

“Praying for the Blessing of the Children”

Numbers 6:22-27

Mark 10:13-16

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(1st and 3rd Worship Services) Today is the Infant Blessing Service, so we have (did) the Infant Blessing Ceremony in the 2nd Worship Service.

Sixteen children from two to five years old come forward, and after their names are called, we all have a time to unite our hearts and pray for the blessing of the children.

There will be no children in the first and third services, but we can pray, and I would like to pray for them. I will pray, and I would appreciate it if you could unite your hearts with mine.

Prayer

Numbers 6:22-27

Mark 10:13-16 (PowerPoint)

Preface

Since this morning is the Infant Blessing Service, we would like to think about blessing children, not from Ephesians as usual, but from the scriptures we have just read.

Now we have the Bible at our hand. Why was the Bible written, why was it left over, why was it translated into various languages around the world, why did it become a bestseller, and why did it reach so many people?

How is it that when nations fall, peoples perish, and even the languages in which they recorded words of God are forgotten, the Bible never dies out, but rather continues to be in the hands of even more and more people?

The reason, in a word, is that God wants to bless people.

The Bible is not a scripture of any particular religion, nor is it a tool for the study of theology, nor is it a complicated textbook that teaches some complicated doctrine that is difficult to understand, but it is God's loving thought and love letter to mankind, in which He wants us to be blessed and live in blessing at all costs.

As I meditated on the words of the Bible while remembering “bless the children,” it occurred to me that “our human parental love, which desires for our born children to

walk in blessings as a matter of course, originated with God the Father, who created mankind“.

God the Father, who created man in His own image, desires that each and every person born on this earth walk in blessing.

And we, parents and adults, are asked to pray and ask for that blessing in the name of the Lord God for the new lives, the infants, who are born from our activities.

This means that God wants to “bless” us through our prayers, using our prayers to ask for blessings.

To remember that everything that is described as a “blessing” is all connected to God, all that happens, is given, is experienced, is felt in our connection with God, and once we remember that, to pass it on to the next generation, to pray for it.

God asks us to remember, to recognize, and to keep remembering that the source of blessings is God, and that “praying for blessings in God's name is the basic premise of blessings,” and to pass on and bless “blessings themselves”.

Part One

I would like to read again the words of Numbers 6:22-27.

Numbers 6:22-27 (PowerPoint)

God is requesting the people of Israel to pray for blessings in the name of the Lord and in the Lord God for all the next generation and children who will be in the line of God's people Israel.

Some churches encourage fathers to pray for the blessing of their children with this prayer of blessing from Numbers 6.

“The Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord turn His face toward you and bless you. May the Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace.” Fathers are to pray for their children, placing the Lord's name above their children.

I don't think there is a parent who does not desire blessings for his or her children.

The only question is whether that blessing is a blessing that we are seeking from the Lord God, a blessing that He will turn His face toward us, a blessing that we hope He will give us peace, or whether it is a blessing that the world teaches, that people chant, or that I wish and envision. If we pray this prayer while meditating, while thinking, while speaking to God and being spoken to by God, what is the blessing of the child will be shown to the praying person himself.

By praying this prayer, it seems to me that we will be shown “whether I am asking God to give him/her what we consider to be a blessing,” or whether we are asking God to give him/her something else that we considers to be a blessing.

The first thing we adults and parents can learn from this prayer of blessing requested by God is that the blessing of children is accomplished through prayer to the Lord God.

A byproduct of this is that through praying for the blessing of children, the adults and parents who are praying are shown what they themselves consider to be a blessing in their lives.

I have heard the testimony of a pastor of a church pastored by an alumnus of the United Theological Seminary in Korea, where I graduated, and what is happening there is that many mothers with children are gathering.

As sometimes reported in Japanese news, university entrance examinations in Korea are truly an examination war, more intense than those in Japan. Mothers of high school students preparing for entrance exams are even more anxious than their children, and they have started coming to church to pray for their children's success in the entrance exams, as if they were asking God for help in times of trouble.

The pastor, seeing this situation, was concerned, “Well, it's all right to pray, but it's not like a shrine or a temple to come to a church just to pray for an entrance exam,” but he thought, “Let's see how it goes for a while“.

Then, the mothers who were also worried about their children's entrance examinations and prayed earnestly for their children's success began to increase in number.

The mothers shared their worries and anxieties with each other and prayed earnestly to God for their children's success in the examination.

Somehow, the mothers' prayers began to change.

As they earnestly prayed to God for their children's success in college, they began to wonder, “Will it really be a blessing for my child if this prayer is answered? Is that all there is to it? Does God want me to pray this prayer? Is this really the prayer that is meant for my child?” Through this prayer, the mothers were led to examine the content of their prayer, and their prayers changed.

The mothers who had been praying for their children's success were touched by God and transformed, and the pastor repented of the easy way he had been judging them in his heart, like a Pharisee judging others, and began to give thanks.

When the mothers themselves were praying for the blessings they envisioned, they would say, “May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord turn His face toward

you and give you peace. May the Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace.” They realized that the true blessing for their children was to put God's name on them.

