

The Priestly Blessing

by

Ellis P. Forsman

The Priestly Blessing

by

Ellis P. Forsman

October 15, 2011

The Priestly Blessing

Numbers 6:22-27

In a book filled with “numbers”, we find a beautiful gem of scripture, which has been called “The Lord’s Prayer of the Old Testament”:

Num. 6:22-27, *“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.”*

As noted in this scripture, it is the blessing of the Lord with which Aaron and his sons were to bless the children of Israel. Aaron and his sons made up the priesthood for Israel.

Therefore this passage has often been called “The Priestly Blessing” (also the Aaronic Benediction).

In this passage, we learn things about the Lord which are just as true today.

Even though we do not live under the Old Covenant, with its Aaronic priesthood, we do have a “High Priest”, who desires to bless us just as richly (if not more so)!

To understand what I mean, let’s first look more closely at...

The priestly blessing defined

“The Lord bless thee and keep thee.” (Num. 6:24).

The word “*bless*” means “to confer well-being or prosperity”.

The promise of such blessings was conditional.

Deut. 28:1-6, *“And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God. Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be*

thy basket and thy store. Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out.”

Failure to meet God’s conditions brought curses, not blessings.

Deut. 28:15-19, *“But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee: Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field. Cursed shall be thy basket and thy store. Cursed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy land, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Cursed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and cursed shalt thou be when thou goest out.”*

The word “keep” means to provide and care, to guard and protect.

A beautiful psalm which speaks of God’s care is:

Psa. 121:1-8, *“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.”*

Like a shepherd guarding and providing his sheep, the benediction calls upon God to keep watch over Israel.

“The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee:” (Num. 6:25).

To “make His face shine” may be an idiom, indicating God’s smile of favor on His people, evidenced by His being “gracious”.

Note how it is used elsewhere.

- Psa. 31:16, *“Make thy face to shine upon thy servant: save me for thy mercies’ sake.”*
- Psa. 80:3, *“Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.”*
- Dan 9:17, *“Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord’s sake.”*

To “*be gracious*” means to bestow favor, especially that which is unmerited.

The parallelism of this benediction suggests this favor refers to the blessing and keeping by the Lord mentioned previously.

Perhaps emphasizing that such blessings are unmerited, even though conditional. Just as our Lord’s sacrifice and grace to us was unmerited, yet conditional.

“The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.” (Num. 6:26).

To “*lift up His countenance*” may be similar to smile.

As such it suggests pleasure and affection. It also suggests approval and recognition.

The word “*peace*” is not just the absence of war, but a positive state of well-being or comfort with our relationship with God.

For the nation of Israel, God had promised peace if they were faithful.

Lev. 26:6, “*And I will give peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid: and I will rid evil beasts out of the land, neither shall the sword go through your land.*”

There was also peace for the individual who trusted in God.

Isa. 26:3, “*Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.*”

That God would have Aaron and his sons bless the children of Israel with this benediction indicates that God really wanted to bless and provide for them.

How about today? Does God desire to bless us, and if so, how?

The priestly blessing today

“The Lord bless thee and keep thee.” (Num. 6:24).

Indeed the Lord does desire to bless us!

Today, those blessings come through Jesus Christ.

Eph. 1:3, “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.*”

They come especially to those described in:

Matt. 5:3-12, “*Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.*”

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."

And the Lord desires to provide and care for us, as described by Jesus in:

Matt. 6:25-32, "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things."

But this care is conditional, the condition described in:

Matt. 6:33, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and the priestly blessing will be upon you too!

"The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee:" (Num. 6:25).

Just as all spiritual blessings come through Jesus, so God's grace is now manifested through His Son.

John 1:17, *"For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."*

Yes, God desires to show His smile of favor upon us, but it is imperative that we not receive it in vain!

2 Cor. 6:1-3, *“We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. (For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.) Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed.”*

How sad that God’s grace is so freely extended, yet so few accept His grace as He intended!

