

The Lord bless thee and keep thee: (Quality: Very good)

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Preacher: Farley, Vernon (1912-1984)

[0 : 00] If the Lord will mercifully help me, I will direct your minds to the book of Numbers, chapter 6, verses 24 to 26.

The book of Numbers, the 6th chapter, verses 24 to 26.

The Lord bless thee and keep thee. The Lord make his face shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee.

The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace.

A very remarkable word is this, given to Aaron to pronounce upon Israel in certain parts of worship, on certain special occasions, particularly when congregations dispersed, went to their homes.

[1 : 39] The structure of the text is remarkably similar to that well-known and beautiful benediction with which most, if not all, are familiar.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, the fellowship of the Holy Ghost be with you all. Amen.

It struck me so beautifully that here is a threefold blessing in the Old Testament. We have quoted a threefold blessing in the New Testament to remind and confirm us in the faith of the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son, the Blessed Spirit.

And although perhaps the doctrine is not so apparent in the Old, it is there. And those dear prophets who wrote under the inspiration of the Spirit, they did believe it.

They did see it from time to time. It shines out beautifully in different places to remind us of that unity of the Spirit that welds the Old Testament dispensation and the new together and makes it the very true and inspired word of the living God.

[3 : 32] We observe also it is a form, a form of sound words.

The point of forms of words has been debated through many centuries and many opinions passed but after all is said and done the great difficulty is not with forms so much as formality.

The dissenters, the non-conformists came away from the established church of old upon many accounts and one of course and one of course was the, they dropped the use of a prayer book and its forms very largely.

Not because the prayer book was to be condemned outright but because there are many strange things in it but also but also there was this ever-present evil namely dull, cold, dead formality.

But even when we come to be dissenters and non-conformists we still haven't escaped that snare so it grows upon us how apt we are to slide into formal singing and formal praying yea and formal preaching unless the Lord keep us fresh anoint our minds and touch our lips.

[5 : 30] But Paul was no enemy to forms in every way he exhorts young Timothy to hold fast the form of sound words.

So it is right sometimes and we ourselves perhaps unconsciously admit this for frequently in our prayers we make use of the forms of prayer in the songs those heart utterances bubble up don't they into our lips and they seem to be so opposite and frame so beautifully to be a medium for our hearts to express themselves.

Likewise the hymns that we sing we cannot escape the form altogether no the great thing is to pray and desire that God will keep us from that formality in vain we tune our formal songs in vain we strive to rise Hosanna's languish on our tongues and our devotion dies but here is a form delivered for Aaron to be spoken from time to time in the hearing of the assemblies of Israel and we read it again today we want to inquire what should be the purpose thereof of our reading and speaking from it at this time well it is in the nature of a prayer is given to Aaron is to pronounce it in the hearing of the people and therefore it has in it many precious points of instruction first it is the prayer for a blessing the prayer for a blessing it is an acknowledgement at once that only

God can do it it is an invocation of the Lord God for his favour upon the people and where it springs up out of the preacher's heart it is a medium whereby he may pour out his affection to those people also this may express the sum of matters it crystallises whatever has been said by way of exhortation many things may have been said a long sermon may have been preached some may be remembered some may have got lost but here is a beautiful summary a crystallising of all that the preacher would wish to say and so it ascends to God knowing that

Paul may plant Apollos may water God only can give the increase that while it ascends to him it drops upon the ears of the hearers we trust with a measure of sweetness so in Nehemiah when Ezra blessed the Lord the people heard it and said Amen and Amen this then would be the use the use of the text that both the preacher and the hearers may be edified it may be a channel whereby I could pour out my affection and desire toward the beloved pastor and the church and dear people in this sanctuary by using it in that way and that as you hear it unfolded you may be edified and instructed in what to pray for we know not what to pray for says