The church then began to advertise, “Anyone is free to come and pray for their children's examinations,” and as mothers who had similar experiences helped new mothers who came, as a result, many people encountered God, met Jesus, and were saved.

I thought, “This is interesting”.

Whatever it is, we pray to God anyway.

We pray fervently.

Then, the God of the Bible is merciful and compassionate, and He is not a person who cannot sympathize with our weakness and pain, so He will lead us to blessing.

Whether it is a blessing for the time being, a blessing that we think of in our own desperate way, or a benefit, if we pray to the Lord God, He will teach us and guide us.

We are reminded that the depth of the bosom that far exceeds our expectations is also an attribute of God the Father.

What this talk reminded me of was the importance of praying to the Lord God and Jesus for blessings for us and our children, no matter what it takes.

Whatever it is, that is where the blessing begins.

I was taught that God's blessing begins from there.

Part Two

In Mark 10, the other passage we read earlier, we read that people brought their children to touch Jesus, who might seem to be “just for the sake of benefit”.

The disciples, however, either did not like their parents' seemingly prayers for benefits, or they simply did not like the children, and rebuked them.

Then Jesus, in turn, rebuked the disciples.

Mark 10:13-16 (PowerPoint)

Jesus embraced the children, laid hands on them, prayed for them, and blessed them.

What kind of blessing?

I am sure that the prayers of Jesus includes hopes and desires that we wish we had when we live here on the earth, such as protection from accidents and calamities, healing from illnesses, material and economic wealth, passing exams, winning things,

having the way opened to us, triumph over things, etc., but it also includes blessings that are more than that.

There is a fundamental difference between what we commonly associate with the word “blessing” and what the Bible teaches us about “blessings”.

Of course, there is some overlap between what we in the world think of as a “blessing” and what the Bible calls a “blessing”.

As I mentioned earlier, the Bible uses the word “blessing” to describe protection from accidents and disasters, material blessings, etc., but the Bible teaches us that these are not the essence or main body of a “blessing”.

As the Apostle Paul confesses in Philippians 4, the Bible ultimately calls it a blessing to receive something that is the basis for being satisfied in any circumstance, whether poor, needy, in what seems like a cul-de-sac, rich, or contented.

So what is the basis for that blessing?

Let’s look again at Jesus’ words.

Mark 10:14-16 (PowerPoint)

“For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Only those who accept the Kingdom of God like children can ever enter it.” By blessing children, Jesus here placed the Kingdom of God and blessing on an equal footing.

In other words, accepting the Kingdom of God and entering the Kingdom of God are blessings, and they are grounds for being satisfied on earth, no matter what one’s circumstances may be.

Jesus blessed children so that they could accept the Kingdom of God, which is the essence of this blessing.

Of course, Jesus knew better than anyone what was most important to the children.

The Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God is most important for children.

The blessing of the Kingdom of God is the most important for children.

Yet the disciples did not seem to understand this very well.

I am not sure if the disciples thought: “As for the Kingdom of God, after you grow up! You still have a lot of things to do and to know before you know about the Kingdom of God! You are 50 years too young to know about the Kingdom of God as a child!” However, the disciples refused to take the children to Jesus, got angry, and even interfered with them to the extent that I suspect they thought that much.

They even interfered.

They were proud to be “disciples of Jesus,” but as if they were Satan's servants, they interfered with the children's coming to Jesus to receive the blessing of the Kingdom of God.

We might say in this way what the disciples must have thought, “No, no, no, no. Before you know about Jesus, about the church, about worship, about the Bible, you need to study, exercise, pass a test, get a job, have a family...you know, it's not too late to get the conditions necessary to live a better life in the world, so don't worry about it now!”

Or, “It's not too late to learn more about spiritual matters after you gain more knowledge about the world, and after you learn more about the rules, common sense, and knowledge of the world, you should be interested in both God and spiritual matters.”

But to those who are thinking like that, Jesus says:

Mark 10:14 (PowerPoint)

The least we adults can or must do for children is not to deprive or hinder them from trying to come to Jesus or from the opportunity to do so.

Take them to Jesus anyway, even if it is for a profit.

Because going to Jesus, going to Jesus and accepting the Kingdom of God is a unique blessing not only for adults, but also for children.

If we want children to be blessed, we must bring them to Jesus, because they need to be embraced in His bosom.

Without Jesus, they will not be able to accept or enter the Kingdom of God, which is the basis of blessings, and they will be in all kinds of circumstances, and they will be unable to be satisfied, unable to be content, and anxious, dissatisfied, empty, and unable to rejoice with all their hearts in whatever they do.

Even if we have accidents, disasters, illnesses, or things don't go the way they had envisioned, if we have faith that we will enter the Kingdom of God, everything in our lives will be a blessing, a benefit, a thanksgiving, and a blessing.

On the other hand, even if you have not had any serious accidents or disasters, have not suffered any serious illnesses, and have unexpectedly led a life that people envy, if your life is not accompanied by the blessing of the Kingdom of God, it will not be a life of blessing.

Part Three

In Luke 16, Jesus illustrates this clearly by telling us the story of two people who are at opposite ends of the spectrum.

