

**Notes for Children's Talk & Sermon Outline for  
Sunday, 12 June 2022**

## Children's Talk: The Benediction

- I want to talk today about the thing that the minister does after a prayer or at the end of a worship service when he puts his hands up and says some words.
  - Do you know what that's called? (The Blessing or Benediction.)
- That blessing is connected to this picture of the Lord with children.
- You might know that people thought that children should be kept away from the Lord but that was not at all what the Lord wanted.
- Mark 10:13-16 (NKJV)
  - <sup>13</sup> Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them. <sup>14</sup> But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. <sup>15</sup> Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it." <sup>16</sup> And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them.
- The Lord wanted to be with the children—to give them hugs and snuggles, to play with them, to pay attention to them, to bless them and make them happy.
- Because of what the Lord did, in some worship services, the minister also touches people as a part of wishing the Lord's blessings on them.
  - Like in baptism or you might remember family Holy Supper services where the minister puts his hands on your head.
  - In a normal worship service we don't take the time for the minister to touch each person's head, and so instead the minister puts his hands out as if he were able to touch each person's head to remind people of how the Lord wants to touch and bless each person.
- That explains what the minister *does*; now I want to talk a little bit about what the minister *says*.
- The minister always says a recitation from the Lord's Word.
- One of the most common ones the minister says is the very last words of the whole Bible:
  - "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen" (Revelation 22:21).
  - The minister is saying, "I hope and pray that some of the Lord's love and mercy and kindness will be with you."
- This is really helpful because sometimes we can be feeling a bit sad or guilty after a children's talk.
  - Maybe the minister talked about something sad or maybe the minister talked about something bad that the Lord wants us to work on not doing and you know that you sometimes do that bad thing.
  - Listen to the blessing—"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all."
    - It's almost like the Lord offering you a hug and saying, "I'll give you what you need to figure this out."
- When you kneel down and close your eyes for the blessing, imagine the Lord putting His hands on you and think about how much the Lord loves you and wants to give you everything you need.
- *Amen.*

# “The Lord Bless You and Keep You....”

A Sermon by Pastor Malcolm G. Smith  
12 June 2022

## Intro

- The topic for today is blessing, specifically this blessing:
  - Numbers 6:24-26 (NKJV)
    - <sup>24</sup> “The LORD bless you and keep you;
    - <sup>25</sup> The LORD make His face shine upon you,  
And be gracious to you;
    - <sup>26</sup> The LORD lift up His countenance upon you,  
And give you peace.” ’
- We use this blessing in baptisms and at weddings and often in the Holy Supper and it seems to hold a special place in people’s hearts.
- But, even though it holds a special place in people’s hearts, I would guess that a lot of people couldn’t actually explain what all of the phrases of the blessing even mean.
  - For example, what does it mean for the Lord to lift up His countenance upon you?
- Today, I want to help you understand it more—to help you see a bit more of the incredible depth and beauty contained in these simple words.
  - We’ll start by talking about where this blessing comes from.
  - Then we’ll go through it phrase by phrase and reflect on what it can teach us about how to be better receptive of the Lord’s blessings.
  - And finally we’ll talk about what it can teach us about our role in being a blessing to other people.

## Where This Blessing Comes From

- This blessing only shows up in one place in the Bible—in the book of Numbers.
  - Jehovah is giving Moses instructions about a whole variety of topics and then He explains how the priests, Aaron and his sons, were to bless the people.
  - I’ll read it to you, with a bit of the verses that come before and afterward and in a more literal translation to help you hear it with fresh ears.
  - Numbers 6:22-27 (Kempton Project Translation, modified)
    - <sup>22</sup> And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>23</sup> “Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, ‘This is the way you shall bless the sons of Israel, saying to them,
      - <sup>24</sup> “Jehovah bless you, and keep you;
      - <sup>25</sup> Jehovah make His face to give light to you, and be gracious to you;
      - <sup>26</sup> Jehovah lift up His face to you, and set for you peace.” ’
    - <sup>27</sup> “And they shall set My name on the sons of Israel; and I will bless them.”
- This blessing was taught to the priests in about 1200 BC and has been used since that time all the way up to present day.
- It is used in Judaism and in many Christian churches.
- So this blessing has been said and sung to various tunes, in many different locations around the world, in sorrowful and joyful circumstances, for over three thousand years.
- Now let’s get into the details of each phrase.

