

Not Mine to Give

As we have sought God's blessing in worship, conveyed God's blessing to our students and school staff and shared of God's blessing through giving of gifts and self; to the church, to those still struggling from the storms and in commitment to Lebanon Kids, I find it fitting to consider these aspects of our morning and the Scriptures we have shared in comparison (dare I say "in light of") to a generator, an electrical outlet and an extension cord.

Those of you worshipping with us last week as well as those studying the Prayer of Jabez, may remember that "blessing" is one of those "not of this world" words, that blessing is connected and dependent upon God and therefore cannot be fully captured in human language, or I dare to say, experience. We talked of the identifying marks of a life blessed by God, as we're told Jabez's was, how the clearest sign may be worn out knees as to be blessed is to kneel before God.

To give a blessing is something we frequently participate in; you gave a blessing in our call to worship or time of gathering. Together we blessed backpacks as sign and symbol of our desire for God's blessing on our students and schools. Others have been and will be blessed by our sharing, of what we have as well as what we are, by our sharing financially, spiritually, relationally (which is bound to spiritually), and physically, by the practice of godly stewardship.

As wonderful as these experiences are, I want us to pause and consider who has done what, who does what, and who has promised what will be. Though our language may be interpreted differently, it is vital to our faith, and for the blessing to be more than just words, to proclaim and give thanks blessings are God's alone to give. If we are tracing the line to the supply of power, that power is God and God alone. It is in all we have done today, all good that has ever been done, and all good that will be. God is the "generator", the source, the one that without there could be no power, no hope, no life. God Blesses! These blessings are not only in the things we gain or experience this blessing is God's presence, the Spirit of Christ, abiding with us.

For us to be a blessing first of all requires that we be grounded in Christ. In order to live as Peter wrote: keeping our tongues from evil and our lips from deceitful speech; turning from evil and doing good; seeking peace and pursuing it, eagerly doing good, not fearing what others fear and living frightened, timid lives, having hearts where Christ is set apart as Lord, always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks us the reason for the hope we display, with responses that are filled with gentleness and respect; we must be vessels for God and not be working from or dependent on our own power and ability. Much like an electrical outlet, we are to be a part of the greater "wall", yet differ in noticeable and remarkable ways. We are to

stand out, be recognized, provide connection and be available. Yet if not connected to the power source there would be no difference, no blessing.

This life that Peter describes is worthy of much greater contemplation that time allows today. Indeed it provides a wonderful place to more fully flesh out the signs of a life blessed by God. I encourage each of you to hold this passage in your thoughts, prayers and reflections this week. Ask God to illuminate where you are an outlet and where you are just a part of the wall.

Out of God's great love and knowledge of what makes for a fulfilled and content life, God not only blesses and allows us to be a blessing, God grants us the privilege of giving blessings. We bless our food, any number of items and objects and we bless others. One of the ways I have been in prayerful consideration while preparing this message has been to converse with Rabbi M. Younger, who shared that priests and others "are enjoined to bless by beseeching God to bless others. God is the source of all blessing and they are merely a catalyst for the blessing to "come down". He pointed me to Numbers 6:22-27, which provides the structure under which Jewish priests and others offer blessings:

... 'This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: ' "The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace." ' So they (the ones' blessing) will put my name on the Israelites (the people of God), and I will bless them." For me, this is the extension cord, useful but not necessary. Unable to function without connection to the outlet, to a God blessed, knees bent life. To give a blessing is to connect our lives to God and then offer a conduit for others to find their own relationship with God.

In giving a blessing we acknowledge that no stopping point along the way will bring blessing, not a growing, loving relationship with others, though we certainly experience God's blessing through our relationships, not an involvement in a church, though the church is a wonderful tool for constructing and maintaining a faith filled life, not in the giving and doing of good, though our giving and doing in God's name can open hearts and doors. Nothing less that inviting and accepting the full infusion of God's goodness and grace leads to and allows blessings to flow. The only way I know of to have God's name imprinted upon my heart is by taking on the name and attitude of Jesus the Christ. It is in Christ's Spirit that I find blessing, I find life, I find the wires, plastic and other minor, inexpensive elements of my life transformed so that I may live as an outlet and serve as an extension cord, by the gift, grace and power of God to the Glory of Christ.

I can be content being just that, I can allow God to be God. We can find purpose and power in just that, we can be blessed and blessing.