

## BFF348 Priests Bless

Scott Moore: Welcome to the "Building Faith Families" podcast with Steve Demme. I'm your host, Scott Moore. Thanks for joining us today. Good morning, Steve. How are you today?

Steve: I'm well. How are you?

Scott: Good.

Steve: Today, we're going to talk about the word "bless." We've established the fact that God originally intended the nation of Israel to be a kingdom of priests. Christ came, He set apart the disciples as priests. Peter says, "We are priests," In Revelation 5, "We're priests."

To me, it's a very ennobling and elevating, if I can put it that way, to be a priest. We're not slogging along. We actually have a role and a function as priests in God's creation. One of the things that we have as priests is the power to bless.

James 3 says, "With it, we bless our Lord and Father," talking about the tongue. "With it, we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth comes blessing and cursing." We have tremendous potential to bless God and to bless people.

Let's pray. Father, help us to use this calling, this gift, this responsibility well. Help us to bless You and not curse You. Help us to bless others and not curse people who are made in Your image. Give us some insight today that we perhaps we haven't had before, but help us.

Help me to speak well. Help us to have ears to hear with the Spirit of God who we are glad to lean on and glad to ask to come alongside of us now and teach us from Your word. In Jesus' name, amen.

Scott: Amen.

Steve: We're going to start in the New Testament. I read James 3, and the word "to bless" is "eulogia." It's where we get the word eulogy. If you're like me when I hear eulogy, I think of funerals. Eulogia is two words put together. Eu—means well or good. Logos, means the word or words, reason. It's good words. It's good thoughts. It confers benefit. It's a blessing. Good words which bless and benefit.

The word "bless" appears 330 times in the Old Testament. This is not a subject we're going to really capture in one podcast, but we can hit some of the high points. As you read through scripture, I hope that you'll keep your eyes open for this word, "bless," and where it pops up and how you can enter into it because it's a huge word.

In the New Testament, one of the places where it pops up is Matthew 21:9 on Palm Sunday. The crowds who went before Jesus and that followed Him were shouting, "Hosanna to the son of David. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest."

That same phrase is used two chapters later in Matthew 23, where Jesus, soberly, is talking and he says to them, "You will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

I think about this verse a lot. What I hear when I read these words is, "You're not going to see me until you want me. You're not going to see me until you love me, and you want me to come back."

"I'm not coming back to people that don't love me, and don't adore me, and don't worship me. I'm coming back to those who say, 'We want you to come back.'" Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

In the Old Testament, the word for bless is "barak," and it means to kneel, and to bless. It's adoration. It's a position.

Interestingly, what we started with, in James, mentions two perspectives. We can bless or curse. We have the potential to bless God, and we can bless people. As priests, we're in between people and God because we represent God to people, but we also represent people to God. In our prayers and in our teaching, we're representing God to people and vice versa.

We're in a unique position of adoration. We're in a position of kneeling. We're in a position that we have the potential again to bless, or magnify, or praise, or extol God. Psalm 104:1, "Bless Jehovah, O my soul. O Jehovah, my God, you are very great. You are clothed with splendor and majesty." Here we are. We're blessing God. I like to think that God appreciates this. I think that's why Jesus said, "I'm not coming back until I'm appreciated."

We have the potential and the awesome invitation, you might say, to be able to bless God. Psalm 103 says, "Bless Jehovah, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His Holy Name. Bless Jehovah, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits."

I'm hoping today that the word "blessed" won't just be one of those words that we use in Christianese for when somebody sneezes. God bless you. I hope that we can get a handle on it, and see more of the fullness of what it means to bless Him. Psalm 100:4, which we've talked about many times, "Bless His name."

You remember the Palm Sunday verse, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," said again in Matthew 23? I don't know if you know this, but they were quoting Psalm 118:26. Boy, did I find some gems today as I was digging deep into this. Psalm 118:26 says, "Blessed is he that comes in the name of Jehovah." Psalm 118 was Martin Luther's favorite Psalm.

Psalm 118 is said everyday by Jews as they are celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles in the fall. It's also a part of the Feast of Passover. Isn't that amazing? If you read through Psalm 118, there are so many Messianic passages in there, it's a Halal psalm which is a big part of the Passover and the tabernacles celebrations.

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." I hope that we see right away that if nothing else, we can bless God. We can bless His name. I try to do it twice a day. I'll tell you what I did this morning. My themed study for today is "God is our Creator."

I consciously, and prayerfully, say, "I praise you, Creator, God. I bless you, Redeemer. I bless you for making us," which is what Psalm 100 says. "It is He that has made us and we are His." I give thanks for this. I focused this morning on His name as Creator. This is what we can do. We can bless God, we can bless His name.

