

The Church's Blessing

Numbers 6:22–27

Have you ever had somebody tell you, “Have a blessed day”? I never heard that expression years ago, but I do seem to hear it a lot now. Sometimes, I hear it from total strangers, and people with no connection to the church. What does it mean? For those from a Christian background it undoubtedly comes across something like *May God's favor rest upon you*. But the name of God is not explicitly invoked. “Have a blessed day” is perhaps deliberately vague, so as not to be offensive, either to the religious or to the non-religious.

But there is nothing vague about the blessing we find in today's text—what we call the Aaronic blessing (the blessing that Aaron and his sons were to pronounce upon God's people). Here, we have an invocation—an invoking, or calling upon—of the name of the one-only living and true God, the God of heaven, by his covenant people. This morning let's take an in-depth look at this oft-quoted but little-analyzed scriptural blessing. I believe it will be a blessing and encouragement to you in your Christian walk. We'll go through it slowly, analyzing its inspired words. First, notice that it is:

1. The Church's Blessing

The Aaronic blessing was intended, not for all humanity, but for the church. It is the *church's* blessing. Now, how do we know that? We'll get to that shortly. But first, notice that in our text today the LORD gives explicit *instructions* about blessing his people. Aaron the high priest and his sons who assisted him were to use these memorable, perfectly composed words. God didn't tell them just to make up their own blessing on the fly. They were to “hold fast the form of sound words” (2 Tim. 1:13). They were to stand in “the old paths, where is the good way” (Jer. 6:16).

Some people like novelty and spontaneity. But the Aaronic blessing calls us back to enduring spiritual realities that we desperately need to understand. Its enduring words are used regularly in many churches today. I frequently use it as the closing benediction at our services. For years I have recited the New King James translation, as it uses the familiar second-person pronoun: “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.”

Isn't that a beautiful blessing? The born-again heart resonates to the language. Who can object to being *blessed* and *kept*; of having God's face *shine* upon him and pour out his *grace* upon him; of knowing God's *smile* and *approval*, and experiencing his *peace*? Are these not blessings that everyone really wants, deep down inside? There are many people who never experience peace, who vainly search for it and never find it. They have inner turmoil, unfulfilled desires, nagging guilt, profound discouragement. They do not experience the fruit of the Spirit—

love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control. Perhaps you know people like that. They abuse medications. They go on drinking binges. They wake up dead-drunk and cannot remember what happened the night before. They look for peace everywhere except the one place where they can find it—in a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace.

In biblical usage, the opposite of *blessing* is *curse*. A curse is a solemn utterance invoking God to inflict harm or punishment on a person. Who in his right mind would want to be cursed? *The LORD curse you and cut you off; the LORD cast you into outer darkness and withhold his grace from you; the LORD frown upon you and judge you.* Such will be the eternal state of everyone who rejects Christ: “Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 22:13).

Can we agree we want to be blessed?

Notice the introduction: “And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, “This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel.”’”

This blessing comes from the LORD. The LORD initiated it. It wasn’t Moses’ idea. It didn’t come from any of the Israelites.

My dad worked his whole career at Detroit Edison Company, which supplied electrical power for most of southeastern Michigan—the most populous part of the state. At that time, Detroit Edison had a suggestion box, where employees could propose suggestions for ways the company could work better or more efficiently. If a suggestion was accepted, the employee would receive an award. Dad was proud that over the course of his career, several of his suggestions were accepted—saving his company money in operating costs.

Now being open to good and honest suggestions is a good thing. But the Aaronic blessing did not originate in the mind of man but in the revealed will of God. It was God’s idea. “As for God, his way is perfect” (Ps. 18:30). God says, “This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel.” It is to be received and put to use. It cannot be improved upon.

The blessing spoken of in today’s text is the *church’s* blessing. It is not the birthright and privilege of every fallen son of Adam. This is clear from the text. It says, “This is the way you shall bless *the children of Israel.*” Again: “So they shall put My name *on the children of Israel,* and I will bless them.” “Children” of Israel means the *people* of Israel. Clearly, the Aaronic blessing was intended for *Israel*, the covenant people. It was not intended for the whole world. It does *not* say, “You shall bless every person on the face of the earth. . . . Put My name on all the people of earth, and I will bless them.” The Aaronic blessing is a blessing that is restricted to the covenant people—the people whom God chose by grace and brought to himself by divine decree. As Moses would say: “The LORD did not set His love on

you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers.”¹ Why did God choose Israel? Not because they were deserving, but *because he set his love on them by divine decree*. Israel was the chosen people, and they were to be blessed.

