

Blessing and Thanksgiving
Numbers 6:22-27, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Brothers and sisters, I have to confess that I am finding it much easier to be thankful at thanksgiving this year.

Because normally when Thanksgiving comes around it can feel a bit perfunctory to list off all the things that I know I ought to be thankful for – and I am thankful, but I don't really feel it, at least not until I've sat down to have a turkey dinner with mashed potatoes and gravy and pumpkin pie – then I feel thankful, or perhaps I have that confused with feeling full??

But this year, In spite of the fact that our province continues to face significant economic challenges because of opposition in the Fed Gov't to our energy industry...

In spite of the fact society is currently hyper-politicized and polarized about anything and everything...

And most obviously, in spite of the fact that we are in the midst of a global pandemic which has caused unprecedented disruption to our lives and livelihoods... and has the potential to prevent me from sitting down to a full-on turkey dinner...

I am actually finding it much easier to be thankful and I have found myself anticipating this year's celebration of thanksgiving and not just because it means a turkey dinner.

And if I have to give a reason for this I would say it comes from the fact that the Lord has been having us focus on Blessing other people for the past couple months – and unless you are brand new to Valleyview or just visiting us this morning, or you have been hiding in self-isolation for since June you know what I'm talking about.

But let me share the story anyways because its such a great story about what God is doing right now and it blesses me each time I get to tell it.

So back in when the pandemic started and the lock-down had been going for a couple of weeks I asked a few of the guys in the congregation to put out some signs in their neighborhoods letting the community know that we are praying for them, that we're available to help with groceries or prayer requests and so on.

So Chuks had put out a couple of these signs in May and much to his dismay one of the signs kept getting tipped over, thrown out of the way and eventually it disappeared. Then a couple weeks later at the beginning of June it reappeared – nicely set up and replaced where it had previously been.

He called to let me know and was rather excited about it because he had made this missing sign and the person who took it a matter of much prayer and of course I was glad to hear that we hadn't lost a sign and maybe someone had had a change of heart.

But only a couple of hours later I received another call from someone who wanted to tell me that they really appreciated

how we had put up a sign to let people know we were there to help them.

They mentioned they had seen one of our signs on their walks, but noticed that was often knocked down and then that it had gone missing. Now they knew it had gone missing because one day they felt prompted to walk a little further than they normally would and their additional walking route led them to discover that the sign had been thrown into a ditch. So they retrieved it and set it back out where it was supposed to be.

I thanked them very much for this kindness and told them that the person who was taking care of that sign was very happy to see it back in place.

But they weren't calling to just tell me they had found our sign – they told me that they had saved up some money for themselves in case they needed it during the lockdown – but they hadn't and now they wanted to give it away to help other people and they figured we could do that for them.

So I told them how we've done a Blessing project in the past and how we could use an opportunity do that again – and maybe do a bit better on the second attempt. They thought that was a great idea and that is how God got us started on Be the Blessing 2.0

Now initially I thought that this would be a great summer project for us at Valleyview and that we would have completed giving away all the funds by Sept – I mean how difficult is it to give money away to bless others right??

But the project has continued – and not just because we've had to do some learning and overcome our hesitations – but because this is a way that the Lord is fulfilling a vision about Valleyview that He gave us when we hosted the Dunamis Ignite conference back in 2017 where during a time of prayer someone had a vision of our church, with streams of blessing flowing out of it into the surrounding community.

So this isn't just a project that we're doing for now and we expect to wrap up soon – its something that the Lord is

working through to shape us to as a congregation, its becoming a part of who we are and its exciting and I feel very blessed that God is doing this with us.

And hearing about how you have gone out, and blessed others, and listening to that being shared each week in worship – its really blessed me and I'm just very very thankful that the Holy Spirit is moving like this and that I'm able to be a part of it.

So that is why in spite of everything that is going on right now – I am finding it easier to be thankful at Thanksgiving this year.

Now for Christians the celebration of Thanksgiving is an opportunity to be reminded that its not just about feeling thankful – but its about actually saying thank-you back to God and expressing that gratitude in worshipping Him.

It is right and good for us to say thank-you to God and express our gratitude – even when we may not feel 100% thankful or

it might feel perfunctory or our circumstances aren't all that great.

That's why Paul instructs us in 1 Thessalonians 5:18 that is it God's will for us that we give – thanks in ALL circumstances.

