

The Blessings of God

2018 Joint Asian Pastoral Conference

Peter Evensen | February 2018

It is common for people to seek blessings from God. We see people going on pilgrimages and visiting various temples to seek a blessing. As Christians, God tells us to bring our requests to Him:

Philippians 4:6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.¹

But, what blessings can we expect from God? What does God promise to us and for what things should we ask? These are questions this paper will try to answer based on God's Word. When we tell others about the blessings God wants to give us, we want to make sure that what we say is the same as what God promises to give.

Earthly Blessings

It is common and natural for people to seek earthly blessings. For example, there is a temple in Hyderabad that is known for giving worshippers success in getting a visa to the USA. In visiting churches, the author often receives prayer requests for good grades or a bright future.

As we read in Philippians 4:6 (above), God wants to bring all our requests to Him "in everything". And Jesus Himself taught us to pray for our daily needs in the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 6:11 Give us this day our daily bread

As Dr. Martin Luther explains in his small catechism, this petition is not limited just to food:

"Daily bread" means everything we need for our bodily well-being. It includes food, drink, clothes, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money and goods, a godly husband or wife, godly children, godly workers, godly and faithful leaders, good government, good weather, peace, health, education, honor, faithful friends, trustworthy neighbors and things like that.

But Jesus also warns us in the Sermon on the Mount not to seek riches. He tells us not to worry about earthly possessions:

Matthew 6:19-24 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

"The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

The things of this world are easily ruined or stolen. These things we see around us will not last. This is important to remember as we are often tempted by the things of this world. Jesus warns

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us that if we fix our eyes on the things of this world, our eyes become bad, and we will be filled with darkness:

1 John 2:15-16 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.

Jesus summarizes what He says here by saying: “You cannot serve God and money.” Chasing after riches so often leads people away from God and into many sins:

1 Timothy 6:9-10 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

It is natural for our sinful natures to want earthy things and earthly riches. We must be careful that we do not encourage people to follow their sinful nature by chasing after the things of this world. No where does God promise to give us health, wealth, or success in this life. But God knows what we need and will provide for us. Jesus tells us:

Matthew 6:8 “...your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

Matthew 6:31-33 “Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

Our loving heavenly Father knows what we need and will give us what we need. That is not the same as giving us all we may want or ask for. Earthly parents usually do not give their children everything they want or ask for, but they try to give their children everything that their children need. Our Father in heaven knows better than we do what we need and He graciously gives us all that we need for this life and for the world to come.

As Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount, we should not seek after earthly blessings like the Gentiles do, but we should seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness and God will provide for us.

Earthly Riches and Success ≠ God’s Blessing and Favor

A common wrong idea in the world is that earthly blessings, like success and wealth, mean that a person has God’s blessing and favor. Some people seem to just stumble and fall into these things. Why would they have such success if it was not from God?

But God tells us that earthly wealth does not mean that a person has His favor. The Psalm writer Asaph tells us that he was jealous of the wicked and their success. Even though they curse God, they still prosper:

Psalm 73:3-6, 12 For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For they have no pangs until death; their bodies are fat and sleek. They are not in trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind...They set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth...Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches.

Asaph, on the other hand, has tried to be Godly and has suffered for being faithful to God:

Psalm 73:13-14 All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in

innocence. For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning.

Asaph did not understand how things could be so unfair. We see the same thing in the world around us. The wicked and ungodly seem to prosper and enjoy life. But God showed Asaph that his suffering was not in vain and that the riches of the wicked enjoy now will not save them:

Psalms 73:16-19 But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end. Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin. How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors!

Psalms 73:23-28 Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. For behold, those who are far from you shall perish; you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you. But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, that I may tell of all your works.

Jesus said the same thing in the parable of the rich man:

Luke 12:16-21 “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?” And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”’ But God said to him, Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

The story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) and other passages (like Mark 9:36) also show us that earthly riches do not mean a person has God’s blessing.

Earthly Troubles ≠ God’s Punishment or Disfavor

Just as earthly blessings are not a sign of God’s favor or blessing, earthly troubles are not a sign of God’s punishment or anger.

