

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! In this edition I'll be exploring the meaning of the term "blessing" as used in scripture.

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Matthew 5:3 (Inspired Version) Blessed are they who shall believe on me; and again, more blessed are they who shall believe on your words when ye shall testify that ye have seen me and that I am.

Acts 20:35 I have showed you all things, how that, so laboring, ye ought to support the weak and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

Alma 16:137 Yea, he that truly humbleth himself, and repenteth of his sins, and endureth to the end, the same shall be blessed, yea, much more blessed than they who are compelled to be humble because of their exceeding poverty; therefore, blessed are they who humble themselves without being compelled to be humble;

3 Nephi 5:48 And again, more blessed are they who shall believe in your words because that ye shall testify that ye have seen me and that ye know that I am.

3 Nephi 13:18 Therefore, more blessed are ye, for ye shall never taste of death, but ye shall live to behold all the doings of the Father unto the children of men, even until all things shall be fulfilled according to the will of the Father, when I shall come in my glory with the powers of heaven.

Ether 4:78 And never could be a people more blessed than were they, and more prospered by the hand of the Lord.

As you can probably see, this is the result of a scripture search for the phrase "more blessed." We probably all have used the term "bless" or "blessed" for a variety of reasons in our lives, either for something we feel to have been "blessed" by, or in blessing someone else, or in other circumstances.

What is a blessing though? Is there a substantial "thing" associated with what a blessing is, or is it just an observation about someone or something?

I'm sure that Jesus did not use the term lightly when he spoke of how someone is "more blessed" or how he would bless someone. He blessed children by praying for them also, so it must be something that has spiritual value.

When Jacob blessed his twelve sons, the blessings bestowed upon them both an inheritance and a series of promises that had a prophetic element ascribed to them.

Perhaps we can understand a little more about blessings if we understand what the opposite of a blessing is.

2 Nephi 1:14 For if iniquity shall abound, cursed shall be the land for their sakes;

Jacob 4:4 And how blessed are they who have labored diligently in his vineyard; and how cursed are they who shall be cast out into their own place!

Romans 12:14 Bless them which persecute you; bless, and curse not.

James 3

9 Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.

10 Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.

It seems fairly clear that a curse is something that definitely has a real effect on someone or something - a "not very nice" kind of effect.

Compare and contrast these two verses in particular:

2 Nephi 1:14 For if iniquity shall abound, cursed shall be the land for their sakes;

2 Nephi 1:20 And if it so be that they shall keep his commandments, they shall be blessed upon the face of this land,

We might well equate a curse as "taking away" something, and a blessing as "giving" something. In our two verses from 2 Nephi 1, the curse takes away prosperity and livelihood - making things much more difficult for people, whereas the blessing brings prosperity, livelihood and abundance.

One may be tempted, therefore, to suggest that robber barons were exceedingly blessed because of their prosperity, and that poor people are of necessity cursed. That would be a very flawed conclusion though, because it is also written,

Luke 12:57 But he who knew not his Lord's will and did commit things worthy of stripes shall be beaten with few. **For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required; and to whom the Lord has committed much, of him will men ask the more.**

Mosiah 9:61 If he had more abundantly, he should impart more abundantly; and **he that had but little, but little should be required; and to him that had not should be given.**

Riches and abundance alone are not signs of blessing or of cursing, but one's attitude towards their use carries with it the seed of either blessing or cursing. How we use the things we have received can become either a blessing or a cursing to us. Remember the widow's offering:

Mark 12 (Inspired Version)

48 And there came a certain poor widow, and she cast in two mites, which make a farthing.

49 And Jesus called his disciples and said unto them, Verily, I say unto you that **this poor widow hath cast more in than all they who have cast into the treasury;**

50 For all the rich did cast in of their abundance; but she, notwithstanding her want, did cast in all that she had, yea, even all her living.

This is only one aspect of what a blessing is, though. Our possession of, attitude about, and use of physical things does not fully define it for us. What about the promise of Jesus, "More blessed are those who believe on your words"?

This element of the blessing seems tied to faith. In those terms we read in Hebrews 11 the following:

Hebrews 11:66 But without faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

The converse of this statement is that with faith it is possible to please God - even to the point that he rewards those who "diligently seek him." Now that is an interesting thing - the idea of a reward, because now we can begin to see how a blessing can have a direct impact on something more spiritual than the mere abundance of possessions.

On the subject of reward, have you considered this passage?

3 Nephi 5:98 But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet; and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father, who is in secret; and thy Father, who seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

3 Nephi 5:109 But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head and wash thy face--that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father, who is in secret; and thy Father, who seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

Would these not be considered as blessings? But alas, one might be inclined to think that we should pray in the closet or fast in secret to secure a reward, and that might be valid - but is it the only reason for doing so?

We have all had those "friends" who will do something nice for you because they expect you to do a favor for them in return. While there is nothing particularly wrong with this, it doesn't exactly bespeak brotherhood out of love. Rather, it would just be a transaction - a fair one perhaps, but not much more. Again, it is about attitude.

Jesus' statement about praying in the closet or fasting secretly is not an equation to describe an equal transaction of favors. After all, what can we possibly give God that he doesn't already have? Instead, it is described as an act of true devotion, and not merely as a way to pay God for some exchange of benefits.

One of the interesting elements of blessings is that it is seemingly available to everyone to give and receive. Think of these passages:

Luke 2:28 Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,

James 3:9 Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.