## “The LORD bless you....”

- The blessing starts off by saying, “The Lord bless you and keep you....”
- And, in one sense, this can feel a little unnecessary.
  - Why do we need a priest—or anyone—to wish the Lord’s blessings on us?
  - Isn’t the Lord always blessing us?
- I went back and read my notes from theological school that talk about the reasons for the blessing in a worship service and I found this sentence that puts it well:
  - “The blessing is not a magical incantation which produces some supernatural results, but is a promise of what the Lord constantly seeks to pour upon all [people], and which may be ours if we prepare ourselves to receive it” (Rev. Martin Pryke. *Liturgics: A Theological School Course*, vol 1. Ed. Rev. Grant Odhner p.105)
  - When I or any other priest say this blessing in a worship service we don’t have any magical power to confer blessing on you.
    - But the words of the blessing being said can serve as an opportunity for you to try to be more aware of and receptive of the blessings that the Lord is trying to give you.
- One part of that is just remembering that basic fact that the Lord is blessing us all the time.
  - In the Psalms David says,
    - Psalm 103:1-2 (NKJV)
      - 1 Bless the LORD, O my soul;  
And all that is within me, bless His holy name!
      - 2 Bless the LORD, O my soul,  
And forget not all His benefits:....
- We easily forget all of the Lord’s benefits and it’s good for us to do that work to remember and notice how the Lord is blessing us.
  - And not just in a general way but also in very specific, mundane ways.
  - For the last few weeks, Abby has started a thing in our family where, when we remember at dinnertime, we go around the family and each person says something kind that someone else did for them and something kind that *they* did for someone else.
    - When we’ve remembered to do it, it’s been really useful.
    - Sometimes it takes tenaciously coming back to the topic as distractions and arguments come up but it’s touching for me to hear from each of our kids and even to hear from Abby what kind thing people did for them and what they did for others.
    - It’s also been useful personally for me to think back over my day, looking for someone who was kind to me and a time when I was able to be kind to someone else.
      - Both of those things are a real blessing from the Lord—to have people be kind to us and to have opportunities to do something kind.
      - Without taking the time, it’s easy to not notice these blessings.
- In a similar way, having someone recite words from the Lord’s Word about the Lord blessing us can be an opportunity for us to remember and appreciate how the Lord is blessing us.

## “...and keep you....”

- The Lord blesses us by giving us good things and He also—equally importantly—blesses us by protecting us from bad things.
- This is expressed in the second part of the phrase, “The Lord bless you *and keep you....*”
- To keep means to protect, to keep a watchful eye, to guard like a shepherd guards his sheep.
- The Lord’s constant, watchful care is beautifully expressed in the 121<sup>st</sup> Psalm.

- Notice how many times the word “keep” is used.

- Psalm 121 (Kempton Project Translation, modified)

- 1 I will lift up my eyes to the mountains,  
From whence comes my help.
- 2 My help is from Jehovah,  
Who made the heavens and the earth.
- 3 He will not allow your foot to be moved;  
He who keeps you will not slumber.
- 4 Behold, He who keeps Israel  
Will neither slumber nor sleep.
- 5 Jehovah is your keeper;  
Jehovah is your shade on your right hand.
- 6 By day, the sun shall not strike you,  
Nor the moon by night.
- 7 Jehovah will keep you from all evil;  
He will keep your soul.
- 8 Jehovah will keep your going out and your coming in,  
From now and even to eternity.

- The teachings of the New Church explain that, at a deeper level, this keeping or protection by the Lord means “protection from evils and falsities” (*Apocalypse Explained* §340:11).
- We have absolutely no idea how much the Lord is protecting us from at every moment.
  - The influence of hell in our lives is like the walls of water on either side of Children of Israel as they walked on dry ground through the Red Sea.
  - There is an ocean of terrible stuff that could come crashing down on us but the Lord holds it back.
- We still experience crushingly hard things in this life sometimes but that doesn’t mean that our God has forgotten about us or stopped protecting us.
- And the best for us to be receptive of His spiritual protection is to ask the Lord to help us do our part to keep His commandments and guard how we speak and how we behave.

