

How Do You Count Your Blessings?

“When upon life’s billows you are tempest tossed, When you are discouraged thinking all is lost, Count your many blessings name them one by one, And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done. Count your blessings – name them one by one; Count your blessings – see what God hath done; Count your blessings – name them one by one; count your many blessings – see what God hath done.”

The words of this familiar hymn encourage us to count the blessings that God has given us. In order to do this we must know *why*, *how*, and *where* we receive blessings.

The Blessing of God

The word *bless* means to speak well of or to bestow favor upon. One who is blessed by God has had the favor of God bestowed upon him. Paul speaks of God’s blessing in his letter to the Ephesians.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: Ephesians 1:3

As Paul begins to write of God’s blessing to us he begins by blessing God. God is the only being in the universe who is worthy of blessing and favor. This blessing of God is a familiar theme in Paul’s epistles.

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; II Corinthians 1:3

Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen. Romans 9:4,5

The one being that is worthy of favor by His very nature is God. God is well spoken of and worthy of blessing because His nature makes Him worthy. Mankind on the other hand is not worthy of blessing in and of himself. Our sinful nature is not worthy of being spoken well of or favor. Because God in His character and nature is a blessed God, He is able to bestow blessing on others. In Ephesians, Paul tells us that a blessed God has blessed us.

In general God’s blessing is divided into two areas. One blessing comes as a result of God’s creative work and is enjoyed by all of His creatures. The other blessing is a special gift of God to His people. This blessing is reserved only for those who come to Him by faith.

God’s blessing in creation is seen in the systems of the earth that serve the needs of man; He gave man dominion over those systems.

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so. Genesis 1:26-30

These systems of the earth provide equally for the needs of the just and the unjust. All the children of Adam benefit from the creation over which he was given dominion.

There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous: I said that this also is vanity. Ecclesiastes 8:14

That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. Matthew 5:45

When the sun shines it shines on the just and the unjust. When the rain falls it falls on the just and the unjust. The very breath in the nostrils of the just and the unjust is a blessing of God’s creation. All are blessed by the systems that God has put into motion in His creation.

The blessing that God reserves for those who approach Him by faith comes on two specific groups of people in the Scripture, the nation of Israel, and the Church, the Body of Christ.

Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. Genesis 12:1-3

The blessing that God promised to Abraham and the nation that would grow from his seed is a special blessing over and above the blessings that God gives to all men in creation.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. Ephesians 1:3-6

When Paul wrote to the Ephesians he wrote of blessings that God gave to "us." The word us refers to members of the Church, the Body of Christ, those chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, accepted in the beloved. Like Israel, these people receive special blessing over and above the blessing that God gives to all men in creation.

Why Are We Blessed?

What is the basis of God's blessing on Israel? The Scriptures reveal two requirements to receive the blessing reserved for Israel.

First, a person must be a physical descendent of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob.

Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sara shall have a son. And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. Romans 9:7-13

Second, as a descendent of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, you must be *obedient* to God's law.

And Moses went up unto God, and the LORD called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel. Exodus 19:3-6

And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God. . . . But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee: Genesis 28:1,2,15

Blessing came in time past to the descendents of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob who walked by faith in keeping God's law.

What is the basis of God's blessing to the Church, the Body of Christ? Paul's epistles make it clear that God's blessing is

no longer based on being a physical descendent of Abraham and keeping the Law of Moses.

For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. I Corinthians 12:13

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Galatians 5:1-3

Today there is no profit, no benefit, and no favor before God for descendents of Abraham or keepers of the Law of Moses. What then is the basis of God's blessing today?

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places **in Christ**: According as he hath chosen us **in him** before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted **in the beloved**. Ephesians 1:3-6

We have emphasized key phrases in the passage above that tell us exactly why we are blessed. We are blessed because we are in Christ. Only in Christ is there blessing. Outside of Christ there is only a curse. God's special blessing today is not based upon your ancestry or obedience to the Law of Moses. It is based on the fact that you by faith received Christ as your Savior are placed in Him by the Spirit.

How Are We Blessed?

Now that we understand *why* we are blessed we answer the question of *how* we are blessed. What type of blessing should we look for from God?