And so if there is a word for us this morning on the 2020 Thanksgiving holiday – this is it, give thanks in ALL circumstances. Give thanks when our economy is struggling, give thanks when society is going crazy, give thanks when there is a global pandemic.

Now don't misunderstand, we're not giving thanks FOR a struggling economy or BECAUSE of the pandemic, or whatever other challenges you might be facing – we give thanks in spite of those things, even when they are occurring.

So if you are struggling this Thanksgiving to say thank-you to God because of our circumstances, or if you are not feeling very thankful, then brothers and sisters let me give you some

more blessings today... because as I can personally attest to - Blessing leads to Thanksgiving.

It is through blessing that God unlocks the gratitude in our hearts so that we can not only do the right thing, but feel the right thing as well – in spite of our circumstances.

So I want to take a closer look at a blessing from scripture that you may be very familiar with because it is often used for the closing blessing at the end of worship.

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.

Sound familiar?? So familiar in fact that we might just let it go in one ear and out the ear and not realize how much amazing blessing is packed into it.

Let's start with the fact that God instituted this blessing to be administered regularly to His people – this wasn't a one-off

blessing that, or a promise of a blessing spoken once to them by God – as amazing as those would be.

This was to be spoken to the Israelite people on a regular basis by the priests. It would be a reassurance to them that God had good intentions for them, that He was planning on fulfilling His promise of blessing given to their father Abraham – but even more so, as God explicitly says in Num 6:27 the act of administering this blessing will “*put the LORD - Yahweh’s name on them*” and thus shape their identity as belonging to Yahweh. (*Remember all-caps small caps =Yahweh*)

Is God’s name on you brothers and sisters? Remember how significant it was for Sheriff Woody in the Toy Story movie that he could look on the bottom of his boot and see the name Andy written there – the kid whom he belonged to. It defined his purpose and direction in life.

And God’s people needed to know they belonged to God because they had just been delivered from being owned by the Pharaoh in Egypt, God had just made a covenant with

them to legally formalize that relationship with them, but it was going to take some time for that identity to solidify in their hearts and minds that they now belonged to God. They were changing from being slaves to becoming a nation that would be a light to other nations – slaves to servants.

So, every time they received this blessing – Yahweh bless you and keep you, Yahweh make his face shine upon you...

Yahweh lift up his countenance upon you... it put the name of Yahweh upon them and reinforced whose people they were.

Which was important because their circumstances hadn’t really improved all that much – sure they were no longer performing back-breaking slave labor, they wandering around out in the desert with limited supplies of food and water – not exactly what you want to be freed up for.

So not only did they need this blessing to shape their identity they needed it to help them learn that they could trust Yahweh in spite of the difficult circumstances they were in. That His blessing would provide for them, protect them,

sustain them, and bring them to the promised land where they could settle and flourish.

And the three different parts of this blessing would teach them about who Yahweh was and how His blessing was all-encompassing for them, so there was no need to worship other gods who supposedly blessed agriculture or fertility or would help them find water in the desert.

And so the ways in which this blessing functioned for the people of Israel can be applied to our situation today as well.

When we hear this blessing, it can remind us how God is the sole source for all our blessings and there is no need to make idols out of industries or put our trust in economies or worship ideologies as we look for provision, and protection that which can sustain us in the midst of these difficult circumstances.

And the blessing also speaks to our identity brothers and sisters because through Jesus Christ we have now also

become a part of the people of God and we have been included in the Covenant and are heirs to the promises and blessings in it.

We are blessed that through the name of Jesus we belong to Yahweh, and knowing who and whose we are shapes our identity - just as those Israelites needed help as their identity was changed from slaves of Pharaoh to servants of Yahweh we also need help as we are changed in our identity from being slaves to our sinful nature to becoming more and more like Jesus Christ.

Isn't that an amazing blessing?! And there's more brothers and sisters.

So let's look at what the three specific parts of this blessing mean and how they now become a reality in our lives through Jesus Christ.

We'll start with the phrase "Yahweh bless you."

You know... “bless” is one of those words that says so much and yet its not very specific is it. In a broad general sense it means favor, good things, to be given good fortune, to be provided for, or to bestow upon.

And that broad general sense can be expressed in a variety of different forms – that’s why we have all these different stories of how we are blessing people.

So what specific forms will Yahweh’s blessing take in this blessing? Well, He says He will keep you, make His face shine upon you, be gracious to you, turn his face towards you – or as the old English phrased it more poetically “*lift up his countenance upon you*”, and He will grant you peace.

