

Lake Cities Community Church
Pastor Craig Schill
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The LORD Bless You!
Numbers 6:24-26

On July 4, 1966, 24,000 fans packed Suffolk Downs in East Boston for the 32nd running of the Mayflower Stakes, New England's premier race for 2-year olds. The horses were loaded into the gates, the starting gun cracked, and the horses boomed onto the field. They pounded the dirt and soon were coming down the home stretch -- when the unthinkable occurred!

A man jumped the fence and, brandishing a rolled up newspaper, ran onto the track waving the newspaper as the onrushing horses bore down on him. Photographer Henry Carfanga, who was positioned to capture the finish of the race snapped this photo:



He said, "I was horrified and flabbergasted." The two horses in the picture, Happy Voter and Taunton were neck and neck and both just barely missed the man. The last place jockey, a man named, Tommy Sisum, clipped the man, spun him around and said later, "I was actually sick and wanted to heave as I was pulling my horse up. I thought I'd killed him."

The man, though, was unharmed. Miraculously all the horses missed him, and he survived. Track security took him into custody and he was identified as 38-year old Boston resident Theodore Lupino. Security personnel asked him, "What in the world were you thinking? You could have been killed!" Still holding his newspaper, Lupino replied, "Now they will read about me tomorrow. Nobody knew who I was, but now they will know me and recognize me." And he was right. Carfagna's photos were bought by Life magazine and were distributed nationally and internationally.

Ted Lupino (you might be comforted to know) was found to be mentally unbalanced... But he illustrates the desire that so many people have to become famous by any means necessary. To be vaulted from obscurity to fame or infamy.

In a way, perhaps Ted Lupino was born just a generation early – because his media-stunt and self-made promotion would have easily been a viral video, launching a You Tube following, ending with a reality TV show. If you think about it many of the cultural icons of our generation, Justin Bieber, J.K. Rowling and Susan Boyle – all became famous nearly overnight, and this is what our culture craves! One recent educational study found that "The lure of celebrity is so great among teenagers that almost one in 10 would abandon their education if they had the chance to appear on television." (Sarah Cassidy, Education Correspondent, The Independent Educational News, Jan 13, 2006).

Let's broaden out our discussion now. Deep inside every person is a desire to live a life of significance – to make a difference in this world. To be known and appreciated by others. The world promises success, fame riches as the ultimate prize, the American Dream. But in contrast to this, we are going to see today that the Bible offers something called “a blessed life.” And to be a blessed person has nothing to do with money, or fame or viral videos. The question I want you to consider this morning – is – *are you seeking in this life to be successful or to be blessed?* A person who is blessed by God, may enjoy some measure of success in the world. But a person who finds the success of the world, but does not have the Blessing of God, is left empty and unfulfilled at the end of their life.

Turn with me to Numbers chapter 6:22-27. In this passage we have God's prayer of blessing for His people. This passage is often called the “Lord's Prayer” of the Old Testament. I have chosen this text because this is the prayer that we are going to pray over hundreds of houses next week. In many of those homes are individuals who are seeking the world's success – and we want God to interrupt them with His blessing, instead.

We will move through the text chronologically beginning with the introduction in verses 22-23, then an explanation of the prayer, verses 24-26, and finally the conclusion in verse 27.

INTRODUCTION

By way of context, we are diving into a book that is full of details and rules that normally make our eyes glaze over. Chapter four talked about setting up and tearing down the tabernacle, chapter five about leprosy and defilement from sin. The first part of chapter

six shares details about the Nazarite vow. And in that context, God takes a time out from the law to invoke a blessing. Verses 22-23: [Num. 6:22](#) Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, [Num. 6:23](#) "Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, 'Thus you shall bless the sons of Israel. You shall say to them: Let's stop there. God rings up Moses and he says, "Tell Aaron and the rest of those priests to get ready - today your job is to BLESS the nation of Israel. Set aside the details of the Nazarite vow, and how to set up the lamp stand in the Tabernacle. It is time for a reminder of God's blessing.

Perhaps a bad analogy, but it is like when you are camping, and you spend so much time setting up camp, planning your day – all that work, and then Dad says, "It is time for S'Mores!" Setting up camp is important too, but let's not forget why we came. Ultimately God want to bless His people.

This IS the main point of the entire sermon: **God desires to BLESS His people.** The expositor's Bible Commentary says, "Perhaps the most impressive aspect of this prayer is that it is a provision for God's desire to bless his people. Blessing is his idea, his purpose. It is not something his people must beg for, but it is the outreaching of his grace (EBC)."

Question - Do you believe that God wants and desires to bless you? If not, why not? Our world strives so hard after success; but for Christians it is the exact opposite – we have a God who strives to give us blessings! As we pray for houses next week, we must believe that God desires a blessing for each home. Now many of the houses we will be praying for will not under the blessing of Christ, but under the curse of sin. And so we want God to break into their routine of life and get their attention.

