

~Other Speakers G-L: Raymond Golsworthy:

The God who gives life

It is plain from Scripture that there were times when God's servants could no longer contain the love and praises that were welling up in their hearts. As they looked back over the years, and thought of the goodness and mercy of the God they were serving, expressions of worship and adoration, just burst forth from their inmost beings. The fact was that, as they walked with God, and worked with Him, His incomparable character was gradually being unfolded before them, and they could only cry out, "Blessed be God"; "Blessed be God."

It will be well for us to note a few examples of this, and also, what it was in each case, that provoked these outbursts; what particular aspects of God's character were they thinking of at the time, and what expressions of His goodness were immediately in their view.

It is impressive that, on three occasions, when writing their letters, God's servants suddenly came out with the identical expression, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is!" Both Peter and Paul did this, and, in each case, they went on to tell what it was that was moving them, and what was provoking this outburst of praise.

Basically of course, it was this matter of God being "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" and deigning to send Him into our dark and needy world. Both Peter and Paul had personally met this Christ (be it at the River Jordan or on the Damascus Road) and they could now do no other than worship and adore the Father, who had graciously sent Him! Hence the expression, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." In a word, it is this incomparable mystery of the Father sending His Son to be the Saviour of the world (see 1 John 4:14). It was that that lay behind whatever followed, and opened the way for the mention of certain explicit and associated mercies of God for which He is to be praised.

Let us notice, first, the example of Peter. He had scarcely started his letter to his, many scattered friends and brethren, when we find him exclaiming: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ which hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Pet. 1:3).

We emphasise those central words "begotten us again", for it was that marvel that moved the heart of Peter as he began to write this letter. What a God he had found! What a mighty Master he is serving! This "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" has now become our Father! He has regenerated us; He has performed the miracle of new birth in trusting hearts. He has done it for Peter; He has done it for those "strangers scattered abroad." Yes, says Peter, He is the life-giving God, and there is no other god like Him. Indeed, indeed, blessed be God, the Giver of new life!

We might remark here that if anyone needed a new life, it was this same Peter! He was the one who had denied Christ, and had done so with oaths and cursings (see Matt. 26: 72-74). Yet, such is the grace of God, that even he had been born again, and, indeed, filled with the Spirit of the Christ whom he had denied. The Scriptures tell us that Peter had wept bitterly after denying Christ, but now we see him singing songs of irrepressible joy to the God who had dealt so bountifully with him (see Psalm 13:6).

And, as we said, God had done the same for all those "strangers scattered abroad" to whom Peter was writing. All of them, through their repentance and faith, had been made "sons and daughters of the Lord God almighty" (2 Cor. 6:18). All of them now had "a living hope", and, now, as members of God's family, were heirs of an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away" (1 Pet. 1:4). All this immeasurable enrichment had stemmed from the marvel of a new birth, and Peter could only say, "Blessed be God; the God who infuses glorious newness of life, and makes us His heirs!"

We notice that, right at the heart of Peter's exultant cry, there is mention of God's "abundant mercy" (verse 3). This, of course, was the root cause of God's regenerating act; it was an act of mercy. We need to realise that, as our forgiveness comes to us as an act of mercy, so does our new birth. Indeed, it would be right to say that, by planting the resurrection life of Christ within us, God is demonstrating how abundant His mercy is, and to what lengths it will go! It was mercy that brought God's Son into this world; it was mercy that brought the gospel to us; it was mercy that forgave us, and it is mercy, pure mercy, that makes us partakers of the life of the risen Lord. What a wonderful God Peter had found, willing to impart His Own overcoming life into the trusting hearts of hell-deserving sinners. Indeed, indeed, blessed be God, blessed be God!

To any unsaved person reading these lines, we would earnestly say, do not delay any longer. Right now you can make your own personal contact with Peter's life-giving God. Bow down in humble confession of your sins, and thank Christ for shedding His blood for you. Put your trust in Him for everything. You will then taste for yourself God's forgiving mercy, and the power of Christ's risen life entering into you. Thus regenerated, you, too, will be rightful heir to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away. And your heart, too, will begin to break forth with Peter's in his exultant cry: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." You will have touched Peter's wonder-working God, the God who imparts life; and the only God who can ever do so. Do not delay.

