

## The Soul is Meant for Blessing – James 3:9-11

The soul is meant for blessing. Our souls will thrive and blossom when they are blessed. But more often than not the soul hears curses instead.

This morning we will look briefly at these two ideas, blessing and curses. Scripture is full of references to blessing, which should not surprise us as it is God's message to us. God blesses us and builds us up. Unfortunately, in this fallen world where sin abounds, there are also many words that tear down and destroy people, curses.

In James 3:9-11 God draws our attention to this important theme. In this passage, which is outlining the power of the tongue to build up or destroy, we read of blessings and curses. Hear the word of the Lord:

**<sup>9</sup> With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. <sup>10</sup> Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. <sup>11</sup> Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? (James 3:9-11)**

Can you hear the problem? On Sunday people are praising God and on Monday they are tearing people apart with their words. Their tongues are the instrument that shapes our words, so James says that this is the work of their tongues. But it is far more than that, for as Jesus says in Luke 6:45:

**<sup>45</sup> The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.**

What Jesus is saying is that what comes out of our mouths indicates what is going on in our souls. If our souls are filled with the love of God, as the Holy Spirit lives within us, then our words will reflect that. But if our words are hurtful and mean, we are critical and demanding, if our words cut and leave scars, then the question that must be asked is, "Where is the Holy Spirit? Where is the love of God? Where is God in your life?"

As James reminds us, fresh water and salt water do not flow out of the same fountain or spring. A thirsty person would be in for a terrible surprise if the water coming out of the fountain gave fresh, clean water at one time and at other times produced salt water which would make you gag if you tried to drink it.

So if we are followers of Jesus, if we are Christians, then we should be speaking words of blessing and not curses. Our words should bring encouragement and hope and joy to others, not criticism, judgement and pain. The same lips that praise God on Sunday should bring words of blessing to those around them through out the week.

Every soul needs to hear words of blessing.

I am afraid we do not really understand the power of blessing. We tend to think of blessing as simple words we throw out when we do not know what else to say: “God bless you.” We say “Bless you” when someone sneezes, but even then we do not understand why.

Yet scripture, which is full of blessings, puts a great deal of importance on giving and receiving blessing.

Turn to Genesis 27 and you would find the story of how Jacob stole the blessing of his brother Esau. Briefly, the story goes like this:

Isaac, the father, is getting old. He knows his health is failing. Already he is losing his sight. So Isaac wants to pass on a blessing to his oldest son. This was a matter of supreme importance to Isaac. He asked his son Esau to go hunt down some venison and prepare him a great meal. After he had eaten, he would pronounce the blessing on his son.

Isaac only had two sons, and the younger son, Jacob was only a few minutes younger than Esau, for they were twins. Both Jacob and Esau knew the importance of the blessing, and so while Esau was out hunting, Jacob, with the help of his mother, hatched a plan to steal the blessing away from Esau. Jacob would pretend to be Esau and hope that his nearly blind father would not catch on to what was happening.

The plan worked, and Jacob was able to receive the blessing of his father, a blessing that foretold riches and power and authority and God’s protection. These were not idle words to Jacob. They spoke of his future.

As you can well imagine, when Esau came back and discovered his brother had stolen his blessing, he was furious. He begged his father for a blessing, but was told every advantage had already been promised to his brother. Scripture says that “Esau held a grudge against Jacob” (Genesis 27:41).

Jacob had to flee to another country. He lost his home and family all for the sake of a blessing. It is clear he took the idea of blessing far more serious than we do. Maybe we should learn from Jacob – and Esau – and learn to value the blessings we receive and give to others, and more importantly, that we receive from God.

John Ortberg, in his book, “Soul Keeping” suggests that we basically have only two postures when we approach others: we either bless them or curse them<sup>1</sup>. We are either looking to bring good into their life, the greatest good being an encounter with God, or we do not. One is a blessing; the other is a curse.

And our souls are meant for blessing.

We can bless with our words, as well as our actions. Last weekend so many of you went out of your way to wish me birthday greetings, sending cards and gifts and messages online... you

---

<sup>1</sup> John Ortberg, Soul Keeping (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014) 153.

were blessing my soul. For the motivation of true blessing is love. It is an expression of what is within us, and God pours his love into the hearts of all Christians through the Holy Spirit, according to Romans 5:5. Both words and actions were a blessing to my soul. Thank you!

We can see how that can work the other way as well, that words and actions can bring a curse on one's soul. We know the way words can hurt, and some still remember harsh words spoken to you when you were just a child. But also reflect on the power of a shrug when someone is pouring their heart out to you, or the pause that is just a little too long when your spouse asks if you love them, or the habitual absence from the dinner table. Actions can be just as loud as our words to say we are not ready to show love to you.

