

God Bless You – Numbers 6:22-27

I trust you had a good Christmas and a relaxing New Year

I'm increasingly thankful for those times together as a family, especially as our girls grow older

We're well aware that our days together as a family are numbered in that respect

One of the reasons holiday breaks are so good, is that they allow us to step off the freight train of life and think/reflect, without a deadline looming on the horizon

And one of the things I thought about was how much I enjoy extending God's *blessing* to you guys, and how many things for which I can do so

I'll often say, "God bless you"; Or, sign my emails, "Blessings"

And my heart in that, is that I would love to see God pour out showers of blessings on your life – not just mercy drops, but showers

And we find in the Bible, especially in the OT, that extending God's blessings like that, is both a privilege *and* a *responsibility* of spiritual leadership

And one of the most famous passages in that respect, is Numbers 6:22-27

And it's the basis for what I'd like to do in our time together (**Intro**)

- At this point in Israelite history, they were out of the slavery in Egypt just over a year . . .
When God starting laying out the responsibilities of the priests
One of which we find at the end of chapter 6, starting in v22 (read Nu 6:22-27)
The Lord spoke to Moses (22) – a common refrain used throughout the book of Numbers, reminding us over and over again, that these instructions are directly from God

Those were the words that God told Moses, to tell Aaron and his sons, to say to the people *Aaron and his sons* being the priests; the religious leaders (23)

They were in charge of the tabernacle with the responsibility to lead worship, direct the sacrifices, encourage obedience, and teach the Law

In addition to that, they were to *bless* the people of Israel (23)

- Now that word *bless* in Hebrew, is "barak" – used 327x's in the OT
And in this context, it's the action of pronouncing/conferring good things on a recipient
That's the first of three things I want you to understand about this word *bless*

The second, is that when it's God who is doing the blessing, it changes people

A pronouncement of blessing by God is not some powerless wish, but a transforming word that empowers the receiver and accomplishes its purpose

So that (this is 3rd thing), when spoken on God's behalf, it carries a sense of *inevitability*
Not like a magical mantra – that just b/c you say it, it's going to happen hocus-pocus
But like a prayer offered to God, on someone's behalf, in line with his will

So a blessing, a pronouncement of good things on a person or group of people, is a powerful word – not something to be thrown around lightly

And in the Bible, it's usually associated w/ or connected to their obedience, or faith
Which is the case here, as this blessing is set in the middle of all the instructions for worship, and how to live

- *Thus you shall bless the people of Israel* God says (23) – this is how you should confer upon them my goodness/grace

You shall say to them . . .

24 – *The Lord bless you and keep you*

Again, think prayer offered to God, while being spoken to the people

Keep you – preserve you, protect you

25 – *The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you*

That is, may he bring the favor and grace of his *presence* to bear on your life

Face being a metaphor for his presence

And how can it be otherwise?

If you stand in the glow of God's presence, you stand in the place of his grace

26 – *The Lord lift up his countenance* [his face] *upon you and give you peace*

May you fall under his loving gaze and be whole

Then God says – *So shall they* [the priests; the religious leaders] *put my name upon the people of Israel* (27)

So shall they put my stamp of approval on them

So shall they mark them as recipients of my protection, provision, and approval – and all the other attributes encapsulated by *my name*

And thereby pave the way for God to *bless them* (27)

- That blessing has been extended to God's people by God's leaders for some 4000 years
Sometimes as a promise of God's faithfulness – of what he'll do in the future
And sometimes as a commendation for their obedience – in keeping the covenant he made with them

It's from that latter perspective, as a commendation for your obedience and faith, that I want to speak it to *you* this evening/morning

Few pastors can honestly say the things I'm going to say

Let alone say them year in and year out like I've been able to

So if you'll allow me, I'd like to spend the rest of our time extending God's blessing to you, for your faithfulness and obedience in 8 different areas this past year . . .
Starting with your giving

God bless you . . .

