

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH
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SCRIPTURE: *Numbers 6:22-27* **DATE:** *December 30, 2018*

LOCATION: *Auditorium (Bill)*

SERMON: *“The Lord Bless You and Keep You”*

(Acknowledgment to Tim Keller for his Benediction message)

So here we are...the last time we *come together* to *worship together* in 2018. If you were attending Five Forks when this year began, I hope that our series on **Esther** back in February has helped you to recognize throughout this year how God often works beneath the surface of your life...it's not till later that you come to see that silence on the part of God was not absence on the part of God.

I hope that the series that Shaun did over the summer on the **Five Love Languages** has helped you to better understand how to give love to others and receive love from others. I hope the series that Ray did back in September has helped you to see how God often works not through your strengths, but often times in and through **your weaknesses**.

If you have just started attending Five Forks recently, we are so glad to have you become a part of our church family, and we look forward to worshipping with you throughout 2019 as we all continue to learn what it means to know Jesus and love Jesus and follow Jesus.

This, as you may have already heard, is **our theme for 2019**, and we're very excited about we are headed...but we're not quite there yet. At the same time, the season of Advent and our Advent Sermon Series **Heaven Came Down** is now in the rear view mirror.

So what we have here this morning is what might be called an “end of the year message.” Our Scripture passage is found in the book of Numbers, chapter 6, verses 22 through 27.

Here's the context...One year has passed since Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery...this event was called The Exodus. One year after the Exodus Moses and Aaron and all of the Israelites are camped on Mount Sinai as God is preparing them to enter into the Promised Land, and...

Numbers 6:22-27 The LORD said to Moses, “Tell Aaron and his sons, ‘This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: “The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.””

“So they (Aaron and his sons) will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.”

Do any of you recognize some of these words? I would think that some of you know that these words are often used as a benediction...a blessing that is offered at the conclusion of a worship service. I'd venture to say that this is one of the more well-known or often-used benedictions or blessings found in the church today.

And so this morning, I'd like for us to look at these words and by doing so, ask God to bless us and keep us as we prepare to embark on a brand new year. We're going to first talk about **His Blessing**....we'll talk about **How His Blessing Comes**...and close by talking about **How His Blessing Impacts Your Life**.

So first...

1. HIS BLESSING

Verse 24...

Numbers 6:24 “The LORD bless you and keep you;...

Again, familiar words...and they became very familiar to the Israelites, because once God gave these words to Moses to give to Aaron in order to bless the Israelites, these words were used at the end of every tabernacle service.

Well, what is a blessing, what exactly does this word mean? It's a good church word, isn't it?

We all just sent out lots of Christmas cards and we probably all received lots of Christmas cards, and I'll bet that many of those cards had words that expressed the sentiment that you and I would be blessed this holiday season. What were we saying?

It's not just a good church word, it has long been the standard response to the sneeze..."God bless you" or simply "bless you" for those who like to be concise. But we don't think about what we're saying, it's just a response that has become ingrained in us.

Here's the thing: If I asked the Lord to bless you and keep you, I would be asking the Lord to do two primary things: To show you favor and to protect you. And those are two things that all of us want, right?

I know how difficult life can be at times...I know how difficult / can be at times, and so I am always asking God to show me favor. I am continually asking for God protect me and those that I love. We all long for God's blessing...His favor and protection, don't we?

I guess the question I really want to ask is this: ***How important is the Lord's blessing to you?*** Do you ask for it? Or do you rarely consider it? How important should it be?

Perhaps the answer is found in the story of Jacob. Now some of you know that **Jacob** was a twin, he and his brother **Esau** were the sons of **Isaac and Rebekah**. On the day they were born, Esau was the first one out, and that meant everything in ancient times.

Even though Jacob was right behind, the firstborn Esau was entitled to most of the estate, to be the head of the family...and eventually should receive this blessing from his father Isaac at the end of Isaac's life. I can't really stress enough how significant the blessing of the father in that culture truly was. The blessing was not just words...there was this expectation that what was said would actually come to pass.

Well...

Genesis 25:27 The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was a quiet man, staying among the tents. Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

Boy, there's an awful lot said in this one verse, isn't there? Are you able to grasp the family dynamics? You've got one son – Esau - who would be shown favoritism by his father because of shared interests. They are “men's men” They are outdoorsmen. And then you had this other son – Jacob - who might have been labeled a bit of a “momma's boy.” And this kind of stuff – family dynamics and roles - can get really messy, as some of you know, perhaps from personal experience.

Well, Isaac grew old and his time drew near, and so came the day that he would officially bless Esau...asking what? For the Lord to show him favor and to protect him. He had these words prepared:

Genesis 27:28-29 “May God give you of heaven's dew and of earth's richness – an abundance of grain and new wine. May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you. May those who curse you be cursed, and those who bless you be blessed.”

And those were the words he said.

But he said them to Jacob, rather than Esau.

How did that happen?

