

The Blessing Numbers 6:22-27 August 23, 2026

You probably heard about the hunter who got hunted. He was running away from a hungry bear. In desperation, he cries out, "Lord, please turn this bear into a Christian!" He looks back and the bear has stopped, dropped to its knees, and is bowing its head. Relieved, the guy walks closer and hears the bear praying: "Thank you, Lord, and bless this food I am about to receive." Say blessing.

I wonder what comes to your mind when you hear that word, Blessing? Tell the person beside you. I wish we had time to go around and hear everyone's response. That's what we always called the prayer before a meal, the bear said the Blessing, which is short for asking God to bless the food and whomever we may include, those that grew it, processed it, transported it, prepared it, etc. But some people might think of something else, like God bless you, be blessed, etc. Others may have first thought of the Beatitudes in Matt 5, Blessed are the meek, etc. And of course we've already mentioned blessings in some of our songs today. We're going to look this morning at one of the most well-known Bible passages but about which I've never preached. Please open your Bibles to Numbers 6.

We've already come across blessings several times in our journey through Genesis. The first time we saw God blessing someone it was Adam and Eve as He told them to be fruitful. Then God blessed the 7th day and made it holy. Then He blessed Noah and his sons after they came out of the ark. We talked about how God blessed Abraham with a 7 fold blessing in Genesis 12 and we preached a whole sermon on it. God later blessed Abraham several more times as well as Sarah and Isaac. About a month ago we saw Jacob steal Esau's blessing and we realized that blessings cannot be taken back. Later God blessed Jacob as he slept on a rock-hard pillow and we watched as he wrestled with God all night long and was blessed by Him at Peniel. We will yet see Jacob bless each of his sons and even Pharaoh himself. The word bless, blessed, or some form is used 426 times in the Bible about a fifth of them in Genesis alone. It is a blessed book.

But the blessing we find today is in Numbers 6:22-27. If you are able, please stand as we read it. Num 6:22 The Lord said to Moses, 23 "Tell Aaron and his sons, 'This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: 24 ""The Lord bless you and keep you; 25 the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; 26 the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace." ' 27 "So they will put **my name** on the Israelites, and I **will** bless them."

What's the first rule of Biblical preaching and teaching? Say context. Numbers 6 takes place after the Israelites have left Egypt and are on the way to the Promised Land (the place, not the quartet). They are becoming the people of God under Moses while Aaron is the High Priest leading their worship at the tabernacle. They are camped at the base of Mt. Sinai and have not even sent the spies in to check out the land yet. They have just received the 10 Suggestions. No, you know, the Ten Commandments. They also received the rest of the law there at Mt. Sinai and the book of Numbers begins with, well, numbers: the census including how the Israelites are to arrange their camps in the desert. Chuck Missler did the math and set up the camp according to the count for each tribe and this is what their camp looked like from the air. Coincidence? I don't think so!

In chapters 2-6, more numbers as well as details for the priests, and at the end of chapter 6, we find this blessing. God tells Moses to tell his brother Aaron and the other priests to use this particular wording to bless the Israelites. The priests were supposed to bless God's people. It was part of their job description! So what is a blessing? The word bless is deep, rich, ancient and powerful! It is speaking **good** into someone's life. It is the opposite of a curse. A curse speaks something bad on someone, but to bless is to say something good over them. To bless is to **claim** something for God. It's **not** just wishful thinking or a word to use lightly. Blessings carries weight and do something. Through blessings, the priests actually transmitted God's goodness to God's people. Stephanie Chapman's brother, Stephen, is an Old Testament professor at Duke Divinity School and has written a very insightful book on this blessing. In it, he says, a "blessing **does** something.... It inaugurates [or begins] a new reality, a different set of facts, and by virtue of its pronouncement it helps to bring that reality into fuller realization." A blessing **DOES** something!

Later, the Jews would gather at the Temple and as the priests finished each worship service, they would stand on the steps facing the people. They would raise their hands and speak this blessing over all the worshippers on God's behalf as the highest point of their worship, the climax. Paul Kretzmann says, "Every Israelite that believed these words as pronounced upon him went to his home with the blessing of the Lord resting upon him." Who wouldn't want such a blessing from God?

Several things I want us to notice about this blessing. Number 1, it came from who? Say from God. "The **Lord** said to Moses!" It is not something any man composed or dreamed up. It is God-ordained. And the specific wording is given. Each line starts with the same words. Say The Lord. In the Hebrew, it was actually Yahweh. They later substituted Adonai, or in English, the Lord, to keep from misusing God's name. Yahweh is God's personal name, like George or Nancy. God's not an it. He's an Individual, He has a personality and all three lines are something that Yahweh, the personal God, does for His people. In each line, He transmits His goodness to them.