I am not here today to teach you how to be experts in the way of cursing others. Sadly we will hurt others with our words and actions even when we do not mean to. We need not rehearse how we can do more harm. As Romans 12:13-14 reminds us, we are to bless even our enemies, those who are hard to live with, those who do us harm. We are to bless and not curse even them!

So today, I would point you to the path of blessing. I am sure we can always use reminders on how to show God's love in word and deed.

As we think about giving and receiving blessings we are drawn to scriptures which speak of us blessing God. Earlier Austin read from Psalm 103:1, but let me remind you of what is said there:

**103** Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

<sup>2</sup> Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits:

<sup>3</sup> Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases;

<sup>4</sup> Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies;

<sup>5</sup> Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.

Can you hear how important it is for the soul to bless the Lord? God has done so much for us, we need to respond in love to Him, and give him thanks. We need to let others see His goodness and hear testimonies of his grace. We bless the Lord in our worship, and also in our lives lived in loving obedience.

God is the author of all good things. As Lamentations 3:23 reminds us, "His mercies (blessings) are new every morning." Our lives are blessed in so many ways because God is with us and will always care for His children. Even if God must take us through the valley of the shadow of death, he will be with us, and even there we will see his blessings flow. As we sing in the Doxology: Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

But let's think about blessing others. If souls are meant for blessing, and blessing others is an expression of love and we, as God's children are to love our neighbour as ourselves, then we should know more about blessing others.

The oldest formal blessing recorded for us is found in Numbers 6:24-26. It was the blessing God gave Aaron to pronounce over the people. It goes like this:

<sup>24</sup> ""The LORD bless you  
and keep you;  
<sup>25</sup> the LORD make his face shine on you  
and be gracious to you;  
<sup>26</sup> the LORD turn his face toward you  
and give you peace.""

Imagine how powerful those words would be if you looked someone in the eye, and slowly, meaningfully said those words to them. If you really meant it, it would certainly touch the soul of that person.

That first line, "The Lord Bless you" is expressing a desire that God would bring only good into the person's life you are blessing. God is a gracious and loving God, and these words express your desire that all his goodness would be poured out on another person.

Words are powerful, and words filled with that kind of love and compassion and grace can really touch the heart of another person. Imagine tucking your child in at night saying those words over them instead of "You should do better!" or "What were you thinking?" or "You'll just never learn!" Words are powerful, whether they are a blessing or a curse.

Look your child in the eye, or your spouse, or a friend and say, "The Lord bless you!"

Then add, "The Lord keep you."

This is a prayer that God would protect and care for the one you are blessing. What kind of care will God provide? We see Jesus dying on a cross to rescue us and protect us from the power of sin and death. That is the kind of care that comes from the heart of our Heavenly Father. He will do anything to rescue you.

"The Lord make his face shine upon you..."

Yesterday was my sister's birthday. Since we live half a nation apart, a zoom birthday party was organized. The whole family was present, but one camera stole the show, and drew the attention of everyone. That camera featured our almost three year old great nephew. As my sister looked into her grandson's face you could see the delight in her eyes. How much more so is that present when a grandma or grandpa looks into the eyes of a grandchild in person? Grandmas glow – and so do their granddaughters and grandsons looking back up at them. That is a love that words just cannot describe, but is as visible as the nose on your face – or the shine on your face! "The Lord make his face shine upon you."

"The Lord lift his countenance upon you."

To lift our countenance is to give our full attention, to give ourselves over to someone completely. When we put the cell phone away and close the computer and turn and face our spouse to really hear what they have to say – that is lifting your countenance upon them. What a prayer to pray for someone else – that God would turn his full attention on them, no matter what that person is facing or going through.

"And give you peace."

Who couldn't use peace in their souls? Knowing that "it is well with my soul," no matter what is happening all around us, is a source of peace. So many people right now need this blessing of peace, for they are a mess inside as they worry about the politics, their rights, conspiracy theories, the mark of the beast, and on and on it goes. Jesus promises peace to those who turn to him. May God grant you peace!

Wouldn't it be wonderful to have someone bless you in that way?

Your soul was made to receive just such a blessing, but your soul is also wonderfully equipped to pronounce that kind of blessing on others. Yes, you will likely need the power of the Holy Spirit to pronounce a blessing on some of the people in your life, but you can, and you must.

We are going to close the service with two songs.

The first is a call to bless the Lord.

The second is a blessing that will be sung over you. Blessings are to be received – not because we deserve them or earned them. They are given as a gift of grace. You may sing the closing song with us or simply hold out your hands and receive the blessing. It is up to you.

God created you as a living soul. The soul is meant for blessing. Be blessed today...