

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

Numbers 6

²²The LORD told Moses ²³to speak to Aaron and to his sons and to tell them to bless the Israelites with these words:

²⁴The LORD bless you and keep you.

²⁵The LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

²⁶The LORD look on you with favor and give you peace.

²⁷In this way they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.

Let this text show how devoted Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are to our salvation.



It is really astonishing how ***traces and expressions of this doctrine of the Trinity may be found*** among almost, if not all, the nations of the earth.

- The Hindus, for example, from the most remote antiquity, have held to a “triad” in the divine nature. The names of the three persons in their godhead being Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva.
- The Persians, also, especially in the Zendavesta of Zoroaster, expressed this belief in a trinity: having three persons in their godhead, one of them a supreme being and two subordinate beings.
- The Egyptians also held the belief of a triad, and represented it on the doors of their temples by three figures, an equilateral triangle, each side being co-equality and each corner being unity.
- Even native American tribes had three great spirits before creation.

But how did they come to this belief? We might allow that one nation stumbled upon it. But here many nations, distant from each other, hold it. Surely that’s not by chance. On the contrary, this common tradition can be explained that this was the original faith; that ***God, in the beginning, revealed Himself as the Triune God***. Then different nations sprung up and carried the triune concept of God. Still, even if it is dim and twisted and misguided, they hold and teach it as part of their religious belief.

Today we don’t have myths or legends. But by comparing the New Testament to the Old Testament, we can certainly learn why God would say, “*Let US make man in OUR image*”; why there is a three-fold “*Holy! Holy! Holy!*” in Isaiah’s vision of heaven; and why God would place today’s three-fold blessing in Numbers 6 on His people. Since Jesus came, we can actually put a name on this Triune God: Father; Son; and Holy Spirit.

But the Hebrews of the Old Testament already had this name packaged in a very special blessing.

GOD’S THREE-FOLD BLESSING

Our text takes us back to the days of Moses, when his people worshiped in the tabernacle. Aaron was the chief pastor back then, and all church services were under Aaron’s direction:

22The LORD said to Moses, 23“Tell Aaron and his sons, ‘This is how you are to bless the Israelites. ... 27“So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.”

So this is really God’s wish or blessing pronounced through Aaron and those who served as pastors after him. In the wilderness, in the temple of Jerusalem, in the early church, in the church of today – Christians have heard and still hear that blessing. In our church you hear it at the end of many of our meetings and at the end of practically every church service. You will hear it again today before you leave.

Just as there are three persons in God, so this blessing is constructed in three sections. Let's look at each section more closely to see exactly what it is God is wishing us.

1. **The LORD bless you and keep you.**

When this blessing was spoken to God's people, they were obviously helpless. They had escaped Egypt at the Red Sea by the miraculous intervention of the Almighty God. There was an enemy behind them. There were also enemies ahead of them and to their flank—the Edomites, Moabites, and the Canaanites. Grazing land was scarce. Those who had inhabited the land didn't want a whole new nation all in their space. So there they were, 3 million people in the desert, no supply lines, no friends, and no option to grow food to feed themselves and their children. They would gradually have to starve.

They had only one Helper and Friend, God. They were totally dependent on him and they knew it. He gave them manna from heaven, water from the rock, and quail in the wind. So the words of Aaron at the end of the church service were full of meaning. Lifting up his arms, he intoned, "*The LORD bless you and keep you.*" They knew that unless God in his grace would keep providing, helping, feeding, and delivering, they would be lost. More than a wish, it was a reality.

To us it's not always as obvious. We have friends. We have phones. We live in the middle of abundance. Our farms produce all kinds of food and the shelves of our grocery stores are loaded. We have good houses, comfortable clothes, water, soda, beer, wine, and everything in between. Who needs God?

Of course we need him. Of course **taking all those things for granted** also takes for granted that the sun rises, the seeds sprout, the fruit grows, the rain falls, the phones work, the furnaces warm, the cattle reproduce, the chickens and turkeys multiply – only and alone because God has guided things along their natural course. Just because we forget that from time to time doesn't mean we are as dependent on God as the Israelites in the wilderness. The thoughtful Christian finds a deep meaning and real comfort in the words, "*The LORD bless you and keep you.*"

After all, in the midst of all our luxuries and abundance, we're surrounded with danger. We never know when we might be in a car wreck or break a bone. Some of us have nervous conditions, arthritis, family evils, or other burdens not easy to bear. **Health of mind and body are gifts of God.**

We are so much like those Israelites of old. God's blessing and keeping in our future is more than a wish – it matches our history with him.

