

October 16, 2005
Patchogue Church of the Nazarene
“The Blessings We Don’t Deserve”
(Based on a message by Stan Toler)
Gen. 32:26-29

But Jacob replied, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” The man asked him, “What is your name?” “Jacob,” he answered. Then the man said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome” . . . Then he blessed him there

Today’s Focus: We do not deserve God’s blessings—but He gives them anyway!
Food for Thought: I will be generous to others because God has been generous to me.

Introduction

(PK: cell phones – rather than candles)

Have you ever been to a candle lighting service, especially on Christmas Eve. There’s just something moving about watching that candle glow fill the entire room. It’s amazing, too, that it all starts with one tiny little flame. From just one candle, the light is passed from one to another until the whole room is glowing.

Now did you ever wonder why that one flame never gets smaller but only bigger and brighter? How is it possible you can take the light of a candle, divide it in half, then in half again and again and again—yet all of the candles glow with the same amount of light?

The reason the flame doesn’t diminish when you share it is because instead of diminishing, it spreads. When you give your flame away, you actually have twice the light—not half.

Many think when you share a blessing you lose a portion of it. Even lots of God’s people think when you share something good with others; you lose something in the process. In reality, sharing a blessing is just like sharing the flame of a candle—it spreads the light. When you share the good things God has given to you with others, you increase the blessing. It doesn’t diminish one bit.

Our God delights in blessing His people. He is generous in every way. He is like that initial flame in the candle lighting service. From Him, all good comes to us. And from Him we are blessed in order to bless others.

Today, I’d like us to make a decision together. I’d like us to agree we will be like God, in that we will be a blessing to others. Will you agree to spread the light?

1. God Can Give Us What We Need

When my kids used to ask me for Christmas presents, they always knew they might not get what they asked for. I enjoy giving, but they knew they wouldn’t get *everything* on

their lists. They knew I *could* give them any present they desired. And that's the kind of confidence we can have when we come to God. Whatever we request, we know He *can* do it.

In our passage today, we find Jacob wrestling with a man. Jacob is strong and holds his own in the fight. The man asks Jacob to let him go, but Jacob refuses unless the man blesses him. Jacob had no doubt the man *could* bless him. The question was *would* he bless him.

As we see in verse 29, the man did bless Jacob. We may wonder what it meant for the man to bless Jacob, and how Jacob knew he had been blessed. The night of the wrestling match, Jacob recognized the man was no ordinary person, but was, in reality, the angel of the Lord. That's why Jacob named the place Peniel, which means "face of God." He realized he had come face to face with God.

It might seem odd to be wrestling with an angel of the Lord—really with God himself—but remember where Jacob was. This was an important night in his life. He was preparing to face his brother, Esau, who had threatened to kill him. Jacob knew that in order for him to return to his homeland, he'd have to settle things with Esau. Jacob knew he needed strength beyond himself to face the brother he had wronged and cheated. That's why he was so desperate to have God's blessing. Jacob needed help!

Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever come to a place in your life where you knew you couldn't make it on your own? Maybe it's a financial situation or illness. Maybe it's a problem in your marriage or family. Maybe it's the loss of a loved one. You came to a place where all you could do was hang on tight and cry out, "Lord, please help me—now!"

That's where Jacob was.

But God has promised to bless us with good things. Whatever we need, we know we can come to God with confidence, and He *can* provide. What are some of the blessings God has given us? The late minister F. E. Marsh listed some of God's blessings, such as:

- An acceptance that can never be questioned (Eph. 1:6).
- An inheritance that can never be lost (1 Pet. 1:3-5).
- A deliverance that can never be excelled (2 Cor. 1:10).
- A grace that can never be limited (2 Cor. 12:9).
- A hope that can never be disappointed (Heb. 6:18-19).
- A bounty that can never be withdrawn (1 Cor. 3:21-23).
- A joy that need never be diminished (John 15:11).
- A nearness to God that can never be reversed (Eph. 2:13).
- A peace that can never be disturbed (John 14:27).
- A righteousness that can never be tarnished (2 Cor. 5:21).
- A salvation that can never be canceled (Heb. 5:9).