The God who blesses

In the previous we drew attention to the fact that there were certain occasions mentioned in Scripture when the servants of God felt compelled to burst forth in uncontainable praises to the God they were serving. Even in their letters, we come across such outbursts, often introduced with the words, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ", and we noted that on each such case, a reason is given as to why the writers could not restrain their outcries of praise.

We have already discussed Peter's outburst regarding our being "begotten again unto a lively hope" (1 Pet. 1:3), indicating that he was being seized upon afresh by the sheer wonder of God imparting His Own Life to those who trust Him for their salvation. Here we would only add that this "impartation of Life" is itself the very essence of real Christianity, and our Bibles make it clear that we are only God's people as we have received and experienced this divine deposit, or, in other words, have been born again (see John 3:3). The very fact that God does perform this miracle and has done it for Peter and his friends, just seizes on Peter's heart as he writes his letter, and brings forth the cry, "Blessed be God"; "Blessed be God."

We now move on to consider a similar outburst, this time from the Apostle Paul. Writing to the Ephesian Christians "and right at the beginning of his letter" Paul exclaims, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). So he, too, is being stirred to cry out the same cry; but here it is for a somewhat different reason. What is here moving Paul is the thought of the infinite wealth that God bestows on all believers at the very outset of their Christian life. He marvels at the fact that, even then, God has already blessed them with all they could possibly need; He has credited them with a measureless Resource. Christ Himself is already in them, and all that Christ has already belongs to them and is immediately available for their use and enjoyment as they walk the walk of faith, looking unto Jesus. Small wonder, then, that Paul joins Peter in exclaiming "Blessed be God". He is a God who has given us His everything.

In the verses that follow verse three, Paul gives us what we may call a sample list of the blessings that believers already have in Christ, but it is not our purpose now to go through that list. We will only stay with the fact that God has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ. In giving Christ to us, baptizing us (= plunging us!) into Him (Rom. 6:3,4) and "joining us to Him, one spirit" (1 Cor. 6:17), indeed, infusing Him into us (Cor. 13:5b; Col. 1:27), God has enriched us with all we can ever need for the Christian life. That is what is moving Paul.

And should it not be the same with us as we ponder this fathomless mystery? We start off in our new life with a "credit" that is as measureless as Christ Himself, for He is our credit. His in us as our Life (Col. 1:18); and what He possesses we possess. All is immediately available to us and ready to be drawn upon, and "lived by" (see John 6:57).

Perhaps we could here use a simple illustration of this great truth. We are told that, in former times, when an Arctic expedition was about to be launched, everything that these explorers could possibly need during their coming months of total isolation was carefully thought of well before their departure, and all was methodically stored away for them in their ship. Even the most unlikely emergencies were anticipated and full provision made "all to be drawn upon as the need arose. Thank God, that is certainly the case with the born-again Christian. All that he will need along the way is stored up for him in the risen Lord Himself, so that, "from His fulness we may all receive grace upon grace" (see John 1:16).

How sad it is that so few Christians are aware of this truth; they do not see it, and do not live on this basis! How "foolish" (Gal. 1:1,3) to try to generate, or develop, our own resource, when such a wealth in Christ is already provided for us! The simple Bible truth is that that old and fleshly resource of ours has been crucified and buried in the death and burial of Christ our Representative, and we are now able to live from a totally new supply (Phil. 1:19) "our risen Lord. Needless to say, this new attitude and approach never comes easily to

our proud flesh. Like the Galatians, we are so eager to do and to be something ourselves; to contribute at least something as from ourselves. But God, in His love and wisdom has planned it otherwise; every step of the way it has to be "Not I, but Christ" (Gal. 2:20). Sooner or later we shall have to learn that only this is spiritually effective and acceptable to God, and only this brings happiness.

Once Paul himself saw this truth, he readily admitted that all his previous and greatly-prized assets and advantages (as Saul of Tarsus the capable Pharisee) counted for nothing. In fact he tells us that he regarded it all as "putrefying refuse", something to be totally abandoned in favour of Christ. And he eagerly shared his secret with all the churches, and with us (see Phil. 3:4-7). Praise God, we are, indeed, "blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3)!

We believe that all who see this will want to sing and shout with Paul, "Blessed be God"; "Blessed be God."

If any of this is not yet clear to you, we urge you to come before Him now. Humbly confess before Him your personal need as best you know it. Christ loves you and gave Himself for you. Take Him to be your Lord and Saviour, and, indeed, your very life. And learn to draw upon Him for everything you need every moment that you live. You, too, will then be saying and singing, "Blessed be God"; "Blessed be God."

