

Perspective of blessing (Quality: Good)

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- [0 : 00] We turn this morning to the words found in the first epistle of Peter, in the first chapter, and at the third verse.
- The first epistle of Peter, the first chapter, at the third verse. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith, and to salvation ready to be revealed.
- In the last time. You know, these words, I think, have a particular relevance and interest to us at this time, at the beginning of a year.
- It is a time when we are accustomed to be reminded of the fact that we are pilgrims, that we pass from one period of time to another.
- And Peter, in writing this epistle, is out to strengthen and harden and comfort Christian people in every generation.
- [1 : 34] He does it by contrasting in the first two verses the outward and the inward conditions of Christian men. Outwardly, the Christian is a stranger and the pilgrim.
- He is subject to all the uncertainty and the hazard that belongs to his pilgrim state in the world. But inwardly, the Christian is erect.
- He is blessed with a glorious certainty and confidence that belongs to his God-given redemption.
- The thing is, the paradox, of course. He is both uncertain and certain at one and the same time. It isn't one or the other. It is both. It is a paradox that is salutary and in many ways helpful.
- On the one hand, the cares and sorrows of a sogyny, alien, pilgrim life, are a deterrent to spiritual pride and presumption.
- [2 : 46] On the other hand, while the assurance and security of God's electing grace are his, they are a safeguard to this Christian pilgrim's temptation to fall into despair and hopelessness.
- So the Christian life comes to be a paradox, a blend of uncertainty and certainty.
- Something we feel at the turn of the year. Because on the one hand, there is always this thought of taking stock of what has gone before and the year that's finished.
- And then there is always the anticipation, accompanied by the uncertainties, of what is in the year that is open. Well, the apostle Peter's comment on it all effectively is this.
- The greatest comfort is the sheer fact of being Christian. And I don't know, my friends, any better message that I can bring to you than that.
- [4 : 07] On this occasion. To be Christian is to be at the source of the spring of grace and peace. And if you've got grace and peace, there is nothing higher or holier or happier in heaven or earth.
- In verse 3 then, the apostle enters fully on this day the comfort of the gospel to the pilgrims of faith.

And he does it in terms of the blessings of being Christian. You see the blessings that he enumerates in these three verses.

Christians are people, he says, first, who are begotten again, second, who have a lively hope, third, they have a glorious inheritance, and fourth, they are kept by the power of God.

Now, if you've got that as you begin the year, you've got everything. Whatever the year holds. When you find yourself in trouble, when you find yourself in difficulty, these, says Peter, are the blessings that no trial and no change of calendar can overturn.

[5 : 41] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy of begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fade is not a way reserved in heaven for you who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Now, this morning, I want to take a very general view of this whole matter of blessings in the Christian life.

no word, I suppose, is so often on the lips of Christian people and I submit that no word is so often used so casually and so thoughtlessly as this word blessing.

Anything that comes our way that pleases us we tend to call a blessing. Anything that comes our way and does not immediately please us we tend not to call a blessing.

I would that you should notice that the apostle here by the very way in which he refers to the particular blessings that he is going to deal with shows us certain broad principles about all blessings.

[7 : 26] it isn't so much by statement as by influence that he stresses the importance of keeping our blessings in perspective.

not every blessing is of the same consequence. There are greater blessings and there are lesser blessings.

There are major blessings and there are incidental casual almost trivial blessings. blessings. Not that any is to be overlooked not that any is to fail to be attributed to the great source of all blessings.

But the plain fact of the matter is that not all benefits that flow to a Christian from his Christian status are of the same value or the same importance.

and they're not meant to be. Some blessings are direct some are indirect some are short term some are long term.

[8 : 35] some are peculiarly Christian blessings that none but his loved ones know. And others are common or general blessings that God bestows on all men the just and the unjust at his good pleasure.

So I submit that it's a matter of some importance since the Christian life is a life of blessing though in the midst of trials that a Christian man should have a sense of perspective and proportion with regard to his blessings.

And the practical question of course is how are we to decide the priorities? How do we establish relative values?

Am I to regard the provision of some small material thing out of the kindness and the goodness of my covenant God as on the par with on the same level as the fact that I'm justified by grace?

clearly there's a need to clarify our thinking about this whole business of blessings because there's no area of spiritual life where we're not over the dangers and one danger to which Christians are open is the danger of spiritual miserliness.

[10 : 18] there are Christians who count their blessings as the miser counts his gold and in the same spirit.

Another danger to which Christians are open is the danger of preoccupation with lesser blessings rather than greater. But of course you see you can't handle that until you have looked at this matter for perspective and priority and order.