We see this first of all in the example of Asaph above in Psalm 73:13-14. Asaph had “kept his heart clean” but he still faced difficulties and rebuke every day.

Paul told to Timothy that we can expect persecution in this life:

2 Timothy 3:12 Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

On his first missionary journey, Paul told the churches he established that they should expect to face problems:

Acts 14:22 saying...through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

Jesus Himself said we will have tribulation in this world:

John 16:33 “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

In fact, Jesus said that if we are persecuted for His sake, we are actually blessed:

Matthew 5:11-12 "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is

great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

This doesn't mean we should seek out persecution as a way to be blessed. That is not what Jesus is here saying. Jesus is saying that persecution and problems does not mean that God is angry with us, but our problems here point us to our great reward in heaven. It is in heaven that we find the true blessings of God.

The Blessings of God

We read about the true blessings of God in the opening of Paul's letter to the Ephesians:

Ephesians 1:3-14 ³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

¹¹In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will ¹²so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. ¹³In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

God has blessed us

If you look at the verbs in this passage they are all in the past tense or present tense. Paul tells us that God has *already* blessed us and that we have these blessings *now*. We do not need to go to God and ask Him to bless us; God has already blessed us and given us all these things.

every spiritual blessing

God has given us *every* blessing that we could need. We lack nothing. We do not need to add anything to what God has given us. God has given us everything we need for life.

Peter says it this way:

2 Peter 1:3 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence

The blessings that God gives us are *spiritual*. They give us a new spirit and a new, eternal life. These are blessing we cannot get no matter how hard we try. We may be able to work and earn money and build treasure here on earth, but we can never do enough to earn a spiritual blessing. We can never do enough to earn salvation.

But God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing.

in the heavenly places

This reminds us that these blessing are not temporary, earthly blessings. They are safe in heaven “where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal” (Matthew 6:20).

That fact that these blessings are in the heavenly places encourages us to lift our eyes from our

earthly life and to look to our true life in heaven. God's word encourages us to do this in a number of places:

Matthew 6:20-21 “but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Colossians 3:1-3 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Hebrews 12:2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith

Philippians 3:18-21 For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

God chose and predestined us

The fact that God Himself chose and predestined you is a great blessing. It shows us that our salvation is not dependent on us, but on God alone. This makes our salvation certain. It is a great comfort that our salvation is from God and depends only on our faithful God.

1 Thessalonians 5:9 For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ

before the foundation of the world

God's choice and call came before the foundation of the world. This again shows us that it is not based on anything we have or have not done. It is based only on God's grace, the undeserved favor He has given us. We see this in the example of Jacob and Esau:

Romans 9:8-11 This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. For this is what the promise said: “About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.” And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls

Here the words “before the foundation of the world” are talking about our call, but these words also apply to our home in heaven:

Matthew 25:34 Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

Here Jesus tells us that our heavenly reward was prepared for us from the foundation of the world. It is not a blessing prepared at the last-minute without much thought, like a gift bought for a wife when the husband forgets a special day, like their wedding day (anniversary). God has prepared the kingdom carefully for you from the very beginning. Because the kingdom was prepared from before the creation of the world, one can say that we were created for this kingdom. There will be no mismatch between us and this perfect gift. It will be a perfect fit. It will fulfill all our desires.

adoption as sons

Although man was originally created by God, by nature we are not God's children. Our sin has separated us from God (Isaiah 59:2). By nature we are God's enemies (Romans 5:10, Colossians 1:21) and children of God's wrath (Ephesians 2:3).

But through Jesus' death and resurrection, we have been adopted as God's sons (see also Romans 8:15, 8:23; Galatians 4:5).

This blessing also shows us that we do nothing to become God's sons. It is the parents who adopt a child. The child does nothing to be adopted. In the same way, our relationship with God is all because of what God has done for us in Jesus.

