

Numbers Chapter 6 v 22 - 27

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[0 : 00] there. So first of all, Numbers in chapter 5, that's page 139, if you've got the church Bible. And we're going to read from verses 1 to 4.

The Lord said to Moses, command the Israelites to send away from the camp anyone who has a defiling skin disease or a discharge of any kind or who is ceremonially unclean because of a dead body. Send away male and female alike. Send them outside the camp so that they will not defile their camp, but I dwell among you. Israelites did so. They sent them outside the camp. They did just as the Lord had instructed. Then we'll turn over, if we could, to verse 29.

We looked at these bits before, so I'm not going to repeat them, but just to give you a flavor of it, verse 29 of Numbers 5. This then is the law of jealousy, when a woman goes astray and makes herself impure while married to her husband, or when feelings of jealousy come over a man because he suspects his wife. The priest is to make her stand before the Lord and is to apply this entire law to her. The husband will be innocent of any wrongdoing. The woman will bear the consequences of her sin, and then over to verse 21 of chapter 6. And this is where we're going to read now to the end of the chapter. This is the law of the Nazarite, who vows offerings to the Lord in accordance with their dedication, in addition to whatever else they can afford. They must fulfill the vows they have made according to the law of the Nazarite. The Lord said to Moses, tell Aaron and his sons, this is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them, the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace. So they will put my name on the Israelites and I will bless them. Numbers and chapter 6 in your Bibles, please.

And particularly, as I said, those verses 22 onwards to the end of the chapter, which we haven't had chance to look at up until now. But why did I read those other bits of chapter 5 and 6, particularly with the emphasis upon the word law? Did you notice that? Again and again, particularly verses 29 of 5, this is the law of jealousy. Verse 21, this is the law of the Nazarite. And then we come to verse 22, tell Aaron and his sons, this is how you are to bless the Israelites. There are some things that don't seem to go together. There are some things that seem to be opposed to one another, that shouldn't, as it were, be part of the same thing, if I can put it away. Think about certain foods. There are certain foods that you just don't eat together. You don't eat them, they're separate, one's savory, one's sweet, or whatever it may be. Of course, there are some things that don't, in my mind, go together, but people do eat them, like peanut butter and jam sandwiches. Americans do that, don't they? And jelly, they call it.

And of course, they do other strange things as well. They put together pancakes with bacon and maple syrup. I don't like that. I've tried it once. They just don't seem to go together. And it's not just in the matter of food, of course, in the matter of what we wear in fashion. And I would not, in any sense, profess to be someone who has a fashionable taste in how I wear, or what I wear. But there are some things that just really mustn't go together. Colors that clash like purple and bright green. But even then, of course, there have been times in history, particularly the 1970s, it seems to me, when things that should never have been worn together were worn together. High-heeled platform shoes and flares and other things like that. Of course, there is one pairing of two certain clothes that have never, ever been acceptable and must and should not ever be seen. Socks and sandals. That is a no-no. I don't know, understand how anybody could think that is acceptable in public to walk with socks and sandals and worse, wearing shorts. Some things just don't seem to go together, at least in my mind. And I think in all of our minds. There are things which are like polar opposites, ends of the magnet, which just repel each other. Now, when we come to Numbers in chapter 6 and into the end of chapter 6, it seems to me that we have two, at least in the world's mind and perhaps even in some Christian mind, things that shouldn't go together. Law and grace. And there are many Christians, sadly, or some Christians,

[5 : 14] I think, who would say, well, of course, the Old Testament is all about law. New Testament is all about grace. It's almost as if there's a different way of doing things going on, or as if maybe God has changed his mind in some way. Law and grace. Holiness and blessing.

And yet, it seems to me that that's exactly what we find here in the Old Testament, as well as in other parts of the New Testament. Because here at the end of these chapters, chapters 5 and 6 particularly, which have been, and we looked at them, didn't we, purity in the camp, resolution of wrongs, a test for an unfaithful wife or a jealous husband, the Nazirite who was to shave his hair and commit himself to absolute outward purity and holiness and keep certain laws. At the end of these chapters, which are all about outward and doing and law, we have this incredible blessing of God to the people through the priests. Law and grace. Now, we shouldn't be surprised, really, if we know our Bibles, that these two come together. There's a principle, as it were, throughout the whole of Scripture that holiness leads to blessing.

That obedience and grace go together. They're not opposites, but in fact, they are connected together.

And again, let me put it to you. This is not just in the Old Testament, but throughout Scripture. Here's the writer to the Hebrews. Just listen. You don't need to look to it. Hebrews chapter 12.

