

***Beloved Of God:  
Blessed***

**Genesis 12: 1-9  
Matthew 5: 1-12**

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Last week we began a four week journey that considers our place in the large and wonderful family of God.

The theme verse for these weeks comes from John 15. Jesus is speaking to his disciples, just before his Passion. He says:

9 *"I have loved you even as the Father has loved me.  
Remain in my love..."*

Loved by Jesus.  
Every bit as much as the Heavenly Father loved him.  
That much.  
That deep.  
That strong.

A love demonstrated by His complete sacrifice for us on the cross.

We are loved by Jesus.  
We are beloved of God.  
And in this Easter season it is my hope and prayer that we will be affirmed in that love, grow ever more confident in that love, and find even deeper joy and peace in that love than we may be already experiencing.

Beloved of God.  
As the beloved of God, we wish to remind ourselves that we are:

- ✓ Chosen
- ✓ Blessed
- ✓ Broken
- ✓ Given

Last week we were encouraged by what it means to be Chosen by God. Tonight join me in meditating on what it means to be Blessed.

Beloved of God,  
you are Blessed by God.

Do you believe that?  
Can you accept it?  
Do you understand it?

Tonight I'd like to:

- define what a blessing is
- consider how we are blessed
- wonder if we are able to receive these blessings
- challenge us to pass the blessings along.

Begin with me in the Word of God.

**Genesis 12:1-9, p.10 (OT)**

**Matthew 5:1-12, p.4 (NT)**

### **DEFINING BLESSING**

What is it to be called "Blessed," to receive a blessing?

What do we say when we refer to Abraham as "blessed by God"?

What is it that we are aiming for when following Jesus' beatitudes?

It is not to be rich, or at ease, or popular.

Jesus makes that clear enough in his sermon. Blessed are the poor, those who mourn, the meek.

And Abraham - he remained childless till well into old age, and never had a place he could really call home.

What is it to be blessed?

Instinctively, we know it is good. We crave a blessing, deep down inside we do. You know, I have lots of grace and room in this congregation to monkey and tinker with all kinds of things in the liturgy. But after having led worship some 1200 times for you what is very clear to me is this -

***don't forget the benediction!***

The imparting of God's parting blessing - before we go into our busy week, we crave that blessing. Indispensable.

*The Lord bless you and keep you.*

*The Lord make his face shine upon you and gracious to you.*

*The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.*

What is that?

What is it to be blessed?

Do a search through the Old Testament and you will see being blessed associated with things like:

- good health
- fruit to one's daily work
- the necessary goods for life being met;
- peace in the home
- the defeat of enemies;

AND

- having a living, peace-filled relationship with God

Blessings show up right in the very beginning, Genesis 1, where God blesses the creation.

What is it to receive God's Blessing?

It is when the God fills us and renews life - our life, the life of creation - when God fills life and renews it, directing it in good and right ways.

It is the enhancing of life, rather than tearing it down.

It is increased wholeness and well-being and depth of meaning.

Yes, the Word of God's blessing into our lives is like the Word spoken into the dark void at the time of Creation.

Order out of chaos.

Life out of nothing.

Light out of darkness.

Fullness out of the empty.

You that are beloved of God through Christ,  
Galatians 3:9 tells us that

*those who believe are blessed with Abraham, who believed.*

Abraham, our forebearer in faith.

Through Jesus, we the descendents in faith, and equal recipients of God's blessing.

Redeemed by Christ from the **curse** of sin and law (Gal 3:13-14).

*In Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham comes to the Gentiles so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.*

The Spirit - yes, the **same** Spirit that hovered over the waters at the first day of creation. The Spirit that formed it, and breathed life into Adam. That Spirit breathes new life into us who were dead in our sins. He **blesses** us.

What Satan and sin have sought to tear down and destroy, the Spirit builds up. Where Satan seeks to rip us out of and away from the arms of God, the Spirit hovers over us, protecting us. Check out Psalm 91 for beautiful language about that.

So clean air can be a blessing.  
Life not abruptly ended, or too short, can be a blessing.  
Peace.  
Sunshine.  
Rain.  
Family.  
Knowledge.  
Justice.  
Gifts of God that fill life and renew it.  
Blessings.

### **GIVEN BLESSINGS**

There is the old hymn. Yes, you were probably counting on me quoting it somewhere along the way. So, don't let me disappoint you.

*Count your many blessings.*

*Name them one by one.*

*And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.*

Beloved of God, our Heavenly Father calls us in Jesus, and in Him grants blessings of all different sorts.