These are five specific forms that Yahweh’s blessing will take for His people – for us, and we have received them and are receiving them in Jesus Christ. The scriptures testify to this.

The first blessing - Yahweh will **keep** us. Turn to Jude 1:24 where it says “*To Him [Christ] who is able to **keep** you from*

stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy...” or as Paul says in 1 Cor 1:8 “*He will also **keep** you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

What a blessing to know that Christ’s grip on us will always be stronger than our ability to grasp on to Christ – and it will keep us until He return.

The second blessing – make His face shine upon you. Turn to 2 Cor 4:6 where Paul writes “*For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light **shine** in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the **face of Christ.**”* And Jesus himself says in John 14:9 “*Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.*”

In Jesus Christ the face of God shines upon us and He reveals Himself to us.

The third blessing – and be gracious to you. I hope you can see where this is going brothers and sisters. Turn to Eph 2:4-

5... what does it say? *“God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.”*

Can Yahweh be more gracious to us than giving us new life in Christ? Nothing can surpass that.

And the fourth blessing – turn his face towards you. Brothers and sisters this is Yahweh paying attention to your situation and remembering you... So turn to Luke 19:10 where Jesus says *“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”* And Luke 15:4 where Jesus describes himself as the shepherd who leaves the ninety nine to go after the one sheep that is lost.

In Jesus, Yahweh doesn't just turn His face towards us – He comes looking for us.

And the fifth blessing – and grant you peace. Turn to Phil 4:7... and it says *“And the peace of God, which transcends all*

understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

The amazing peace of God – the kind of peace that makes you thankful in spite of the current circumstances - is available to us in Jesus Christ, our savior who says *“ask me for whatever you need in my name!”* (John 14:14)

All these blessings brothers and sisters – which Yahweh intended for His people, coming to us – now, today, still... in Jesus Christ. So you are blessed – we are blessed!

And there is still more packed into this blessing, it continues to bless us by revealing who Yahweh really is or rather who He fully is – because brothers and sisters the better you get to know who Yahweh is - he more blessed you are since He is the source of ALL blessings.

So let's talk about this in some familiar terminology and discover the Three colors of Blessing in this blessing.

May the Yahweh Bless you and keep you – this is a Green blessing because it reveals God as the Creator. The Hebrew word for “keep” here is “*Shamar*” and that same word is used by God as Creator in tasking Adam with his stewarding of the Garden. He was to “till and keep – *shamar*” the garden.

And the blessing that comes to us from knowing God as Creator is how life goes well for you when you live according to the Creators design for the creation.

As Prov 3:16 says “*wisdom brings long life and riches and honor*” and 3:18 says “*those who hold fast to wisdom will be... blessed.*”

The green blessing is knowing and experiencing God as Creator.

Ok – next section... May Yahweh make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. This is a Red Blessing – because as we have already learned, if we have seen Jesus we have

seen the Father, and there is no way for God to be more gracious to us than in the salvation He gives us in Christ.

So the red blessing is knowing and experiencing God as savior in Jesus Christ – and we’ve just covered that extensively.

Now the third section – May Yahweh turn his Face towards you and grant you peace. You know what’s coming next – this is the Blue Blessing. Why? Because the Hebrew word for “peace” is “*shalom*” which is must more than just feeling at ease or tranquil and zen-like.

It means being made whole, healed, restored, and God does that much needed work in our lives and in our personality and our identity brothers and sisters, through the Holy Spirit.

As Paul encourages us in 2 Cor 3:18 “*And we all... are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*” And we see the evidence of this in our lives as Galatians 5:22-23 describes “*the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance,*

*kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.
Against such things there is no law.”*

So the Blue blessing is knowing and experiencing the Holy Spirit transforming and sanctifying you more and more.

So – this blessing reveals Yahweh to us as the Trinity and as I said that is important, because the more fully we know the Trinity the more blessed we are for we actually know God as our Creator, Savior, and Transformer – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Well brothers and sisters – are you blessed? I pray that you are – receive this teaching and understanding of scripture this morning as blessing.

Because God blesses to unlock the gratitude in our hearts and motivate us to say thank-you to Him and express that gratitude in worship of Him.

So let’s make sure we’re ready to do that – I’ll give you one more blessing ok..

Brothers and sisters in Christ

May the Lord bless you...

And Keep you

May the Lord make His face to shine upon you

And be gracious to you

May the Lord turn His face towards you

And grant you peace.

Amen.