

Here / There

Introduction:

Blessings – different things to different people

- Social media – Going viral, lots of followers
- Bargain shopper – Incredible deal at a garage sale, or a good BOGO sale
- Broke – Money you weren't expecting
- Unemployed – A great job opportunity
- Looking for love – Finding the right one
- In a bad relationship – Getting rid of the wrong one

Christians use the word blessing a lot. Most of the time our blessings fit in one of two major categories– health and wealth. If we get a good report from the doctor. It's a real blessing. We get a bonus at work. It's a real blessing. We compare our health and wealth to those less fortunate than us, and we say we are so blessed.

Certainly, health and finances are two areas where God can bless us. But God's blessings can be so much more than that. We need to deepen our understanding of blessings. The Apostle Peter talks about some of the blessings we have as Christians.

We're in this series called HERE / THERE. We live HERE but belong THERE. That can create this incredible tension.

For the Christians who first received Peter's letter. HERE wasn't all that great. The way we count them, they couldn't point to a whole lot of blessings. They were suffering. They were persecuted. They were dealing with all sorts of challenges and difficulties.

But even with all of this Peter tells them they are blessed. And he's telling you, that even when things HERE aren't going well, because of who you are THERE, you are still blessed.

Here's his point: It's worth it. Faith is worth it. Following Jesus is worth it. Loving God is worth it. Serving in the church is worth it. Living according to His word is worth it.

Now there are some things in life are not worth it.

- Making your bed
- Flossing
- Playing the lottery
- Shaving your legs in the winter
- Waxing your back
- Trying to convince anybody of anything on Facebook
- Giving your cat a bath.

Some things are not worth it, but Jesus is worth it. 1 Peter 3:8-12 says,

8 Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. 9 Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. 10 For,

*“Whoever would love life
and see good days
must keep their tongue from evil
and their lips from deceitful speech.
11 They must turn from evil and do good;
they must seek peace and pursue it.
12 For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous
and his ears are attentive to their prayer,
but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”*

I. Blessing of Living in Christ Here

A. Love Life

Alright, the first blessing of living for Christ is that you can love life. Do you love life? Do you love your life? Jesus wants you to. We all know people who don't love life. They were born sucking on a lemon. They wake up every day on the wrong side of the bed.

But there is something quite contagious and magnetic about someone who is filled with the love and joy of Jesus. One of the blessings of following Jesus is loving life. Look how vs. 10 starts, *“Whoever would love life.”*

This is an invitation for anyone who wants to love life. Jesus is the key to loving life, even when life isn't going the way you want it. Listen to what Jesus says in John 10:10, *“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”* Jesus is the one that wants you to have a full and abundant life. Satan is the one who wants to take it away from you.

Don't buy into the lie that Satan is a good time and Jesus is boring. It's one of the biggest scams the Devil has going. He promises you fun. He promises good times. He says that doing things his way is really the way to live life. But you do things his way, it will rob you of life. Every time.

Jesus wants you to have life to the full and He wants you to love it.

Long before Siri and Alexa, there was the talking car. Do you know when we had the first talking car? All the way back in 1982 Nissan came out with the Maxima 810, and it was the first talking car for sale in the U.S. They actually used a tiny plastic record for the voice. One of my preacher friends tells the story of having this talking car that he referred to as his little lady.

She had this sweet, annoying voice, “Key is in the ignition.” “Lights are on.” So, one day he’s driving along and his little lady says, “Fuel level is low.”

He looks down at his gauge it’s right on the E. Alright guys, he does something we’ve all done. He says, “Oh, I’m still good for 30 miles.” But the little lady is still “Fuel level is low.” Finally, he gets so annoyed with her, that he pulls the fuse so she shuts up. A couple miles later the next sound he hears is his car sputtering to a stop.

How’s your fuel level? Are you running low? Is your life on empty? Jesus wants you to have a full life, but sometimes we’re going through life, and the Holy Spirit is telling us, “Your fuel level is low.” “Your fuel level is low.” And we ignore the voice. We try to shut it up. And then next thing you know, you’re sputtering to a stop.

One of our blessings HERE is a life you love. Nothing to be ashamed, embarrassed by, nothing you’ve got to keep hidden. Just a life that is full.

B. Good Days

Secondly, there are good days. Good days are a blessing from God. Verse 10 continues “*Whoever would love life and see good days...*” What is a good day for you? (Ask people what a good day for them is like.)

My friend Aaron Chambers has a good definition of a good day. Three ingredients to a good day.