[10 : 36] Paul as we ought in such a benediction as this uttered by the high priest we have several branches opening up to us matter for prayer and then it has in it a great encouragement namely I said not unto the seed of Jacob seek ye me in vain however formally people may speak this text however frequently they may write it in their letters it has a real meaning now the words of God intended for a purpose namely this God can bless he has infinite resources not only so the words are not mere form they are intended surely to raise up our thoughts our expectations our hope our meditations blessings to the

God whose name is here invoked in the desire for blessing also it will set our minds in motion upon our needs what can we do without the blessing of God what is the alternative to the blessing of God these Israelites well knew the alternative they would hear from time to time the blessings of God proclaimed upon Mount Gerizim they would hear also the curses pronounced upon Mount Ebor so that they were taught at least in the letter to value the blessing of the

Lord their God and to dread his frown and his silence and his rod and his judgments and the hidings of his face so there is somewhat of the use of the text the old Puritans used to bring their sermons to a close by adding some lengthy paragraphs by way of application reasons of the point sometimes they would say the uses but I would not wait to the end of the sermon to point out the uses but emphasize them really at the beginning that you might watch for them the uses are that I might convey to you my affectionate concern in the way of this prayer as it is opened up you might be more and more conscious of your need of the blessing of God and help to be able to pray concerning these things in some detail and then that you might be conscious the Lord does not lay such things down in his word for mere repetition it is to raise up a real and solid expectation of the good that is contained in this blessed word so we read it then in the tenor of a prayer the Lord bless thee and keep thee the key note is blessing and I suppose most have a fair notion of what is intended by blessing there are two kinds of blessings there are

God's blessings and man's blessings in Cruden's concordance there's a remarkable distinction worth repeating he has one cluster of texts where he gives this heading God the agent man the object man the agent man the object what a difference when Jacob blesses Pharaoh man is the agent man is the object but when God blesses Jacob or David or Jabez God is the agent man is the object how sweet

Balak said to Balaam I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed and he whom thou cursest is cursed well whatever he meant it is true so David when the Lord favoured him there in the second of Samuel and the seventh chapter he closes that note of thankfulness by saying in effect whom the Lord blesses he is blessed indeed blessing is the key note by which we understand happiness the Lord bless thee the Lord make thee happy it is borne out by so many precious words happy is the man whom the

[17 : 37] Lord corrected instructed him out of his law happy is that people whose God is the Lord happy is that people that is in such a case and so on happy art thou O Israel who is like unto thee O people saved by the Lord so we have the thought and the prayer and the desire for you that you might be happy O but not in the common acceptance of the word not as so many say I wish you a happy new year and other things good in their place when we say it on God's behalf in this manner the

Lord bless thee we think of the suitability of God's blessing to our fallen sorrowful undone miserable state through our sin now no man can boast of happiness in this world by nature he might talk about it he might pronounce it he might claim it but we know if he hasn't got inside of this text we know he has not yet found it happiness thou lovely name where's thy seat oh tell me where learning pleasure wealth or fame all cry out it is not here not here therefore the prayer the desire the blessing come so suitably to make those people happy who are unhappy by their sin or in an unhappy state and case some of course are in a miserable state by their sin who are not conscious of it who try to beguile themselves deceive themselves there are some made mourners in

Zion some who have to say behold I am vile woe is me I am undone the Lord says of these blessed are the poor in spirit theirs is the kingdom of heaven blessed are they that mourn they shall be comforted these are the people then who need are being prepared who will appreciate the happiness desire in the text it holds forth then true happiness true satisfaction that elevation and enlargement of the human heart its affections its understanding which shall presently yield it a true and lasting satisfaction tis the blessing of the

Lord that maketh rich and he addeth no sorrow with it so that the word in opening seems to be a comprehensive approach or introduction to the things which follow you might say as you look at the details of the text are they not all blessings indeed they are but the blessing of the Lord is somewhat like that river you read of in Psalm 46 there is a river the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High I see this river here in the first word the

Lord the Holy Trinity the Father the Son the Spirit bless thee here's the river oh how wide how deep how long then there are the streams that make glad the city of God and they seem to branch out and each of the branches are of such a nature as to meet some great need some great spiritual need of a people who have fallen and ruined and darkened alienated and distressed through the sin which they are guilty of through the woes that have come upon them through being descended from

