



Living in the perpetual blessing of our Ascended King

Main Scripture:

Then Jesus led them to Bethany,
and lifting his hands to heaven, he blessed them.
While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up to heaven."
(Luke 24:50)

Main Points

What does it mean that Jesus 'blessed' his disciples and why are we called to 'bless' other people?
Does anything special happen when we bless someone?

Is receiving a blessing like being filled at the petrol station,
only to have to return time and time again to be blessed again?

In today's passage we read that prior to his return to heaven, Jesus blessed his followers.
But notice, even as he slipped out of view, he was 'blessing them'. So that means Jesus' blessing
hasn't stopped - we are still living in Jesus' perpetual blessing even today.

We have freely received the blessing of Jesus' name.
How can we not freely give this blessing to others?

Intro |

When was the last time you heard someone say, 'God bless you'?

Or perhaps you, yourself have said, 'God bless you.'

Probably all of us have said, 'I am feeling really blessed at the moment'.

And, we've desired to hear the words of blessing spoken at the end of the service, because we are
aware that these words impart some spiritual significance on our lives.

But 'why?' What does the action of 'blessing' someone really mean?

Is there any difference in Jesus speaking a blessing, and us, his followers, speaking a blessing
over someone?

The phrase 'being blessed' or 'feeling blessed' is used so often that we can easily lose sight of its
enormous significance.

Today I'd like to teach on the enormous responsibility that accompanies our receiving Jesus'
blessing so we may learn how to be a responsible steward of the gift that we have freely received.

Let's turn to the Gospel reading. It is amazing how one short sentence can be filled with so
much.

Jesus led his followers up to the mountain at Bethany. Lifting his hands to heaven Jesus blessed them. Then notice the next sentence *"while he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up to heaven."* (Luke 24:50)

So ... if we were standing among the disciples that day, two thousand years ago, we would have realized that Jesus' spoken blessing over his followers continued as he disappeared from their eyes.

Have you ever wondered what he said as he blessed them?

Well, thankfully Luke got hold of the actual words Jesus spoke. We read in Luke's second letter that Jesus blessed them by promising the outpouring of the Spirit which would shortly occur.

He said,

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Then, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

So, the blessing that the eleven disciples received, and probably some women who accompanied them, was the blessing of a promise that in a few days they were to be empowered by God to be witnesses of Christ's rulership on earth.

But I think it is necessary to delve a little deeper into what the action of 'blessing' really is.

Point 1 | We serve a God who always blesses. It is in his nature to impart his goodness, peace and very personhood to those who believe in his Son.

If there is one theme which dominates the entire Biblical story, it is the truth that God takes every opportunity to speak blessing over his creation. Blessings literally pour from God's mouth like a waterfall.

From the very beginning God designed humanity to be conduits or channels of His blessing through which His creation would be blessed. We know that one of God's first actions was His proclamation of blessing upon His creation (Genesis 1:28).

Then, when humanity threatened God's plan, He called the man Abraham to be a channel of blessing to all the nations of the world (Genesis 12:1-2)

Certainly, it is God's nature to bless. At the very heart of God is His desire to impart His divine favour and goodness upon another. When God blesses, he imparts the qualities of Himself which only He possesses: His completeness, His perfect peace, His wholeness and wellness.

That is why when John tried to explain what it meant to have the blessing of Jesus dwell among us, he said,

"Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known." (John 1:16-18)

When God imparts blessing, He is literally imparting Himself upon another.

Point 2 | We need to re-define what it means to be blessed. Jesus spoke of those who are blessed in an entirely new way.

But having said all that, the word blessing has a myriad of connotations in our world today.

In our culture 'being blessed' means that someone feels they have or are getting everything they've dreamed of getting.

- It could be used when someone gets the promotion they hoped for.
- Or, moves into a new home.
- Or, when someone gets some unexpected good news.
- Or when someone's healing is restored.

We call such moments as, 'the blessing of God.'

This line of thought is totally consistent with how God revealed Himself to His people in the Old Testament.

In God's wisdom, the Jewish religion was largely a 'come and see' witness to the surrounding nations. Israel was to be the 'light to the nations' (Isaiah 49:6) or the showcase of God's earthly and material blessing, the reward of obeying God's covenant, to the nations. (Genesis 12:1-3, Psalm 98:1-3)

But, then this whole concept of what it means to be blessed of God, was radically turned on its head when an ordinary, plain-looking man, turned up and said,

Blessed are the poor in spirit ...

Blessed are those who mourn ...

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst ...

Blessed are the persecuted ...

It is no wonder that this kind of teaching totally threw the religious leaders into an uproar.

According to the Old Testament the poor weren't blessed, they were cursed!

And those who mourn, they weren't blessed, they were obviously under God's judgement due to some sin in their life. (Deuteronomy 28:15-68)

Jesus turned everything on its head. He totally redefined what it means to walk in God's blessing and favour.

Then, instead of telling the world to come to us ... he told us to, "*Go into the world and be my witnesses ...*" (Acts 1:8).

So, how are we supposed you know whether or not the blessing of God is flowing through our lives?

We could go back to the verse we read earlier,

"Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." (John 1:16)

Those of us who have received Jesus Christ, have already received the most powerful gift of blessing that God could ever impart on a person.

That's why Paul wrote to the believers in Ephesus,

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." (Ephesians 1:3)

Now, I hear you say, 'Well yes, but that is in the heavenly realms. I'm not in the heavenly realms, I'm in the earthly, physical realm.'

I would disagree! We are actually located in **both** realms.