The God who comforts

We have been considering certain occasions, mentioned in Scripture, when the hearts of God's servants burst forth in uncontrollable praises to the God they were serving, and we have been noting what it was, in each case, that was moving them at the time. Peter, we saw, cried out at the thought that his God is a God, who imparts life, His Own life, into the hearts of those who trust Him (1 Pet. 1:3). We then saw that Paul uses the same expression when thinking of the fact that God blesses those trusting ones with "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3); sending them forth on their new journey, fully equipped with all they could ever need. Christ has all, so they in union with Christ, are rich beyond all telling. No wonder Peter and Paul cry out in unison: "Blessed be God"; "Blessed be God."

We now move a step further and find Paul bursting forth with praise again when writing to the Corinthian believers. His words, in this case, were: "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God" (2 Cor. 1:3,4). Again we say, what a wonderful God Paul has found, in this case One Who is ever present to minister His own comforts to those who experience tribulations for His sake, and specifically while seeking to spread His gospel. Through long experience, Paul had come to know this God, and his heart cries out again, "Blessed be God"; that God of comfort!

Paul certainly knew what he was writing about when he spoke of tribulations, and in this same letter to the Corinthians, he sums it up as follows: "In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers" in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness" in weariness and painfulness" in hunger and thirst" in cold and nakedness. Beside these things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches" (2 Cor. 11:26-28). And even that, we may say, was only part of the story. But let us mark well that it was not the sufferings that provoked any outburst from God's servant, but purely and simply the memory of how his God had comforted him in his trials, and doing so in such measure that he was able to pass on the surplus of comfort to all others that were in need!

Just one example of this will here suffice. In Acts 27, we read of the violent storm at sea, which Paul encountered while being escorted to Rome for his trial. The historian, who was himself present at the time, described the scene as follows: "No small tempest lay on us, and all hope that we should be saved was taken away. But" Paul stood forth in the midst" and said, "Sirs, be of good cheer" for there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying fear not, Paul." Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer" (Acts 27: 21-25). Yes, indeed, right at the height of the storm, God was at hand comforting his servant, and Paul was able to comfort others from the same comfort! This may be an extreme example, but the fact is that in countless situations, God had made Himself known to Paul as "the God of all comfort", and that itself brought forth the cry "Blessed be God".

We should perhaps point out, here, that the original word for comfort in 2 Cor. 1 implies a "coming alongside to impart urgently needed help". It could be likened, for instance, to a powerful swimmer coming alongside a drowning man, or, as it is specifically used in Scripture "1 John 2:1), a capable advocate coming alongside a bewildered client to help him in his legal problems. Basically, however, it is this same matter of a near presence, and the outflow and inflow of much needed help. Praise God!

From long experience Paul knew that that was the character and nature of the God he served, and just to think of it made him, as it were, leap for joy and exclaim, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who comforts us in all our tribulation. Well he knew that the heathen gods of Corinth did not have hearts like this, in fact they did not have hearts at all, but his was "the God of all comfort".

The Bible says that this God changes not (Mal. 3:6; Jas. 1:17) and we may be sure that at this very moment, Paul's faithful God is drawing near to countless suffering souls all over the world and graciously imparting His Own needed help. And, in due time, He will be praised for doing so.

The Christian gospel is certainly a gospel of comfort, for it tells us how this "God of all comfort" personally came alongside our whole human race when He sent His Son to die for us at Calvary, and to shed His blood for all our sins. Praise God, the Saviour rose again, and now, in another sense, God is alongside us and waiting to implant into us the resurrection life of that Beloved One (1 Pet.1:3), making Him our "All in all", and the Sum of all heavenly blessings (Eph. 1:3). Let us gratefully respond to Him, and if we do begin to suffer for His sake, we may be sure that He will come alongside us again, comforting and helping us in ways we could never describe (2 Cor. 1:3).

And could it not be, dear reader, that, as you read these lines, God is coming alongside you, in your need, proffering His help, and showing you His Way (John 14:6).

Please bow your head before that living and loving One right now. Confess to Him your deep heart-need, and take Christ as your Lord and Saviour. Then you will get to know Him for yourself, and very soon, your heart, like Peter's, and like Paul's, will burst forth with the same exclamation, "Blessed be God"; "Blessed be God."