1. For your faithful giving (1 Cor 16:2)

1 Cor 16:2 – *On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.*

Paul is talking about a special collection to relieve the suffering of the saints in Jerusalem (as opposed to their regular tithe) . . .

But the principle remains – that we s/b disciplined in our giving so that appeals don't have to be made all the time

You've done that and continue to do it

You've brought your full tithe into the storehouse, like Mal 3:10 says

And we've ended the year strong b/c of it

Which is not the case with many churches/ministries these days

I was in a meeting with some pastors recently when the subject of finances came up, and I couldn't say anything
Most of them were experiencing a decrease in giving, and looking at a flat or reduced budget for next year
Meanwhile, *you* guys gave more, and more of you gave
God bless you for that

2. For your consistent attendance (Heb 10:24-25)

That doesn't sound very spiritual does it?

I could say, God bless you for your commitment to corporate worship, or your faithfulness in fellowship – both of which would be true

But that's not the gist of **Heb 10:24-25**

Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

The issue is attendance; Your presence

Without which there would be no corporate worship or fellowship

So many of you are living that out, and I want to commend you for it
You're here week in and week out, rain or shine – b/c you've made it a priority
And you consistently attend a SG – b/c you've made it a priority
Or you anchor one of the prayer times – b/c you've made it a priority
God bless you for that

- I also realize that many of you *aren't* so consistent in your attendance
And my prayer this year, for your sake *and* for ours, is that you would be

That you would realize your need . . .

To be stirred up to love and good deeds, *every* week

For fellowship and the encouragement of God's people, *every* week

To worship with God's people, in God's place, for God's glory – *every* week

And not only that, but that you would realize the need of *others* for *your* presence, your fellowship

I think it's obvious that many of you *have* realized those things

And consequently have made church the priority it s/b in your life

God bless you for that

3. For your sweet spirit (Rom 12:10)

Have you ever heard that old chorus – There's a sweet, sweet Spirit in this place?

And I know that it's the Spirit of the Lord

There are sweet expressions on each face

And I know they feel the presence of the Lord

That's what I see in you; You have a sweet spirit . . .

To welcome those who are new to our church

To lend a helping hand; To come alongside those who are hurting

To *rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep* (Rom 12:15)

There's an obvious affection for one another, like Paul says in **Rom 12:10** to . . .

Love one another with brotherly affection.

You're doing that – I can see it in your smiles, laughter, warmth, tenderness

One of the most encouraging things I hear from new people in Pwtp's, is that there seems to be a sweet spirit in this place

They see it in our worship; They hear it in our conversations . . .

And they sense it in our interactions

God bless you for that – it's an intangible I never want to lose around here

4. For your encouraging words (Proverbs 16:24)

Proverbs 16:24 – *Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body.*

I just want you to know how thankful I am personally, for your encouragement

Rarely does a week go by that I don't get an email or card or note, encouraging me

Sometimes it's a simple thank you

Other times, it's a testimony of what God has done in your life through our church, or the messages, or one of our ministries . . .

And they often show up at just the right time

So thank you for your sensitivity to the HS that way, and for your encouraging words

I'm not a big fan of honey, but truly, they are sweetness to my soul, health to my body

And I'm pretty sure I'm not the only recipient

I both hear, and hear *of* encouraging words spoken to others

And I see the visible effect in those who receive them

So keep on; And offer them freely

B/c God blesses that in both the giver and the receiver

5. For your gracious hospitality (1 Pet 4:9)

Some of you have been practicing such a gracious hospitality

From adoptions and foster care . . .

To being a "Safe Family" with Lydia Home for moms and kids in crisis . . .