Because Paul also told them,

"But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus," (Ephesians 2:4-10)

So, where are we? We are also seated with Christ in heavenly realms.

We are new creations, re-created by God, and we walk with God's gift of blessing, the Holy Spirit, wherever we go (also see v 8-10)

Point 3 | There is a responsibility that accompanies being a steward of God's blessing. We are responsible to freely give what we have freely received.

But the Holy Spirit is not the only blessing we have received.

When Jesus gave instructions to His followers, whom he had blessed and commissioned to go and be His witnesses, He said,

"As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.'" (Matthew 10:7-8)

Pretty powerful stuff, isn't it?

He sent them with pretty big mission, didn't He?

What on earth, or rather in heaven's name, had they freely received that they could freely give?

We are told in just a few verses earlier; Jesus gave them His authority (Matthew 10:1) This is also inferred at the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18).

They had received the blessing of the name of Jesus; the name that has authority over every other name, in heaven and on earth. (Philippians 2:9)

And they were to speak the name of Jesus, and the blessing of God's divine freedom and favour to whomever they encountered.

But, I hear you whisper to yourself, "but that was the apostles, not me!"

Actually, last week, we read Matthew's account of Jesus' final instructions to his followers. Mark describes Christ's commission even more powerfully,

"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. ¹⁶ Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. ¹⁷ And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; ..." (Mark 16:15-18)

and other such signs.

No matter which way you read and apply these verses, we carry a powerful message, and an even more powerful spiritual authority as we bear witness to reign of Christ.

We carry the blessing of the name of Jesus.

And I need to tell you today, there is a responsibility that accompanies being a steward or channel of God's blessing.

There is enormous power when we invoke a spoken blessing over the life of another.

Our words are like containers, they can either contain words of blessing or words of cursing.

So, let us ensure that every word that proceeds out our mouths are filled with words of blessing, God's truth spoken over those who hear what we have to say.

Application |

So, today's message is extremely practical.

Whenever I meet someone whether I'm running or walking Toby, I don't just say "hello! or good morning or afternoon' to the person I happen to walk past.

Now, I add 'God bless you'.

And as they are walking away (often with a look of shock on their face), I do a quick prayer, "Lord reveal yourself to them, shine your face upon and give them your peace".

I invite every one of us to be a channel of God's blessing to others.

Let me close by imparting to you the words of blessing, commonly known as the benediction.

'May the LORD bless you and protect you. May the LORD smile on you and be gracious to you. May the LORD show you his favour and give you his peace.'

Amen.

Some more examples of a spoken blessing over someone:

For a person who is struggling with fear and anxiety:

May the Lord God bless you and keep you from the torments of fear and anxiety. May He cause His face to shine upon you with His power and love, and may He give you a sound mind. Through His perfect love, may God give you grace to cast out fear. May He lift up His countenance upon you with freedom as you tell Him every detail of your need in earnest, thankful prayer, and may He give you His peace that surpasses all understanding as He keeps your heart and mind safe through Jesus Christ.

For a person who is experiencing deep sorrow:

May God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God of all comfort, encourage your heart and protect you from despair. May He cause His face to shine upon you as you rejoice in the midst of troubles and trials, putting your faith in Him and being confident of His loving kindness toward you. May the Lord lift up His countenance upon you with the riches of His joy and pleasure, and may He give you His peace in your heart and soul.

For a person who is enduring a trial:

May the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, bless you and keep you strong during this time of testing. May He cause His face to shine upon you and give you grace to endure with patience. May He lift up His countenance upon you to make you perfect and complete in Him, to establish you clearly in the direction He gives you, to strengthen you through spiritual knowledge and by the power of His Holy Spirit as you seek Him with all your heart. May the Lord settle you, making you secure and confident in His love and provision for your peace and well-being.

The following New Testament passages are particularly suitable for use in spoken blessings:

- Romans 15:5-6, 13
- 1 Corinthians 1:4-9, 16:23
- 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, 2:14, 13:7-9
- Ephesians 1:3-23, 3:14-21, 6:18-20, 23-24
- Philippians 1:3-6, 9-11; 4:6-8, 23
- Colossians 1:3-6, 9-14; 4:2-6
- 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3, 3:12-13, 5:23-24, 28
- 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12, 2:16-17, 3:5, 16

The Lyrics of a song I often sing/ speak while I'm walking around the neighbourhood

I speak the name of Jesus over you:

(by Darlene Zschech)

I just want to speak the name of Jesus
Over every heart and every mind
'Cause I know there is peace
within your presence, I speak Jesus.

I just want to speak the name of Jesus
'Til every dark addiction starts to break
Declaring there is hope and there is freedom
I speak Jesus

'Cause your name is power
Your name is healing, Your name is life
Break every stronghold
Shine through the shadows, Burn like a fire

I just want to speak the name of Jesus
Over fear and all anxiety
To every soul held captive by depression
I speak Jesus
Your name is power, Your name is healing
Your name is life, Break every stronghold
Shine through the shadows,
Burn like the fire.

Shout Jesus from the mountains
Jesus in the streets, Jesus in the darkness over
every enemy, Jesus for my family
I speak the holy name, Jesus [repeat]

Your name is power
Your name is healing
Your name is life
Break every stronghold
Shine through the shadows
Burn like a fire [repeat]

I just want to speak the name of Jesus
Over every heart and every mind
'Cause I know there is peace within his presence,
I speak Jesus

- 2 Timothy 4:22
- Philemon 1:4-7
- Hebrews 13:20-21
- 1 Peter 1:3-9, 5:10-11
- 2 Peter 1:2-4, 3:18
- 2 John 1:3
- 3 John 1:2-