knowing you are his. That comes by faith. Be blessed by walking in virtue and wisdom. Be a blessing via worship and service.