To sharing meals and time together in your homes

You've taken **1 Pet 4:9** to heart – *Show hospitality to one another without grumbling*

I think of the woman who moved to the QC's recently, and called our church needing a place to stay

So we connected her with another woman in our church

And she's been staying with her while she gets her feet on the ground

That's gracious hospitality

And then there's the family in our church who had the kids of a homeless mom pretty much dropped on them spur of the moment – for how long they weren't sure

So they brought them to church needing help, ended up connecting with another family in the lobby, and gave them two of the kids before they left

And in so doing, bridged the gap for several days until the mom took them back

That kind of gracious hospitality is happening more/more – both spontaneously/planned

But it's not without a cost

It's exhausting to care for kids who lack discipline; Even risky in some situations

And it doesn't always turn out like it should

Like when your 4 month old adopted baby is taken away from you on a technicality by a decision of the courts – that's happened among us

Sometimes there are devastating results to gracious hospitality

And if that happens, may God richly bless you all the more

6. For your desire to learn (2 Pet 3:17-18)

2 Pet 3:17-18 – *Take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

You're not only growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, but you're eager to do so – you guys love to learn

I see it in your attentiveness to my preaching

I see it in your participation in one of our Bible studies or DC's

I see it in your involvement in one of our SG's

I even see it in PP as you soak up who we are and what we believe as a church

You have a thirst for truth and a desire to learn – and I love preaching to you b/c of it

Far from sitting in judgment or critiquing every thing I say . . .

You're eager to learn and grow, even from messages whose content you've heard before – at least that's my impression (or you're really good fakers)

It seems to me that you're always trying to find that new nugget of knowledge, or brush up on what you already know

That shows much maturity on your part & leads to much stability in your walk w/ Christ

God bless you for your desire to learn – it's a joy to teach you

7. For your soft heart (Proverbs 23:12)

Proverbs 23:12 – *Apply your heart to instruction and your ear to words of knowledge.*

You not only have a desire to learn, but a desire to *apply* it

A desire to become more like Jesus

A desire to be challenged in those areas of your life that are lacking or out of balance

And that takes a soft heart – especially when you're hearing things that convict

It takes a soft heart to hear tough truth week in and week out – and come back for more

It takes a soft heart to risk the discomfort of unfamiliar faces – and join a SG

It takes a soft heart to respond to an invitation for salvation – like 50 of u did last month

It takes a soft heart to make a public profession of faith in the waters of baptism

And yet 100 of you did so last year in our church

While so many people are storing up wrath for themselves b/c of their *hard hearts* (Rom 2:5) – you guys are storing up blessing

While so many are darkened in their understanding and alienated from God b/c of their *hardness of heart* (Eph 4:18) . . .

You guys have been enlightened to the truth and reconciled to God

All b/c your hearts are soft to receive God's instruction, and apply it to your life

God bless you for that

8. For your dedicated service (1 Pet 4:10)

1 Pet 4:10 – *As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace [as good managers/users of his various giftings]*

Gal 6:9 – *And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.*

I firmly believe that describes you

So many of you are so dedicated in using the gifts God has given you to serve

Week in and week out you draw on the strength he provides so as to not grow weary . . .

And trust that it will make a difference – that a harvest *will* be reaped

It's happening on our Parking Team – as they enable more and more people to get in here

It's happening among our SM leaders – as they influence JH's and HS's

It's happening in CM – as you impact our kids with the truth of God

It's happening at Books & Things – as they spread the word

It's happening in SG's – as you spur one another on to love and good deeds

And it's happening outside these walls in some of our CO's

Hundreds of you are contributing to a bountiful harvest b/c of your dedicated service

God bless you for that

And if that doesn't describe you – make a change, so that he will

For your (**summary slide**). . .

Soft heart; Desire to learn; Gracious hospitality; Encouraging words . . .

Sweet spirit; Consistent attendance; Faithful giving; Dedicated service . . .

God bless you

Prayer

After all that, I can't think of a better ending than to boast in the one who blesses

Let's stand and make our boast in Christ alone

Close

(Nu 6:24-26)

The Lord bless you and keep you;

The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;

The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.