

# Connecting with God

## What's a Benediction?

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This morning we continue with our series of messages entitled Connecting with God. We are looking at the different ways in which worship connects us with God. As we join with God in redeeming and restoring his creation, it will be easy to get overwhelmed with the needs and problems in the world. Living out our Impossible Dreams will only be possible as an overflow of God's love and power working in us. Staying connected with God is imperative. This morning we are going to look at the Benediction as a way to connect with God. In Numbers 6, God told Moses how to do a Benediction.

### Numbers 6:22-27

The LORD said to Moses, <sup>23</sup>"Tell Aaron and his sons, 'This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them:

<sup>24</sup>" ' "The LORD bless you  
and keep you;

<sup>25</sup>the LORD make his face shine upon you  
and be gracious to you;

<sup>26</sup>the LORD turn his face toward you  
and give you peace." ' "

<sup>27</sup>"So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them."

The word benediction is a Latin word which means "good word." A benediction is a blessing: "The Lord bless you." In the Creation story in Genesis, six times God looks at what he has created and says "It is good." He spoke a "good word" or "blessing" over creation. By declaring creation good, God was delighting in it, enjoying it. To bless something means to delight in it.

In the Old Testament we observe fathers pronouncing blessing over their children. Near the end of a father's life, he would gather his children and bless them one at a time. He would express his delight in each child and wish them well. As part of the blessing he would divide up his property and give them the means to accomplish the wishes he had conferred upon them. He does not wish them well, he commits his resources toward the goal.

When God blesses us he does the same three things for us that a father does for his children. God delights in us. He wishes us well. And he commits himself to us. He gives us his resources to accomplish the goals that he has for us.

We see the power of blessing in the story of twin brothers, Jacob and Esau. Esau was the first one to pop out. By a matter of seconds he was declared the first born. As the first born, Esau would receive a double share of the inheritance and would assume the duties of the head of the clan when the father passed away. When Rebekah was pregnant with the twins, they wrestled inside her, and she asked God what was going on. God replied to her that two nations were at war in her womb. I'm sure that was very comforting to her. Then he added that the "older would serve the younger." This was totally against the tradition where the first born son received all the privileges and responsibilities.

It is not clear if Rebekah told her husband Isaac about the prophecy. One thing is clear; Isaac loved Esau more than Jacob. Esau was a hunter and a man's man. Jacob was soft and a mamma's boy. Whenever a parent has a favored child, it creates problems in the family. When Isaac is near death, he calls Esau and tells him to prepare a meal at which he will give him the blessing of the first born son. Rebekah overhears the plan and while Esau is out hunting, she helps Jacob disguise himself as Esau. Isaac who is nearly blind at this point falls for the deception and gives to Jacob the blessing of the first born son. Now Jacob knew that he would not get away with this. When Esau came back from the hunt and brought the food to his father, the deception would be discovered. He knew that his father and brother would be furious. Why would he do it realizing that he would be caught? Jacob was so needy for the blessing of his father. He had never heard words of blessing from his father. His father only talked about Esau and how wonderful he was. Just this once, even if the words were meant for his brother, Jacob wanted to hear words of blessing spoken over him. He wanted to hear

his father say: "I delight in you. You are my beloved. I wish you well in life." Through the deception, Jacob was able to hear the words he so desperately needed.

Of course, when Isaac and Esau found out about the deception, they were furious. Esau vows to kill Jacob who flees from home to escape with his life. Even though he had received the promise of double portion of the inheritance, Jacob leaves with literally the shirt on his back. He will never see his mother or father again.

Jacob's story is our story. We are all desperate for the blessing. We want someone of great worth to say to us: "You are unique and special. I delight in you." We need someone outside ourselves to give us this blessing. We cannot give it to ourselves. We can't say, "I will bless myself. I don't care what anyone else thinks of me. I think I'm special." Blessing ourselves just does not work. We do care what others think of us. We cannot be assured of our worth as a person until someone of great worth blesses us: "I delight in you. I wish you well. I'm committed to you and your future."

We go around like Jacob desperately seeking someone to bless us. Many people spend their entire lives trying to get the blessing from one or both of their parents. But it never comes. A few years ago, I talked with one of my former college roommates who had become a very successful real estate tycoon in Dallas. He told me that he was driven to succeed in business at whatever cost to himself and his family. And it nearly cost him his health and the destruction of his marriage. He said, "I was driven to be successful thinking that if I reached a high enough level of success I would finally hear my dad say, 'I'm proud of you.'" No matter how many millions he made and how prominent he became, he never heard the words from his father. He said it took thousands of dollars worth of therapy before he could accept that he would never hear those words from his father.