Make every effort, verse 14, to live in peace with everyone and to be holy. Without holiness, no one will see the Lord. But then he goes on, verse 15, see to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and of the bitter root that grows up to cause trouble and defile many. So you have, without holiness, you can see the Lord.

[7 : 24] But in one sense, he's also talking about, with that holiness, we're in the grace of God. Not to confuse these two things, but certainly not to get into that foolish understanding that really is the basis for all religion, apart from Christianity, is that if you do holy things, God will bless you.

That isn't the case here at all. And it never can be. But the truth is that holiness and blessing are found together from God in the life of the Christian.

In fact, remember Jesus, when he was praying his high priestly prayer in John and chapter 17, he spoke about holiness being a very blessing of God upon those who are Jesus' followers.

John 17, verse 17, sanctify them by the truth. Your word is truth. Jesus' prayer for his people, his prayer for his disciples was that they should be holy, sanctified, set apart, pure.

And that this was God's work to do through the truth that is the gospel. Before we come to unwrap this incredible blessing, this threefold blessing that we have, verses 24 to 26, I want us to notice a couple of things to begin with.

[8 : 48] First of all, do you notice that the name of the Lord is repeated three occasions? The Lord bless you. The Lord make his face. The Lord turn his face.

All blessings come from God. He's the source of every blessing. Every blessing that you and I have, every blessing in our lives, every good thing that we enjoy comes from God.

That's why ultimately, men and women who live without giving thanks to God for life, health, strength, and all things are sinning against him.

People don't think of that, do they? They say, well, sin is, of course, when I do terrible things and break God's commandments and follow all sorts of wicked ways and so on.

But actually, one of the greatest sins, surely one of the most terrible sins, surely is an ungrateful heart, an ungrateful spirit to God for what we have. Now, and again, let's look at ourselves before we point our fingers too much at the world outside.

[9 : 51] How often do you and I complain and moan and whinge about what we don't have and what we don't enjoy, but the things that come into our lives in comparison to how much do we thank God and praise him and bless him for every good gift?

The Lord is the source of everything that you and I have. He is the origin of every blessing. But there's something more here, I think, and I don't think I'm straining the scriptures in this way, but I think it's right for us to suggest and ask the question, why is the name of the Lord mentioned three times?

Why isn't the name of the Lord just mentioned once or twice or four times or five times? Why just three? Because, of course, it could be the Lord bless you and keep you and make his face shine upon you and turn his face.

It doesn't need the repetition of the name of the Lord. Remember, the name of the Lord is a very holy, sacred thing. Surely it points us to the fact that God is again hinting at the revelation that he is Trinity, that he is one God in three persons.

We see that all the way through the Old Testament and into the New Testament. But we can't, as some would say, trying to invent this idea. It's God's idea.

[11 : 13] It's God's revelation of himself, that he is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And we see, of course, that coming all the way through the scriptures, especially in the New Testament. That blessing that we often say, and we almost certainly say at the end of our service this evening, when we say, let's say the words of the grace, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

Three persons, one God. Of course, when the Lord Jesus gave that commission for his disciples to go and to make disciples of all nations, his command was they should be baptized, what?

In the name, singular, of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And so with New Testament eyes, as we look back onto the Old Testament through Jesus and all that he's done for us, we see here again, here is a reflection, here is a truth that God, the Lord, is three persons.

And that from those three persons, our blessings come. They work in harmony for our salvation. That's the great thing. Our salvation is of God, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

They each have a vital role to play in that salvation work. But they all work together in harmony. And the wonderful thing is this as well, of course.

[12 : 32] That the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, it is the desire and purpose of each to bless us. To bless us.

What does that mean? The Lord bless you. We still use that, don't we, when somebody sneezes? Bless you. If you're trying to be really clever, you say, Gesundheit.

I don't know what that means in German. Anybody know German enough to know what Gesundheit means? I think it means the same thing, God bless you. Something like that. But we don't say, God bless you, we just say, bless you. And, of course, the word blessing has become in our day and age a bit vague, a bit old-fashioned, a bit out of vogue.

It's a bit like wishing you good luck, isn't it? To say, bless you. Hope you feel better soon. It's lost its power.

It's a polite wish that somebody be blessed. It's sort of a desire that good things should happen to them. That they should be happy. But, of course, as we've seen already, the word bless has lost its power because it only can be a blessing when it comes from God.

[13 : 46] Because every blessing comes from him. He alone is the blessing of people. And those who know him are the only blessed people on earth. So when the Lord says here to the priests that they are to speak to the people and to say the Lord bless you, he's not simply, as it were, saying, tell the people I want them to be happy.