EXPLANATION of the Prayer (24-26)

Let's now look at the prayer itself, verses 24-26: [Num. 6:24](#) The LORD bless you, and keep you; [Num. 6:25](#) The LORD make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you; [Num. 6:26](#) The LORD lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace.'

STRUCTURE

Before we get into any explanation of the text, I want to point out to you a little bit of the structure, which is fascinating to me. And to do that I am going to put up the Hebrew text.

יְבָרֵךְ יְהוָה וַיְשַׁמְרֵךְ	24
יְאֵר יְהוָה פְּנֵי אֱלֹהֶיךָ וַיִּתֵּן	25
יְשַׂא יְהוָה פְּנֵי אֱלֹהֶיךָ וַיִּשֶׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹמִים	26

Notice first that there are three lines and they follow the verses markers we have in our modern Bibles. Sometimes this is called the “Three in One.” blessing of God. Three, you may recall is a number in the Bible that often indicates completeness or totality, and thus this may be considered a complete blessing. The name of God is also used three times, once per line. Remember Holy, Holy Holy. Emphasizing God’s holiness – Here – do you know who blesses? Yahweh, Yahweh, Yahweh!

Second, notice that the blessing grows. In verse 24 there are three Hebrew words, in verse 25 there are five, and in verse 26 there are seven! This is an intentional progression.

It is a crescendo of blessing, ending at the number seven which is often used to signify perfection.

In total there are fifteen words total in this prayer, and David Barker, a scholar links the fifteen words of this prayer with 15 Psalms: “The 15 psalms (of Ascent 120-134)... were chosen to accord with the 15 words of the priestly blessing in Numbers 6:24–26. ...The four key words used in the blessing occur throughout these psalms, which in fact were commentaries on these words. (“The Lord Watches Over You – Psalm 121” David Barker, Bib Sac., Vol 152, Issue 606.).

Others have pointed out that if you take out the three references of God’s name, there are twelve words left – perhaps representing God’s blessing on the 12 tribes of Israel.

Very interesting! I don’t want to make too much of this – but it is a prayer for blessing that was not just thrown together. But it was carefully crafted, and even in the structure of the prayer we have meaning. It is like a beautifully painted picture that brings glory to the painter, or a lovely building that brings glory to the designer. This prayer is beautiful, bringing glory to God.

EXPLANATION OF TEXT

Let’s look now at the prayer itself –and we will take it line by line. The first line, verse 24: [Num. 6:24](#) **The LORD bless you, and keep you;**

First, notice the word you. Often in the Bible we assume the English translation is singular and then the pastor tells us it is plural – God’s blessing for the church, or in this case for all of Israel. But that is NOT the case here – all of the “you” in this prayer of blessing are second person singular. This is a blessing for the individual. For you!

Let me ask the question again. **Do you believe God wants to bless you?** Not the church, not the nation, not your family – but you. You as a single person, created in the image of God. He wants to bless you. Let that sink in.

Now let's look at the word, "bless". This is the first of four words of blessing in this prayer. This is the common Hebrew word *barak*, which means, "to endue with power for success, prosperity, fruitfulness, longevity, etc." (Theological Wordbook of the OT).

Literally in the Hebrew "*barak* / bless" means "to kneel." Kneeling is the physical position where one would traditionally receive a blessing by the benefactor. And that continues to this day.

Knights kneel to receive blessing from their King or Queen. If you were to go before the Pope for a blessing, you would kneel. Even we have our missionaries or pastors kneel for the blessing of a commissioning service or ordination.

"The Lord bless you." May God find you ready to receive the blessing that He desire to give you. It is not a question of God desiring to bless you – but are you ready to receive it?

But not only bless, but may God **"keep you."** The word, "keep" is the teeth of the blessing. The Hebrew word, *Shamar* means to keep, guard, or observe. Normally it used in respect to ourselves. "You watch out. Watch your step. Watch out!" But here we have God watching out for us.

Again the expositor's Bible Commentary: "The buttressing words "and keep you" further explain his blessing. God's intention for his people is for their good; he will preserve them to enjoy that good. (EBC). I think of Jesus' words, "[John 10:28](#) and I give eternal life to

them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.” God bless you and keep you.

Now verse 25: [Num. 6:25](#) The LORD make His face shine on you, and be gracious to you; The image here of a shining face takes us back to Mt. Sinai, where the glory of God causes Moses face to literally shine. Now God is saying to Moses to tell Aaron to tell the people of Israel – that the bright brilliance of God’s glory will shine on them.

Now this is both a wonderful and terrifying thought. Do you really want God’s face to show up in your home? That is more than a little frightening to most of us. Don’t worry, God says to Moses. Tell Aaron to tell the people that when God’s face shows up - God will be gracious to you. This is our third word of blessing – *hanan*, and it means, “to be gracious or generous toward another. To take pity on, to be favored.” (NIDOTTE).