Jacob, at the urging of his mother Rebekah, disguised himself as Esau, approached his father who could barely see, and thus deceived his father into giving him this verbal blessing.

You know there's a good question to be asked here, and I never really thought to ask it until I was listening to a sermon given by Pastor Tim Keller. Keller says, ***“What was Jacob thinking?”***

Yes, he did this at the urging of his mother, but he's got to know later that day Esau is going to return home and everything is going to come out in the open and his deception will surely be discovered. Did he think that he could simply say, "Well, too late now...the blessings been given, we're all just going to have to live with it."

You and I sit here this morning and we know that God was working and there was something really big going on that would span the rest of history...but on that day Jacob would not have known this. So why would he do it?

Keller suggests that maybe it has something to do with the longing that Jacob would have had for his father's approval. Even if it was just for a passing moment, even if under false pretenses, maybe he was just longing to hear words of blessing, words of affirmation from his father. Once...just once!

And of course Esau did find out about it, and he was horrified and Isaac was aghast. Isaac came to accept it, but not Esau, he was bent on killing Jacob, and so Jacob had to flee. He never saw his father again. He never saw his mother again. At this point in his life things just fell apart...the blessing seems to have been for naught.

Look, we don't know for sure how much of a factor this really was, but don't you think he longed to hear words of affirmation and blessing from his father?

Whether or not this is what Jacob is thinking...doesn't this story resonate with us? Some of you in this room were blessed by your father and mother. They blessed you by providing for you and protecting you. But for some of you, it was even more personal than that. You were not only provided for, but you received words of love. You were not only protected, but received words of affirmation coming from your parents. They told you they loved you and you know that they meant it.

That's not everybody's story that's in this room today however. Some of you longed to hear the words "I love you" from your father, your mother...but they never came. And maybe some of you didn't care or don't care. Maybe.

But maybe you do.

Because deep down don't all of us want to hear words of blessing and love and affirmation...coming from those that we look up to? To hear: *"I love you and I am for you...you hold a special place in my heart, and I am committed to helping you with the things you need, and will do my best to protect you from harm."* Because I love you."

We want to hear them from our parents, but I believe there is something within all of us that wants to hear those words of blessing from God. We want to know that He loves us. You want to know that He is for you and longs to help you with all that you need...that He will cover you with His protection.

You want **His Blessing**.

And some of you know that you have it...you know that God loves you and is for you and is committed to you.

But some of you don't believe it...or you just aren't sure. And so this morning, I'm praying that you will hear His voice and it will penetrate your heart, and you will know that He longs to bless you...to show you favor and protect you. To let you know that you, yes you, hold a special place in His heart.

If you sense that He is speaking to you, and you find yourself wanting to receive **His blessing**...let's talk about...

2. HOW HIS BLESSING COMES

Numbers 6:25 ...the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you;...

So let's start with this: It's important that we all understand that **there is a difference between the presence of God and the face of God**. All of us right here, right now are in the presence of God. We are here, He is here.

But when the Scriptures speak of *the face of God*, it's more than just His presence...The Scriptures are showing us a God who is far more personal.

Think about it this way...maybe you came together or will be coming together for a family gathering here around the holidays...and chances are you'll be sitting at a table, eating, with a number of other people present around the table. You will be in the presence of all of them.

But as you eat, there will be times where you will engage in a face to face conversation with someone at that table, and at that time, the relationship will change and become far more personal.

And so there on Mount Sinai, the Israelites find themselves in the presence of God, but God is saying, "Ask that *my face* will shine upon the Israelites." God is opening the possibility of a relationship that goes beyond mere presence, but becomes something quite personal.

But Moses has to be scratching his head at this point. From here on out, Aaron is to say to the Israelites at the end of every tabernacle service. "*The LORD make his face shine upon you...the LORD turn his face toward you...*"

Why would Moses be scratching his head?

Well, if you were here a few weeks ago during our Advent series, I stood up here and talked about the time that Moses was high up on Mount Sinai and he asked God to show him His glory...it was a request for intimacy. But what did God say? "Can't do it."

Exodus 33:20b " **...you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.**"

Moses has to be thinking, "*Which is it God? Will the sight of your face kill us...or can your face truly shine upon us?*"

I think the answer to Moses' dilemma is found in the midst of this blessing, where we read...

Numbers 6:25 **...the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you;...**

And...be...gracious.

Here is our answer. If the face of God is not going to kill us, but shine upon us, something drastic has to happen. And what it is will be an act of grace on the part of God.

We get a hint of it as we look at the tabernacle services in the Old Testament. During the service there would be a glimpse of grace...an animal sacrifice...there would be blood shed...sin would be atoned for, for a time. And then at the end of all this would come the blessing which included the words: ***“...the Lord make his face shine upon you.”***

Now that sin was atoned for – for a while – now may the Lord’s face shine upon us.

But that was just a glimpse of a far more radical act of grace. Fast forward to the New Testament. Jesus came – God Himself came - and offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins. His blood was shed. Sin was atoned for...not for a time, but once for all.

