

February 7, 2021

“Bless the LORD”
Psalm 134

FCF: Confusion on an essential biblical idea

PROPOSITION: (anchor) As we come to the end, we see everything begins with this.
(magnet) We are to bless the LORD.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Many words and expressions in our everyday vocabulary can be traced back to the Bible. The rub is that there is often a fair bit of confusion as to what those words mean. Case in point, after today’s big game, no doubt an athlete will declare, “I’ve been blessed.” After a sneeze, we may hear someone say, “Bless you.” In Southern-speak, we often hear, “Bless his heart.” Before meals, someone may well be asked “to say the blessing”. But what on earth does all this mean?

It’s worth noting “blessing” is all through the Bible. What is the point here for us today?

SCRIPTURE READING: Psalm 134**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION****SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

I was on the phone with customer service at a tech company this week. The nice lady began the call by asking me for some standard information - my name, account number, and the nature of my problem. Those ordinary questions got me to thinking about much larger questions we all ask in one way or the other. “Who am I? Why am I here? What am I looking for?” All so basic but fundamental. We can distract ourselves from them but they really do need answers.

Psalm 134 is the last in the Songs of Ascents. These pilgrims have made the trip and now finally arrived at their destination - Jerusalem and the Temple. What we read is something of a dialogue, perhaps even a formal liturgy. In vv.1-2, the pilgrims address the priests and the Levites, the folks serving in the Temple. In v.3, those folks respond and pronounce a blessing.

This word “bless” is the key. It’s repeated three times and is the theme of the psalm. As we listen to this exchange, what we hear is truly profound. Here at the end of the journey, we come back to where things begin and discover the key to flourishing. We are to bless the LORD.

At the end of the journey, we see everything begins with blessing the LORD. That’s where we begin. What does that mean? Let’s look at three things that come out in this psalm. First, the dynamics of blessing. Second, the necessity of blessing. Third, the priority of blessing.

I. THE DYNAMICS OF BLESSING

First, the dynamics of blessing, what we see as this unfolds. And there are two things.

A) Reciprocity

We see there is a reciprocity at work, an exchange between the giver and the receiver.

1. Us to God

For us to bless God is to give Him praise and to express His greatness. It is to worship Him.

2. God to us

For God to bless us is for Him to give us His favor, to look upon us and supply our needs.

B) Inequality

But right away, we see an inequality to this reciprocity. The exchange is not equal.

1. Us to God

For us to bless God is to acknowledge who He is, reviewing the heights and depths of His worth.

2. God to us

For God to bless us is for Him to review our needs. Derek Kidner puts it this way (**READ**):

To bless God is to acknowledge gratefully what he is; but to bless man, God must make of him what he is not, and give him what he has not.

Think about that. This is the dynamics of blessing - both a reciprocity and an inequality.

Application:

Put another way, we need to know our place, what we bring to this exchange. We need to speak, to bless the LORD. But it is wise to be still before we speak and to reflect upon some things. Who are we? Who we are speaking of? Who we are speaking to? That stills the heart.

Everything begins with this. We are to bless the LORD, understanding the dynamics.

II. THE NECESSITY OF BLESSING

That takes us to our second point, from the dynamics of blessing to its necessity. That is, it is vital and imperative so as to begin and maintain any sense of spiritual health and sanity.

A) The Whole of Life

There is a comprehensiveness to this blessing. It has to do with the whole of life.

1. Unity

Note the unity here. No one is being excluded from this call (**READ Psalm 134:1a**).

2. Continuity

Then there is a continuity. This is for everyone all the time (**READ Psalm 134:1b**).

3. Whole person

And the expression of praise and petition includes the whole person (**READ Psalm 134:2**).

B) The Course of Life

So it has to do with the whole of life. And the resetting of the course of life as well.

1. Our attention captured

Note what is to capture our attention. Three times we hear the word “bless” and five times we hear the name of the LORD - the maker of heaven and earth who has covenanted with even us.

