

Bethel

Prayer Meeting Addresses

Number 61 Blessing and Being Blessed

Reading: Psalm 134

1 Behold, bless ye the Lord, all ye
servants of the Lord, which by night stand in
the house of the Lord.
2 Lift up your hands in the sanctuary,

and bless the Lord.

3 The Lord that made heaven and earth
bless thee out of Zion.

Address

Years ago here at Bethel in the early days of my pastorate a person came to me with a question that was troubling him, and the question was this. He said, “I think I completely understand something of what it means for God to bless a sinner, but I have never, never been able to understand the many places in Scripture where we read of sinners blessing God and sinners being called on to bless God.”

Well, in this little Psalm we have both. We have sinners blessing God and we have God blessing sinners. But of course there is a complete difference. When God blesses a sinner, He lovingly and kindly and graciously bestows on that sinner some of the benefits and favours of His great salvation. That is God blessing a sinner. Now when a sinner blesses God, he does not give anything to God; he does not communicate any favour to God. What he does: he *ascribes to God* these wonderful blessings of salvation that He bestows on sinners, and as he ascribes these blessings to God, he blesses God in this way: in a way of humble thanksgiving, in a way of humble praise. So we have both sides of it, and in our prayer meeting may there be both sides of it. May we be found blessing God for all His mercies to us personally and in our lives and families, in the church of God, for His help, for His salvation, for answers to prayer, for things in providence as well as grace.

“Bless ye the Lord, all ye servants of the Lord.” That does not just mean preachers. “Bless ye the Lord, all ye servants of the Lord.... Lift up your hands in the sanctuary” – that is in prayer and praise – “and bless the Lord.” And you notice, He says, those “which *by night* stand in the house of the Lord.” Of course, there may be some reference here – there probably is – to the Levitical priesthood and their office through the night, but really this is night-time in our nation and night-time in the church of God. Sometimes we think, Wouldn’t it have been wonderful if our lot had been cast in the days of the Reformation, or the days of the Evangelical Revival, in those times when the hundreds if not thousands were wending their way to the house of God? But God’s all-wise appointment is that our lot is cast in the night-time. Some of the old divines used to say this is an honour because the stars are more needed when the night is very dark, and the stars shine most brightly when the night is very dark.

So may there be this blessing of the Lord in humble gratitude, in humble thanksgiving. “Behold, bless ye the Lord, all ye servants of the Lord, which by night stand in the house of the Lord. Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the Lord.”

And then we have the opposite, this prayer that the Lord will bless sinners, that the Lord will bless us. “The Lord that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion.” So as we come we pray for the blessing.

“We humbly for Thy blessing wait,
Seeking to know Thee as Thou art;
We bow as sinners at Thy feet,
And bid Thee welcome to our heart.”

So may there be that seeking of the blessing and may the Lord in love and mercy bestow it, in the church of God and in our homes and personally in our souls.

“The Lord that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion.” What does this mean, for the Lord to bless a sinner out of Zion? Well, do not forget this is one of the songs of degrees. It is the last of them. I have often spoken to you of them, how they sang them as they went up to Jerusalem three times a year to worship and probably as they returned, and what Zion meant. There was the temple there. This was the place where outwardly God blessed His people. It was all pointing forward to gospel days, pointing to Christ, a great High Priest there, the Lamb slain there, the sacrifice there, the blood shed there. O a godly Israelite knew this: that if Almighty God – and He is Almighty God; there is this

reminder of His greatness and glory; He is the Lord who made heaven and earth – and if He is ever going to condescend to bless a guilty sinner, then it is “out of Zion.” It is on gospel grounds, not law grounds. He is not blessing them out of Mount Sinai, but He is blessing them out of Mount Zion. The temple set forth the gospel in Christ.

“The Lord that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion.” And then secondly you can think of Zion as heaven. Lord, look down from Thy sanctuary. Turn not away from us. Let Thy pitying eye behold us. Though Thou art our almighty Creator, may we know Thee also as our Redeemer. Here we are on earth and there Thou art in heaven, and we are weak and Thou art mighty.

“The Lord that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion.” And then thirdly we so often read of Zion as it signifies the church of God here on earth, and especially the church of God on earth in its solemn assemblies, when we meet for worship on the Lord’s day, when we meet for prayer in the week, when we are found in Zion.

“Zion, thrice happy place!
Adorned with wondrous grace.”

“My soul shall pray for Zion still.”

“How did my heart rejoice to hear
My friends devoutly say,
‘In Zion let us all appear.’”

The solemn, sacred assemblies of God’s people. Well, the Lord has appointed He will bless them. He says, “In all places where I record My name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.” So, “We humbly for Thy blessing wait.” And so tonight, those who pray aloud and those who pray secretly and with us at chapel and with us at home, may we be enabled to bless the Lord. In love and mercy may the Lord bless us.

This address was given at Bethel Chapel, Luton, by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom, on Monday, 31st October, 2011

O bless the Lord, my soul!
Let all within me join,

And aid my tongue to bless His name,
Whose favours are divine.

O bless the Lord, my soul!
Nor let His mercies lie
Forgotten in unthankfulness,
And without praises die.

'Tis He forgives thy sins;
'Tis He relieves thy pain;
'Tis He that heals thy sicknesses,
And makes thee young again.

He crowns thy life with love,
When ransomed from the grave;
He that redeemed my soul from hell
Has sovereign power to save.

He fills the poor with good;
He gives the sufferers rest;
The Lord has judgments for the proud,
And justice for the oppressed.

His wondrous works and ways
He made by Moses known;
But sent the world His truth and grace,
By His beloved Son.

I. Watts