What are the greater? What are the lesser? We need a sense of perspective and that is precisely what the Apostle Peter gives us in these three verses.

The Apostle's immediate concern you see is with the blessing of being Christian and it is important to notice how he approaches the subject.

He lays down an order of priority, of precedence, of perspective. There are as I can see three steps, three ranks if you like of priority.

[11 : 43] first in this order of priority or precedence is the blessing of God himself. You'll notice in our text that before there's any reference to the new birth, which might be reckoned to be a major blessing, before there's any reference to the lively hope of a resurrection from the dead, which might well be calculated to be a special blessing.

Before there's any reference to the Christian's great inheritance or the fact that he is kept by the power of God, there comes this, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

is it not obvious that the first, the foremost blessing, indeed the fount of all blessing, and the sum total of all blessings, to a Christian man, is the person of Almighty God.

whatever other blessing you name, place it back to its source.

Where did it come from? What is it? He's the beginning, the author, the originator. The ultimate blessing is God himself.

[13 : 24] the only indispensable blessing of God's universe or God's church is God. Without him, there is nothing.

No prospect whatever of being begotten again, or having a lively hope, or an eternal inheritance, or being kept without God, there is nothing with him.

There is infinite blessing. It's obvious, and I agree, but my question is, when you count your blessings, is that where you begin?

do you begin with purely personal things? Material, passing things, which may be truly blessings, but is that where you begin?

The apostle's great concern is that Christians should not degenerate into mere blessing collectors. there is such a thing as a blessing collector mentality among professed Christians.

[14 : 57] There are circles where you can hear people say, oh, you went so-and-so, you did so-and-so, did you get a blessing? A blessing collecting mentality. however wonderful any particular blessing may be, my question this morning is, where do you put it on your list when you begin to count your blessings?

Where do you start? Well, Peter starts with the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that is the first priority in the blessing of being Christian.

Do we not have to admit that many of us have our values all wrong? Our perspective distorted in this respect.

Alexander Simpson, an American minister about a hundred years ago, saw his failure on this point, and put his experience memorably and very tersely in verse like this.

He said, once it was the blessing, now it is the Lord. Once it was the failing, now it is his word.

[16 : 24] Once the gifts I wanted, now the giver owed. once I sought for healing, now himself alone. You see the emphasis, you see the priority. Another has put it even more positively like this, my God, he said, I love thee for thyself, all creature things above.

my God, I seek thee for thyself, besides, I ask not aught.

If a man has the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, he has the fountain head of all measure. So I say, here's the starting point.

This immeasurable, incalculable blessing of knowing God, of being apprehended of Christ Jesus, of entering into the holiest of all and coming with boldness to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[17 : 47] The first thing for you to consider as you begin to count your blessings at the beginning of this year, my friends, is this, do you know God? God, and if you know him, then he should be first on your list of blessings.

If that blessing is unknown, well, what can you have without the fountain head? But if you know him, the first, the foremost, the all-inclusive benefit of the Christian life, God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, says Peter, to these pilgrims, in trouble, in sorrow, in need, of comfort and help, reminding them of the sheer blessing of being Christian.

Oh, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. What is it that makes us Christians? That we do collect a lot of benefits and blessings of various kinds on our way through this pilgrim world?

Or is it the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that makes us Christians, and therefore makes every other blessing of us again?

So in the first rank of blessing, there is God himself. second in order of priority and precedence in this whole field of blessings are what I will call spiritual blessings.

[19 : 34] There is a sense in which all blessings, properly understood, are spiritual. even material benefits and blessings are spiritual or can be spiritual in the effect they have.

In the fact that they remind us of our kind and gracious God. In the fact that they enable us to do something or other in his service. The distinction between sacred and secular comes very often in the Christian life to be very artificial.

And yet, when it comes to the matter of priority and precedence, it is a needful distinction. You notice that here, when Peter speaks of the blessing of being Christian, he names nothing that is outward, mortal, temporal.

After the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Christian blessings he names are regeneration, begotten us again, the living hope, the risen redeemer, the eternal inheritance, and the keeping power of our covenant God.

These are major blessings that flow directly from a Christian's knowledge of God. They relate him to God. They have to do with the interests of his immortal soul.

[21 : 17] They abide, they are everlasting. And while they affect his outward life and material concerns in the world, they are of themselves essentially spiritual things.

blessings. And it is in this sense then that I use the expression spiritual blessing. Scripture makes this distinction and scripture gives priority to the works of God's grace that affect a man's soul.

