

## **4. God blessed the Seventh Day**

### **Resume**

We need a resume of what we have discussed so far. I have dealt with the seventh day, the rest of God and for this week and the next, the blessing and holiness of God. They are not separate topics to be dissected out. We need to see them as a whole which is given to us in the fourth commandment.

We have noted that the fourth commandment is the only commandment with an explanation. We should not be surprised by that. As parents, we don't simply shout out a command to our children. If we don't see them doing the right thing, we take them aside and explained to them why they should or should not do that. God is doing the same thing here.

We talked about the rest of God last week. We saw that it was not a rest from fatigue or exhaustion after the hard work. It was a rest of completion and satisfaction because the creation is good. We also saw that God has not been dissociated from His creation as if it is on autopilot by physical and chemical laws. He is intimately involved in His creation and is moving creation to its fulfilment through Christ and the Spirit. That is the Sabbath rest as argued in the book to the Hebrews. We live in His rest, i.e. in all that He has completed for us and is directing us.

So, we see that the fourth commandment is not merely taking a day off to worship God. The scriptures in both Exodus and Deuteronomy give to us the two reasons for the Sabbath observance – creation and liberation. Though a day is specified in the observance, we have seen that the understanding of the Sabbath (seventh day) is about our relationship with the Creator and living in union with Him as He continues to bring creation to its fulfilment. That is our liberation from the slavery of sin. It is only in this way that we realise our freedom. This has been achieved for us by Christ and that is why He is the Lord of the Sabbath. Our Sabbath day observance is an expression of this union with God, very much like the sacrifices of old in Israel. This expression in the observance of the Sabbath must have its basis in the union with the living God, otherwise it is mere ritual and meaningless. The expression of the Sabbath must go beyond the one day a week worship to the 'love of our neighbour as ourselves'. This has been given to us in the Ten Words. To wind up the studies, we need to see the roles of the blessing and holiness of the Sabbath. Again, it is not quite the way most people see it. Just as our living in the rest of God is intimately tied to the presence of God, so are the blessing and holiness.

### **The Sabbath blessing**

A common way of seeing the blessing and holiness of the Sabbath is that we go to church on a Sunday to receive the blessing of God. In doing this we are then holy.

'God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it'. These are the two themes which we will deal with today and next week. These two themes are related. They are the result of the completion of the work of creation. As we have seen last week, God has completed His work of creating and we are to live in the seventh day of His rest. We explored what that means and saw that there is a 'rest' that is now and there is a final installment of that rest in the future. This rest is to live in His presence. There are two things that God included in the completion of His creative work and these are His blessing and holiness. The blessing and holiness are not optional extra given by God for good behavior. They are part and parcel of creation.

What we want see this morning is that God has given to His creation all that is needed for relationship with Him and for creation to function in the way the God has intended. We will talk about the 'blessing' of God today. Next week we will see what it means for God to make this day holy and this has bearing on our understanding of holiness.

### **The Blessing of God**

I have spoken much on the blessing of God when dealing with the Beatitudes in Matthew's gospel some time ago. Our problem in understanding the blessing of God is that the term, 'blessing', connotes with the material in all languages and cultures. So, when we reason from what we know to the things of God, we will inevitably distort that understanding and make God a creation in our image. That is the problem we face when trying to understand the blessing of God. In other words, we need the transformation by the Spirit of God and to be brought into the presence of God in order to think about the things of God. The Word of God is the place where we start. Knowledge is relational and revelatory.

I have stressed that the blessings of God are not material but relational. There is material blessing and I will not deny that, but we need to realize that the blessing of God is primarily relational. When I say that the blessing is relational, they should not be seen as something we can get out of the relationship. That would make it a contractual relationship. We do not relate in order to obtain the blessing. That is not the biblical framework. That would be a purely utilitarian approach and our relationship with God becomes a utilitarian exercise. That is not what is meant.

### **Creational Blessing**

The blessing of God is creational. It is given so that creation may 'be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth'.

<sup>21</sup> So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. <sup>22</sup> And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth."

<sup>27</sup> So God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup> And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Gen. 1:21-22, 27-28)

This blessing to the living creatures that God has created is again re-affirmed on the completion of creation.

<sup>1</sup> Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. <sup>2</sup> And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. <sup>3</sup> So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation. (Gen. 2:1-3)

This blessing is creational and is not withdrawn because they are given for the fulfillment of God's purpose for His creation. The creation is good and complete. God is satisfied with what He has created and, in His rest, He continues to move His creation towards the fulfillment He has intended. His blessing on creation is towards this end so that the creation is enabled to respond to Him. His blessing on creation is not an optional extra dependent on good behavior.

This blessing is later given in a specific way with the call of Abraham. Again, this re-affirmation is for the fulfillment of God's purpose for His creation and that is to bring His creation to Himself.

<sup>1</sup> Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in (*through*) you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Gen. 12:1-3)

This blessing to Abraham is not a new blessing but the continuation of His creational blessing in order to fulfill His purpose for His creation. Note that God intends that His blessing for His creation now comes through Abraham. We know that with the call of Abraham, His descendant, Jesus Christ, is the one who fulfilled God's purpose. Thus, the blessing is then found in Jesus Christ. So, we see that the blessing of

God is given to His creation so that God's purpose may be fulfilled. For this end, God has not withheld anything from His creation. Peter, writing in his letter, said this.