Tell the people I want them to have an easy life or things to go well with them. No, because the word of God has power, doesn't it? God is not purely a God of affection and emotion because every affection and emotion of God brings forth action.

Yeah, we can have feelings, can't we? Feelings for somebody or feelings about something. But we don't necessarily put those feelings into action. Well, with God it's not like that. All of his emotions, all of his feelings, all of his desires are put into action into our lives.

The priests have no power to bless the people, to do them good. They were simply a sort of a functionary job, didn't they? They simply took the lamb or what it was and killed it and offered the offering.

They were just these sort of mediators. They were sort of the middlemen between God and his people. The blessing the people received was from God himself. So when the priests say, The Lord bless you and keep you, The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

[15 : 17] The Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace. What he's saying is this, is that this is how God is dealing with you and will deal with you. And this is his way of dealing with you, to bless you.

God's people. And what God has to say here to his people of the Old Testament is exactly the same as what he says to his people of the New Testament because we are one people.

And we know that's true because the New Testament tells us, 2 Corinthians 1.24, No matter how many promises God has made, they are yes in Christ. And if we are in Christ, all the blessings, all the promises, all the good things that God says throughout the Scripture belong to us.

Because he is the giver of them, the source of them, the channel as well of them too. So let's think about these blessings. And what do they mean for us today? What is it that God wants you and I to know?

And that's why he says to the priests, I don't know how often they were to give this blessing, or how often they did, whether it was to be every day, or whenever they came and brought an offering, whatever, but the reality is this is what God wants you and I to know every day, that the Lord bless you and keep you.

[16 : 34] Make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you and turn his face towards you and give you peace. The very first thing it seems to me is this, that the blessing of God means salvation.

The blessing of God means salvation. The first and foremost blessing that God can give to anybody is to bestow upon them rescue and salvation.

The Lord bless you and keep you. Come back to that word in a moment, to keep. But you notice there's couplets there, isn't there? There's first of all the Lord's intention, we might say, or the Lord's action, the Lord bless you, then it's followed up by something happening to us.

Keep you. Make his face shine upon you, be gracious to you, turn his face towards you, give you peace. Yeah, so there's actions by God that have resulting consequences in our lives.

And the very first of them, it seems to me, is the blessing of God that he saves his people. That's the meaning of the word keep, isn't it? To keep safe, to protect, to watch over to God, to look after.

[17 : 48] The blessing of God is this, that he saves us. He keeps us. He protects us. And rescues us. That comes to us through Jesus.

Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 3, speaking of the God who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ. That's why it's so imperative that we are in Christ.

There's no salvation outside of Christ. There is no way that we can be right with God unless we have put our faith in Christ and become one with Christ. Now God is not simply reminding the people here that he has saved them from Egypt because they were still just a matter of months or about a year or so after they'd come out of Egypt so it's fresh in their minds the Passover and what had happened when God had sent the plagues upon the land and how on that Passover night they had been thrust out into the night with just what they could carry into the wilderness as it were.

And of course that rescue through the Red Sea when the seas had parted and God's people had gone through, he isn't just saying to them, look I have kept you safe but for the Lord to say the Lord bless you and keep you present and perfect tense and it was ongoing it's the Lord has kept us safe, he saved us, he is saving us and he will save us.

So he doesn't say the Lord bless you because he has kept you and rescued you from Egypt or the Lord will keep you when you get to the promised land but the Lord keeps you now, the Lord bless you and keep you continual, eternally, ongoingly.

[19 : 39] The promise is this to God's people there and to us now that when we are in Christ we are safe for eternity. We are saved for eternity.

That just as he has delivered us from sin, delivered us from the dominion of Satan and brought us into the kingdom of his son so there will never be a moment in your life and mine when we can be lost, slip through his fingers or not make it to the end.

Now we all fear that, I'm sure. I know I do. I know there are times when doubts come and perhaps struggling in a particular aspect of my Christian life and I think, well Lord, will I ever make it to heaven?

I just seem to be so prayerless and so my mind seems to be so distracted and they seem to be, oh, the Lord bless you and keep you. We'll keep you.

We stumble, we fall, but he keeps us. What a glorious blessing that is. Oh Lord, if you are a Christian this evening, there is a day when you will be in heaven and not all the powers of hell, not all the raging of wicked men, not all the sinfulness of your own heart can stop you from getting there.

[20 : 58] Why? Because God's bigger. The Lord bless you and keep you. And let me, let me again urge you, urge you, place your hands in the safekeeping hands, place yourself in the safekeeping hands of Jesus.

Make sure you're in him totally, completely, utterly, and if we have faith in him, we need not fear anything else. Then we come to the second part of the blessing, don't we?