Now the gospel is concerned with the whole of life. Christians have got to be on their guard against, always be, always looking inward, so preoccupied with personal spiritual concerns, that they are careless and forgetful about their soulful and their sinning, responsibilities and duties.

that is so. The gospel does concern itself with the whole of life and yet, when the question of priorities arises, he is a poor Christian who is not more concerned with his relations with God than he is with his relations with men.

Because the gospel is not a narrow thing, but is concerned with every aspect of life. gospel blessings are varied. They are spiritual, they are material, they affect our relations with heaven, they affect our relations with earth.

[22 : 58] And yet, you see, in perspective, those blessings that directly govern the interests of the soul must take priority over material and outward blessings.

They command more praise, they call for more gratitude. After the blessing of God himself, a Christian man ranks in esteem and honor those blessings that are essentially spiritual.

Blessings such as Peter here speaks about, the new birth, the lively hope, glorious inheritance, the preservation and perseverance of the saints.

These are the distinctively Christian blessings. These are the blessings that you don't find in anyone other than Christians. These are the blessings that are to be ranked after God himself, but before everything else.

Now, this priority surely is precisely what our Lord was teaching in the Sermon on the Mount when he said, Matthew 6 33, seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

[24 : 31] These other things may be good, they may be right, they may be legitimate, they may be in his heart to give you, they may be a tremendous blessing to you when they come, but you're not to seek them first.

Seek ye first. All else is subordinate to that. Or in John 6 27, the Lord says, labor not for the meat that perisheth, but for that which endureth unto everlasting life.

Now he's not saying, don't bother where your next meal's coming from. He's not saying that. It's a matter of relative values. Labor more for that which endures to everlasting life than that which belongs only to this life.

That's the principle. Peter strikes the same note here. When in verse 18 and 19 in this chapter he says, ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold.

Now notice he doesn't say silver and gold are bad and you mustn't have anything to do with them. The world can't go on without currency and trade and commerce. But he says, ye were not redeemed with those things.

[25 : 55] those things are legitimate in their place. But ye were not redeemed with those things. You can have all those things and go to hell. You can have all those things and they'll be a blessing to you for a while while you've got them.

But if that's all you've got, you're not saved. You were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ.

silver and gold, the whole material realm has its place in God's economy. But there are things that he can't do, there are things that he's not meant to do.

There are spiritual blessings that rank higher. Well, I'll simply repeat the question.

When you look back on the year that's closed, will you begin to count the blessings that have come to you? Are these the things that predominate in your thinking?

[27 : 03] You begin with the Barber and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and see how mighty and how merciful he is in himself and has been toward you and then you go on to what he has done for your soul?

Indeed, I go so far as to say this, it's not a bad thing to count blessings, but we have to get beyond counting them because you can count them with that miserly spirit.

And of course also, as the psalmist reminds us, it is, at the end of the day, impossible to fully number the blessings that God bestows upon his people.

It isn't enough to count blessings. blessings. You must weigh them. You must weigh them. Some are of greater consequence, some are of lesser consequence.

Some are important, some are relatively unimportant. Where do you put them? The first place to God himself, the second place to spiritual blessings.

[28 : 18] blessings. And then there is the third rank in this whole order of precedence, and that is what I would call, for want of a term, temporal blessings.

Temporal blessings. And by that expression, I mean the provision of bodily material, temporal means.

Indeed, everything that our Lord has in mind when he teaches us to pray, give us this day our daily bread. He doesn't mean simply bread and no other food.

He doesn't simply mean food of every kind. He means everything necessary for the sustenance of natural life. We had asked for it, and he did.

Now I suspect that many Christians, when they come to count their blessings, would start with this category, the daily bread, the nightly care, the provision of all these things.

[29 : 30] What are my blessings? A good home? Health? Family? Pool? Friendship? They're wonderful blessings.

They are the provision of God. And let there be no mistake about it. It is an utterly false view of the gospel that rules out all these things as unimportant and as of no consequence in the Christian life.

if the rich fool was wrong to put all his trust in his material blessings, that is, in his harvest barns, then we shall be equally wrong if we go to the opposite extreme and we begin to despise and denigrate and take for granted the blessings by which God meets our bodily needs while we're in a mortal state.

there have been those professed Christian people. I hope few in number, but there have been those people whose attitude toward, for example, the refugee and the down and out is that all you have to do for them as Christians is preach the gospel to them.

you ignore their disease, you ignore the fact that they've got no home, you ignore their near starvation, you ignore their fear, their frustration, you don't need to bother about all that, you just preach the gospel to them.