It is important to remember that when the Bible talks about us being adopted as *sons*, it is not talking about male versus female. Both men and women are equally saved in Christ (Galatians 3:28). But God talks about both men and women being adopted as His *sons* because it is the son who receives the inheritance. We are adopted as God's sons and for that reason we have an inheritance from God (see v. 14 above and the comments below on "inheritance").

according to the purpose of his will and plan

These words also show us that our salvation depends only on God. We are saved because God wants us to be saved! We have been adopted as His sons because He wanted to adopt us. It does not depend on us. We also read this in the opening of John's gospel:

John 1:12-13 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

We are not born again because of our choice. We have not become children of God because of our decision. It is all from God. And because it is God's will, purpose, good pleasure, and plan, it is certain. We can be sure that we have been saved.

These words also show us that God does not reluctantly or hesitantly save and bless us. God blesses us with His whole heart. It was His good pleasure to give us all these things. As Jesus said:

Luke 12:32 "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

We also see this in our Savior: Jesus willingly laid down His life for us. No one took it from Him:

John 10:17-18 "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."

Isaiah 53:11 Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

Hebrews 12:2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

You and I are the joy that was set before Him. Jesus sacrificed Himself because He wants us to be with Him:

John 17:24 Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the

foundation of the world.

we have redemption

By nature we were dead in our trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1). We were slaves to sin and death (Romans 6:17, 20). There was nothing we could do to buy our release. We could not redeem ourselves.

Jesus asked:

Matthew 16:26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?

The truth is that there is no price we can give for our soul; nothing would ever be enough:

Psalm 49:7-9 Truly no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life, for the ransom of their life is costly and can never suffice, that he should live on forever and never see the pit.

But God has paid the price for our souls. He has given us reception through Jesus' blood. We have been set free.

the forgiveness of our trespasses

In Christ we have the forgiveness of our sins. Jesus' paid the penalty of our trespasses by dying on the cross. The "record of debt that stood against us" has been taken away and nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14).

the riches of his grace which lavished upon us

We do not deserve any blessing from God. The only thing we deserve is God's wrath and punishment because of sins. But "He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities" (Psalm 103:10). Grace is God's undeserved favor. He graciously blesses us even though we do not deserve it.

These words also show us that God does not hold back. He has given us the *riches* of His grace. He has lavished (put an exceedingly great amount of) His grace on us.

in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will

Another blessing that God has given us is to reveal His will to us. He has revealed His Son to us.

We cannot understand the things God has given us unless God gives us wisdom and insight:

1 Corinthians 2:14, 16 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned... "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

Paul prays in this chapter of Ephesians that they would be enlightened by the Spirit:

Ephesians 1:16-19 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might

It is only through God's Spirit, the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, that we can know God and know our Savior. It is only through the Spirit that we can know the riches of the inheritance God has given us in Christ. May the Spirit continue to show us the greatness of the heavenly

blessings God has given us.

sealed with the promised Holy Spirit

And God has given us the Holy Spirit which we need to know Him.

God promised to pour out the Holy Spirit on all flesh (Joel 2:28). For this reason the Spirit is called here the promised Holy Spirit. That God has given us His Spirit shows us that God fulfills his promises.

We were sealed with the Holy Spirit. To be sealed mean to be “stamped”: to have a mark that shows ownership. We were given the Holy Spirit as a sign to show that we now belong to God:

1 John 4:13 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

Romans 8:9 ...Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

Romans 8:16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God

A seal is also put on something to secure it. The solders secured Jesus’ tomb with a seal on the stone (Mathew 27:66). The Holy Spirit does the same for us. He secures our spiritual life. The Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts bringing us salvation. The Holy Spirit sanctifies us and enables us to put to death the works of our sinful flesh:

1 Corinthians 12:3 Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 6:11 ...you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

2 Thessalonians 2:13 But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

Romans 8:13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

who is the guarantee

God has given us His Holy Spirit as a guarantee, a pledge, a down payment to show that our inheritance is certain. The fact that we have the Holy Spirit shows that God gives us what He promises. We will certainly receive our promised inheritance:

Romans 8:16-17 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

The Spirit shows us the blessing that we have from God:

1 Corinthians 2:12 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.

our inheritance

As said above, our adoption as *sons* points us to the inheritance we have from God. “Inheritance” is a very important word; it reminds us of *how* we receive this blessing from God.

