

**Ascend:
Is It Right to Ask for God's Blessing?
Psalm 128**

Dr. Steve Horn

July 24, 2016

Introduction to Text: This morning we are continuing a series called, "Ascend." This series is an expositional study of Psalms 120-134. Each of these Psalms has the heading "Song of Ascents." Most believe that these are songs that worshippers sang as they made their way to Jerusalem for thrice annual special times of worship. If this is so, then we learn a great deal about what was on their hearts as they approached worship and thus understand what should be upon our hearts as we prepare to worship or just give attention to the subject of worship. We are considering one each Sunday for the weeks of this summer. Today, we are studying Psalm 128. Here is a Bible passage that helps us to think about the question, "Is it right to ask for God's blessing?"

Text: How happy is everyone who fears the LORD,
who walks in His ways!

²You will surely eat
what your hands have worked for.

You will be happy,
and it will go well for you.

³Your wife will be like a fruitful vine
within your house,
your sons, like young olive trees
around your table.

⁴In this very way
the man who fears the LORD
will be blessed.

⁵May the LORD bless you from Zion,
so that you will see the prosperity of Jerusalem
all the days of your life

⁶and will see your children's children!
Peace be with Israel.

Introduction: Is it right to ask for God's blessing? In Genesis 32, we read about Jacob's all night wrestling with an unknown being. Later Jacob acknowledges that he has seen God face to face. Jacob asks, "Do not let me go until you bless me!"

Here in this text, the worshippers have journeyed to bless God in worship, but in worship, they are freed to ask for God's blessing. Seeking the blessing of God is the recognition that we depend upon God for that which we cannot do for ourselves. We are truly in the hands of God. So, is it right to ask for God's blessing? Absolutely, we cannot live without the blessing of God on our lives.

Yes, because . . .

God's blessings fall on the faithful!

1. On those who fear God.

What does it mean to fear God? The word fear can be somewhat confusing, but don't be confused about fearing God. It's simple. I think there are Scriptures to help.

- Psalm 89:7 says, "God is greatly feared in the council of the holy ones, more awe-inspiring than all who surround Him."

So, fearing God means greatly respecting and referencing Him.

- 2 Corinthians 7:1 says, "Therefore, dear friends, since we have such promises, let us cleanse ourselves from every impurity of the flesh and spirit, completing our sanctification in the fear of God."

So, fearing God results in obeying God.

The Bible, in 1 Kings 18, tells of a man named Obadiah who was in charge of the palace. Jezebel was the queen. She had slaughtered the Lord's prophets. Obadiah, though, hid 100 of the Lord's prophets. In 1 Kings 18:3 we read why. "Obadiah was a man who greatly feared the Lord."

I think what we could say is that Obadiah feared God more than he feared Jezebel.

Oswald Chambers said about fearing God: "The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God, you fear nothing else; whereas if you do not fear God, you fear everything else."

2. On those who walk with God.

Walking in His ways means doing exactly what He asks in the way that He asks: you love your wife the way He says to love her; you lead your children the way He says to lead them; you do your job in a way that pleases Him. You live to "walk worthy of the calling you have received" (Eph 4:1). If you want your life to change, to be better, then you must resolve to follow His commands. (From Lifeway blog)

Author Larry Crabb remembers as a four year old watching his dad, who was a pastor, lead the congregation in prayer during the Lord's Supper. Crabb says even as a four year old boy, I remember thinking, "He actually thinks he is talking to someone." He noticed his father "walking with God."

Jews use Psalm 128 often in wedding ceremonies and refer to it as the Marriage Prayer. They use it to indicate a 7 fold blessing. The first blessing is to fear and walk with God.

3. On those who trust God.

To this point, we might conclude that in order to receive the blessing we must fear God and walk with God. And, yet, sometimes those who fear God and walk with God have hard times. So, we must also trust God. Ultimately, the blessing comes from Him. The blessings of God are not so much mine to get as they are God's to give, so we trust Him.

Charles Spurgeon once said, "Every blessing that comes from God is sent with the same message, 'And more to follow.' 'I forgive you your sins, but there's more to follow.' 'I justify you in the righteousness of Christ, but there's more to follow.' 'I adopt you into my family, but there's more to follow.' 'I educated you for heaven, but there's more to follow.' 'I give you grace upon grace, but there's more to follow.' 'I have helped you even to old age, but there's still more to follow.' 'I will uphold you in the hour of death, and as you are passing into the world of spirits, my mercy shall still continue with you, and when you land in the world to come there shall still be more to follow.'"

God's blessings fall on the faithful. Our men heard this week from Kelvin Cochran. Kelvin shared with our men how he was fulfilling his boyhood dream to be a fire fighter. Not only that, he was the Fire Chief of a major city like Atlanta, GA. Here he was a boy from the projects of Shreveport, LA, carried by a dream and fearing and being faithful to God. But, he was fired in 2014 because in a book he wrote, he communicated his Biblical belief that homosexuality was a sin.

Now, somebody could say, here is a man who fears God, who walks in God's ways, but his reward is being fired not blessed. Kelvin would tell you that he is a blessed man. And here is why...

God's truest blessings follow the Father's priorities.

Beginning in verse 2 we see a list of what it means to be truly blessed. That is, it may not be the same list that the world would identify as blessing.

You could list in different ways, but here is my list of what the Psalmist says it means to be blessed.

- Work will be blessed.

I don't want something for nothing, but it is good to have a reward for your labor, isn't it? I want "to eat what my hands have worked for."

- Family will be blessed.

In verse 3, the attention turns to the family. In fact, this is a carry-over idea from the previous Psalm. True blessing is when your family is blessed. Olive shoots, for example, were symbols of hope for the future in the Jewish community. A father is truly blessed when he can look to his children as symbols of hope.

- Nation will be blessed.

The idea of blessedness extends beyond the family in verse 5. In order for my life to be truly blessed those around me will be blessed. I constantly pray for the blessing and favor of God to rest on our church, our community, and our country. Those seeking the blessing of God always want those around them to be blessed.

God's blessings flow down to others.

The worshippers rightly saw their blessing flowing to others. They wanted to be a blessing to those who come after them.

If we can rightly ask for the blessing of God, we will be blessed already.

So What?

I don't know about you, but I hear Jesus's word in this text. Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added to you."

Focus less on the blessing of God and more on the relationship with God and the blessings will take care of themselves.

Augustine, of the fourth century, said something that is still powerful for today. He said, "God wants to give us something, but He cannot, because our hands are so full, He has no place to put it."

Seek His Kingdom and all these things shall be added to you.