

The Blessing

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on February 12, 1995, the sixth Sunday after Epiphany. Scripture Lessons: Jeremiah 17:5-10; Psalm 1; 1 Corinthians 15:12-20; Luke 6:17-26.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Notice how many times we heard the word "blessing" in our Scripture readings. "Blessed are those who trust in the LORD." We sang Psalm 1,

"The one is blest who, fearing God,
Walks not where sinners meet,
Who does not stand with wicked ones,
And shuns the scorners' seat."

Then we turned over to the New Testament where we heard Jesus say,

"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man."

I want to talk to you about blessing. I want to talk to you about God's blessing. When we think of the word "blessing" we usually think of a prayer before we eat. We say a blessing before our meals. But the Bible means something far more wonderful when it talks about God's blessing.

God's blessing on our life doesn't mean that our life will always be happy and successful and without conflict and stress. Jeremiah said, "Blessed are those who trust in the LORD.... They shall be like a tree planted by water.... It shall not fear when heat comes.... in the year of drought it is not anxious...." The heat will come. We can get ourselves into hot water. And drought will come. We may go

through dry spells but that doesn't mean we're not blessed. ~~if we're not rich as God~~
~~can't do that...~~

God's blessing doesn't mean lots of money. In fact, lots of money can be a curse. Just look at Daryl Strawberry. He's a millionaire - yet he's plagued with drug addiction. Or look at Kurt Cobain of Nirvana - all kinds of money but it wasn't a blessing. Don't believe that your life would be blessed if you merely had lots more money. God's blessing has nothing to do with health or wealth! God's blessing is God's grace. God's blessing is Jesus Christ. God's blessing is salvation. God's blessing is the promise that we belong to God in life and in death. God's blessing is that nothing can separate us from God's love for us in Jesus Christ. *Poverty, illness, persecution... hunger... death*

You might lose your job. You might lose your money. You might go hungry. You might have people say all kinds of bad things about you - but that's not a sign of God's curse. You may experience all of that and yet still enjoy God's blessing. God's blessing is something that no one can take from you.

Charles Spurgeon was a great Victorian preacher. He preached to thousands of men and women at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in the heart of London, England about a hundred years ago. Spurgeon experienced a lot of suffering in his ministry. He had a lot of detractors. His health was shot. He went through long periods of deep depression. There were times when Spurgeon was even suicidal. He felt cursed by God! Rejected by God! There were times when he felt that he couldn't go on. But he did. And yet this poor tormented man enjoyed God's blessing on his life and ministry. Thousands of men and women were brought to new life in Christ

through his powerful preaching.

One Sunday morning Spurgeon preached a sermon on Isaiah 48:10, "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." It was really an autobiographical sermon. He said, "We are chosen (by God), not in the palace, but in the furnace. In the furnace, beauty is marred, fashion is destroyed, strength is melted, glory is consumed; yet here eternal love reveals its secrets, and declares its choice. So has it been in our case... Therefore, if to-day the furnace is heated seven times hotter, we will not dread it, for the glorious Son of God will walk with us amid the glowing coals."

~~It's clear that~~ Spurgeon was referring to himself. Spurgeon came to see the dark night of his soul as a furnace and yet in that furnace of affliction he came to discover more richly God's eternal love. ~~God's blessing doesn't mean a palace and~~ lots of money and good health. God's blessing doesn't mean that all your children are going to be brilliant and well behaved all the time. *stormy weather - darkness...*
re-ally q meshadai
God's blessing means that we belong to God through Jesus Christ. God's blessing means that the furnace of affliction can never separate us from God's love. Since God raised Jesus from the dead, no tragedy, no deep depression can ever separate us from God's blessing and love.

Last Fall Kay and I asked you to pray for her father. As most of you know, he was diagnosed with cancer in the Fall of 1993. We thought that surgery had gotten rid of the cancer. But it came back again last Easter. He had more tests, more surgery and then the final diagnosis that he was terminally ill.

~~Last Fall~~ ^{in Sept.} We went up to visit him when he was in the hospital in Lewistown.

At one point, I was left alone in the hospital room with my father-in-law. Kay and her mom were eating lunch. The boys were with their cousins. And he spoke openly of his approaching death and his desire to die as a Christian. There were people whose forgiveness he needed to seek. There were people he needed to forgive. He needed to prepare the book of his life for God's final audit. And as he talked I thought of the Old Testament patriarchs and how they died. And I said to him, "Will you ^{give your blessing to} bless my boys before you die? Will you ask God's blessing for them?" He didn't say much but he must have given it a lot of thought.

A month or so later we celebrated Thanksgiving in Lewistown with Kay's family. Her brother, Paul, his wife, Sonja, and their seven month old son, Max, ~~were there. Her sister Lucy's three children, Leah, Elena and Grant were there.~~ Her sister Ann, her husband, David, and their two children, Joanna and Daniel. Kay's mother and father were there. And after Thanksgiving dinner Mr. Ziegler called us into the family room.

He said, "This might be the last time we're all together in this life." He was absolutely right. He said, "This might be the last time I can tell you how much you mean to me."

He spoke briefly of Jesus and his resurrection. He spoke of the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. And then he said, "I want to give you my blessing." He slowly stood up. He painfully walked to each one of his grandchildren. He placed his two large hands on each one in turn and

told each one of them, "I love you! I'm proud
Respect and obey your parents!" He blessed
spouses. He came and placed his hands on

That's what God does for us in Jesus
his arms to us in Jesus Christ. He stretch
all who trust this One who comes to bless us.
Christ in life and in death. If our trust is in nothing more than mere mortals than
our life is cursed. If our hope is in the economy or in the president or in the
congress or in the nation - our faith is futile and we're still in our sins. If our
trust is only in our money then woe is us and of all people we're most to be pitied.

"Blessed are those who trust in the LORD,
whose trust is the LORD.
They shall be like a tree planted by water,
sending out its roots by the stream.
It shall not fear when heat comes,
and its leaves shall stay green;
in the year of drought it is not anxious,
and it does not cease to bear fruit."

Let us pray :

C.W
Hymn
Prayer
Hymn
Scripture
Sermon
Apostles Creed
Prayer
Hymn
Benediction

Hymns-
1 All People That
On Earth Do Dwell
231 Blessed Assurance
253 I am Thine