“The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.” (Num. 6:26).

Through Christ, peace with God is now possible.

Rom. 5:1, *“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

And as we continue to pray, God bestows peace through His Son.

Phil. 4:6-7, *“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”*

The Father is willing to give us peace, but do we accept it?

Conclusion

We have been talking about “The Priestly Blessing”, how God wanted to bless Israel under the Old Covenant through His priests in the Aaronic priesthood.

We have noted that the same sort of blessings are available today; but the blessings of God are bestowed through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Who today is our “High Priest”.

Heb. 4:14-16, *“Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”*

The point of this lesson is simple, yet profound:

If you desire “The Priestly Blessing” today, you must be in Christ and He must be your High Priest; for that is how God is blessing His people today!

Eph. 1:3, “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.*”

Are you in Jesus Christ? How does one get “into” Christ, where they can receive the blessings He offers as our High Priest?

The following are the steps necessary to make that happen:

- **Faith.** Heb. 11:6, “*But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*” When I was in high school (I was about 17 years old), a neighbor boy my same age told me he was an atheist. Since I had been baptized, I took the opportunity to talk to him about the scriptures. He told me that he could see that living the life of a Christian was good, but he wasn’t sure if he believed there was a God. But to be on the safe side, maybe he should go to church, and when he dies and stands before God (if there is a God) on the day of Judgment (if there is a Judgment), maybe if God sees that he has gone to church and lived a good life that God would send him to heaven (if there is a heaven), and not to hell (if there is a hell). I told him, “It doesn’t work that way. You have to believe in Him with all your heart or you cannot please Him.”
- **Repentance.** Acts 2:38, “*Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*” Acts 11:18, “*... Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.*” If while you were sleeping, you heard a noise in the other room, and you think to yourself, “There’s a burglar in my house!” So you reach for your cell phone, and as quietly as you can, you call the police, tell them there is a burglar in your house, and you give them your address. Soon, you heard them arrive and capture the thief. He yells, “I’m sorry; I’m sorry!” What is he sorry for? He is sorry that he got caught; not that he stole. In true repentance the thief would be sorry that he ever stole and wants to change his life so that he would never steal again. That is true repentance. It is a change of mind that brings about a change of action. That is what we have to do before we can become a Christian.

- **Confession.** Rom. 10:9-10, “*That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*” What do we confess? That we believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Note that in the above scriptures that faith (believing), repentance, and confession are “**UNTO**” righteousness, life, or salvation. “Unto” means toward something; not that one has already attained.

- **Baptism.** It is baptism where righteousness, life, and salvation are attained. Jesus, himself, was baptized to fulfill all righteousness, “*But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*” (Matt. 3:14-17). Jesus was baptized because God said it was the right thing to do. Did you see how pleased God was about Jesus being baptized? Jesus also said “*it becometh **us** to fulfil all righteousness.*” We are baptized because it fulfills His righteousness, not because it is of our righteousness.

In fact, if we are not baptized, we are still in our sins. “*Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*” (Acts 2:38). Peter, what did you say the reason of baptism is? “*for the remission of sins*”. Why would anyone want to leave out the step that removes our sins?

Jesus commanded that to reach salvation we must be baptized. “*And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth **and** is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*” (Mark 16:15-16).

Ananias told Saul (before he was rename Paul) the very same thing, “*And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*” (Acts 22:16). Baptism is a requirement given by God.

Baptism is called a burial. *“Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”* (Rom. 6:4). Our old man is to be dead to us. *“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.”* (Rom. 6:3-6). Baptism is God’s blueprint for applying the blood of Christ in our lives by baptism. We are free from our old sins only when we are baptized.

This doesn’t mean “sprinkling. The scripture above says baptism is a burial. We don’t take a dead body to the cemetery and sprinkle a little dirt over it; we bury the body.

If you have not yet become a Christian, won't you consider it today?