2. Our hearts follow

Despite all the other possibilities and the other rivals, this is who is to have our attention. Which is vital given that our hearts follow who we praise. Our lives are shaped by who we admire.

There is a necessity to this blessing. And we see it in the whole and the course of life.

Application:

How does this reach the ground? Think of the number of times we say, “But I don’t feel like it.” Well, it’s not about you. It’s about the LORD. Lift up your hands and bless Him. It’s

not about us and our feelings. That said, He can change us and our feelings. The feelings may follow. This is ancient wisdom. We bless the LORD and we let Him take care of our hearts.

Everything begins with this. We are to bless the LORD, understanding the necessity.

III. THE PRIORITY OF BLESSING

Which brings us to the priority of blessing, where our focus has to be - the deep center.

A) *God over All*

1. An elimination of options

God over all - not just a view of His theoretical rule over our lives. Five times we hear His name. Ask these pilgrims, “Why are you here?” Their answer would be, “To bless the LORD.”

2. An invitational imperative

Their hearts were to rule out all the other options. It’s an invitational imperative. “Come, bless the LORD. You are called to this. You are made for this.” There is a creational relational need.

B) *By Grace Alone*

The LORD is God. But there is another narrowing. We come to Him by grace alone.

1. From Zion

Note the source of the blessing ([READ Psalm 134:3](#)). This is the holy mountain, the site of the temple just north of David’s palace, the chosen place of the LORD’s presence among His people.

2. The holy place

([READ Psalm 134:2](#)) This is likely a reference to the holy of holies within the temple, the area behind the curtain set apart for the ark of the covenant. Inside sat the Ten Commandments. Upon it was “the mercy seat”, the place where the blood of the sacrifices was applied. The idea being that the blood of another had to come between the demands of the law and the people.

This is a picture of Jesus. The priority of blessing - God over all and by grace alone.

Application:

How do we honor and bless such a Savior? We recognize what He has done for us. We recognize it, receive it, and rest upon it ([READ Psalm 134:3](#)). His blessing is rich indeed.

Everything begins with this. We are to bless the LORD, understanding the priority.

CONCLUSION:

You might say, “That’s interesting. But what does it have to do with anything?” Good question. It has everything to do with everything - our personal lives and society as a whole.

In *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis describes two ways where we go wrong ([READ](#)):

One is when human individuals drift apart from one another, or else collide with one another and do one another damage, by cheating or bullying. The other is when things go wrong inside the individual—when the different parts of him (his different faculties, and desires, and so on) either drift apart or interfere with one another.

We should think of mankind as “a fleet of ships sailing in formation” and what makes that work:

The voyage will be a success only, in the first place, if the ships do not collide and get in one another’s way; and, secondly, if each ship is seaworthy and has her engines in good order. As a matter of fact, you cannot have either of these two things without the other. If the ships keep on having collisions, they will

not remain seaworthy very long. On the other hand, if their steering gears are out of order, they will not be able to avoid collisions.

Moving from this image of a fleet of ships, Lewis then offers another metaphor to consider: “humanity as a band playing a tune.” “To get a good result,” he says, “you need two things”:

Each player’s individual instrument must be in tune and also each must come in at the right moment so as to combine with all the others.

These two factors are fairly obvious, but we often forget to identify the most important thing:

We have not asked where the fleet is trying to get to, or what piece of music the band is trying to play. The instruments might be all in tune and might all come in at the right moment, but even so the performance would not be a success if they had been engaged to provide dance music and actually played nothing but Dead Marches. And however well the fleet sailed, its voyage would be a failure if it were meant to reach New York and actually arrived at Calcutta.

You see, the answers to these questions have everything to do with everything. Whether you think in terms of the charts for the ship or the music on the sheet, we need to know why we’re here. If we mislay the foundation, nothing else will can be settled. It will all collapse.

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