The reality is that no human being can give us the ultimate blessing we need. The only place we can get the blessing is from God. Our Creator, our Maker, says to us: "I delight in

you. You are of infinite value to me. I wish you well in life. I am committed to you with all the resources I have. Everything I have is yours.” When we hear those words from God, we know who we are. I am a child of God, and he delights in me. When other people including our parents bless us, it is icing; it is nice but not necessary.

“The Lord bless you and keep you...and give you peace.” The word for peace is the Hebrew word, “Shalom,” which means absolute fulfillment of your deepest desires. When God says you are worthwhile and commits himself to you, it brings us absolute fulfillment of the blessing we so desperately need.

The benediction goes on to say “The Lord make his face shine upon you.” The face of God is his relational presence. There is a difference between the general presence of God and the “face of God”. The general presence of God is his omnipresence—God is everywhere. The face of God represents a personal relationship with him. Although everyone is in the presence of God all the time, not everyone has a personal “face to face” relationship with God. For God to make his face shine upon you, means that God smiles upon you. He takes delight in you personally. And you receive his blessing and his love. God offers his blessing to everyone; not everyone receives it.

A few weeks ago, we talked about the scripture in Exodus chapter 31 where it says that no one can look upon the face of God and live. A holy God cannot allow any imperfection in his presence. That which is imperfect would be vaporized by the holiness of God. Sandy Richter said that the “Raiders of the Lost Ark” movie got it right when it showed the people removing the lid from the Ark of the Covenant where God’s Spirit dwelled. As soon as they did, they melted and vanished. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Therefore we cannot see his face. And yet the benediction says: “The Lord make his face shine upon you.” How can that happen without vaporizing us? We see the answer in the next

verse: “The Lord be gracious to you.” The only way to see his face is by grace. God must do something about our sin because we cannot do anything about it.

The benediction was pronounced at the end of the worship experience. In Old Testament times, worship included the sacrifice of animals which God accepted as a substitute for the worshipper. The worshipper could not enter the presence of God without being destroyed by his holiness. In order to enter God’s presence, the worshipper had to be forgiven and cleansed of all sin. God provided the sacrifice as a way to forgive and cleanse the worshipper. Every time the person came to worship, he brought a sacrifice for his sins.

The animal sacrifices did not really do anything about sin. God accepted them temporarily as a sign pointing to the only sacrifice that could really deal with sin. God would become a man himself in Jesus Christ. He would live a perfect life, and then he would offer his life upon the cross as a sacrifice for our sin. He would take the curse of death for us in order that we might receive the blessing of life. Because of the sacrifice of Jesus, we are forgiven and cleansed of all our sin. We are able to see God face to face without being vaporized. We are able to have a personal relationship with him. His face shines upon us. He smiles at us and calls us his own. Have you heard him say, “Because of what Jesus did for you, you are my beloved? Everything I have is yours. Will you receive my love and forgiveness?” God offers his love and forgiveness to everyone, but not everyone experiences it until they accept personally what Jesus did upon the cross. Upon the cross Jesus gave to us the blessing that was his as the first born and only son of God. He made us co-heirs with him. We have received the inheritance that belongs to him. How is that possible? “Because the Lord is gracious to you.” Amazing grace!

God went on to say that when the priests pronounce this blessing over the Israelites they are putting his name upon them. To bear his name means that we are his child. Persons in Old Testament times did not have last names. They were known as “the son of their father.”

Jacob's full name was Jacob the son of Isaac. Though the blessing, God gives us his name. When someone is baptized I say: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." It is a form of a blessing. When I was baptized I was given a new name. My full name is Bill, a child of God. Say that with me: "I am \_\_\_\_\_, a child of God."

One of the great themes of the Bible is that we are blessed to be a blessing. We are not blessed to be blessed. Because we know who we are, we are free to give ourselves to others. Persons who don't know who they are still search for the blessing. They cannot give what they do not have. Until we have received the blessing, we are unable to bless others. When we know how much we are loved, we are free to love others. God has plans for us. He wants us to go to work in the family business. He wants us to join with him in redeeming and restoring a lost world. He gives us all his resources to do that work. The only way we can live out our Impossible Dreams of making a difference in the world is to receive God's blessing and then become a blessing to others.

God is eager to give us the blessing. Listen again to the blessing he wants to give us:

**Numbers 6:24-27**

" ' "The LORD bless you  
and keep you;  
<sup>25</sup>the LORD make his face shine upon you  
and be gracious to you;  
<sup>26</sup>the LORD turn his face toward you  
and give you peace." '

AMEN!