

5/3/15

Acts 3:19-26

The Real Blessing

*Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, **20** that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, **21** whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. **22** Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. **23** And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.' **24** And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. **25** You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' **26** God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness."*

Late in my preparation for this sermon, I got hung up on a verse in this passage, really just one phrase in one verse: in v. 26 it reads, "God sent him to you first to Bless you." *To Bless you.* It's why Jesus came – *bless* – to bless you.

There is not a person in this room who doesn't want to be blessed. We want the Lord to bless us. We sign our emails "God Bless You." We sing "God Bless America." We pray God will bless our families. But we don't ever really *define* it. Or, if we do define it, we tie it to the word "blessings," to something tangible or *see-able* or *touch-able* or *convict-able*, never thinking the word through and landing on *how we know* we have been blessed by God.

How do you measure it? Health? What happens if you are sick? Children? What if you can't have any? Children's health and success? What if your children have special needs? Do you feel blessed if the bills are paid and you have money? What if you are poor? Bankruptcy? Friends? Are friends your blessing? What if you are socially awkward or don't make friends easily? Does that mean you're not blessed? Blessed with a good mind and attitude? What if you are given to melancholy or depression? Is it just the shiny, happy people?

Be careful how you define blessing.

Not too many years ago, people latched onto the Prayer of Jabez, and it became the *cult* of Jabez being manipulated for some sort of personal, mostly financial, gain. Our best source for clarifying the word "blessing" is Jesus himself.

Listen to how Jesus defines and qualifies blessing. In Matthew 5 He says "Blessed are the poor in Spirit, Blessed are those who mourn, Blessed are the meek, Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness," people who are merciful, pure in heart and peacemakers. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

Then Jesus makes it personal in Matthew 5:11: *"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil falsely against you on my account."* There's the blessing: when you have been so identified with Christ that you get what He got. In v. 26 we see that God sent Jesus to bless you. Forget the soft-core "prosperity gospel" that loves the *gift* rather than the *giver*. This text tells us that Christ is our Blessing. It is God's desire to bless his people and *Jesus Christ* is the blessing.

1. V. 20 – Christ Jesus is appointed for you.
2. V. 21 – Prophesied about from Moses and Prophets.
3. V. 22 – He will direct your path.
4. V. 23 – He will define your future.
5. V. 25 – He will display God's faithfulness.
6. V. 26 – He will extend God's grace.

Jesus Christ is Our Blessing

And when you receive Him by faith and follow Him in repentance, you experience your "best life now." *He* is the blessing.

Today I will keep it simple and use five words: The first word of repentance is:

Forgiving

Peter is preaching a scathing message in Chapter 3. He points out our sin and the problem that plagues us. In v. 19, he offers up one solution that has glorifying ongoing benefits. Look what he says in v. 19: *"Repent, therefore, and turn again that your sins may be blotted out."* It is the idea that your record being done away with. So when you come to the Cross of Christ and place your faith in what Jesus has done by His death and resurrection, your record is expunged. What if your record shows things like Abortion, Divorce, Homosexual Relationship, Lust, Lying, Porn? When you come to the cross of Christ, repent and believe, your record is blotted out.

Listen to what Paul says in Col. 2:13-14: *"And you who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him having forgiven us all our trespasses."* By cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands, this He set aside, nailing it to the cross.

Jesus Christ is the Blessing. In Him is *forgiveness*.

Refreshing

Listen to what Peter tells the crowd in v. 19-20: *"Repent, therefore, and turn again that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come."*

Times of refreshing. Peter is describing what happens to your heart and mind and life when you turn from your sin and come to the cross and believe. To paint the picture, Peter uses the phrase that's never been used in the New Testament -- and this is the one place – *times of refreshing*. It's a hot shower after working in the yard, a comfortable

chair after being on your feet all day, it's cold Gatorade after a hard workout, a good nap after a terrible day. Don't you see? It's what life in Christ brings: A deep joy under a mountain of pain...A real tangible relieving of the pressure. You no longer perform trying to *earn* the blessing of God. By God's grace, through faith in Christ, He comes like a cool breeze on a July day. He comes and with Him comes forgiveness and refreshing. Isn't that what you want?... It's found in Christ. *Christ* is the blessing.

Enduring

Endurance. I have found that so much in life depends on the ability to remain under intense pressure for a sustained period of time and to do so for the Glory of the Lord.

Notice the refreshing that Peter speaks of in v. 20, "*That times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.*" Some of you hear the words of God "I will never leave you or forsake you." In his presence, a presence you can only know in Christ, in His presence, there is refreshing and forgiveness. Psalm 16:11 says, "*You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of Joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*" Don't you see, it's *Christ* that is the blessing?

There's not a drug or a game or a person or an amount of money that can satisfy. Look away from the *gift* and look at the *giver*. It's the presence of the Lord that will get you through the Valley of Depression, the heartbreak of death, or the pain of prolonged sickness. It's His presence, the presence of God that comes through faith in Christ.

Can't we agree that at the root of so much of what you are dealing with is the fact that you are not living in the presence of the Lord? You're not living at the base of the Cross of Christ, and this morning you need to embrace what God has done for sinners. For everyone who believes, *Christ* is the blessing.

I'd like to give you one more word, although there are others:

Belonging

To understand where I get this, you have to back out just a little and read v. 21-25 as a whole. Peter is speaking to Jewish people. God's chosen people and tells them that when you come to Christ, you belong to the plan of God that is going somewhere. Listen to v. 21-25, *whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. 22 Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. 23 And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.'* **24** *And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. 25 You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.'* Peter is telling them that God is faithful. The promise of the Old Testament has its fulfillment in Christ.

All of this is going somewhere. All of history moves with a purpose toward an end. And when you step into Christ, you fall into a river of grace that is flowing into the good plan of a gracious God. You *belong*. You live in a world that is moving toward Christ. Matt Chandler reminded us on Thursday that you will give glory to God. You will glorify Him when you give your life to Christ and receive the free gift of forgiveness and refreshing, or you will glorify Him as He pours out His justified and perfect judgment on your life. God's purpose is headed to an end with Christ as Lord. Today is provided for you to join the gift of God, found in Jesus. Quit looking for some evasive blessing. *Christ* is the blessing.

(Pastor Prays)