Listen to how eloquently the writer of Hebrews puts it as he describes the Old Testament tabernacle sacrifices compared to Jesus’ sacrifice.

Hebrews 10:11-12 Day after day every priest stands and performs religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest (talking about Jesus) had offered up for all time one sacrifice (his blood, his life) for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

It was Jesus and the giving of His life - a radical act of grace on His part - that helps me to see just how much I am loved. To receive His blessing – favor and protection - *AND* to have His face shine upon me. In a very deep and real and personal way.

You see this act of grace on Jesus’ part is ongoing...God’s face shining on us...God’s face turned towards us...we want this , we need this every day as part of the ongoing relationship He has with us.

And for those who long for His blessing and understand **how His blessing comes**...through the continuous grace of Jesus, let's close by looking at...

3. HOW HIS BLESSING IMPACTS YOUR LIFE

Verse 27...

Numbers 6:27 “**So they** (Aaron and his sons) **will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.**”

God says Aaron and his sons will put *my name* on the Israelites. My name.

What does that mean?

Well, imagine if you would, an orphan that is all alone, completely alone, and is adopted by a family. And is given what? The family name. **A name** is put on the child.

And along with that comes a number of things. For one, this child has a new **identity**, right? We have lots of Shanks and Martins and Millers...everybody has a name in this church, and it becomes part of our identity, it's one way that we identify ourselves.

The child not only has a new identity, but this name that he has been given makes him a part of that **family**. The child is not alone anymore, there is support and many other benefits that come from being a part of a family

At the same time, along with the name comes **accountability** for the child. Now that the family's name is on you, what you say and what you do reflects on the rest of the family. I remember taking a course up at Messiah College a few years ago, taught by Terry Brensinger.

He told about how one of his sons, when he was younger got into a bit of trouble and Brensinger got alone with his son and said, ‘*Uh-uh...your name is Brensinger...you're carrying my name...the family name.... and this is not who we are or what we do.*’ Accountability.

Finally, there is **security**. When you're given a name and you become part of a family...if you mess up, it's different than if you're working a job. You mess up at work, you might get fired. You mess up at home, you may be held accountable...but you won't get fired. Because you are loved. Security.

Along with the name: A new identity...a family... accountability...and security.

God says Aaron and his sons will put *my name* on the Israelites “..and I will bless them.”

Many of us here this morning have been adopted into God's family and been given a name.

We are **Christians**. This means that we know, love and follow Jesus.

This becomes a part of our **identity**. If and when my name comes up at any time...people I went to school with, people I used to work with...I hope that above all else, I am talked about - identified - as one who knows and loves and follows Jesus. *We want* His name to be on us. To identify us.

Being adopted by God and given a name, I also become part of a **family**. It's you...you are my family...and it is through you I receive support and many other benefits that come along with being part of a family. And one thing that we will be stressing throughout 2019 is the importance of family, of community as part of our church's identity.

At the same time, God, through you my family, holds me **accountable**. This is another thing that we want to become a part of our identity. A desire for accountability. You need to come to me when you see me do or say anything that would reflect poorly on Jesus' name. And again, my hope is that more and more we will all reach the point where we invite others to hold us accountable...that we will make them feel safe to do so.

And then there is the **security**. There is this one song that comes on the radio every now and again, and when it does, I just allow it to remind me who I am. That's the name of the song – *Remind Me Who I Am* – by Jason Gray, and it goes like this:

*When I lose my way...and I forget my name...remind me who I am
In the mirror all I see...is who I don't wanna be...remind me who I am
In the loneliest places...when I can't remember what grace is
Tell me, once again, Who I am to You
Tell me, lest I forget...Who I am to You...that I belong to You*

*When my heart is like a stone...and I'm running far from home...Remind me who I am
When I can't receive Your love...Afraid I'll never be enough...Remind me who I am
If I'm Your beloved...Can You help me believe it
Tell me, once again, Who I am to You*

I'm the one You love.

Security. Sometimes we all need to be reminded that we are loved. Especially when we fall into that trap of feeling like we'll never be enough. As if depended on us anyway.

I just need to be reminded that my security – God's love and acceptance - is not dependent on what I do...but on what Jesus did.

And I need to be reminded how what Jesus did impacts my life. I carry His name...I'm part of His family...therefore I am accountable to Him and to you...and I am secure, because I am the one He loves.

CONCLUSION

As I said at the beginning of the message, this blessing is one of the most common benedictions that is used in the church today. The word "**Benediction**" is translated "**Well said.**"

This week will you go out into this community and may the words that come from your lips be well said? A good word, a well said word isn't just the way we end a service, but that way that we live our lives.

Throughout your life you may recall times when people encouraged you with a word or two that was well said. There are enough people in this world who are looking to find fault, to criticize and tear down...the opposite of benediction.

Go out of your way this week to tell others what you see that is good in them. The potential that you see in them. If you recognize how God has blessed you, this week allow Him to use you to bless others.

PRAYER