

Redeeming Your Blessing From Being Mere Christian Cliché

As Christians, we can often overuse certain words within our various interactions with others. When this happens, the meaning of these particular words either becomes anemic to our hearts and minds or forgotten completely. Perhaps one of these words that is most overused in our Christian vocabulary is the word “bless” or “blessing.” We use this word when we keep company with others, at the end of conversation, after someone sneezes or to sign off an email. In prayer, we can toss the word “bless” or “blessing” around with a nebulous ambiguity or use it as a catch-all filler when interceding for the needs of others. Is it possible we as followers of Christ have become too casual or flippant with this word that is so rich in biblical meaning?

Biblically speaking, a blessing is something that is graciously given for the benefit of someone else. In Psalm 67, we have one of God’s divinely inspired songs that brings back in view the amazing reality of what it means to bless or to be blessed. In just seven short verses, this psalm reveals at least five realities of what God’s blessing entails, and it serves to reclaim the word “bless” from flippancy to fervency.

God’s Presence

The psalm actually begins with a benediction. In verse one the psalmist proclaims, “May God be gracious to us, and *bless* us, and cause His face to shine upon us” (Ps. 67:1; italics mine). No doubt this opening line is a restatement of the well-known Aaronic blessing found in Numbers 6:24-26 which says: “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift His countenance upon you, and give you peace.”

What the opening line of Psalm 67 and the benediction in Numbers 6 make clear is that God's blessing is primarily about who He is and secondarily about what He does or gives. God's blessing arises out of His gracious character which then extends to His merciful dealings with humanity. The emphasis here on God's face redirects the reality of blessing from a self-focus toward a God-focus.

As Christians, we often proclaim the phrase "God bless!" with great frequency. Yet even within that phrase the person of "God" comes before the word "bless." In other cultures and languages, this phrase is constructed a bit differently so as to remind the speakers and hearers what is meant when one extends the saying "God bless!" From my experiences serving alongside missionaries in Haiti, I was told once that the Haitian Creole word for "God" is actually a compound of the following two words: "bon" which means "good" and "dye" which means "God." So in other words, when Haitians in Creole declare "God bless you," they are essentially saying "May our God who is good, bless you": *Bondye beni ou!* Creole speakers have built a reminder of who God is into the well-used phrase, which gives fresh meaning to the word "bless."

We need to be reminded daily that our greatest blessing is to know, love, cherish and be affectionately and reverently aware of God's gracious and shining presence in our lives.

God's Power

Next in the psalm, we are given a straightforward connection to the purpose of God's presence among His chosen people. Verse two goes on to say "that Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations." The direction of God's blessing in this psalm is clear—it's not meant merely for our inward enjoyment but for outward multiplication. In its original context, the singers and hearers of this psalm were the chosen people of the nation of Israel. Yet God's purpose in choosing and making His presence and power known was never

meant to stop with Israel, but it was meant to flow through Israel and out to all the nations of the world.

This psalm points us back to the beginning of this blessing when God chose Abraham and said “I will make of you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing ... and in you all families of the earth will be blessed” (Gen. 12: 2-3). Moreover, this psalm points us forward to the fulfillment of this blessing in Christ. In Galatians 3:8, the Apostle Paul makes the connection by declaring “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel in advance to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’”

God’s blessing of His saving power will one day be extended to “all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues” (Rev. 7:9b), and we who are blessed to know God’s presence have been commissioned to partner with Christ in bringing the gospel of His saving power to the ends of the earth.

God’s Praise

The next facet of God’s blessing comes in verse three and is repeated in verse five. With exuberance, the psalmist declares, “Let the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You.” Once again, we are directed back to a God-focus. It is an immense blessing to praise and celebrate who God is, and it is a privilege we will enjoy for all eternity. This psalm has a strong missionary trajectory that redeems the term “blessing” from something we just enjoy ourselves to one extended to all peoples of the earth.

God’s Provision

If we’re honest, this is where most of our minds go to when we think about God’s blessing. We often speak of the blessing of the various ways God provides for us and our loved ones. Whether it be our homes, jobs, education or opportunities we

know that “every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no change or shadow of turning” (James 1:17).

Psalms 67:6 puts it this way, “Then will the earth yield its produce, and God, our God, will bless us.” This can serve to remind us of our loving heavenly Father as the source of all our needs and His gracious power to meet those needs. Just as the earth is dependent upon its Maker to bring about its fruits and resources, we as God’s blessed people are dependent upon our Creator for everything. While God’s blessing is always about people over possessions, even the material things God provides are meant to be shared for His kingdom purposes.

God’s Protection

While there are certainly more facets regarding the reality of God’s blessing, one last aspect that clearly emerges is the blessing of God’s protection. The psalm closes in verse 7 with the confident assertion that “God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth will fear Him.” As God’s chosen and saved people, we can have strong confidence that as we walk in the fear of the Lord ourselves, God’s presence goes before us and is with us as we live life in a culture that is increasingly hostile to Christianity. When we walk in the blessing of God’s presence, power, praise and provision, we can trust Him for His protection that will bring a recognition of Christ, even among those who do not yet know Him. Yet may we remember that the blessing of God’s protection is not intended to increase or maintain our comfort, but to guard our hearts from compromise and to walk victoriously in the spiritual battle before us.

So may we, as followers of Christ, redeem our use of the word “blessing” from a self-focus to a God focus, from a flippant phrase to a fervent declaration and from an ambiguous statement to a specific proclamation rooted in the deep truth of the Scriptures.

May the Lord bless you today with a tangible awareness of His presence, a humble expression of His power, a fresh song of praise upon your lips, a renewed dependence for His provision and the peace of His promised protection from the evil one.
{eoa}

Justin Jeppeson *has served in pastoral ministry at the same church for the past 10 years, where he helps lead a multi-generational congregation in further becoming a house of prayer for the nations. Through mobilizing men and equipping the next generation of church leaders, Justin passionately strives in God's grace to see revival happen in and through God's people of all ages. He currently lives in a suburb of St. Paul, Minnesota, with his awesome wife Madeline and a newborn son!*

This article originally appeared at .