1. Have someone to love
2. Be loved.
3. Have a purpose.

God wants to bless you with good days. So, why don’t we experience more of them? Here’s what Peter says, “*Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it.*”

You see God wants to bless us with good days, but we cut off those blessings by the things we say, by the things we do, and by our broken relationships with others. We wonder, “Why isn’t God blessing me?” but we don’t consider all the ways we are choking off His blessings.

God wants to bless you with good days.

C. Being seen by God.

Blessing #3. Being seen by God. God wants to bless you with his presence. Verse 12, “*For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous.*”

Have you ever struggled to get someone's attention? You're just trying to get noticed? When you're a teenager there's someone you like. You would love to get to know them, and you're not sure they even know you exist. When you're at your job, you want that promotion. You want a raise. You work really hard. You do a great job, and you not sure your boss even notices.

Have you ever been on the phone with technical support, and you just want to get a real, live human being? You just want someone to listen to your problem and understand. Think about this— The God of the universe. The Creator of everything, sees you. You have his attention. You are seen by God.

He doesn't just see us. He sees what we do. He sees the choices we make. It says his eyes are on the righteous. How can we expect God to bless us with his presence, if we willingly ignore him? But God sees you and he wants to bless you with his presence.

D. Being Heard by God

Another blessing is being heard by God. It isn't just being seen by God. He doesn't just notice you. He hears you. He listens to you. If you don't feel like God is hearing you. Vs. 12 continues, *"and his ears are attentive to their prayer"*

Mother Teresa was once interviewed on a talk show, and the host asked her, "What do you say when you pray to God? She answered, "I don't say much, mostly I just listen." Then the host asked "And what does God say to you?" And she says, "He doesn't say much. Mostly He just listens. And if you don't understand that, I can't explain it to you."

I'm not sure about the complete theological correctness of what she said, but you get her point. We saw last week how husbands can hinder their prayers by not loving their wives the way they need to be loved. And there are a lot of things that can hinder our prayers— sin, pride, not loving people properly.

If you feel like God's not listening, God can't hear you or won't hear you. If you feel like you can't hear God. Ask 2 Questions. 1. Am I doing anything to hinder my prayers? Is there something in my life right now that's getting in the way of my communication with God?

2. Am I doing anything to help my prayers? Things like Reading God's word. Regular worship and fellowship with other believers? Being active in serving others? All of these things can be like springboard to catapult our prayer lives.

When you pray, be less concerned about what you are saying, and more about what God is hearing, and what might be getting in the way.

E. Having God's Face Toward Us

The last blessing we need to see here is having God's face toward you. Vs. 12 ends by saying *"the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."*

That's like saying God turns his back to those who do evil. Have you ever had someone turn their back to you? It's the ultimate insult. They don't want to be in your presence. They don't want to see you. They don't want to hear you. But if you love him, he turns his face toward you.

It's a wonderful thing to have God's face toward us.

Adrian Rogers tells a story of a tragic accident that claimed the lives of a mother and son leaving behind a heartbroken father, John, and an 8-year-old daughter, Isabella. Life was just a numb blur from the time of the accident to the funeral when they felt the sudden weight of their loss come crashing down. That night, unable to sleep, Isabella crawled into bed with her daddy who was also still wide awake. John let out a deep sigh and hugged his little girl tightly.

Out of the silence, Isabella whispered, "Daddy, are you there?"

John wearily said, "Yes sweetie I am here."

"Daddy, its SO dark... Why is it so much darker than the night before? I can't see anything. I can't even see you.... Daddy, is your face towards me?"

John kissed her on the forehead and said, "Yes, my face is towards you."

"Ok daddy, I'm going to bed now. I will see you in the morning."

The Christians Peter is writing to were in a dark place. They needed to know it was worth it. And Peter is telling them that God's face is toward them. He's sees what they're going through. He understands. He hears their prayers.

You need to know this morning, that even if you're in a dark place, if each night seems darker than the night before, God sees you. He knows. He understands. God isn't turning his face away.

These are all blessings we can have here and now— having a full life we can love, good days, having his face turned toward us where he can see us and hear us. Those are blessings that make a difference HERE and NOW.

II. The Key to Unlocking these Blessings?

Now we want to back up to verses 8 and 9, and ask this question- what is the key to unlocking these blessings? Here's what Peter says,

Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

The key that opens the door to these blessings is being unified. When Peter says *like-minded*, he doesn't mean we all have the same opinion or that we all hate sushi and love prosciutto. It literally means "unity of mind." It means that we're in pursuit of the same thing. A good word to use here would be harmony. To experience God's blessings we must have harmony in the church. Think about harmony in music. "the combination of simultaneously sounded musical notes to produce chords...having a pleasing effect." Different notes, they sound different but they sound good together.