[24 : 02] Adam her first fallen parents each of these clauses then comes forth like a rich pure stream of living water the Lord bless thee is the subject and then in its subdivisions we proceed and keep thee and keep thee as you ponder it at once it anticipates so many facets of our present state our needs and necessities trials difficulties are so met and compassed by this word bless thee and keep that is and in particular keep thee a wonderful word we're very familiar with it when we come to search out its usage in the scripture we find it has some very beautiful applications for instance broadly speaking we should find the

Lord keep thee will embrace this the Lord nourish thee the Lord support supply thy needs as a man keeps his family as a shepherd keeps his flock the Lord nourish up thy soul in the words of faith and of good doctrine carry that impression nourishment I am the bread of life the true bread the bread which came down from heaven the bread of God which if a man eat he shall not die but live forever the Lord bless thee and keep thee in the way of nourishing as the outward man perishes the inward man may be renewed day by day it anticipates that need it's held forth for us as a matter for prayer for the speaker he desires it for himself and for you the people hear this detail and say amen amen the

Lord God say so too the Lord bless thee and keep thee will embrace this sense a keeping in the way of prevention the Lord will keep the feet of his saints the Lord shall preserve thy soul he shall preserve thee from all evil there's the keeping of God which you need and I need so much the keeping of prevention the psalmist prayed for it in one particular keep back thy servant from presumptuous sin let them not have dominion over me then shall I be upright then shall I be innocent from the great transgression yet another prayed oh that thou wouldst bless me indeed enlarge my coast and that thou wouldst keep me from evil that it may not grieve me oh how this benediction and blessing this prayer anticipates the need we have to be kept kept from falling kept from error kept from preserved from temptation said the

Lord Jesus in this particular I pray not thou shouldst take them out of the world but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil and so we include that in our petition together the Lord bless us in the broad sense with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus the Lord keep us in this particular sense from the evil without within and everywhere the way of prevention and as you have traced it in your life this would introduce the note of thankfulness so often hath the Lord kept thy feet kept thy heart kept thy mind kept thee from pitching over the cliff into the gulf below kept by the power of

God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed at the last time oh but there is another sense highly needful in which this word keep applies the Lord bless thee and keep thee in a way of recovery recovery I mean this the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord and he delighted in his way though he fall though he fall oh he does fall he shall not be utterly cast down for the Lord upholdeth him with his hands there's no guarantee for any child of God he should never fall mark that emphasis though he fall oh

[31 : 35] Peter you are bold do fault less for the presence of his glory with joy doubtless some people find it hard to reconcile these things people in one place you read he will keep the feet of his saints he is able to keep you from falling yet alas along through the records as a saint is stumbling here and the believer stumbles there what are we to make of it why he is certainly able to keep you from falling into hell he is able to keep you from falling altogether it is very plain

God moves in a mysterious way for the edification of the saints they do stumble and they fall but they are not utterly cast down the just man we read fall seven times what a mercy he riseth up again here then is a keeping of recovery recovery David was glad of this you'll be glad of it too we shall all be thankful for it ere life's journey is done there's a keeping which embraces recalling raising up restoring he restoreth my soul says David he leadeth me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake so that our prayer this afternoon yours and mine together will be this the lord bless thee and keep thee you will have need of this is recovering grace to raise thee up when fallen set thee on thy feet like the evangelist of old did search out the pilgrims and found them in various places he raised them up he chastened them he set their feet down again in the narrow road kissed them and bid them god speed the lord bless thee and keep thee with his recovering grace and she may stand and having done all may stand but this thought the lord keep thee is a very suggestive and a fruitful word suppose we apply it this way the lord bless thee and keep thee as he did jacob what did he say to jacob why that he would be with him in all places with us whoever he went you would not leave him nor forsake him he had completed that which he had spoken to him off i will keep thee saith god oh what a keeping you may trace in dear unworthy jacob wasn't it wonderful that the lord should give him that promise at that time right upon the heels of his great sin and deception to remind us that our god is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think jacob would not ask for it you not expected it the poor guilty wretch unhappy houseless homeless oh what grace appears in this which