- As David prays,

- Psalm 141:3-4 (NKJV)

- 3 Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth;  
Keep watch over the door of my lips.
- 4 Do not incline my heart to any evil thing,  
To practice wicked works  
With men who work iniquity;  
And do not let me eat of their delicacies.

## **“The LORD make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you....”**

- The next phrase is “The Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you....” (Numbers 6:25).
- I was thinking about this phrase yesterday as I was appreciating the beautiful Durban Winter sun.
- It can get kind of chilly when I’ve been working in my home office for a while and so I periodically go stand in the sun to warm up.
- As I was standing there, facing towards the sun with my eyes closed, I realised that I was having a physical experience that directly corresponds to the spiritual experience of having the Lord make His face shine upon me.
- I was experiencing the warmth and light of the sun together as a wonderful package deal.
- The teachings of the New Church explain that the Lord is Divine love and from His Divine love He flows into people with Divine truth and Divine good (*Apocalypse Explained* §340:11).
- The truth from His love is what is symbolised by the light shining from His face.
- We really need the light of the Lord’s truth in our world and in our individual lives to be able to figure out what we should be doing.
  
- We particularly need the Lord’s light to shine into the dark places in our lives—the places where we feel ashamed, the places where we feel afraid, the places that we don’t want to look at.
  - When we are in dark, angry, selfish, lustful places we can feel like the Lord’s truth is very harsh and too bright.
  - In those times we can try to remember that the Lord’s light comes from His warmth.
    - His face shines upon us with light because of His love.
    - He is gracious and merciful to us.
- When Adam and Eve had eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and then they heard voice of the Lord walking in the garden it says that they “hid themselves from the face of Jehovah God....” (Genesis 3:8).
  - We can understand this reaction but listen to what the teachings of the New Church say in explanation of this story:
    - *Secrets of Heaven* §223
      - [T]he Lord’s face is mercy, peace, and everything good... [H]e never looks at anyone except with mercy and never turns His face from anyone. It is we, when we are wrapped up in evil, who turn our faces away.
  
- The teachings of the New Church also talk about how a person’s face is designed to make it so that what a person is feeling on the inside can be seen on the outside (*Secrets of Heaven* §9306).
  - Now, we can sometimes fake how we’re feeling with our faces.
  - The Lord never does that.
  - His face shows exactly how He’s feeling on the inside.
    - If you could see His face looking towards you right now you wouldn’t see an angry expression on His face or even exasperation or frustration.
      - You wouldn’t see fake kindness or strained tolerance and politeness.
    - You would just see His face beaming with love, compassion, understanding, and encouragement, and grace.
    - This is what is meant by the next phrase of the blessing.

## **“The LORD lift up His countenance upon you....”**

- The next phrase of this blessing is “The Lord lift up His countenance upon you....”
  - As a side note, I don't know why the translators used the word “countenance” in this phrase; it's the same word for face as in the phrase before.
- In the phrase before the emphasis was on the light shining from the Lord's face and in this phrase the emphasis is on the expression on the Lord's face.
  - The previous phrase about light had more of an emphasis on receiving the Lord's truth and this phrase emphasises receiving the Lord's goodness (*Apocalypse Explained* §412:4)
- What does it mean for someone to lift up their face?
  - The opposite is for someone's face to fall, like when Cain gets very angry it says that his face fell (Genesis 4:5).
  - The teachings of the New Church explain what these phrases mean:
    - *Secrets of Heaven* §358
      - When charity shone out from the face, the face was said to be lifted, but when the opposite was true, the face was said to fall.
- So the Lord lifting up his countenance upon you is Him looking at you with charity and love and a big smile on His face.