The Lord bless you and keep you. But it says, the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. Just think of that very first part, the Lord make his face shine on you.

What a wonderful picture that is, isn't it? When you speak to people about God and you were to say, how do you imagine the face of God? They would say, well, I imagine God frowning.

looking down on the world and frowning, frowning at the wickedness and the evil and frowning at that suffering or I see his face is wrapped with a sense of frustration because men and women are so much against him.

[22 : 08] But here we're told to make his face shine. Make his face shine. He beams on us. Isn't that lovely?

God beams on you. His face shines. Now, of course, we know that God has no face as we understand a face. God is spirit. He is not like us.

We have been made like him. He has no body and features that we understand, but he uses our earthly language to convey to us a spiritual reality which we just can't grasp.

grasp. You only beam on people who you love, don't you? Who give you a sense of joy.

Don't tell anybody this. When Ange and I were first courting, I kept getting into trouble from the pastor I was an assistant to because he said, can you wipe that silly smile off your face?

[23 : 10] Because I was in love. Still am. Just take that ready. I still am. But they make you, that person that you love, that soul mate, whoever you want to call, they make your face beam, don't they?

So it is with God. When he sets his eyes on us, his face lights up. That's not my word. This is God's word. How often when we think of God and how he looks upon us, we think, oh he must be so disappointed with me.

But you seem to forget again that if you are in Christ, when he looks on you, he sees the beauty and the perfection of his son. He sees all his loveliness and all his glory and it's covered over your sin.

And what's the outcome of God beaming? What's the outcome of God's face shining on us? It's this, he's gracious to us. Not only saving us from what our sins deserve, but also giving us what we do not deserve.

His acceptance, his blessing, and so on. He pours out into our lives every good gift so that we lack nothing.

[24 : 29] The Lord bless you and keep you means that God saves us. But the Lord make his face to shine in you and be gracious to you mean the Lord sustains us.

There's wonderful words of Paul at the end of Philippians chapter 4 verse 19. My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

Think about these people, the Old Testament people of God as they travel through the wilderness as a wonderful testimony. Isn't it at the end? Every day they were provided with manna.

Whenever they needed water, it was given to them. Their clothes didn't wear out. Their sandals and they didn't wear socks didn't wear out either. For 40 years the Lord provided for them, sustained them and kept them.

symbol then of God's lifelong provision for us in all of our needs. Gracious to you. Again, how sad it is that when people think of God they think of him as a miserly God.

[25 : 38] God doesn't want to bless me. God doesn't want to provide. These things that have been held for me that other people have these riches or these relationships or this job or whatever it's because God has kept it from me because he doesn't want me to have it.

No, it's not because God knows best. He gives to us good gifts and only the best of gifts he gives to us when and at the right time that we should receive them. If God has withheld from you, dear friends, something that you think you deserve or should have then it's because he is gracious to you not because he is punishing you.

Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The final result of this blessing which is his grace is that we're told there the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.

Satisfaction. That's what peace is, isn't it? To be at peace is to be content. To be satisfied. But again, it's another insight, isn't it?

It's not just that the Lord's face shines when he looks on us but actually he turns his face on purpose to us that it might shine. To turn your face to somebody is to give them your close attention, isn't it?

[27 : 07] To display a concern for them. To hear them when they pray or call out to you it's to take an interest in them. The very opposite, isn't it?

If somebody turns their back on you. If it's ever happened to you, you've gone to speak to somebody they turn their back on you across the road. Well it's a rejection, isn't it? It's saying I don't want to know you, I don't want to engage with you, I don't want to have any relationship with you but to turn your face to someone is to receive them.

In one sense to receive them, to embrace them, to receive them and to accept them. So God says bless them by reminding them that the Lord will turn his face towards them that whenever they cry to him he'll answer their prayers.

Whenever they call upon him he'll be near that he has a genuine interest in your life. It's a wonderful thing. Yes, we are one of seven billion people in this planet and so we get that silly thought in our heads well God hasn't got time for me.

He's got so many other things that he's got to deal with, so many concerns he's got to deal with, he can't be concerned for me. That's not the case, he's God. It's not a problem for him to be concerned if there was one out of seven billion or one out of seven hundred thousand million billion, whatever the number that may be.

[28 : 27] I'll have to ask somebody who knows about maths. Emily, that's not a number now, I don't think it was. It's a lot anyway. Perhaps in your own life, perhaps because of the way you've been treated, perhaps because of situational circumstances you find yourself in at the moment, you feel I'm just an insignificant person.