[31 : 14] Well, if that approach is right, the parable of the good Samaritan is wrong. And if that approach is right, then James, when he rebukes the man, the Christian man who says to a down and out be warmed and filled and does nothing about it, then James also is wrong.

It's a very interesting point that here in our text, where Peter is dealing with down and outs, where Peter is dealing with refugees virtually, these Christians who are scattered through these various countries to which they didn't belong, who had lost their own homes, who were deprived of all manner of temporal blessings, but Peter makes no reference whatever to temporal blessings.

that he writes to them about the blessing of being Christian, and every blessing he lists is a spiritual blessing, the uber, the life, the glorious inheritance, things which of themselves alone don't automatically fill the stomach or put a roof over your head.

what then is the point? Well the point is to stress the relative value of the different types of blessings, to stress the fact that spiritual blessings are eternal, and material blessings, however desirable, however necessary, are temporal.

let me take it in terms of the spiritual blessings that the apostle puts before us here. Are you my friend blessed with health of soul because you've got the new birth, you've been begotten again?

[33 : 15] That's a blessing that will last forever, and nothing on earth or in heaven will take it away. are you this morning blessed with bodily health?

That's a great blessing, but it won't last forever. You can have the most perfect physique, you can have the most wonderful state of health, but the day will come when decay and disease will take their course, and you'll put off the body.

Why? Because bodily health is a temporal blessing. A temporal blessing. You see the difference? Or let me put it like this.

Are you blessed with a lively hope in the risen Lord? Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has begotten us again to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

that hope will be fulfilled. It is sure, it is certain, that the trumpets will sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible.

[34 : 33] That lively hope is certain. Now it may be that you are also blessed with natural hopes, human hopes, for your friends, for your children, for your family, for whatever may be.

Now those hopes may be fulfilled or they may not. But if they are fulfilled, and if their fulfillment brings you great blessing and joy and exhilaration and happiness, you'll leave those blessings behind you.

You'll have to pass on, you'll have to go. Why? Because human hopes are temporal blessings. There's a difference between spiritual and temporal.

Or let me put it like this, the next blessing that Peter mentions is the blessing of this eternal inheritance. this inheritance laid up in glory for the people of God, to which they are to come.

This is a Christian's place in God's great purpose. That blessing, if that is yours, you will certainly resent.

[35 : 58] Now are we the sons of God. born and earth we shall be like him that is an enduring blessing that's a spiritual inheritance no you may also have an earthly inheritance and it may be in its way and place a great blessing to you at the time in what it does for you in what it enables you to do you may receive an inheritance a legacy a human inheritance or legacy it will be a blessing while you've got it but you won't have it forever either it will run out or you'll have to go and leave it behind that's the difference between a spiritual and a temporal blessing spiritual blessings are permanent temporal blessings are for time both categories come from God the one category is meant to endure the other to meet us in our needs as pilgrims through the wilderness well my friends can you take this word of Peter's as from the Lord at the beginning of the year as you look back at last year's blessings and as you try to anticipate what this year's might be the exhortation is keep your blessings in perspective get beyond counting them start weighing them distinguish between the temporal and the spiritual those that are for a time those that are eternal sort them out put them in order see whether your priority is where it ought to be for the first rank the great all inclusive blessing is God himself the God and Father of our Lord

Jesus Christ start as David did in the psalm that we read yes the Lord oh my soul and all that is within me bless his holy name God the fact of all blessing without whom there is no blessing that's the first and then the second rank of blessing is that which embraces the great redemptive work of God in Christ a new birth a lively hope a grand inheritance and you can go on with David and you notice that David has got his priorities right in the 103rd psalm after his breast the Lord is God he says forget not all his benefits what are the benefits these are the benefits who forgiveth all thine iniquities who healeth all thy diseases who redeemeth thy life from destruction who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tenderness then there comes the third category the third rank of blessing that which looks after our needs as mortal men while we're in the body and David goes on to that in verse 5 of the 103rd psalm who satisfieth thy mouth with good things so David has got his priorities right first he blesses the

Lord is God then he remembers the spiritual benefits and then he comes for the things that are needful for life in the body the blessing of being Christian so when we lift our hearts to praise our God may we be helped to keep our blessings in perspective don't merely count them wait the wise Christian will make his temporal blessings servants to his spiritual blessings and he'll make his spiritual blessings ties that bind him to his covenant God blessed be the

God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath begotten us to a lively hope to an inheritance incorruptible for we are kept by the power of God through faith and to salvation ready to be revealed in the last time the blessing of being Christian is the best possible with which to close a year or begin again the Lord enable us to see these things in perspective and give him the praise and the glory Amen