3 Nephi 2:103 I have reason to bless my God and my Savior Jesus Christ that he brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem (and no one knew it save it were himself and those whom he brought out of that land) and that he hath given me and my people so much knowledge, unto the salvation of our souls.

The wrinkle this adds to the mystery of blessings is that they are not only sent from God to us. Rather, we can bless God as described by Simeon in Luke 2, James in James 3, and Mormon in 3 Nephi 2. If these were idle words then it would basically mean these holy men had spoken nonsense. Yet it seems they did not speak nonsense. Just imagine what confusion David must have had when he wrote these words, if blessing could not be given from men or women:

Psalms 145:1 I will extol thee, my God, O King; and I will bless thy name forever and ever.

Psalms 145:2 Every day will I bless thee; and I will praise thy name forever and ever.

Psalms 145:21 My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord; and let all flesh bless his holy name forever and ever.

So even the act of blessing the name of the Lord must represent something very special and spiritual. Surely it is not that we can expect to give God something that he doesn't already have either spiritually or physically...or does it?

The one thing we can give the Lord is worship. The Lord gave us free will - the agency to choose between good and evil way back in the time of the garden east of Eden. Adam and Eve made their first choice between good and evil when they partook of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Our agency is the one thing the Lord has decreed that cannot be taken from us.

The act of worship is a willful choice to give obeisance and to submit to the reign of God over us. When we bless the name of the Lord, it is an act of worship, or in other words, it is a willful choice to accept, admit, and follow the Lord and to acknowledge his superiority over all things.

Do you see how there is a difference, then, between the blessings we can give and the blessings God can give? The blessings we can give to him are our worship, while the blessings he can give to us are the grace and abundance of his Spirit.

But there is more. Remember how Jacob blessed his sons? We can also bless others, but it is not an act of worship in doing so, or at least, not an act of worship of the one that we bless.

Genesis 14:25 (Inspired Version) And Melchizedek lifted up his voice and blessed Abram.

I should say, rather, in this case that Melchizedek blessed Abram because the Holy Ghost moved upon him to do so. And that is also true for Jacob and his sons - the blessings he bestowed upon them were manifested to him by the Spirit of God.

There is one other element of blessing I would like to mention. The blessing of "things." That might sound a bit funny at first, but we do it every month:

1 Corinthians 10:16 **The cup of blessing which we bless**, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?

Moroni 4:4 O God, the eternal Father, we ask thee, in the name of thy Son Jesus Christ, **to bless and sanctify this bread** to the souls of all those who partake of it, that they may eat in remembrance of the body of thy Son and witness unto thee, O God, the eternal Father, that they are willing to take upon them the name of thy Son, and always remember him, and keep his commandments which he hath given them, that they may always have his Spirit to be with them. Amen.

Moroni 5:3 O God, the eternal Father, we ask thee, in the name of thy Son Jesus Christ, **to bless and sanctify this wine** to the souls of all those who drink of it, that they may do it in remembrance of the blood of thy Son which was shed for them, that they may witness unto thee, O God, the eternal Father, that they do always remember him, that they may have his Spirit to be with them. Amen.

Yes, the sacrament of the Lord's supper consists of bread and wine that are blessed, and it is done by one having authority from God to administer it. The blessing comes by prayer, and this particular set of blessings is to make sacred something that is common. It is not sacred for its own sake, but for what it is set aside for and for what it represents. The blessing is associated with a promise on the part of the individuals who partake so that by remembering the Lord Jesus they might have his Spirit to be with them.

We find another blessing upon a "thing" (if that is the correct term) -

Ether 4:22 And thus the Lord did pour out his blessings upon this land, which was choice above all other lands; and he commanded that whoso should possess the land should possess it unto the Lord, or they should be destroyed when they were ripened in iniquity; for upon such, saith the Lord, I will pour out the fullness of my wrath.

The land received a blessing - and a cursing - depending upon the people who inherit it. A blessing if they are faithful and a cursing if they are sinful. This is not all that different from what Moses declared to the Israelites before his departure:

Deuteronomy 30

19 I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live:

20 That thou mayest love the Lord, thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him; for he is thy life and the length of thy days--that thou mayest dwell in the land which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.

It seems then that this is a very versatile term that is used ubiquitously throughout scripture. If someone tells you "bless you," or if God tells you "you are blessed," then it represents the affectionate good-will of the one doing the blessing.

You may not be able to calculate the value of a blessing in terms that have great meaning in this world, but the blessings we have are not just of this world. Ultimately we find one blessing to be so exceedingly valuable that it is beyond calculation by any human measure:

Acts 3:26 Unto you first, God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.

The term "bless" that is used here has a depth of meaning that is belied by its simplicity. Jesus was sent to bless us, but what a blessing that is! It invokes the entire meaning of the virgin birth, life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus, along with the forgiveness of sins, the bestowal of the Holy Ghost and the gifts of the Spirit, and ultimately the resurrection of all people and the hope of eternal life! Surely that is the most condensed version of the gospel as spelled out in just one word, "bless."

It is so casually used these days - even by Christians - that it is used as a simple greeting, and so many times it makes you wonder if we have become so casual about our beliefs that we have minimized the value of this word. But the holy prophets and apostles used it in their language for very specific, very important and very powerful reasons. The patriarchs of old sought out those blessings with a fervency that many of us may not appreciate because our language has become nearly dismissive of the value of the idea it represents.

Now that we have examined for a moment the term "blessing," how do you plan to use it moving forward?

Jared