God is showing up, even here in the Old Testament, in grace and favor. And when you see a gracious face – we think of someone with the beautiful disarming smile. The New Living Translation put it this way: “May the LORD smile on you.” There is an old spiritual:

God has smiled on me,
He has set me free.
God has smiled on me,
He's been good to me

May the Lord’s face shine on you and be gracious to you.

Finally verse 26: [Num. 6:26](#) The LORD lift up His countenance on you, and give you peace.’ Notice here, before we go on, that each verse of this prayer has two aspects: (1) Bless you and (2) keep you. (1) Make his face to shine on you and (2) be gracious, and here.

Now (1) The LORD Lift up his countenance on you and (2) give you peace. Six blessings – another aspect of the intentional structure of this beautiful prayer. It is very symmetrical!

Now the LORD's countenance (or his face) is lifted up on you. As far as I can tell it is very similar to verse 26. We have God personified, and his face turning up to you in a way that brings blessing and encouragement.

From 1880 to 1930 over 27.5 million people immigrated to the United States. Many who came to America were the persecuted, poor and disenfranchised. They were used to being kicked around and treated badly. They were used to angry faces and people looking down on them as rejected people. Losers. And so it is no surprise that we have story after story tells of the powerful emotional reactions they had when their ships came into New York harbor and they saw someone whose face was raised up to them. A strong face, but a kind face. Lady Liberty! The statue represented America's favor upon them -- that this was a country that welcomed immigrants.

In the same way, when we have been kicked around and rejected by the world, God's face is lifted up to us and fills us with blessing and hope. God's is a strong face, but a kind and gracious face that

And the final word of blessing is that we **would have peace**. This is the Hebrew word Shalom, meaning, "**Completion and fulfillment – entering into a state of wholeness...peace.**" (Theological Wordbook of the OT). As we kneel to receive God's blessing, with God himself watching out for us. With the smile of God upon us and his kind face turned toward us in gracious favor – we enter into rest and peace. To have shalom. To be complete and whole – a rest and in line with who we were created to be is God's blessing to us. This is what He wants us to have.

CONCLUSION

God concludes his instruction on how to bless the people in verse 27: [Num. 6:27](#) “So they shall invoke My name on the sons of Israel, and I *then* will bless them.” God says that the priests will invoke My name upon the Sons of Israel. When you are under the name of God – covered by that name – there we have the blessing.

If you are a Christian this morning – you are under the name of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In our passage the blessing comes through the priests, but in the New Testament Jesus is the perfect peace and blessing comes through Him. We are marked by His name. John said symbolically of Jesus in the book of Revelation: [Rev. 22:4](#) they will see His face, and His name *will be on their foreheads*. In other words – we belong to Him.

The best image of this is adoption. I have been in the courtrooms a couple times now where the judge in a final act – places a child under the name of the adopting family. It is a legal transaction – a final decision. And all the blessings of that adopting family now come to their new child.

But if you are not a Christian. If you have not put your faith in Jesus Christ, who lived and died and rose again for you – than you are not under His name. You do not have access to His blessings. Let me encourage you today to get under His name – if you express your desire. God will adopt you into His family. If you are interesting in doing that, please talk with me after the service.

APPLICATION

My application for you is to memorize and meditate on this prayer of blessing, verses 24-26 in preparation for our time of prayer next week. We will walk in front of a

home, and pray this beautiful, powerful prayer before houses that are occupied by a wide variety of people. And for all of them, we want them to come under God's name and His blessing.

Conclusion:

Let me conclude with this story. Howard Rutledge's plane was shot down over Vietnam. He bailed out and was immediately attacked and captured. For the next seven years he endured brutal treatment. The food was bad and the living conditions worse. Rutledge was raised in a Christian home, but the faith of his parents never caught on with him. In his memoirs, he wrote, "I wanted to talk about God and Christ and the church. But there was no pastor, no Sunday school teacher, no Bible, no hymnbook...I had completely neglected the spiritual dimension of my life. It took prison to show me how empty life is without God, and so I had to go back in my memory to those Sunday School days in Tulsa, Oklahoma. If I couldn't have a Bible and hymnbook, I would try to rebuild it from memory. I tried to recall gospel choruses from childhood and hymns from church. The first dozen song were relatively easy. Every day I'd try to remember another verse or a new song. One night there was a huge thunderstorm - and a bolt of lightening knocked out the lights. At the water pounded the dark prison, I was humming my 37th song. One I had entirely forgotten since childhood."

Here are the words: "Showers of blessings, showers of blessing we need! Mercy drops round us are falling, but for the showers we plead. There shall be showers of blessing. This is the promise of love; there shall be seasons refreshing. Sent from the Savior above." This is an old hymn called, "There shall be Showers of Blessing"

Do any of you know that hymn? Many of the old hymns sang of the blessings we have in Christ. Blessings all mine with ten thousand beside. Count your many blessings, name them one by one. We need to sing more of those to remember God wants to bless us.

Num. 6:24 The LORD bless you, and keep you; Num. 6:25 The LORD make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you; Num. 6:26 The LORD lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace.'