How does one receive an inheritance? One receives an inheritance because of the relationship one has to the person giving the inheritance. One does not receive an inheritance because of what ones does or does not do. Through Jesus our relationship to God has changed. Before we

were alienated and separated from God, but Jesus has reconciled us to God. Through Him we have been adopted as God's sons. Because God has made us His sons, we have this inheritance.

When we think of an inheritance, we naturally think of earthly goods – what a person might received from their parents. But the inheritance we have from God is far better. Peter describes it as:

1 Peter 1:4 an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you

Our inheritance is *imperishable*. It is something that will never go away. It will never be spoiled or ruined by anything. It will last forever.

Our inheritance is *undefiled*. It will be perfect. We will never find anything wrong with it. We will never find anything that we do not like about it. We will never be disappointed by it.

Our inheritance is *unfading*. This means that our inheritance will not lose its wonderful character. We will never grow tired of it. Because we live in time, we cannot understand what eternity will be like. Here on earth we sometimes get bored with and tired of things. We can lose interest in actives or things that we used to enjoy. But our eternal inheritance will not be like the things of this world. We will never grow bored or tired of it. It will always bring us joy. It will be a joy that will never fade away.

As Peter said, our inheritance is kept safe for us in heaven. It is far from moths and rust and thieves and anything else in this world that could take it away.

through and in Jesus Christ

The phrase “in Christ” (or “in whom/him/the Beloved”) occurs 10 times in these 12 verses. God does not want us to miss that fact that all these blessing are only found in and come through Jesus Christ. It is only through the perfect life, innocent death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ that we have these things. Apart from Jesus, we do not have any spiritual blessings from God.

Heavenly Blessings Lead to Earthly Blessings

We have looked at some of the many blessings we already have from God in Christ. These are “spiritual blessings in the heavenly places”. But what about our life here and now? Does God not give us blessings in this life?

God does give is blessings here and now, but these blessing come from the spiritual blessings with which God has blessed us in the heavenly places. God does not promise earthly riches, but He does provide for us during our earthly life. Jesus told us not to worry about what we will eat or drink, because God will provide:

Matthew 6:33-34 “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

When Jesus was telling His disciples that He would send the Helper, the Holy Spirit, He said:

John 14:27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

And Paul too said that we will have peace while we are on this earth:

Philippians 4:4-7 ...The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

We have this peace despite the tribulation and difficulties we face in this world (see John 16:33). It is a blessing that comes from knowing that we are redeemed, that we are adopted children of God, and that we have a guaranteed inheritance kept for us in heaven. In this life the Holy Spirit brings us peace and joy in the kingdom of God.

The Apostle Paul faced good and bad times. He said:

Philippians 4:11-13 ...I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

1 Timothy 6:6-8 But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.

The writer of the book of Hebrews tells us:

Hebrews 13:5-6 Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"

This same writer also told us to look "to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2). When we look to Jesus and the heavenly blessings we have in Him, we find peace, contentment, and the strength to withstand the storms we face in this world. When we take our eyes off Jesus and focus on the things and problems around us, we begin to sink, like Peter when he was walking to Jesus on the water (Matthew 14:29-31).

The world around us tempts us and attacks us. When we take our eyes off Jesus, may He reach out and take our hand and bring our focus back to Him and all the blessings He gives us.

Conclusion

It is wrong for us to encourage someone to hold on to Jesus so that He will give them a good job with a good income or any other earthly blessing. God may give these things, but no where does God promise us health and wealth in this life.

Instead God tells us of all the blessings He has already given us in Christ. It is on these blessings in the heavenly places that God wants us to focus. We want to point people to these blessings in our preaching and teaching. These heavenly blessings, are worth far more than anything we could ever obtain on this world. These are blessings that we already have in Christ.