<sup>3</sup> His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, <sup>4</sup> by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. (2 Peter 1:3-4)

The purpose of the blessing of God is that we may 'become participants of the divine nature', i.e. in union with Him, which is the purpose of creation. Creation without the blessing of God would leave humanity in a conundrum with nowhere to turn except to trust in his own effort. In other words, the blessing was given so that we may be enabled to relate with God and come into His rest.

### **Blessing in Christ**

So, the promised blessing of creation has been made more specific through Abraham and then through the one and only Son of God, the direct bearer of the blessing from God. The blessing of God has come through Jesus Christ in the final installment as we see it.

<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, (Eph. 1:3)

If the blessing is creational, why are they in Christ? Because Jesus is the true bearer of the blessing of God as He is from God and it is only through Him that we can rediscover our relationship with the Father. I have said that the blessing of God is relational. In other words, the blessing of God is not a thing that can be obtained apart from the presence of God. Humanity wants to take the gift and rejects the giver. That has happened right through history and even now.

That is why I have said all along that the blessing of God is relational. They are not packages that can be sent by overnight express to those in need. They cannot be downloaded as and when we want them. The blessing of God is tied to the Creator Himself and now through His Son, Jesus Christ. We cannot extract the gift from the giver. The gift comes through our connectedness with the giver.

Further reading: 1996 Pastors' School on 'The Fullness of the Blessing of Christ'.

### **Blessing to pass on**

So, the blessing of God is passed on to us through Christ. What is the rationale for the passing on of the blessing? Because the blessing is relational and personal, they can only be passed on by the connectedness in those relationships. They are passed on from Christ to us because of our connectedness – we are in Christ through His work on the cross. They are also passed on from one to another because of our connectedness in the body of Christ. As the blessing is creational, they are passed on to others because of our connectedness in creation. That is why Paul wrote,

<sup>27</sup> ... For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings. <sup>28</sup> When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you. <sup>29</sup> I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. (Rom. 15:27-29)

St Paul knew that he was a bearer of blessing, the full blessing of Christ. So, when he wrote his letter to announce his impending visit to Rome, he made this audacious claim: 'I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ' (Rom 15:29). He came to Rome with the fullness of Christ's blessing to share with the Christians there.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kleinig, John, 'Pastoring by blessing', *Lutheran Theological Journal*, 43:1 (May 2009): 28.

In keeping with God's law those who have received God's blessing can pass it on by blessing others. Parents may bless their children (Gen 27:28,29,39; 48:15,16). Leaders in a community may bless a couple at their wedding (Gen 21:60; Ruth 4:11,12). Kings may bless their people (Gen 14:18-20; 2 Sam 6:18; 1 Kgs 8:55-61). People may greet another person with a blessing on meeting them (Gen 47:7; Ruth 2:4; 1 Sam 13:10; 15:13; 2 Kgs 4:29) or on leaving them (Gen 24:60; 28:3,4; 31:55; 47:10; 2 Sam 19:39). John Kleinig.

I was asked to pray and bless a wedding some time ago. The couple was not Christian though they profess Christian allegiance. I did not feel comfortable about doing that. Later I came to understand that marriage is a creational ordinance and I should feel free doing that.

### **Blessing and Obedience**

Creation, the rest of God, the blessing and holiness are all related themes. The Israelites missed out on entering the promised land, the rest of God, because of their disobedience. So likewise, the blessing of God is linked to the presence of God as we have said, and we enter into the presence of God through trust and obedience to the word of God. Luke recorded these words of Jesus for us.

<sup>27</sup> As he said these things, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!" <sup>28</sup> But he said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" (Luke 11:27-28)

As we saw last week that the Israelites were prevented from entering into the rest of the land because of unbelief, so too our disobedience will result in the loss of God's blessing, i.e. the curse. This does not make God's blessing conditional on our obedience, but that our disobedience is our rejection of God's blessing.

God is the fountain of blessing. They are creational and are ours. Do not let this pass us by because of our refusal to come into Him.

In closing let us look at the Aaronic blessing. We recite this often and it is good to know what it actually says. This is a good summary of what we have been saying that the blessing of God is tied to His presence. In praying this way, the priest is affirming the blessing that God has already bestowed on His people.

<sup>24</sup> The LORD bless you and keep you;

<sup>25</sup> the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;

<sup>26</sup> the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. (Num. 6:24-26)

We have said much regarding the blessing of God in enabling His people in their response to Him. By the power of God, He will keep His people in that blessed life. This is God fulfilling His covenant to His people. He has promised to do that and He will.

The next two lines are a duplex, further affirming that the blessing is tied to His presence. Both terms, 'face' and 'countenance' means His presence with His people. His blessing is all given in Christ, and in our relatedness with Him, we experience the fulness of His blessing. The two verbs used, 'shine' and 'lift' are the positive actions of God in bringing us to His grace and peace, the blessing of God.

Let us sing this doxology in closing.

Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow;  
Praise Him, all creatures here below;  
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.  
(Thomas Ken, 1674)