One of the first times in the Bible that Barak is used is in Genesis 2, which says, "On the seventh day God finished His work that He had done and He rested on the seventh day from all His work that He had done. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy because on it, God rested from all His work that He had done in creation."

God blessed this day. There's another aspect of blessing which means He to set apart. God, by blessing, made this day holy, He consecrated it. By a divine edict, God blessed a day, and that day is different. I'm not going to explore this now, but there are many scriptures, including the Ten Commandments, which teach about keeping the Sabbath holy.

It was because God blessed it and set it apart. Now, think about that concept, God blessing, God setting apart, God making a pronouncement which extends to this day. To bless is a verb.

Blessing, the noun, is used 69 times, it is "baraka," is a different aspect. When you read in Genesis, look for the places where God blessed Abraham, 12th chapter, 15th chapter, and other places in there. I'll read one passage.

"Jehovah said to Abraham, 'Go from your country and your kindred in your father's house to the land that I will show you and I will make of you a great nation and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonors you, I will curse, and in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'"

Abraham received a blessing, and it wasn't just a nice little saying that God placed on his birthday card that He sent to Abraham every year. This was a blessing that is still reverberating to this day. This is a blessing because He says all the families of the earth will be blessed. Abraham is the father of all who believe.

Billions of people are, you might say, feeling the effects of this divine blessing on Abraham. Then we see that Abraham blesses his sons, and his sons bless their sons. When you think about Esau and Jacob, we think about the importance of a blessing. It's all about something that they valued. They knew how important this was. Jacob deceived his father, Isaac. It was really his mom that did it, but the two of them got together and his father, Isaac, gave Jacob the blessing. Jacob then had his name changed.

Jacob became Israel, had 12 children, which grew into the 12 tribes of Israel, and the whole Bible from then on is impacted by a blessing that was passed on from Abraham to Isaac and then to Israel.

Scott: That's a passage that messes me up. There's blessing all over the rest of the Bible and Jesus, it seems like he's blessing everybody, blessed are the poor, blessed are the peacemakers, blessed this, blessed that, but that one it's like even Esau says, "Well, bless me too," and it didn't work that way.

I've read an entire book about this at one point about the blessing, and it still confuses me sometimes how the cultural difference between that context, and then the rest of how we use the word "bless." If you've got a quick answer for that, I'd love to hear it.

Steve: No, but just hold on to the fact, like you said, we have, you might say commonized the word "bless," we just bless you, but not in that culture and that culture is the one that matters. The blessing was everything and Jacob knew it, Isaac knew it, Esau knew it. There's a lot to it. Esau despised the blessing. He traded it for some lentils.

Remember that God never rebuked Jacob. In fact, He blessed him and changed his name, and it was through him that all the promises continued. Then he passed on a blessing to Joseph. He placed Joseph at the head because Reuben had gone into his concubine, Levi had slain the people in anger, Judah still received part of the blessing because it was through Judah's line that David came in Christ.

Steve: The one thing I want to hold on to is that blessings have substance. Priests were set apart, they were consecrated, and given power to bless.

When God was giving instruction to Aaron, who was a priest, He says in Numbers 6:24-26, "Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying 'This is how you shall bless the sons of Israel.'" This becomes the template for a blessing and is really important.

"You shall say to them, 'Jehovah bless you and keep you. Jehovah make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. Jehovah lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.' So, shall they put my name upon the people of Israel and I will bless them."

There is so much packed into that one passage right there. One of the key components is "Jehovah make His face," that's panim, "Shine upon you." "Jehovah lift up His countenance, His face upon you."

My spiritual journey changed several years ago with Psalm 100, "Come into His presence," which means is come before His face, same word.

We have studied the showbread which is the bread of faces. These faces were right there in the Holy of Holies looking at God all the time. There's something very deep and meaningful about this blessing because this is what we want. This is what we yearn for, to see God's face and be in His presence.

Sadly, the children of Israel virtually said, "We're not interested in seeing God Moses, you go talk to God face-to-face. We're going to stay way down here where it's safe." Moses was a little nervous the first time He was in the presence of God, but once he saw God face-to-face, he says, "I'm in." He would continue to spend so much time with Him that his face shone from being in God's presence.

What God is saying, "Jehovah, bless you and keep you," which makes me think of John 10. "None shall snatch them out of my hand." We're being kept. "Jehovah, make his face to shine on you." Think of God having His face shine, light up, and be gracious to you. "Jehovah lift up His countenance upon you." This is just glorious language, and give you peace.

Then, the final part of this blessing when Aaron and his sons, lift up their hands over the congregation, perhaps at the end of a feast or at the end of a special Yom Kippur, day of atonement or something. When everything is over, Aaron and his sons raise their hands and say this wonderful benediction. The result is, "So shall they put My name upon the children of Israel and I will bless them."

