

## Blessing Part 2 – Old Testament

Last week I introduced the concept of using our words to be a blessing to others. When God chose Abraham to be the Father of His people, He announced to Him that He would **bless him** and his descendants so that they in turn could **be a blessing to others**. And then we saw this promise repeated and applied to us through Jesus Christ. That specific passage is found in Galatians 3:13-14.

**Galatians 3:13-14 (NIV)** *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole." 14 He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.*

This passage points out that followers of Jesus Christ have been tremendously blessed is through the indwelling Holy Spirit. And that's such a great blessing because one of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to remind us of what Jesus said and did and thus enable us to keep living in awe of Jesus and God the Father. And living in continual awe of God will dramatically transform your life.

- **What's your level of daily awe of God?** Take a moment and rate your awe level. 1 = hardly think about it and 10 = the awe of God is constantly on my mind and heart.
- Now, rate your level of **daily awareness of your problems or problems in the world**. 1 = hardly think about it and 10 = constantly thinking your problems or the problems in the world.

My guess is that for most of you – your score on **awareness of your problems** is greater than your **awe of God**. And therein is a contributing factor to **create dissatisfaction and unrest** in your soul.

Because I'm thoroughly convinced that living in continual awe and gratitude of God can transform the way you live your life. Without that it's easy to slide downward into despair, sadness and unrest. I've heard from more and more people that you're intentionally choosing to not watch the daily news because it is so upsetting. I think that's a very healthy step in providing balance to your life. However, I'd encourage you to take it one step further. Instead of just not watching the news. Spend time each day reflecting and perhaps recording the greatness of God. It's a matter of retraining our hearts and minds to concentrate on the best things in life, rather than the worst.

Left to our natural train of thought, we tend to become absorbed with the negative and our many problems, rather than on the positive and greatness of God.

Let me bring you back to the topic of "being a blessing to others." The ultimate goal in being a blessing to others is to direct their attention to God as the **"divine blessing"**. Because the greatest blessing any person can have is to live their lives in a personal relationship with God allowing Him to empower and bless their lives and equip them to be a blessing to others.

During the next 2 weeks we're going to dive deeper into how to bless people by directing their **minds attention** and **hearts affection** to God.

This week we're going to focus on an Old Testament passage and next week a New Testament passage.

So, this morning I want to encourage you to turn in your Bibles to the Old Testament book of Isaiah. There's numerous great Old Testament passages that encourage us to focus on the greatness of God. The Psalms are filled with them.

- **Psalms 8** – all of it talks about being blown away with God's majesty displayed in all of His creation, particularly in the fact that in this vast universe, God knows and cares for each of us. One of the great lines from that psalm you'd be familiar with is stated both at the beginning and the end is, *"O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!"*
- **Psalms 96:2-3 (NIV)** *Sing to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples.*

- **Psalm 145** (the whole thing reminds us of the greatness of God in all He does). Vs. 13 says, *“The Lord is faithful in all his words and **kind** in all his works.”*
- Vs. 17-18 *“The Lord is righteous in all his ways and **kind** in all his works. The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.”*

**Our main text this morning is Isaiah 63:7 (NIV)** *I will tell of the **kindnesses** of the Lord, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the Lord has done for us— yes, the many good things he has done for Israel, according to his **compassion** and **many kindnesses**.*

The Hebrew word, translated “**kindnesses**” at both the beginning and the end of this verse is a variation on the Hebrew word, “**hesed**” which is used many times to describe God in the Old Testament. It flows from His deep love and desire to bless His people and bring them into the kind of life He envisioned from the very beginning and will one day take place again. Because of our many sins, God, as the holy and righteous judge has every right to pronounce judgement upon us and condemn us forever to live separated from Him. But from the perspective of the various Old Testament writers, it’s incredible that God chooses not to do that. Instead God doesn’t treat us as our sins deserve but instead out of His love He blesses us. And it’s that kindness of God that continually gives them and us hope.

You see this Hebrew word once again in **Lamentations 3:22**. Things have been rough for the prophet Jeremiah because he’s had the very difficult job of pronouncing God’s judgment upon His people because of their many sins. And so, Jeremiah spends much of his life and ministry crying out to God. And in Lamentations, Jeremiah is recounting how difficult life has become and yet in the midst of this darkness you read the hopeful words of **Lamentations 3:19-24 (ESV)** *Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall! My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me.*

*But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope:*

*The **steadfast love** of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. “The Lord is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in him.”* This word translated here as “**steadfast love**” is the same Hebrew words translated the “**kindness**” of the Lord earlier in Isaiah.

I love that description of God. That He’s “**kind**” or treats us with His “**steadfast love**”.

“**Kindness**” conjures up for me the idea of someone who I enjoy being around. They’re not harsh or confrontational, but I feel safe and protected around a kind individual. A kind person cares about me and not their own life or agenda. I want to be around kind people and when I’m in their presence I feel better about myself.