The word you is used 6 times in these 3 lines. Say you. The Hebrew you is singular but it's clear the entire nation was assembled together before the priest. So although it was for all, with a singular you, it was a personal message from a personal God to each person individually. And it still is today. He blesses you. Say It's for me!

And He keeps you. Say Keeps. Not in the sense of holding onto something, but taking care of something. Like a shepherd keeping her sheep. Think Psalm 23. Protecting. Watching over. Guarding. Like a custodian keeping your bank account. Stewarding. What a very special privilege to be **kept**, watched, guarded by Yahweh!

Then Yahweh will make His face to shine upon you. Say face. To have God's face directed toward you. And to shine implies His joy and favor are over and around you as He looks at you. May He smile at you. There's even a hint of beaming. Say beaming. You know what it means when someone is so happy their face is beaming! That's not just the way we want God to look at us, but the very way He said we should expect it! This is the blessing He wrote for His people!

And He will be gracious unto you! Say gracious. To be generous to you with all good gifts. To overflow our cups from His cup. Chapman says, a super-abundance of God's blessing to nourish and sustain our life. This doesn't just include the spiritual, but the emotional, the physical, the intellectual, the financial, etc. It is God's provision for our flourishing in all parts of our life. Prosperity, long life, fertility. Anybody want God to be gracious unto you? Sign me up! Is it any wonder this particular blessing continues to be spoken at Jewish synagogue services today as well as at many Christian worship services?

The blessing continues in the 3rd line with vs 26, "the Lord turn his face toward you..." There's His face again! Facetiming with God! Moses couldn't look at God face to face, but when Jesus came, God's face was with us for 33 years. Once again we see the intimacy God wants. Sometimes Nancy will say something and I'm doing something else and she'll say, "Look at me." God wants our undivided attention, but even more incredibly, He's giving us His undivided attention! He's looking into your eyes! He's turned His face toward you! Can you imagine? Yahweh the Eternal turning His face toward us and He's smiling! The Faithlife Study Bible says that to lift up His countenance, which is the KJV, "describes looking favorably on someone." It describes how people of superior status showed their acceptance of an inferior person when they looked up at them." Who's more superior than God and who's more inferior to Him than us? Yet He looks with favor on us and grants us His acceptance! What a blessing!

And then this blessing concludes with the promise of God's peace. Say peace. Guess what Hebrew word that is? Shalom! Which is so much more than just the absence of conflict or war. The difference between our peace and God's shalom is like the difference between a Walmart fudgesicle and a banana split from Tressie Rigby. They're

both ice cream, but I know which one I want! Shalom is total well-being. It is the fullness of human flourishing. A body that's healthy, a mind that's content, relationships that are whole, all is well. It is to be good in all aspects. Shalom is what we all desire! It seems we often get one aspect of life in place and another goes south. Our marriage is good and then our job goes sour. We get that in shape and we get high blood pressure. Shalom is total wholeness. And Shalom has to be given by God. We can't manufacture shalom. God is the only supplier. As the hymn, Come Thou Fount proclaims, He is the fount, He is the source of every blessing, of every good thing. And He makes them available to those who follow Him. May God give you His Shalom peace.

Then, not as a part of the blessing itself, but as an explanation of what it is and does, Vs 27 declares, "So they [the priests] will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them." So there's no question about God's activity. He **will** bless them. Chapman has observed that this blessing from God is "an unconditional statement without requirements or contingencies. Its words appear as words of sheer grace." You don't have to complete sacrifices a, b, and c so you can then be blessed. No. Speak the words, God says He will bless. Period. What a gift!!

But there's another part of verse 27. When the priests said this blessing, they put God's name on the Israelites. Suddenly, they were no longer their own. They were His! It was a form of oral branding, a verbal tattoo of God's name on them. Placing the name of a deity on someone or something asserted the ownership of that god and established His presence. Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place. Chapman says that Yahweh is not a god who claims only a few spiritual thoughts now and then. He wants our bodies too! He wants everything! Robert Macina has said their bodies became shrines of the Lord. A shrine is a holy place for worship and that's what their bodies became!

Wait a minute. That's exactly what Paul says in I Cor 6:19, "Your bodies are temples of God!" You don't belong to yourself! You were bought at a price and you belong to Him! Your body and your mind are shrines of Yahweh! We have His name on us, His brand. The Eternal, everlasting, all holy Creator! If you're saved, He has put His name on you. You're not your own, you are His!