Think about your own life for a minute. Think about all the good things God has given you throughout your life. What is the evidence of God's blessing in your life? How have you seen His touch in your world?

Now, let me ask you another question. How many of God's blessings have you deserved?

2. God Blesses Us Though We Don't Deserve It

Let's go back to Jacob for a minute. Until this point in his life, Jacob hadn't cared much about God. He thought of God as his "father's god"—not his own. He had never embraced God for himself. In fact, Jacob was something of a louse. He lied to his father and cheated his brother, Esau, out of his birthright. He was a hustler and a swindler who seemed to get the better of everyone he ever dealt with.

Yet in spite of this, Jacob called out for God's blessing. When the going really got tough, Jacob called on God, even though he had ignored God for years.

Now let me ask: If you were God, what would you have done? Do you think it was fair for Jacob to expect God's help after he had turned his back on God for so long?

Most of us would agree he didn't deserve any help.

Well, he may not have *deserved* God's help, but he got it anyway, because the angel of the Lord blessed Jacob. That's the kind of God we serve—a God of generosity, who loves us even when we don't deserve His love.

Jesus told a story in Matthew 20 about a landowner who hired people to work for him. Throughout the day, he continued to add workers to his vineyard. That evening, some had worked for an hour, others for 3 hours, and others for 6 hours, and yet others worked for 12 hours. When the workday ended, he paid each worker the same wage—from the last-hired to the first. Those who had worked longer hours complained the owner wasn't fair. The landowner reminded them that each of the workers had agreed to work for their promised wage. He also reminded them he had the right to use his money as he chose, and asked if they were envious because he was generous. In other words, God has a right to give people something better than they deserve or earn—and He does. Many here today can testify to this truth.

That's good news for you and me, because the Bible says we have all "earned" death. "For the wages of sin is death;" But there's good news: "the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). God gives us something better than we deserve—He blesses us.

Isaiah 30:18 says, "Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion." It isn't that we deserve God's blessing. We don't. Despite our unworthiness of God's blessings, He gives to us in overflowing measures. Someone described "grace" as "everything for nothing to those who don't deserve anything." That's the place where each of us lives!

A story is told about the dark days of the last century—the Great Depression and World War II:

The people of New York City often referred to Mayor Fiorella LaGuardia as “the Little Flower,” because he was only five feet four and always wore a carnation in his lapel. He was a colorful character who rode along on fire trucks, raided speakeasies with the police, took entire orphanages to baseball games, and whenever New York City newspapers were on strike, read the Sunday funnies to the kids via radio.

One bitterly cold night in January 1935, the mayor turned up at the night court that served the poorest ward of the city. An obscure law allowed the mayor of New York to serve as a magistrate. On this particular evening, LaGuardia invoked his right, dismissed the judge for the evening, and took over the bench himself. Within a few minutes, a tattered old woman was brought before him, charged with stealing a loaf of bread. She told LaGuardia her daughter’s husband had deserted her, the daughter was sick, and her two grandchildren were starving. Yet the shopkeeper, from whom the bread was stolen, refused to drop the charges.

“It’s a real bad neighborhood, your Honor,” the shopkeeper told the mayor. “She’s got to be punished to teach other people around here a lesson.” LaGuardia sighed. He turned to the woman and said, “I’ve got to punish you. The law makes no exceptions—10 dollars or 10 days in jail.” But even as he pronounced sentence, the mayor was already reaching into his pocket. He extracted a bill and tossed it into his famous sombrero saying, “Here is the ten dollar fine which I now remit; and furthermore I am going to fine everyone in this courtroom fifty cents for living in a town where a person has to steal bread so that her grandchildren can eat. Mr. Bailiff, collect the fines and give them to the defendant.”

The following day, New York City newspapers reported \$47.50 was turned over to a bewildered old lady who had stolen a loaf of bread to feed her starving daughter and grandchildren—50 cents of that amount being contributed by the red-faced store owner. Some 70 petty criminals, as well as a number of New York City policemen—each of whom had just paid 50 cents for the privilege of doing so—gave the mayor a standing ovation.