This substantive blessing that we've been reading about, which we don't understand fully, was a calling that the priest carried, and they were able to bless the people and put God's name on them.

When I was a pastor, this is how we closed the Lord's supper. After communion, the pastor would stand up, lift his hands and pronounce this Aaronic benediction. It's a beautiful blessing .

I'm starting to think about all the times that there were blessings in the New Testament. These benedictions are often at the end of epistles like Thessalonians, "May the God of peace himself sanctify you completely."

Or Romans 15, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace and believing." Or 2 Corinthians, "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all." Philippians, "May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

It's growing on me that this is something that I believe Paul took seriously because he was a priest, and he was the one that was using the same language before, give thanks in all things, pray without ceasing, all these kinds of things. That's priestly stuff. So, Paul was pronouncing a blessing, or what we call a benediction on the people at the end of most of his letters.

For many years I just looked upon this as kind of a common thing, a nice touch you do when you're leaving someone's house. "Oh, thank you very much, what wonderful hospitality, bless you and your family," and blah, blah, blah.

The more I study the Word and the more I look in the context of scripture, this is powerful stuff. Paul is blessing the people like Aaron and his sons blessing the people.

You and I have the potential to bless God, number one, and to bless His people.

Is there anything you want to add?

Scott: Well, the power of the words. If you look at how loose-lipped we are with the things we say...In our modern culture, we say all kinds of stuff without thinking about the weight of it. God spoke, and things were created. We were created in His image.

Blessing, especially when you look at the full context of it throughout scripture, clearly there's more to it than just a little wish upon someone after they sneeze. There's a mystery to it, but it's powerful, and it matters. We should take it more seriously, as we should everything that we say.

Steve: We each have the potential to bless and curse. I believe more and more as every year goes by, that I can bless my family, and I can hurt my family with words that I say. I'm trying to take the opportunity to bless people.

One of the places I do it is on Facebook. It's nice to leave a comment saying, "Ben, you've got a wonderful family, and I really appreciate the way that you're doing such-and-such as a mom, or a dad." Words mean things. That's what our tongues can do. We can either bless, or we can curse. We can build up or we can tear down.

It really is awesome when you think about the fact that we can bless God, and we can bless His name. That's part of the joy, the benefits. I don't know what the word is. May we use this power while people are alive and not eulogize them when they die. I don't know if I ever told you, but I have already had my wake. Did you know that?

Scott: I don't think so.

Steve: Leading up to my 50th birthday, my wife could tell that I was sliding down into the Slough of Despond because when you're 50, you can see the light at the end of the tunnel.

It's like you've crossed the horizon. You say, "If I don't do it now, it's not going to happen." It was about that time that my sons were starting to go off to college, and I thought, "Oh, my homeschool family is leaving me!"

She took the initiative, and reached out to people, many of whom she didn't even know very well, from my youth group, from kids that I taught in schools, kids that I'd grown up with, people I had gone to college with, the whole package, and she put together a dinner to honor me.

If the people couldn't come, they sent videos. My sons, all this behind the scenes, made this wonderful celebration video to play at dinner. Everybody that showed up got up, and with the microphone, stood up and said these wonderful things. They eulogized me. Then we watched the video together. When it was all done, I thought, "Wow, I can die. I actually did some things." I told someone later, "I was awake during my wake." I still think back to that time. They made a book of remembrance of that evening. I have the video that people put together. It's now on DVD.

We have that ability to bless people. I think it's important that you do it while people are awake. We've done this at our kid's birthdays. I try to do it as a husband because it says, "Her children rise up and called her blessed," as in Proverbs 31.

"Her husband, also, and he praises her." This is part of the responsibility of a husband and a father to praise and build up -- Sandy, for me. It's the responsibility of children to bless their mom because she's not going to get it from anybody else.

Especially in our culture we live in today. We need to make sure that we're building up each other and blessing each other, and using this wonderful gift that God has given us.

Steve: Father, thank you. There is so much to this subject, and we can go deep and deep and deep but as priests, help us to be faithful to our calling to not only bless You, but to bless others.

For all those that are listening today, may Jehovah bless you and keep you. May Jehovah make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you. May Jehovah lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace so shall they put My name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them. Amen.

Scott: That's our show for this week, folks. Thanks for joining us for the Building Faith Families podcast with Steve Demme. If you have a question for the show, email Steve at [spdemme@gmail.com](mailto:spdemme@gmail.com). If you have a question for me, you can reach me at [scott@unsocializedmedia.com](mailto:scott@unsocializedmedia.com). Thanks for joining us. Have a great week.