“**Steadfast love**” communicates to me the idea that in an unsteady world we live in there’s a God I can depend on. And I can count on the fact that He will continue to love me, sometimes despite myself. He wants what’s best for me and He’s not going to use me to get His ways. He wants to bless me and the greatest way He can bless me is to draw me into a relationship with Himself. And it’s in that relationship that we find direction and purpose and meaning and power to live our everyday lives. I don’t have to go through life worried about whether I’m loved, because the Creator of the universe loves me unconditionally. And much more than that, He has plans to empower me to be a blessing to others. You see God’s agenda for your life **two chapters earlier** than our main text, in Isaiah 61. The first part is what Jesus quoted as his **mission statement** for His ministry but it’s also the ministry Jesus has given us to carry on as well.

**Read Isaiah 61:1-4**

I find it fascinating and very instructive that when Jesus stood up in his local synagogue and read from this as his ministry goal, he stopped right before it says, *“to proclaim the day of vengeance of our God.”* Why did Jesus stop there? Partially because God’s judgment will be proclaimed when Jesus returns the second time. But also, because when Jesus died on the cross, he took all of God’s vengeance toward our sins and us onto Himself. The only person who ever lived a sinless life took all of our sins upon Him and

in exchange we are declared Holy and righteous before God through our acceptance of Jesus Christ. And then we are filled with God's presence, the Holy Spirit, and empowered to be transformed from sinners deserving God's vengeance to now "*oaks of righteousness for the display of His glory.*" And we are commissioned to display His glory through living transformed lives drawing our daily strength from Him and *telling everyone about how great God is.* And as we do that it becomes a blessing to many others. People are desperate for some good news and this is the greatest news anyone can hear. That there's a God who knows them and is well aware of everything they've ever said and did. And this God flat out loves them and has an incredible plan for their lives.

Yesterday, Connie and Ruth and myself had the privilege of attending the funeral for Vonnie's sister, **Alma**. It was held in the backyard of her sister and husband's house, which is right on Cedar Lake in Aitkin, Minnesota. It was an incredibly beautiful setting for her funeral. And it was a beautiful service in which we all heard about what a loving and caring person Alma was. How she was compassionate and caring towards others. The pastor presiding over the service shared that she came to the church there about 5 years ago – the same time Alma began her battle with cancer. And the minister shared that she never heard Alma complain about her cancer or her discomfort. But Alma just continued to live life to the fullest showing God's love to everyone around her. That's what we're called to do as well. Last week I shared that the Greek word for blessing is eulogia from which we get our English word eulogy. Eulogies are read at funerals where someone reflects on the person who they are there to honor in death. Many prefer to call funerals, "Celebration of life" services. Well the way we bless God and others is by recounting how great God is. And that begins by making that a regular discipline in your daily life.

Yesterday I read a Facebook post that really captured the essence of what I'm preaching on. It was a post by **Kendra** who grew up in **Kenosha, Wisconsin** where there's been a lot of unrest in response to the police shooting of **Jacob Blake**. Kendra's parents still live there and her heart has been heavy for her home city.

She posted: *I have so many mixed emotions this week. There have been too many extreme events in Kenosha and it's hard to absorb and react to each one. It's surreal. Shock, sadness, anger, fear, anxiousness, exhaustion, etc. Have empathy. Be willing to listen. Be considerate. How can there be change without any of these actions?*

**Mary Knoll** responded with: *Yes Kendra. I'm so sorry for the tragedies happening in our country and for the families involved and yet at the same time am grateful for and challenged by the opportunity to make change in the world. I think the roots of change are love for God first and a knowledge of His love for me and everyone else. Then we go love as He did. I think a lot of loving right now looks like listening and being compassionate and kind, then speaking truth in love as God prompts. He really is active in showing love.*

To which I say: **Right on Mary.**

Constantly, daily, let God fill you with His love and *kindness* and then show that to others. We've got plenty of people, even Christians, spouting off their opinions on what's wrong with our *justice system* and either *supporting or defunding the police*, and *healthcare* and *immigration* and *support for either the Republicans or Democrats*. What we need far more of is the people of God focusing on God and talking about His greatness and kindness. There does need to be serious discussions about racial inequalities and reforming our justice system and many other issues. But I don't see a lot of that being done within the context of God's love and kindness. There's a whole lot of finger pointing and blaming and accusing going on. As followers of Christ we'd be far better representatives of Jesus if rather than pointing fingers at others we pointed out fingers at God and talked about how great He is and the profound difference He continues to make in your life.

We're instructed in the New Testament to "*speak the truth in love*" and it appears to me that we're often forgetting that. I personally believe God is not pleased when we're striving to just be "*right*" rather than *loving*. You know what Jesus called those types of people? "*Whitewashed tombs.*" They appeared all about justice and arguing their points of view and quickly judging and dismissing others

who don't agree with their point of view. Most often as I've read those types of responses, God is seldom mentioned but rather just their view on things. We need less of us and more attention directed to God. I believe God wants to do some great things during this time of unrest and rampant anger. But He's going to do it through people who humbly bow their wills to His and allow God's love and blessings to flow into them and out onto others.

**Application Assignment for this week:** Spend time focusing more on God and His greatness and blessings and less on the problems in the world or in your life. I encourage you to consider writing down your reflections on the character of God and how He's blessed your life. Then ask God for the opportunity to share that with others.