That’s a picture of generosity.

We serve a generous God—a God who—himself, suffered and died on the cross for us. He has blessed us beyond measure with houses and wealth and families and health. We are truly a blessed people.

Will any one of us stand up and say this is what we deserve? We know better. We are blessed because God is generous—not because we deserve it, but in spite of it.

3. God Wants Us to Bless Others

When I was a child, I looked forward to Christmas as much as any other kid—maybe more! It's always fun to receive presents. But as I grew older, I discovered something important. It's actually more fun to give gifts than to receive them. There's great joy in being generous.

By the way, God wants us to know this wonderful truth, and He wants us to experience the joy of being generous.

If you take time to read the story, you'll notice when God blessed Jacob, the blessing wasn't for him alone. Through Jacob, God promised all subsequent generations would be blessed. Jacob passed God's blessing to his sons and grandsons—all the way down the line to you and me. Through Jacob's line came the forefathers of Jesus Christ to provide the world with the greatest blessing of all—"God with us."

One important thing to remember is God doesn't give His blessings to us so we can keep them to ourselves. He always gives them for our benefit and the benefit of others. As we are blessed, we have both the privilege and responsibility to bless others. The Apostle Paul encourages us to be generous. He says we are blessed with everything we need so we can do good works. Paul says, "You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God" (2 Cor. 9:11).

I love the story Melva Cooper tells about her eight year old granddaughter, Mary Kathryn.

One day, Mary Kathryn—all excited—brought home her report card. She got all "A"s, and she knew her grandfather would give her a dollar for each of them. Sure enough, granddad was thrilled to see the excellent grades and counted out six one-dollar bills for Mary Kathryn.

She was thrilled! She now had six dollars to spend any way she chose!

A couple of days later, Mary Kathryn asked her grandmother to take her to the Dollar Store. She said, "Grandma, I want to spend four of my six dollars to replace the items in our treat box at school. That will leave two dollars for me." Picking out just four things at the Dollar Store wasn't all that easy. Mary Kathryn would pick one thing, then put it back and choose something else. Finally she had it narrowed down to six items.

"Help me choose four things, Grandma," Mary Kathryn pleaded. The little girl was in a quandary. If she chose two items for herself, she would have to put some of the others back. She wouldn't be able to give all she wanted to the other children.

Finally, the little girl made a decision. "I know, Grandma," she said, "I will just use all of my six dollars to give to the treat box at school."

That little girl learned a great lesson. It's actually more satisfying to be generous. When you give to others, you gain even more.

All of us can be a lot like that little girl, clutching our six dollars tightly, thinking of all the things we can do for ourselves with the money. In reality, everything we receive is a gift from God.

It goes against human nature to give away rather than keep things for ourselves. But isn't this just like God? We lose what we hold onto and gain what we give away.

What do you own about which you can honestly say, "Someone else needs this more than I do"? Have you ever looked at the balance on your investment account and realized, "I have more money than I need"? When you have an opportunity to give, do you see it as a chance to bless others?

Here is the question for each of us: "Am I willing to be generous to others like God is generous to me?"

Conclusion

For almost forty years, Eunice Pike worked with the Mazatec Indians in southwestern Mexico. During this time she discovered some interesting things about these beautiful people. For instance, the people seldom wished someone well. Also, they were hesitant to teach one another or to share the gospel with each other. If asked, "Who taught you to bake bread?" the village baker answered, "I just know," meaning he had acquired the knowledge without anyone's help. Eunice says this odd behavior stemmed from the Indian's concept of "limited good." They believed there was only so much good, so much knowledge, so much love to go around. To teach another meant you might drain yourself of knowledge. To love a second child meant you had to love the first child less. To tell someone "Have a good day!" meant you gave away some of your own happiness, which could not be reacquired.

When it comes to generosity, our thinking can become like that of the Mazatecs. We may think that by giving to others, we will have less.

Here is the lesson every one of us needs to learn—God's grace has no limit. His generosity is boundless. When He gives to us, He is not made less by it. And when we give to others, we gain.

Make this decision today: I will be generous to others because God is so generous to me.