Yeah, I can understand why God would have an interest in those people or that person because they're so godly or they're so holy or they're so much better than me or because they haven't got the muck of the past that I've got in my life.

There's no distinction here, is there? There's not God saying, I'll turn my face just to those who are the really good people. I'll turn my face towards you, the people of God, the children of God.

If you're his child, then he has an interest and a concern for you and he turns his face to you and he looks upon you. And what is the outcome? What is the outcome of God's concern for you, his interest in you?

Well, the outcome is surely this. Not only has we seen that he saves us and rescues us from sin, that was the act of his grace, his eternal grace when he purposed and planned to save us.

[29 : 46] He chose to keep us and make us his own. It's not only his wonderful provision for all of our needs to provide and sustain us and keep us going, that we might make it to heaven and that we might be with him forever.

But here it is that we might have peace, that he might satisfy the deepest longings of our hearts, the greatest concerns of our souls, the hunger and the thirsting that we have inwardly.

When we know the grace of God, when we know the face of God turned towards us, when we know the smile of God in Christ, then we have peace. Whatever goes on in the world around about us, we are able to sing with the songwriter of old, it is well with my soul.

Peace is not simply the absence of conflict, is it? There is a sense, of course, in which the only way we can know peace with God is when there is a surrender that takes place, a reconciliation that takes place between us and God.

Colossians 1 tells us that we were alienated from God, enemies from God in our minds because of our evil behavior, but that God in his grace has reconciled us, brought us together to him, he's made peace with us.

[31 : 08] As Paul says in Romans chapter 5, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God. And that peace with God is the source of all other peace.

It means that we are able to live at peace with one another in our relationships, but it means as well, surely, that we have peace within our consciences. Conscience is a great gift that God has given to us, dear friends.

It shouts at us when we sin. If we ignore it too much and reject its voice too much, then we will dumb it down. And when you become a Christian, as it were, the conscience is reanimated, reawakened, as with all the senses of the soul.

Conscience, of course, tells us of that sin within. Even the enemy can use our conscience against us and cast doubts upon our salvation and tell us that we're too wicked for God.

But here, listen again to Colossians chapter 1. Once you were alienated from God, were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior, but now he's reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight without blemish and, listen, free from accusation.

[32 : 33] Isn't that lovely? Free from accusation. There is no, therefore, says Paul in Romans 8, therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ. Yes, our sins are many, but God's grace is more.

We deserve to be condemned and we deserve to be accused, but there is for us, says John, a mediator, an advocate before the Father, one who stands and pleads on our behalf.

So when, in one sense, there's an accusation thrown against us to God, well, this person is so sinful and their past is so wicked and their lives are such a mess that surely, God, you can't accept them.

There is one, the Lord Jesus, who stands and says, hold on. I've paid for this one's pardon. I've taken all their sins upon myself. They are justified by what I've done for them.

There is no accusation for them to answer anymore. The peace of a guilty conscience is a peace that the world can never know because it comes to us only through Christ and the blessing of God.

[33 : 51] And that word peace, of course, means fullness, doesn't it? It means completeness, wholeness. Augustine, that great theologian of the fourth century.

God, you have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you. Why is the world in which we live in so much turmoil? Why are men and women war with one another?

Why is it that they're scrabbling and searching and seeking and trying to find some sense of peace and contentment and satisfaction with their lives? It's because they have not found God, their maker.

they have not found the rest and the blessing and the peace that is in Christ, their saviour. That peace which God gives us because he looks upon us is a peace which is able to sustain us in the most difficult trials and troubles.

that's why Paul is able to write in Philippians chapter 4 sorry verse 7 the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

[35 : 06] Do you know that peace dear friend? That transcends transcends the circumstances and situation and the accusations and the way people behave towards you and so on.

Peace and contentment in Christ. Surely one of the saddest things in the world is that when the dissatisfaction of life which surrounds us in the world begins to become part of the church then surely we've lost touch with the blessing of God.

when that plague of discontent is found within the hearts and lives of God's people surely we have lost and forgotten the blessing of God whose face is turned towards us in Christ forever.

Let me close by saying this dear friends surely these three blessings that God assures us us here the blessing of salvation the blessing of sustainment the blessing that God gives us of satisfaction aren't they more than enough to counter to inoculate to protect us from moaning complaining or being resentful shouldn't those three blessings spring forth from your heart and mine day after day moment after moment blessing to God praise to God thanksgiving to God joy to God just as the psalmist there in Psalm 103 as we looked this morning and this evening tells us praise the Lord oh my soul why on earth would you praise the Lord oh your soul because of all the benefits that he has given me forgiveness of sins healing of diseases redemption of life crowning with love and compassion