

Numbers 6:22-27  
Pentecost 1st  
May 30, 2010

**Numbers 6:22-27 (New International Version)**

**The Priestly Blessing**

22 The LORD said to Moses, 23 "Tell Aaron and his sons, 'This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: 24 " ' "The LORD bless you and keep you; 25 the LORD make his face shine upon you \_and be gracious to you; 26 the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace." '27 "So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them."

**A Threefold Blessing from our 3-in-1 God**

**I. Of preservation**

**II. Of pardon**

**III. Of peace**

"God bless you." That's a common response we make when someone sneezes. Have you ever wondered why we do that? I vaguely remember reading or hearing somewhere that years ago sneezing was considered the bodies way of cleansing itself of evil spirits or germs, and to say "God bless you" was a way of wishing better health for the person who sneezed. Regardless of how that custom started, it really has become nothing more than a social reflex or a common courtesy that really has no effect.

However, when God says "Bless you" that's different matter. That's why the words of our sermon text have been, and still are an important part of the public worship of God's people. It is called the Aaronic Benediction because Aaron and the high priests who followed him used it much like we use it today as part of the worship service. But this blessing is not intended to be just formal way to end a church service, but powerful words which actually bestow on the recipients all the blessings that God's saving name makes available to sinners like us. So on this Trinity Sunday let's see that the threefold blessing we receive from our 3-in-1 God are preservation, pardon, and peace.

I. The first part of the Aaronic Benediction states "The LORD bless you and keep you." Our Savior God is not only the one who created our life, he is the one who preserves and protects lives.

What a comfort these words must have been to the people of Israel. When God first spoke this blessing upon them, they were encamped near Mt. Sinai. They had just escaped slavery in Egypt and were about to begin their difficult journey to the promised land of Canaan. Where were they going to find enough food and water for so many? How would they survive the many enemy nations they were going to have to conquer? Left to themselves they surely would not survive.

But they were not alone. The LORD was not only going to go with them, he promised that he would bless and keep them. Those weren't empty words, but a powerful promise. God did preserve his people, giving them water from a rock, manna and quail from heaven, their shoes never wore out, and God gave them victory over their enemies.

"The Lord bless you and keep you." These words aren't an empty promise to us either. They are God's promise that even though we don't know what's going to happen in the coming week, God will be there to bless and keep us. So, no matter what will happen this week-sickness, loss of job, car breaking down, dollars not stretching far enough to make ends meet, our God will go with us and he is the one who has power to bless and keep us no matter what happens. We wouldn't, we couldn't survive without him.

I recall the story about a little boy who misunderstood what the pastor was saying about this blessing. Instead of "Aaronic Benediction" the boy thought the pastor said "The Ironic Benediction." Although that little boy misheard what the pastor said, he was right. There is something ironic about this blessing. No, the irony is not that God blesses us, because that's the kind of God he is. He is gracious and merciful giving us what we don't deserve. The

irony of this blessing is that we so often fail to trust it and so often fail to thank our God for never failing to keep his promise of preservation.

**II.** The second part of this blessing speaks about pardon. It states "The LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you."

A person's face can often reveal that person's feelings or emotions toward us. If we say a person's face is dark or downcast as he looks at us, we know he is angry with us. If a person looks at us with a bright shining face, then we know that person is happy with us, that his kindly disposed toward us.

In this blessing God promises to look at us with a bright shining face. And that's amazing, considering that God has every right to scowl at us and be angry with us on account of our sinfulness. But wonder of wonders, God doesn't look on us in anger. He looked with anger on his own Son on the cross. And now, on the basis of that payment for sin, God blesses us with full pardon for sin and smiles on us in his love.

Think of our comforting it was for the people of Israel to hear that. History shows that they were stubborn people who often rebelled and complained against God and often chose to worship idols that they made with their own hands or borrowed from the Canaanites whom they were suppose to destroy. Yet, in spite of their unfaithfulness, God was faithful to his promises and through these words assured them that he would pardon them for their sins.

And do we need anything less as we end one week and begin a new one? Do we rebel against God and his Word any less than the Israelites? Don't we also have idols in our lives, things, activities, or even people that have a higher priority in our hearts or lives than God? You know the answer to such questions. As we look into God's holy law, we all stand condemned.

So what a joy and relief it is to hear the words "The LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you." As we hear these words we can not help thinking of Calvary's cross and finding comfort in knowing that God does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For Jesus' sake he has removed our transgression from us as far as the east is from the west. What is that, but the blessing of pardon from our Triune God?

**III.** Closely associated with the blessing of pardon is that blessing placed upon us in the third part of the Aaronic Benediction in which God says "The LORD look on you with favor and give you peace."

The word for "peace" in Hebrew is the word "Shalom." "Shalom" was the common form of greeting and for the Jew "Shalom" was the sum total of all that is good in life which they wished for each other in that greeting.

For the Christian, the highest form of good in life is being at peace with God. By nature we were not at peace with God. By nature, we were his enemies. But the wall of sin that caused hostilities between God and us was removed by Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Having reconciled sinners to himself through what Jesus did, the Father now looks on us with a favoring eye.

This peace, which Jesus purchased between us and God, is the peace which the Holy Spirit gives to us. That is why Luther correctly connected this part of the benediction with the Holy Spirit. For it is the Holy Spirit who works in our hearts through the gospel to convince us that when Jesus died, he died for us, and in that sacrifice we now have peace with God!

Do you remember what the Apostle Paul said about this peace with God? He said that it is this peace that will guard our hearts and minds. That's what God is really promising us in this benediction. And we need that reassurance because there are many times in life when it may seem to us as though God has hid his face from us or that he's acting more like our enemy than our loving Father. When sickness keeps knocking us down, when it seems that peace and joy exist everywhere else except in our home or life, or when death takes a loved one from us, it may seem as though God is not looking on us with favor. But when such storm clouds gather, we need to remember this blessing. In Christ you are at peace with God. In Christ God does look upon you with favor as his redeemed child. And even more, in Christ you will enjoy eternal peace with God in heaven. How can you be sure of that? You can be sure because every week here in church you are blessed with God's promise. "The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace."

There are a number of personal stories I could tell you about how God's people recognize the importance and power of this benediction. Allow me, in closing, to share just two. Years ago, an elderly man told me about growing up on his father's farm. Even though they still had chores and milking to do on Sunday morning, they never missed church. On one

Sunday, however, things got behind schedule and it was obvious they weren't going to get to church on time. Soon it was obvious they were going to be so late they'd even miss the sermon. The man thought for sure they wouldn't go to church that Sunday. But his father said, "We're still going. We can still receive the benediction and we need that for the coming week."

The second story has to do with little children. Even though most people don't notice it, it is not uncommon that when I raise my hands to speak the benediction a little child will either lean or step out into the aisle to watch. Even little children sense that something important is happening when the benediction is spoken. And something important does happen. Our 3-in-1 God gives us the blessing of preservation, pardon, and peace. Amen.