So God governs the heavenly bodies in their revolutions; He rides on the wings of the wind; He clothes the lilies of the field; He numbers the hairs of our head. It is a blessed truth that we are not subject to the caprices of accident or to an implacable necessity of fate, that a loving Father above the stars shapes and governs our lives. He has and will watch over the life of little Deacon.

Moses continues,

2. **the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you ...**

Neither Moses nor Aaron could say this in light of Israel's sins. The Lord doesn't lighten up when he sees our dark hearts, our dirty words, and our red hands. The Lord's shining face means a smile in happiness. God doesn't smile at imperfection or unholiness. The Lord doesn't mistake us as perfect. We would expect Moses and Aaron to say, "*The Lord frown on you,*" "*May His face darken.*"

What do you think of yourself as you look at the week just past, or at the months since Easter? Most Christians would rather not look back. Looking back reminds us of too many failures, too many deeds left undone, too many sins. Looking back makes us feel guilty, disappointed, and even depressed. If you feel your own face crossed with a frown, you're in good company with us sinners. St. Paul felt that way when he wrote to the Christians in Rome: *"The good that I would do I don't do; the evil I do not want to do, this I keep on doing ... Oh, wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"* (Romans 7)

Feeling the weight of our sins isn't altogether bad. There once was a pastor named Moody who was preaching to a large audience on the weight and guilt of sin, when he was interrupted by a drunk in the third row, "Mr. Moody, I feel no weight on me." To that, Moody replied, "Dead men feel no weight, no matter how large. Your problem is that you are spiritually dead." We who believe in Jesus Christ are spiritually alive. That's exactly why we are sensitive to sin and feel the weight of sin pressed down on us. We need God's grace. Our hearts yearn for it. ***We want God to see us, think of us, and smile.***

May God forgive us instead of punish us. May God exchange our record with what Christ has won for us. May God trade what we deserve with salvation. May God remind us of our baptismal promises, so that we do not carry our old sins into the new week. May we not enter our Sunday afternoon burdened with the world of our many sins.

The proof is in the gracious smile of the Lord. God's pastors can only mean these words if the people's sins are already removed, covered over, and gone for good. He loves you. He takes those weights and releases you. You are a new creation!

Maybe you know you don't feel any different. "Pastor, I think I'll sin again. So far, being a believer isn't heaven yet." Well then, bury those early sins in the empty morning tomb. Drown those missteps in the waves of your baptism. When your trespasses struggle to breathe again, be ready to battle them, and be ready to bury and drown your sins again.

3. What has God found in you personally? Has he discovered someone he might turn his back on? Has he decided that most Christians' lives are hopeful, but yours is hopeless? Do you think that you are an exception to the rule? Friends, those are selfish thoughts. The Lord hasn't turned his back away. He has personally lifted his face in your direction. You are an individual part of his holy city. He calls you by name and sends his Spirit on you to dwell in your heart and watch over your steps. So the last phrase in God's blessing is:

"the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace."

Since God smiles on us (part 2), why shouldn't we have peace? The angels sang about that peace when they appeared to the shepherds. *"Glory to God in the highest ..."* (Luke 2:14). Jesus spoke of that peace when he said, *"Peace I leave with you ..."* (John 14:27). Paul stated this peace with God in Romans 5, *"since we have been justified by faith,"* based on justification, the not-guilty verdict, that gives us access to God's grace. ***That peace is rooted in the knowledge that in Christ, God and sinners are at-one again.***

You have been reconciled, brought together with God after a separation called sin. Ever since placing His name on you, God loves you dearly, forgives you richly, cares for you daily, guides you truly, protects you completely, helps you individually, so that ... All is well, no matter what it looks like. *Only a little faith* in that fact makes it a reality for you.

We all have reason to trust Him, for He is the God of love, and mercy towards sinners is the foremost law of His providence.

- From the great deep of God's judgments David saw the Lord's mercy shine forth and he said, "*How excellent is your lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of your wings,*" Psa. 36:7.
- Jesus by His providence bestows uncounted benefits on all, including the wicked. "*He causes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous,*" Matt. 5:45.
- God does good unto men to draw them to repentance, as He said of Israel: "*I drew them with gentle cords, with bands of love: and I was to them as those who take off the yoke,*" Hosea 11:4.
- If God does so much good to the wicked who do not walk in His ways, what a kind Father will He be to those who love Him and that nestle under the shadow of His wings! Surely "*they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing,*" Psa. 34:10.

I invite you to write down ***three things that make you feel safe in this life***. Police? Government? Insurance? Stocks? Automobile breaks? Tinted windows? Firearms? Bulletproof vest? What is your safety net? What will you write down?

Look and see how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit make you far safer than any three things you write down. And you are baptized into that name and into that blessing. ***Let it always remind you that you are baptized into Jesus Christ.***

In Jesus' name, Amen.