Moreover, the Aaronic blessing is for the church today, for as the apostle Paul expresses it in Galatians 3, “those who are of faith are sons of Abraham . . . those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham . . . if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed.” Christians are part of the Abrahamic covenant.

The bottom line: if you, a fallen son or daughter of Adam, have come to Christ by faith and are a baptized member of a faithful church, the Aaronic blessing is for you. This is *your* blessing—and it is a rich one.

In today’s bulletin I reproduce the text of the blessing from the King James Version, which is more literal than the modern translations. Elizabethan English had pronouns that corresponded perfectly to those in the Bible’s original Hebrew and Greek—*I, thou, he, she, we, you, they*.² Listen to our text from the King James Version: “And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto *them*, The LORD bless *thee*, and keep *thee*: The LORD make his face shine upon *thee*, and be gracious unto *thee*: The LORD lift up his countenance upon *thee*, and give *thee* peace. And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless *them*” (Num. 6).

Notice that the people who were to be blessed are indicated by both the third-person plural “them” and by the second-person singular “thee.” God directs: “Say to *them*: ‘The LORD bless *thee*, and keep *thee*.’” The Spirit of God identifies the people of God as “them”—thousands and millions of distinct individuals who make up the whole number of the elect—as a single aggregate: “thee,” indicating the people as a whole. In Elizabethan times (referring to the first Queen Elizabeth, 1530–1603), if a minister stood before his congregation and said, “I love *you*,” it would have been evident that he was speaking to all the individuals who made up the congregation; he loved them as brothers and sisters in Christ. But, on the other hand, if he had said, “Dear church, I love *thee*,” it would have been evident that he was expressing his love for the church as a whole, as a single body. The bottom line: Christ speaks to his church in *both* senses! He says, “I love *you*—all the individual members who make up my body.” He also says, “I love *thee*, my bride, my beloved, whom I am working to present to my Father as a glorious church, holy

¹ Deut. 7:7–8

² Hebrew (like French and Spanish) has just two genders: masculine and feminine, and lacks the neuter pronoun *it* (which must be determined from the context). The KJV’s “it shall give forth *his* water” (Num. 20:8) was corrected to “it will yield *its* water” (NKJV). Greek, unlike Hebrew and Aramaic, has masculine, feminine and neuter pronouns.

and without blemish.” The church is both individual and collective. Church of Jesus Christ, the LORD loves *thee*. People of God, the LORD loves *you*. Amen!

Here, then, in the heart of the Aaronic blessing, is the Lord Jesus Christ speaking to his Bride with tenderness and affection: “The LORD bless *thee* and keep *thee*.” If you are a confessing member of Christ, this blessing is for you, and for your children, for this is the church’s blessing. Amen. Secondly, it is

2. A Trinitarian Blessing

The Aaronic blessing has a triadic structure, reminiscent of the Trinity. Notice that there are three lines, each beginning with “The LORD.” The LORD God of heaven is one God in three Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Spirit is God, yet there is only one God. God is both three and one, yet not in the same sense. He is one in essence and three in persons. The Athanasian Creed, accepted by the whole church, puts it this way:

“Now this is the catholic faith: that we worship one God in Trinity and the Trinity in unity, neither confounding their persons nor dividing the essence. For the person of the Father is a distinct person, the person of the Son is another, and that of the Holy Spirit still another. But the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, the glory equal, the majesty coeternal. The Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God. Yet there are not three gods; there is but one God. Thus, the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, the Holy Spirit is Lord. Yet there are not three lords; there is but one Lord.”³

Lord and *God* are titles, but God’s personal name is יהוה *Yahweh*. Twenty times the Bible speaks of “*my* holy name,” “*thy* holy name” or “*his* holy name” (שֵׁם קָדוֹשׁ). Each person of the Holy Trinity is called by the Hebrew name יהוה *Yahweh*. Since the publication of the the King James Version of 1611, the divine name יהוה has been represented in English translations by all capitals: “LORD,” to differentiate it from אֲדוֹן or אֲדֹנָי (Lord).

It is יהוה *Yahweh*, the one true and living God, who three times in our text puts his blessing upon his people. This is a singular privilege—a privilege he gives to no other people on the face of the earth. If you are part of the Christian church by baptism, this is *your* privilege. “My soul shall make her boast *in the LORD*: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad” (Ps. 34:2). Note that we boast *in the LORD*, not in ourselves. It is a gracious privilege. The Christian does not boast in a boastful, bragging, conceited manner. The *LORD* is all our glory.