Sometimes our lives are SO rushed that we scarcely notice.

And sometimes, we receive these blessings so often, in such quantity, that we mistakenly assume that we **deserve** them; that they are some inalienable birthright, rather than a gift of sheer grace through Christ.

And so, let's enjoy the privilege of being able to end the Lord's Day here in the still and peace of this place. May I invite you to take a few minutes now to list in your mind some of the life-giving divine gifts that have been granted to you.

**<2 minutes>**

I'd also now like to invite you to turn to someone near you, and share one or two of those blessings. If you'd rather not, rather just keep them as a quiet conversation between the Lord and you, that's OK too. We'll respect that treasure of quiet time. Just say so to the one beside you.

But if you'd like to share a blessing or two, please do so now.

<2 minutes>

## RECEIVING BLESSINGS

I listed one of the issues about blessings as being that we are too busy to see the blessing.

Another - a particular problem, I think, in our culture, is that we can quickly be too independently minded.

Somehow I have this sneaking suspicion that too many of us never fully outgrow the attitude of the little child who defiantly says to mommy, "*I can do it MYSELF.*" Only - we learn how to dress it up a bit.

One way to gauge that is to wonder a bit, how good are we at receiving help from other people? Can we accept graciously what someone may seek to give into our life? Or do you find yourself saying what I've noticed myself saying, probably too often, "*Oh, you don't have to do that. I'm fine, thanks.*"

If that is my attitude towards others, why would it be any different towards the Lord?

Hmmm.

How is that with you, people Beloved of God and Blessed by God?

Can we cultivate an attitude that receives blessings gladly and humbly?

Both from the Lord, as we so crave at the end of the liturgy?

AND from each other, as God gives occasion for that?

## PASSING ALONG BLESSINGS

Which is the last thing I'd like to leave with you.

For, you see, as God grants us the privilege of receiving His blessing through Jesus, so He also grants us,

as ambassadors of Christ

and temples of the Holy Spirit

the amazing position in the Kingdom of being *dispensers of blessing.*

Receiving blessing, and aware of it, will lead to a desire to bless others.  
And it is not merely an option.

Jesus calls us to deliberately live a blessing-dispensing lifestyle.

In Luke 6 He says

*27 "But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,*

*28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.*

In Romans 12 the apostle echoes that direction, "*Bless... do not curse.*"

Henry Nouwen says, "There is little or no neutral territory between the land of the blessed and the land of the cursed." (p.82 *Life Of The Beloved*)

How true.

Consider the words of Jesus, "The one who is not with me is against me" (Mt 12:30). That's in the context of allegiance. And then he says, in the context of distributing mercy and blessing, "whoever is not against us is for us." (Mk 9:40)

Either way, there is no such thing as spiritually neutral turf, either/or living, indifferent status.

With Jesus, or against him.

Offering blessing or passing out curses.

It's one - or the other.

"Bless, do not curse" says the Holy Word of God.

Begin right here in this congregation.

How do you speak of your brother or sister? Or the leaders of the congregation?

In blessings?

And how do your actions speak?

And then, moving from here to your home - what flows from you there?

Blessings?

Or the opposite?

And in the classroom or office?

The realm of the curse is the realm of evil, the realm of death, the realm of hell. No one is brought to life through gossip, accusations, name-calling or blaming.

Do we ever get sucked up by that?

Or can we fight the temptation and be blessing dispensers instead?

There is, for some odd reason, a long tradition that says in CRC worship only the ordained pastor can pronounce the blessing.

Apparently it doesn't "take" when 'mere mortals' (otherwise known as 'laity') say the words. And, whatever you do, don't raise your hands above your shoulders if you SHOULD say such words.

I'm not going to fight that particular battle.

And believe me when I say that I **DO** count it a great privilege to be able to speak a blessing to you twice each Sunday!!

But don't **EVER** leave here thinking that the business of blessing dispensing is only mine to do. And that with the closing words of the service, that it is done!!

It is not only a formal act for a pastor in a priestly role.

It is a **lifestyle** for **ALL** God's people....

**ALL** the time!

Do you know what the very last act of Jesus was before He ascended to heaven?

Look up Luke 24:51.

*While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven.*

As he left, so we pick up the ministry and carry it on.

AND,

may it become such an ingrained lifestyle for us, that it will follow us, too, to our very last breath.

Living, speaking, and demonstrating the life-giving grace of God through Jesus.

Blessing.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

And let all God's people say -

**AMEN!**