

Numbers 6: 22-27 :The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.

These are words used in our church services. They are familiar to regular people in Christian congregations.

What does it mean to be blessed? if I asked you how blessed you are what would your answer be? In a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being least blessed and 10 extremely blessed, how would you rate your life as blessed?
Quiet minute to have a think.

Of course, being blessed can have different meaning to different people. It can mean being healthy, having a job, good and healthy relationships etc.

But what does it really mean to be blessed by God?

The story of Abraham is a good example of a person who was blessed by God.

God said to Abraham *"Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing." I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse and all people on Earth will be blessed through you.'*

Imagine you were Abraham and God spoke to you regarding your future. How would this make you feel? Content? Happy? sure about life no matter what?

Abraham did not get to know where he was going, what he would experience, how he would get there, how long it would take, or what his life would be like when he arrived. Having nothing but the promise of God, Abraham stepped out in faith. He obeyed.

Apostle Paul in Romans said that against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, ¹⁹ *Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. ²⁰ Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, ²¹ being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.'*

The story of Abraham tells us that hope and believe kept him going when things were completely the opposite of God's promises. He was wealthy but the promise of being a father delayed. We know Sarah grew weary of waiting and had a plan B- Hagar who bore Ishmael to be Abraham's heir. Abraham went along with the plan. We also know that Abraham, hoped and believed in the promises.

Being blessed is a huge topic and I will not attempt to explore but rather touch a little bit on having peace God as a blessing. Every Sunday we share with each other the sign on peace which means it is a big part of our lives.

There once lived a very wealthy man who was willing to pay a small fortune to the artist who could best illustrate the presence of peace. Several artists brought paintings of sunsets and quiet meadows, but the man did not accept any of these. One day as he was walking through looking at the most recent attempts, two paintings captured his attention.

One was a painting of a beautiful calm lake surrounded by lush green mountains. The water seemed as still as glass. Wispy white clouds danced in the bright blue of the sky. Next to this painting was another with vast differences. It was also a picture of a lake surrounded by mountains, but the strong winds had whipped the lake into a tempest and the dark clouds hovered about the rugged mountain landscape ready to release a downpour of torrential rains.

The audience standing about watched with anticipation to see which one the man might choose to depict the story of peace. All were shocked when he did not choose the first, but instead chose the second. How could such a stormy scene tell a story of peace?

The rich man explained. The first painting was beautiful and peaceful, but it didn't tell the truth of where peace can be found. Anyone could feel peaceful upon a crystal-clear lake with white clouds drifting across the sky and not a breeze blowing across the water.

Then he pointed out something in the second painting which everyone else had overlooked. If you looked closely into the mountains of the second, there was a waterfall, and tucked into a crevice of that mountain near the waterfall was a small nest on which a mother bird sat upon tiny blue eggs.

The man spoke. "This second painting is a picture of true, perfect peace.

Now There is a lesson from this story.

It is within the storms of life, we find real peace tucked into the side of God, knowing His presence will guard and protect us even amid this world's storms."

We all in our lives experience storms and challenges which make us doubt and even at times have plan B, C and even D. Loss of a loved one, sickness, loss of a job or loss of income, challenging relationships, challenges in parenting, all these things affect us. As the story illustrates it is in the middle of these storms that we can find God's peace.

One thing we know for sure is that life will always have challenges. Jesus told his disciples "*In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*"

Some of us are going through very tough times. My encouragement this morning is that we have a loving God who cares and wants us to have rest. He is ready and willing to help us. He has his hands open for us to come to him in prayer "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest*" He says.

I would like to encourage you again that there is rest in God. It is human nature to worry.

We need the help of God so that we can sincerely come to him and find rest. Like Abraham, with God's help let us choose to hope, believe, and obey even in toughest of times.

God's promise of peace is also captured in Jesus's words. '*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*'

So let us come to God and ask him for the peace that he gives.

As we come to a close, I would like us to pray for three things. Recognising that in our own strength we struggle to find rest.

1. Prayer for ourselves, our families or/and friends who are going through tough times right now. So that we can stand firm in him even when the world around us is not peaceful. Pray for that peace that only God gives.
2. Prayer for ourselves to be peace makers. The word of God says *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*
3. We live in a world full of turmoil and it is hard to see it as a place of rest. Let us pray for peace for the world especially in places of War. Pray for leaders to seek peace and pursue it.

Let us take a moment to pray now quietly.

As we go out this week, let us consciously ask God in prayer to give us rest in him. seeking His peace instead of that which the world gives.

It is time now for our next hymn based on Psalms 23. As we sing this let us make it our prayer.