

It's all about the Grace

Prayer

This sermon is all about the Grace, bout the Grace, bout the Grace no trouble...

Numbers 6:24-26 NKJV

*“The Lord bless you and keep you;
The Lord make His face shine upon you,
And be gracious to you;
The Lord lift up His countenance upon you,
And give you peace.*

When we look at this blessing, we need to ask ourselves what does it mean when it says The Lord:

- Bless you and keep you
- Make his face shine upon you
- Be Gracious to you
- Lift up his countenance upon you
- Give you peace

I think we all know what the lord bless you and keep you means. I also think we have a pretty good grasp on what it means when it says and give you peace, but often the other three components of this blessing are confusing. But before we delve in let's put some context around the scripture.

The nation of Israel was preparing to leave Mt. Sinai where they were encamped for about a year. Israel was about to continue her journey through the wilderness to the promise land. In short, my friends this was a blessing for each day of their journey. Just as it is a blessing for us each and every day that we choose to receive it.

Many churches still use this blessing today at the conclusion of their services. We see examples historically in Leviticus 9:22, Deuteronomy 21:5; Chronicles 30:27; Psalms 67:1 and Psalms 121:7-8 where it is used at the conclusion of worship in service.

When we really dig in academically and look at the original Hebrew, we find that each line of the verse has The Lord or Yahweh as the subject and each line is progressively longer than the last.

For those who study the numerics of the bible, consider in this blessing that:

- There are 3 occurrences of the name Yahweh (3 completeness or perfection)
- There are 12 other words perhaps signifying government or in the original context the tribes of Israel
- God is the actor in all 6 (Six is the number of man) of the clauses Bless, Keep, Make his face shine, be gracious, lift up countenance and give peace.
- The 6 verbs show all of God's benevolent activity and his will of grace towards us.

Continuing in this vein of thought...

The word "bless" is talking about the entire blessing that is coming forth and covers all aspects of this benediction or "blessing".

Note something specific here. That the word "you" in context is directed at each individual person... are we prepared to receive his blessing this morning?

Now I mentioned that Yahweh was mentioned 3 times. To add some detail to this statement each occurrence has a different emphasis or accent. This denotes three persons. As we study the New Testament we come to realize that this is explained in that:

- 1) We receive the blessing from the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ
- 2) We receive the Love of the Father
- 3) We receive communion of the Holy Spirit...

..."and yet not three but one Lord" see 2 Co. 13:14

The word "Keep" refers to God's sheltering us

The word "Face/Countenance" speaks to the shining light of God in the darkness to enlighten and comfort. When we compare and contrast this with Psalms 13:1 which says: "How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me." It becomes clear that the shining face of God is indicative of his benevolent disposition towards us. It is a gracious act of God upon those who do not deserve his grace. The lifting up of the Lord's face signifies grace. Gen 32:20; Gen 40:13

To put this in modern terms what this is saying is that God is smiling down on you.

So for those among us who speak modern English...

The blessing therefore is that - The almighty God our savior protects us, we enjoy his great favor as a child who sees the loving smile of his father, he forgives us our sins, supplies our needs, comforts our hearts, prepares us for eternal joy and peace

Through Christ's work on the cross, and I have spoken of this in previous sermons

We are:

- Redeemed – Bought with his blood
- Justified – Made Righteous in him
- Propitiated – He took our place
- Reconciled – Made right in relationship with the Father

All of which is part of the great work of grace that God has put into our lives.

Let's summarize:

Bless you – this part of the blessing means to give to you all manner of blessings natural and spiritual

Keep you – this part of the blessing means to continue the blessing but also to keep you as you utilize the blessings given to you. It also means to keep you from sin and its effect on your life.

Shine upon you – Think of the warmth of his love shining down on you. It is the warmth and security of being under his wing. It is an expression of his love towards you

Lift up his countenance - Think of the smile of a father upon his children with joy. It is a Father looking at his children as his special treasure.

Give you peace - Peace with others, peace with God and peace with yourself.

This benediction or blessing is clearly then an illustration of God's grace to us.

I asked earlier if we are prepared to accept the blessing:

Will we:

- Accept that which God has for us is best for us?
- Accept his blessing of provision for our spiritual needs?
- Accept his blessing of provision for our natural needs?
- Accept guidance from the Holy Spirit and our teachers to avoid sin?
- Accept the love that God has for us?
- Accept the peace and forgiveness of God towards us?
- Accept God's forgiveness and grace enough to forgive our selves?

It's all about the grace, bout the grace, no trouble...

"The Lord bless you and keep you;

*The Lord make His face shine upon you,
And be gracious to you;
The Lord lift up His countenance upon you,
And give you peace.*

Suddenly this epic blessing takes on a new and powerful significance in our lives, just as it did for the Israelites.

We have a lot to accept from God in this blessing, will our hearts receive it?

Friends, let me give you an illustration of grace...

There was once a mayor of New York named Fiorello LaGuardia. Fiorello was mayor during the depression. This gentle man would make himself seen, he would take entire orphanages of kids to baseball games. In one instance when the newspapers were on strike, he went on the radio to read the comics from the paper to the kids...

One dreary cold night in January of 1935 this colorful mayor showed up at night court for the poorest area of the city. He proceeded to dismiss the judge for the evening and took over the bench himself.

A few minutes later a tattered old woman was brought into court charged with stealing a loaf of bread. She related to Fiorello that her daughters husband had deserted her, that her daughter was sick and could not work and her grandchildren were starving to death.

Nevertheless the shopkeeper refused to drop the charges.

The shopkeeper told the mayor "It's a real bad neighborhood, your Honor. She's got to be punished to teach the others around here A lesson."

The mayor sighed...

He turned to the woman and said: "I have got to punish you. The law makes not exceptions ... ten dollars or ten days in jail."

When he pronounced the sentence, he reached into his pocket and pulled out a ten dollar bill. He put it into his hat and said: "Here is the ten dollar find which I now remit, furthermore I am going to fine everyone in this courtroom fifty cents for living in a town where a person has to steal bread so that her grandchildren can eat.

The New York papers reported that \$47.50 was collected and given to the old lady who had stolen the loaf of bread to feed her starving grandchildren. The majority of the courtroom gave him a standing ovation.

Now clearly the lady broke the law and she didn't get what she deserved. She had stolen a loaf of bread. Though the reason is understandable stealing is stealing and is wrong. But what is of significance here is the grace in this story.

We are all guilty of our sins
She stole bread – We all have sinned

We could not afford to pay the cost
She could not pay – We could not pay

God to whom we owed the debt, paid it for us
The mayor paid – God paid

God blesses us and keeps us
The mayor sent her away with 47.50 – God has given us his blessings and eternal life

What we see here is an illustration in real terms of God's grace towards us.

Now... How many of us have read the story of the workers in the vineyard?

Turn with me to Matthew 20:1-16
The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. Now when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.’ So they went. Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle, and said to them, ‘Why have you been standing here idle all day?’ They said to him, ‘Because no one hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right you will receive.’

“So when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, ‘Call the laborers and give them their wages, beginning with the last to the first.’ And when those came who were hired about the eleventh hour, they each received a denarius. But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received each a denarius. And when they had received it, they complained against the landowner, saying, ‘These last men have worked only one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day.’ But he answered one of them and said, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?’ So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen.”

This parable given by Jesus is a clear example of Grace...

Explain it!

(Turn over to congregation to present ideas on grace and discuss this parable)

Prayer