

Numbers 6:22-27 (NIV)

The LORD said to Moses, “Tell Aaron and his sons, ‘This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them:

“‘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.” ’

“So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.”

In the name of our God who blesses his people, dear brothers and sisters:

Jacob’s Blessing

Today, I feel a bit like Jacob in the last chapters of Genesis. Jacob, his name changed to Israel, he’s elderly, reclined, surrounded by his sons and grandsons, and he’s about to go to heaven. But before he does he wants to bless his children. A blessing was a formal speech for three reasons. One, he delighted in them; he’s saying, “I love you!” Two, he was wishing them well; here’s the dream I have for your future. Third, he wants to give them something. He gave them their inheritance so that they could succeed in the future.

Some of the blessings almost seem funny. They were heartfelt and serious, but our culture just doesn’t talk like they did 3500 years ago. For example, Israel said about his son Judah, **“He will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes. His eyes will be darker than wine, his teeth whiter than milk.” (Genesis 49:11).** Or there’s this one in verse 27, **“Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; in the morning he devours the prey, in the evening he divides the plunder.” (Genesis 49:27).**

I feel a bit like Israel today. I’m not going to wish that you bathe in the blood of grapes. And I don’t think I’m about to die. But with this being my last sermon at Mount Olive, I want you to know that I love you. I want you to know what I dream for your future. And I want to give you something.

The LORD’s Blessing

I’m going to use a blessing that’s a bit more familiar. God actually used these words 400 years after Israel blessed his sons. That family had become a nation of millions, and these are God’s instructions for how the church leaders

should bless the millions of people they loved. **“The LORD said to Moses, ‘Tell Aaron and his sons, (those were like the pastors of the nation of Israel) ‘This is how you are to bless the Israelites.’ (Numbers 6:22-23).** So even today, this is how tells people through pastors that he loves them, he wishes them well, and he gives them something.

The LORD Bless You

“The LORD bless you and keep you,” (Numbers 6:24). That first one, “bless,” you’ve heard someone say “count your blessings.” What do they want you to number? The good things in your life. And hasn’t God blessed you? Even just little things. Thank God for pork chops. Or if you’re vegetarian, thank God for impossible burgers. That’s not world-changing, but it’s a good thing that God provided for you. He’s blessed you with food and clothes and a roof over your head. He’s blessed you with friends and family and a church family to support you emotionally and spiritually.

If you’re like me, sometimes you think, “Yeah, thank God, but I bought the pork chops, and I got the job, and I made the friends.” That’s like a little kid pouring a bowl of cereal thinking “I can take care of myself.” You poured the cereal. Good job, girl! But who put the cereal in the pantry? Who put the milk in the fridge, the spoons in the drawer, the table in the kitchen?” Same thing with us. I’m glad that we can take care of ourselves, but realize we are kids at the breakfast table. All this your job, your food, your house, your family, it would all be impossible if God weren’t behind the scenes providing what we need to take care of ourselves.

The LORD Keep You

The LORD bless you and keep you. That means keep you safe. There’s no way to count how often God has kept you safe because, this is hard to explain, you don’t know when God protected you from something bad because it didn’t happen. You can’t know how often God stopped your car from crashing or your finances from bottoming out. You don’t know because God protected you from that bad stuff. That’s what God does. But not always.

We could put our heads together and make a long list of bad things that have happened to us. I’ve heard some of your horror stories. This is important, God has not promised to protect you from all bad things. He promised to keep you no matter what happens. God has not promised to protect you from bad things. He promised to keep you no matter what happens. He promised, “I don’t sleep, so nothing will happen to you that I’m not ready for.” He promised, “Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you, so you will never

face a challenge alone.” He promised to work all things to a blessed *END*, so no matter how the middle of your life story is going he’ll turn it around by the time the credits roll.

Why Should the LORD Bless You?

Why? Why should God give me pork chops or a house or a family? Why should he protect you or help you through anything? Isn’t it weird that God cares about us when tells us to be holy, and yet we do the opposite? Or, God has done the most for us in our lives, and yet in our priority list he comes in like number 6, just after family, and work, and the house, and having fun, and sometimes football. Why should God be nice to us? Well, for myself I can rule out one answer; it’s not because I deserve God’s love. And you don’t either.

Grace in Jesus

And yet, you have it. You see, God knows that can’t deserve God’s love and neither could I, but he could. God could be holy. God could always keep his priorities in the right order. And so God came to earth, and he did those things. You see, baby Jesus was born on Christmas and he grew up living the best possible life and then he died the worst possible death. He did that to take your place. Jesus lived in your place and he died in your stead. You get to hide all your flaws behind Jesus’ perfection because it’s yours. Now when your Father in heaven looks at you, he doesn’t have wrinkles in his forehead. He’s not mad. He’s smiling.

The LORD Make His Face Shine on You

“The LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you,” (Numbers 6:25). Hebrew is a bit more concrete than English. “I’m thrilled!” but “thrill” is invisible.. Hebrew writers like to say the same thing but with something you can see and touch like a face. “The LORD make his face shine!”

I’ll never forget Rachel’s face when she first saw our baby Soren. She was exhausted and in pain and radiant. Soren wasn’t much to look at. He was a little slimy at first and misshapen. But she had endured so much, sacrificed so much, and there he was, our child. She lit up like a light bulb. I know you are not, spiritually speaking, much to look at, even a bit slimy. But God has sacrificed for you far more than any mother. He gave up his own son to have you. And here you are, his child. He absolutely beams at the thought of you. That’s what it’s like when the LORD is gracious to you for Jesus’ sake.

The LORD Turn His Face Toward You

“The LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.” (Numbers 6:26). There’s that concrete word, “face,” again. We might say, “The LORD pay very close attention to you.” The blessing God gave us says that his face is pointed right at you. I don’t know what ups and downs wait in your future, but I know this: No matter what happens, you’ve got both of God’s eyes and his smile watching over you, each and every one of you. Other parts of the Bible say even more than that. God isn’t just looking at you from the outside in, he has moved into your heart. You know, your heart, where you feel joy and stress and hope and fear, that’s right where God lives. He moved in there so that no matter what happens out here, he can give you peace.

Pastor Puts God’s Name on You

So I feel a little like Israel in the last chapters of Genesis. I want to tell you I love you, wish you well, and give you something. It’s not that I want you to bathe your robes in the blood of grapes. I want you to love each other and God. I want you to stress or worry or fall away from Jesus. What should I do, yell and scream to motivate you or text you every day? God has a better idea. He says, just tell them who they are. When he gave those instructions for pastors to bless their people, he said, **“So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.” (Numbers 6:27).** “Put my name on them.”

I put my name on my son. I want him to act right because what he does reflects on me. But when he’s a little rascally, he’s still my son. He’s got my name. You’ve got God’s name. What you do reflects on him so he wants you to live up to it. But when you fall flat on your face, you’re still his dear daughter, his dear son.

So, if you dozed off, come back. This is the last 10 seconds of the sermon. Look me in the eye. For the second-to-last time, let me re-tattoo God’s name on you.

**““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.””**

Amen.