Here is a photo of two silver amulets that were originally about the size of a credit card but rolled up to be like two small cigarettes. They were so delicate, it took 3 years to unroll them. They were discovered in 1980 in a burial plot near Jerusalem and on both of them was inscribed this blessing. We saw them in the Israel Museum when we were there. They were made about 600 years before Jesus was born and they are the oldest portions of Scripture we have outside the Bible. They were made before Babylon conquered Jerusalem. They were either worn by the person or buried with them as an offering indicating how important this priestly blessing was. Amulets are what we might call good luck charms. Which Christians should never use. We don't need them. A

rabbit's foot wasn't very lucky for the rabbit and he had four of them. To believe that a piece of jewelry, clothing, a statue, a crystal, or anything else can somehow channel God's blessings is idolatry! If you have something you've been using in this way, get rid of it. Even a cross. It's an attempt to substitute a thing for a relationship. We don't need good luck charms to be blessed, protected, favored. We already are. The means of accessing God's presence and his power is His Holy Spirit from being born again! Trinkets won't do it!

Sadly, it seems many Christians have fallen for the commercialization of blessings with so many modern-day amulets. Religious **stuff** that promises to have God's power and presence. Something in your pocket, in your car, etc. There's nothing wrong to have reminders of Jesus, but don't look to them as good luck charms or magic tokens. The Priestly Blessing is **not** magic like saying Abracadabra. We can't manipulate God. He's not manipulatable. We can't force Him to do something by using certain words or phrases or things. When we bless, we are not trying to take His power and do something with it, but rather to participate with Him in what He is already doing. Chapman says, "In some mysterious fashion, the human speaker cooperates with God, but only because God ordains and enables the act of doing so." When the priest blessed somebody, God was the one who acted, but the priests invited Him to do so by pronouncing His name. Let's not fall for cheap imitations of God.

So we've been talking mostly about the Old Testament context as the priests would bless the Israelites. What about us non-Jews today? Does this OT blessing have any meaning for us? Say Absolutely! God continues to show unmerited favor to His people! In fact, this blessing reaches its fullness in Jesus! If you're a Christian, you're one of His people and His blessings come to you! We can enjoy God's richest blessing today! There is no greater blessing than to know Jesus Christ and to experience His peace and His provision and His presence. To enjoy His face, His favor, and His grace and to be kept by Him! And just as Jacob's blessing could not be withdrawn, God's blessing cannot be taken from you! He is for you! Enjoy the fullness of God's blessing in Jesus!

But don't stop there! Abraham was blessed to be blessing. All nations are still being blessed through him. He was never to be a cul de sac of blessing; to just soak it all up and die full. Nor are we! Yahweh blesses us so we can bless others! Flow-through blessings. As our Invitation to give says today, God has been generous to us so **we** can be generous to others. The New Testament teaches that all believers are new priests, so we can bless others! Andrew Davison has said, "When we bless something we change its orientation. We direct it towards God, ... We do not treat a blessed object or person, ... in quite the same way as it was before." We have the power and authority to bless others in Jesus' name, in Yahweh's name!

Now since the blesser claims to speak for God, we must be truthful in our blessing. God cannot bless open and obvious sin. So we must use discernment. Chapman

says, “The ultimate criterion in deciding whether or not to bless should be, in the best judgement of the blesser ... whether the thing or person to be blessed is already, or potentially, or willing to be in line with the purposes of God.” And if so, bless away! For the true benefit of blessing comes from being an active blesser rather than a passive receiver of blessing. We blessed God, not because He needs it but because it blesses us to do so and the Bible tells us to do so! So we bless His name! And we bless others in His name!

So to bless someone is to speak good into or over a person, a good that comes not from us, but from God. Who will you bless this week? Bless your children, your spouse, your coworkers, your students, your employees, your employer! Bless your grocery clerk, your child’s bus driver and teacher.

And now, we want to bless all of you with a musical rendition of this blessing. We invite each of you to receive it personally from God. We also want to extend it especially to a few Antioch members who are moving out of the area. Randy and Denise Doyle, Justin, Krista, and Keely Day, Dann and Wendy Boyd. Each of these families is moving out, and as they go, we do bless them in Jesus’ name and pray that they will likewise be a blessing to others wherever they go. To them and to all, hear and receive God’s blessing!

Song: The Blessing

And to each person gathered here today, may God’s blessings be on you as well. Invite that as we pray.