History reveals that Israel was blessed in visible, physical ways. When delivered out of the land of Egypt under the leadership of Moses they experienced a very defining event.

Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness. And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace. Exodus 14:12-14

The blessing that defined Israel as a nation was a physical deliverance from a physical enemy In the Law of Moses, Israel's blessings are described as physical in nature.

Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store. Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out. The LORD shall cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face: they shall come out against thee one way, and flee before thee seven ways. The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. . . . And the LORD shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground, in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers to give thee. The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his

season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow. Deuteronomy 28:4-8,11,12

This is not to say that God had no *spiritual* blessings for Israel, but those blessings were always viewed as a future goal rather than a present possession. In early Acts Peter made it clear to Israel that their spiritual deliverance and blessing would not come until the times of refreshing in the earthly kingdom.

Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; Acts 3:19

While Israel viewed spiritual blessing as a future hope they experienced physical blessing as a present reality.

What about the Church, the Body of Christ? What form do our blessings take? The answer is clear in our text passage.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: Ephesians 1:3

The blessings that we have already received in Christ are spiritual in nature. Paul lists the specific spiritual blessings that we received in Christ. These blessings include election (vs. 4), predestination (vs. 5), God's acceptance (vs.6), redemption (vs. 7), forgiveness (vs. 7), and an inheritance (vs. 11). None of these blessings is physical in nature. This does not mean that they are not real, but it does mean that they cannot be seen as Israel's blessings were seen.

The physical blessing of the body of Christ is a future hope.

For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. Romans 8:22,23

The blessing Paul says we already have in Ephesians 1:7 (redemption) is what he says we wait for in Romans 8:23. This is not a contradiction. The difference is that in Ephesians Paul speaks of spiritual redemption and in Romans he speaks of the redemption of our physical bodies.

Our blessing is the opposite of Israel's. We view physical blessing as a future hope, but we experience spiritual blessing as a present reality. We must never fall into the trap of looking at our physical surroundings to determine the level of our blessing from God. Paul had every spiritual blessing that we do; yet his physical circumstances left much to be desired. (See II Corinthians 11:24-27.)

Where Are We Blessed?

Now that we have seen *why* and *how* God has blessed His people we consider *where* the blessings for Israel and the Body of Christ are found. Where should we look to count our blessings?

In Genesis as God explains to Abraham the blessing that will come on his descendents, He makes it clear that those blessings are found on the earth, specifically in the land that God gave to Abraham and his descendents.

Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: Genesis 12:1

In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the

great river, the river Euphrates: Genesis 15:8

Israel's hope is for God's kingdom to come to the earth. This is seen in Christ's prayer instruction to Israel, which confirms the promises of the prophets.

After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Matthew 6:9,10

Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle. And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south. Zechariah 14:3,4

Israel's future destiny is inextricably attached to the land that God promised to their father Abraham. Because their destiny is on the earth God attaches their blessing to the earth.

What about the Church, the Body of Christ? Where are our blessings located? Again we will refer to our text passage.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: Ephesians 1:3

Our spiritual blessings are located "in heavenly places." The theme of heavenly places continues throughout the book of Ephesians.

And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: Ephesians 2:6

To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, Ephesians 3:10

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Ephesians 6:12

The location of our blessings keeps with our position, witness, and warfare. The hope of the Body of Christ is not for God's kingdom to come to the earth, but for Christ to catch us away *from* the earth to a heavenly home and destiny.

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. I Thessalonians 4:16,17

For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself. Philippians 3:20,21

Unlike Israel whose blessings are associated with Christ's *earthly* kingdom, our blessings are associated with Christ's *heavenly* kingdom. The destiny of the Body of Christ is heavenly and God has given us blessings in heaven that keep with that destiny.

Count Your Blessings

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. In that creation He placed many blessings enjoyed by all creatures. In addition, He created two groups of people to rule His creation. To Israel, he gave physical, earthly blessings that allow them to reign on the earth. To the Body of Christ, he

gave spiritual blessings in heavenly places that allow us to reign in the heavenlies. When counting blessings keep these truths in mind.