

## ^The Great Blessing

Numbers 6:24-27

Sunday, January 3, 2021 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

### Introduction: The priestly blessing

Our worship service, and most worship services, end with a benediction, a sort of blessing and then sending you back out into the world to make the most of your days until we gather again for worship. The call to worship and invocation collects and unites us to present ourselves as a community to God Almighty, and the benediction is the blessing that send us back out. This one, here in the Book of Numbers, is the most famous one of all, and is often used in worship but not often considered. It is this blessing, perhaps more than any other, that expresses the heart of the Lord for His people.

### If you were the only person on earth...

The first notable element of the blessing is the "you" in the phrase "the Lord bless you and keep you." The "you" is singular, not plural. Now that can mean that the blessing is spoken over the entire people of God as one community, but the way is phrased so that it could be spoken exactly the same way to one person. It answers the rhetorical question, "if you were the only sinner on earth that needed a Savior, would Jesus have still come to earth, just for you. I suggest that imbedded in the language of this ancient blessing is the answer. It is "yes, He would have come even if it had only been for you."

### Set in the context of the Vow of the Nazirite.

I find confirmation of this in the context of the blessing. The prior content of the chapter deals with the Nazirite Vow. It was considered one of the most sacred of all the fasts in Scripture. It could be taken for a season or for life, and the parts of the vow included a refusal to shave or cut one's hair. Samson, known for his great strength, was a life-long Nazirite. That is why his strength was in his hair. It represented God's plan for him. More relevant to our message for today is the fact that another element of the Nazirite Vow was abstinence from grapes or grape products. I think that, in an act of tremendous devotion to us, Jesus took this vow during the First Communion during the Last Supper. He said that He would not partake of the fruit of the vine until He could take it with us in the Father's Kingdom. When we partake of Communion we are signaling that we want to be there when Jesus finishes His vow and again partakes of the fruit of the vine. The blessing is set in the mechanics of the Savior's unwavering devotion to His people.

### Peace-everything for a full life. Giving us peace has to do with our effect on others

The blessing ends with a call upon the Lord to grant peace to His people. The word for peace, "shalom", goes far beyond the mere absence of strife. The word involves completeness, wholeness, health, welfare, safety, soundness, tranquility, prosperity, perfectness, fullness, rest, harmony. the root word means to be complete, perfect and full. Jesus gave a similar benediction to His disciples in John 14:27 "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.

I would like to suggest one of the best examples of peace in the Bible is Ruth, the heroine of the Old Testament book named after her. I nominate her not so much because she lived in such prosperous circumstances but because of the affect she had on her beloved mother in law, Naomi. Ruth constantly brought blessing and joy to Naomi and that is the true test of the peace of God. It is not how peaceful you feel, it is how peaceful to make other people feel.

Application: look for people who are "peace giving" or life giving to others

And that brings us to our application. Pray this blessing when you pray for others in the church but also look for people who are "peace giving" or life giving to others. Who are the people to bring peace to the lives of others under their influence? For that matter, what is your influence on other people. Do you bring peace to them, or are you an influence toward peace in their lives?

### Conclusion

This blessing is the great priestly blessing of the Old Testament, and one of the greatest in the Bible. It speaks of our Savior's great devotion to His people, all of them together and also to every single individual. The blessing speaks of peace in all its many different meanings and leaves us with the question of influence. The people who walk in the peace of God are people who bring peace to others. Who are those people in our lives, and are we that sort of person in the lives of others? This and much more is in the Great Blessing.