When you don't have harmony, you have noise, cacophony, its chaotic, its grating on the nerves. In the body of Christ when we're all doing our own thing, our own way, for our own reasons, it's out of tune, its discordant; we don't make beautiful music together.

Our oneness as a body of Christ is essential to experiencing the blessings of God. Our disunity is Satan's priority. He uses division, disagreement and dissatisfaction to pull us apart, and to pull us away from the face of God. We must value unity. We must value the body. We must strive to build and guard our unity.

Let me give you some practical help when it comes building and guarding our unity. When you're talking with someone about church, ask yourselves this: Does this build the body up? Does this increase our unity? Does this further Christ's purpose in church? Will this help those I'm talking to be closer to Jesus? Does this pull us closer together? Or is this just to further my purpose in the church? Is this just to make me feel better? Does this pull us apart?

What do you do when someone comes up to you and they're bent on divisiveness, disagreement and dissatisfaction? They begin to vent and they begin to complain, what do you do? How do you guard the unity of the church? Say this, "Have you talked to them about this?" "I appreciate your concern, but you really need to talk to them first.

This can diffuse a situation real quick. It keeps division from spreading. And it's biblical. When we're not happy with what someone else has done in the church, the Bible says we need to go to them directly. But we don't like that. We don't want to talk to them. We want to talk to everyone else about what we don't like about them. It is destructive. It is divisive. It is disobedient. And it shuts us off to the blessings of God. You can't go around bringing a curse to others, and expect God to bring you a blessing.

So, body of Christ, listen to me here. In the name unity, in recognition that God wants to bless us, do the hard thing, do the right thing, do the loving thing, and go to the other person first. So much of what pulls the body apart and what pulls us down would be solved if we just do this.

Being united is the big key. The rest of these things are like individual teeth on the key. If you want to know what unity looks like, it looks like these following things. This is how you have unity in the church.

Be Sympathetic

First be sympathetic. Put yourself in other people's shoes. Feel what they're feeling. What are they going through? How does this seem to them? This is where compassion starts. Sympathy gets us out of our own emotional space. A healthy body shares pain. For a long time now, I've had foot problems. When my foot acts up, the whole body feels it and helps with it. I limp. I favor that foot. My other foot has to pick up the slack. My hands apply cream or wrap my foot in an ace bandage. The rest of the body is sympathetic with the part that hurts.

Be Loving.

Next, is be loving. "*Love one another,*" Peter says. The Greeks had several different words for love. The usual love we think of in the Bible is *Agape*. That's unconditional love. But that's not the word he uses here. Here is love- *Philadelphos*. That's brotherly love.

We're family. And just like family, sometimes we get annoyed with each other. We might disagree. But we've got each other's back. We're family.

Be tender-hearted

Next, Peter says we need to be tender-hearted. A fun little Greek detail here. The Greek word used here is nowhere near the heart. You know what it actually says. Peter says, have healthy bowels. No, he's not recommending a colonoscopy or a special cleanse.

We see the seat of the emotions as the heart. They saw the seat of emotions as a little lower down. Think of our expression, "Feel it in your guts." Same idea. Peter is saying love with your guts. This isn't superficial. This is deep down. We need to give more than lip service to unity. We have to gut it out.

Be Humble

Next, be humble. You're not on the throne. Jesus is. It's not about you.

Be Merciful

The last ingredient to unity is be merciful. Peter says it this way. Do not repay evil. Don't go insult for insult. Instead, bless them. Be a blessing, even to those who don't bless you.

Remember the golden rule of Jesus, "Do to others as you would have them do to you." When we twist that into "Do to others as they have already done to us," it kills unity.

If we are bent on returning an eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth for every wrong against us we'll all be blind and toothless.

Romans 12:19 says, "*Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord.*" Revenge is playing God, and putting ourselves on his throne. Here's the problem. We are not very good a playing God.

Be a Blessing

The bottom line to all of this is that we are blessed to be a blessing. This is the heart and soul of these words in verse 9, *“repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.”* We don’t just receive God’s blessing. We are to pass those blessings on to others.

The opposite of a blessing is a curse. When we are unable to be united as a church. When we can’t be sympathetic, be loving, be tender-hearted, be humble or be merciful, we become a curse instead of a blessing. We might not think we’re bringing a curse into other people’s lives. We might think they deserve it, but it affects the whole church. When we tear others down, when we bad-mouth others in person or social media, we are obliterating our identity and building a barrier between ourselves and the blessings of God.

2 Practical ways to bless others:

1. Look for the good in others.
2. Praise the good in others.

I really like how you handled that situation. I really like what you said. You did a great job with that. Look for something good, and then praise it.

The more we bless others, the more will come, because they will be blessed, and everyone wants to be blessed.