Luke 16:19-31 (PowerPoint)

We are living in difficult times, in an atmosphere where people do not want to talk about, know, or weigh the afterlife, and even Christians are wishing for treasures here on earth rather than in heaven. But if one gets this, gets that, eats such and such, goes there, goes here, meets such and such a person, lives in such and such a place, if it is not in the Kingdom of God, it cannot be the final and ultimate blessing.

Jesus is serious.

He is serious about the seriousness of entering into or not entering into the blessing of the Kingdom of God.

It is never too early to enter into the blessings of the Kingdom of God.

In fact, the sooner you do, the better.

The sooner you enter the Kingdom of God, the sooner you will be living the Kingdom of God, instead of an empty life with no answers and no fulfillment.

You will enjoy the blessing of knowing the Lord God in every path you take.

You may have learned about Francisco Xavier, who was the first to introduce Christianity to Japan, in your Japanese history class.

He said, "Leave your child with me until he is seven years old. After that, do with him as you wish".

Based on these words, many churches around the world began to operate kindergartens.

And they have endeavored to bring the Kingdom of God into the hearts of children.

Essentially, the mission of kindergartens is to plant the blessing of the Kingdom of God in the hearts of children, not to provide them with an adult-determined education, or to educate them to be gifted.

The Bible teaches us that once we have the Kingdom of God in our hearts, the rest will naturally follow.

Deuteronomy 28:1-15 (PowerPoint)

The Bible says that even the blessings that all people desire, such as being better than others, winning things, becoming financially rich, etc., depend on how they stay connected to the true God and Savior Jesus.

He dangles the items of blessings in front of us like a carrot dangled in front of a horse's eye, while explaining the importance of staying connected to God, living the Kingdom of God, and abiding in the true blessings that God offers.

Lenin, who established the world's first socialist dictatorship in Russia, used or abused his own interpretation of the words "Leave your children with me until they are seven years old. After that, do as you wish with him," and said, "The seed I planted in them will never be pulled out in their lifetime."

In Japanese, there is a saying, "The soul of a child continues even up to hundred years of age." I believe that we must seriously and earnestly consider the true meaning of this saying and its application to our faith.

Part Four

From the time I was born, there were no adults around me who took me to Jesus to have Him touch me, so I lived until I was 20 years old without knowing about the blessings of the Kingdom of God.

As a result of this upbringing, my goals in life were to become rich and to be popular with women.

I thought that achieving these two things would make my life happy and enjoyable, and it is no exaggeration to say that I wanted to accomplish things for these two things. I had no other goal or purpose in life at that time.

I thought they were all there were in this world, and that I was just a man of the flesh with no spiritual vision who could only see that much in this wonderful world God had created.

I can only be thankful, with a shudder, when I reflect on the fact that if I had ended up there, I would have been in serious trouble, never knowing or tasting the main body of the blessing, and suffering a life of true great damage and consequences in my life.

The world is being kept told and taught that the kind of truth that is not truth, the kind of success that is not success, the kind of life that is not life, the kind of love that is not love, the kind of freedom that is not freedom, the kind of laughter that is not laughter, the kind of peace that is not peace, and the kind of God that is not God, make us happy, enrich our lives, and promise the prosperity.

A world where our hearts are shaken, tempted, attracted, and their power is so considerable that we are under the illusion that those idols, if we are mistaken, really do give us life and prosperity.

And so we are broken, placed in such a broken world.

A stifling thought because of the god-like substitutes for the one true God.

Liberation from that is the Kingdom of God, and salvation is the blessing of the Kingdom of God.

And as those who know that blessing, we are entrusted by God with the mission to tell our children about it and make them know it as soon as possible.

Conclusion

In an interview with Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon.com, the world's largest Internet retailer, I read the following:

Everyone who met Mr. Bezos asked him the same question.

What kind of question is this? It is “What will change over the next 10 years? If anything will change, what will it be?”

I think the intent of the question was, “In this fast-changing world, we want to apply well and be successful.”

Mr. Bezos' response to the question is this:

“The question itself is wrong. What is really important is to know what will change, but to know what will not change.”

Why is it so important to know what will not change?

Because if we know what will not change, not change in 10 or 20 years, we can predict the future and prepare for that future with confidence, right?

Bezos continues.

“I've been successful because I've focused on two things: the unchanging demands of Amazon's merchandising customers over the past 10 years, and even 10 or 20 years from now.

The two unchanging demands of customers in the distribution industry are fast delivery and low prices.”

There is a lesson to be learned from this.

We can take away from this that no matter how much the world changes, we know that some things will never change.

It is the Triune God, God the Father, Jesus the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, and His Word.

The words of Malachi 3:6, “I, the Lord, do not change,” and Isaiah 40:8, “The grass wilts and the flower scatters. But the word of our God will stand forever”.

The greatest thing we can do for our children today is to let them know about the One who never changes, and to store up and plant His words in their hearts.

Let us pray and practice for a life that is not at the mercy of change, but a life that is lived in the unchanging One, His Kingdom, and His blessings.

Let's pray.

Benediction : Numbers 6:24-26