## **“...and give you peace.”**

- And then the blessing ends by saying, “...and give you peace.”
- The peace that the Lord wants to give us is not just natural peace but spiritual peace.
- *Apocalypse Revealed* §306
  - “Peace” is charity, spiritual security, and internal rest; for when a person is in the Lord, they are in peace with their neighbour, which is charity; in protection against the hells, which is spiritual security; and when they are in peace with their neighbour, and in protection against the hells, they are in internal rest from evils and falsities.
- Doesn't that sound great?
  - At peace with our neighbours and protected against the influence of hell.
  - In this world we have a lot of the opposite of peace.
    - There's a lot of strife and conflict worldwide, within South Africa, and also within our communities and families.
      - Think of all the conflict and strife of the last few years!
- I wish I could promise you that that was going to change—that things are going to get better—but I can't.
- And so a blessing praying for the Lord's peace for you might feel like naive, wishful thinking.
  - Despite the conflict and the uncertainty I still pray for peace for you in the midst of it all.
  - The peace of the Lord is what can help us get through the hardest times and He can give it to us on the inside, in the midst of the hardest circumstances.
    - As Psalm 23 says,
      - 4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil;  
For You are with me;  
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
      - 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies....

- We all know that there are hard things ahead but still I pray for peace for you—peace from worrying about the future, peace from worrying about your children and their future, peace from worrying about South Africa.
  - On Sundays when you come into this building I pray that you will have peace—even just for one hour to hand over your worry and anxiety to the Lord and have peace for that hour.
  - And then maybe you can work towards trusting the Lord and asking Him for peace for two hours a week, then three, and keep working up from there.

## **Blessing Others**

- I could end the sermon there but, if we only spend our time thinking about how we can be blessed individually, we will not receive the full blessings that the Lord wants to give us.
- When Abram was called by Jehovah to leave the land of his fathers and go to the land of Canaan, this is what Jehovah said to him:
  - Genesis 12:2-3 (NKJV)
    - 2 “I will bless you  
And make your name great;  
And you shall be a blessing.
    - 3 ....  
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”
- A big part of how the Lord blesses people is by means of other people.
- To flesh this idea out a bit, I want to go back through the blessing from the book of Numbers and think about applying it in our relationships with other people.

### ***“The LORD bless you....”***

- Think of someone that you’ve had some conflict with.
- Then think of saying to them, “The Lord bless you....”
  - For me, saying these words reminds me that the Lord is working to bless that person and give them every good thing.
  - Who am I to hold a grudge against them?

### ***“...and keep you....”***

- I find that this phrase reminds me how vulnerable and fragile each human being is.
- Some people can seem big and influential but the reality is that every single person is just a frail human being in need of the Lord’s help and protection.
- Sometimes we have a role to play in helping to keep and protect other people from the influence of hell, even if it’s just protecting them from the influence of hell that comes up inside us and wants to hurt them.

### ***“The LORD make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you....”***

- It’s useful for me to remember that the Lord is the source of light in every person’s life.
- I can sometimes get very caught up in needing to make other people see things the way I do, in *my* light.
- So it’s useful to remember that, if someone else is going to see clearly, it’s going to be because they’re looking to the Lord’s light, not just listening to me.

- And again it's a useful reminder that the Lord is working with each person to help them grow and develop.
- He shines light into their lives and he's gracious to them; maybe I can be a bit more gracious with people too.

***“The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.”***

- It's good to wish other people well.
  - That's the heart of charity, the heart of forgiveness, the heart of any good and healthy relationship—wanting what's best for the other person, for their sake.
- It's good to pray for peace for other people.
- It reminds me of when the Children of Israel had been taken away captive to Babylon and the Lord sent them a letter through the prophet Jeremiah, telling them to get settled where they were in captivity and put down some roots.
- And He also said this:
  - Jeremiah 29:7 (NKJV)
    - <sup>7</sup> And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the LORD for it; for in its peace you will have peace.
- In whatever circumstance you find yourself you can pray for peace and pray for the peace of the people around you.

## **Conclusion**

- So this blessing contains a lot—how we see ourselves in relation to the Lord, how we see other people, and how we see the Lord.
- It contains what we need to get to heaven one day and also what we need to experience states of heaven and peace right now.
- And it all points back to the Lord as the source of it all—the source of all blessings in our lives, the source of what we need to get through each day, and the source of peace.
- As the Lord said in the Gospels,
  - John 14:27 (NKJV)
    - <sup>27</sup> “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”
- *Amen.*