reminds us of another truth before they call i will answer before they call oh how marvelous this before they call upon me in confession before they even feel their need before they're made penitent god intercepts with his grace and his promise things we look not for indeed are there i will keep thee saith god then it must be a matter of pure grace not for your sake saith the lord do i this not for your righteousness nor your excellence no because of my covenant because of my name for my own righteousness sake and so the promise is made over to dear jacob at the outset of his pilgrimage how glad he was of it in days afterward in a crisis then he was glad to pray thou said i will surely do thee good god honoured it the lord honoured his promise yes kept him all away right along through the vices etudes the griefs the bereavements the sorrows of his life many many clouds came over his promise many times he thought all was over almost swallowed up by fear and sorrow but the righteous must hold on his way at last the dear man comes to this point have waited for thy salvation oh lord i waited not in vain so he pronounces his fatherly blessing upon his sons gathers up his feet in the bed gives up the spirit to god passes away in peace and the most sweet composure i will keep thee in all places whither thou goest the lord bless them and keep thee as he did dear jacob such an unworthy one the supplanter the deceiver to remind you that all manner of sin is forgiven unto men the lord bless thee and keep thee in another sense you read in deuteronomy he found him in a desert land in a waste howling wilderness he led him about he instructed him he kept him as the apple of his eye the lord keep thee and me after that pattern what a vivid illustration it is the apple of the eye a small but vital member you know how the lord our creator has

provided for the protection of the apple of the eye the eyes in a sunken position surrounded by strong bones it has the eyebrow for protection from glaring light it has the lid which acts so swiftly that in a flash it will cover the eye those tender lashes in endued with such a sensitivity all in order that the apple of the eye be protected and the keeping of this apple consists of two things again protection or recovery or many things are kept out by that defense by that sensitive protection there and then if on some occasions the foreign body gets in then there's another kind of keeping and mark this practically the whole of the constitution is halted for the benefit of the apple of the eye you say

I've got something in my eye it must get it out work must stop everything must stop it's a serious thing the eye being so vital so important and he kept him as the apple of the eye consequently the psalmist in psalm 17 was moved to pray after that pattern and said keep me as the apple of the eye and lower down in the Bible in Zechariah are the saints of God there depicted he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye leading us once more to that two fold defense the protection from invasion how much we owe to that part of our anatomy protection then a wonderful method whereby the eyes cleanse the water flows the tears come and the foreign body is so often extracted and the eye returns to its normal comfortable condition community the lord bless thee and keep thee as the apple of the eye to teach you to remind you that your smallness does not mean insignificance midst all his vast concerns, said one, he could not me forget. Who hath despised the day of small things, saith the prophet. He hath not despised the prayer of the destitute. He regarded and not despised. Oh the tender regard of our God, great as he is for small things. How glad we are to read it. How often does he argue that way, even from 1 Corinthians 12, where that mystical body is described and delineated. Great compassion and attention is called for, for the weakest and the most insignificant members of that body. There is to be a sympathy and unity, one with the other. And then we are led up to the headship.

[45 : 51] The Lord Jesus Christ, how that glorious head, cares for and cherishes the weakest of his members. To him the weakest is dear as the strong. So this then is the structure of the prayer.

The Lord bless thee, to nourish thee, to preserve thee, to recover thee. Keep thee as Jacob, keep thee as the apple of the eye.

Oh what a safe keeping this is. We know that where he takes the soul in hand, he bring to pass at length the fullness of the matter as expressed by Jude.

Now to him that is able to keep you from falling and present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.

That's the ultimate of my desire and petition for you this afternoon. And doubtless, your souls would echo the same and say, Amen. Amen.

[47 : 30] The Lord God of Israel say so too. Amen. Amen.