But again, observe that the Aaronic blessing has a triadic structure. This means that it is composed of three triads, or groups of three. Surely this is reminiscent of the Trinity. There is one God, eternally existing in three divine Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Each of the three lines of this blessing invokes the name of the

³ <https://threeforms.org/the-athanasian-creed/>

LORD (Heb. יהוה *Yahweh*). “The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.” In a certain sense the first line represents God the Father; it emphasizes God’s protective nature, assuring his people of his constant care and safeguarding. The second line highlights the grace offered through Jesus Christ, underscoring the importance of his sacrificial love and the salvation he provides. The third line focuses on the peace that comes from the Holy Spirit, who comforts and guides his church in Christ’s service.

The Aaronic blessing is a Trinitarian blessing. That means that it cannot be claimed by any group that denies the Holy Trinity, such as Unitarianism, Modalism, Arianism, or Judaism, Islam, any of the eastern religions, atheism, secularism, wokism, or any of the cults. It cannot be claimed by those who want no connection to the church of Jesus Christ, who refuse to put themselves under the care and oversight and fellowship of the visible church. As Jesus put it, “. . . all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent him” (John 5:23). What this means is that those who claim the God of heaven must give equal honor to the Son as to the Father. They cannot claim to honor the Father if they refuse to give equal honor to the Son. That is the explicit teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, and if anyone denies it, he is denying Christ and forfeiting eternal life. “Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: but he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also” (1 John 2:22–23).

We do not say it in a boastful manner, but simply because it is the truth: if you deny the biblical doctrine of the Trinity, the threefold blessing of the Aaronic benediction is not for you. Unless you repent of your sin and put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, God in human flesh, you are lost forever. *Today* is the day of salvation. When you stand before the Lord Jesus Christ on judgment day, it will be too late. The stakes are *that* high! The only rational thing is to confess him as Lord and Savior. Our elders and people stand ready to counsel you and lead you to faith in Christ.

The Aaronic benediction is the church’s blessing and a Trinitarian blessing. Thirdly, it is

3. A Priestly Blessing

Hear our text once again: “The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them.” Amen!

What is a blessing? *God's favor and protection.*⁴ That is probably the best and simplest definition.

Who offers the blessing? The anointed priests: Aaron, the high priest, and his sons the lesser priests. There is no more Levitical priesthood, so the offering of the benediction in Christian worship is now the duty of the ordained ministers, who offer the benediction not as private persons but as representatives of Jesus Christ, the King and head of his church. When the benediction is pronounced, it is *Christ* blessing his people through his official representatives. Ministers in the church have authority to speak for God and to bless his people in God's name. Everything they speak in such an official capacity must be consonant with his written Word, the Holy Scriptures.

Who is blessed? Clearly, the covenant people, the church of both Old Testament and New Testament, the "Israel of God,"⁵ the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. The people blessed are not millions and billions of discreet, disconnected individuals but one united people, the church which our Savior purchased with his own blood.⁶ The church is not some exclusive club but the body of God's people charged with taking the gospel—the good news of Christ—to the nations. The people of this church sincerely and eagerly desire to share Christ with you. "This is life eternal, that they might *know thee* the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."⁷ "That I may *know him*, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death."⁸ To be saved is to know and confess Christ with his people. It is to confess, as we heard this morning, that you know that you are a sinner, that you repent of your sin and trust for salvation not in yourself but in Jesus Christ alone, that you acknowledge him as your sovereign Lord, that you promise that you will serve him, forsake the world, and lead a godly life. We are not saved because we do these things perfectly; rather, we are saved because our Savior, Jesus Christ, did all these things perfectly. He is "Jesus Christ the righteous," the perfect Savior, the One who died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, who was buried for three days and nights, who rose again the third day by his mighty power, who gives his people his perfect righteousness as a gift of his grace, who sent his Holy Spirit to indwell his church, give us faith, and make us perfect to do his will, to the glory of God our Savior. This is the God who saves. This is the God whose name is יהוה *Yahweh*, the Lord of glory, who incorporates us into his people by faith, and blesses us with his blessing forevermore, Amen.

⁴ *New Oxford American Dictionary*: blessing (MacOS)

⁵ Gal. 6:16

⁶ Acts 20:28

⁷ John 17:3

⁸ Phil. 3:10

Why would anyone in his right mind want to be separate from the people that God purposes to bless? The only reason I can think of is pride: somebody saying, “I don’t need the church. I’m good enough on my own. I’ll take my chances on Judgment Day.” If that is you, I plead with you to reconsider. It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment. After you draw your last breath on earth, the next moment you will stand before Jesus Christ in all his glory. The day of salvation will have passed, and it will be too late. Come to Christ today! All human beings are either in the church or out of the church. There are no other categories. There are the sheep and the goats, those who are taken, and those who are left, heaven and hell. The LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish.⁹ Amen!

⁹ Ps. 1:6