**Advent Theme: Benediction**

**December 11th 2024 Midweek Advent II**

**Text: Numbers 6:22-25** 0753

**Theme: Benediction: The Warm Sun.**

May the benediction of our Triune God grant unto each of you joy and peace at this time of Advent. Amen. Dear Christian friends: Last Wednesday evening we began a series of sermons studying the benedictions of God, particularly those given in the Aaronic benediction given in the Old Testament. Though they were spoken by Aaron, the first high priest of Israel, they are not his words, but the words of very God Himself unto Israel of the Old Testament, but also unto Israel of the New Testament, that is, the Church. They are given for the benefit of all who believe, and are not meant, nor imparted to, any other people, for they are given through faith. Now as we remember from last Wednesday a benediction means: “to confer a blessing.” It is a conferring of blessing upon us, dear Christians; it is the giving of something directly from the hand of God. If they are the blessing of God, can we just gloss over them as they are spoken to us? Can we listen to them only insofar as they are a mark of the end of worship? No we cannot. They are to us the very confirmation of all that we have heard and done throughout the service up to that point, they seal and galvanize to us all the promises which we hear on a daily basis. For that reason they become one of the most important parts of each worship service, and something to be valued highly and anticipated as we begin and end our services.

A week ago we looked at the first of the three blessings which are imparted to us in the benediction of Aaron. It was to keep us. We saw that God, through the infant Jesus in His advent, keeps us in both body and soul. He keeps us in our bodies with every gift He gives us on a daily basis, such as our food, our clothing, homes, cars, jobs, among other things. Truly did we see that each of these gifts is given only for the sake of the sending of Christ, the first and ultimate gift of God. For without this gift we would have no other gifts, the keeping us in body would not only be unnecessary, but God would still be wrathful toward us and we would receive cursing rather than blessing. In Deuteronomy we see the antonym to the benediction of Aaron, we hear: *“Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field. Cursed shall be thy basket and thy store. Cursed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy land, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Cursed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and cursed shalt thou be when thou goest out. The Lord shall send upon thee cursing, vexation, and rebuke, in all that thou settest thine hand unto for to do, until thou be destroyed, and until thou perish quickly.” (Deut. 28:16-20)* These curses are for all those who despise the benediction, or blessings of the Lord. They are for the wicked and rebellious, for all who love not the Lord God, who in unbelief despise Him and His Son Jesus Christ. And thus when we hear the benedictions of our Lord it should remind us of the great gift He has given us in His Son Jesus Christ, so that through faith we receive blessing instead of cursing, and life instead of death, we receive keeping in our bodies. In addition God keeps us in the faith, in our souls, through the promises of the Gospel found within the birth of Jesus Christ. In those promises we have the basis of our faith, for therein we have faith because the promise is sure to all men. It is not in doubt and thus our faith grasps it, takes hold of it, yea, clings to it in desperation for our very lives are at stake. And it is here that we find the second blessing of our Triune God, given through the Advent of our Savior. And that is the benediction of the warm Sun. We will see this benediction according to our text for this evening which is found in the sixth chapter of the book of Numbers beginning at verse twenty two.

**Quote text here.**

Let us pray, O dearest Lord God almighty, we are ever fearful according to our flesh that Thou art still wrathful and angry over our sin and shame, and for that reason we fear death, we fear your almighty power. We implore Thee to have mercy upon us and do not impute our trespasses unto us, do not give us what we most assuredly deserve: thy wrath, cursing, bitterness of soul, and damnation. Yea, we remember with joy in our hearts the birth of Thy Son Jesus Christ, wherein we find redemption from sin, Thy grace shed abroad upon us like the warm sun on a cold day. Cause Thy face to shine upon us our whole lives through, that we not fear Thee as a wrathful God, but as a loving and merciful Father whom we adore in the face of the infant Jesus in the manger. Remind us ever of His coming, not just during the celebration of Advent and Christmas, that we may, the whole year through, receive Thy benediction in faith. Wherefore we shall praise and worship Thee evermore as the gracious and worthy King and Lord of all. Amen.

Dearest friends, let us hear and receive the benediction of our Lord and God, learning first that the warm Sun is:

1. **Shining upon us in mercy.** We read verses twenty two through twenty five of our text: **read verses here.** Imagine to yourself, for a moment a rainy, cool day, a day that you have been outside in the rain, and you are soaked from head to toe. Cold and shivering you long for warmth, your clothing soaked with water, and suddenly the rain stops and the clouds begin to break up, and then the first rays of sunlight begin to break through, and finally the sun is shining directly on to you. You soak up the warmth from the sun, you bask in its rays of heat, no longer cold, you begin to dry, the shivering stops. Keep in your mind the comfort and warmth of those days, remembering the feeling when the sun first comes through the clouds and the warmth that you feel. That is similar to what we discuss here tonight, though on a much greater scale. That is the idea behind what we hear in the benediction. When God’s face is turned away from us in His fierce wrath and anger it is as if we do not see the sun at all, it is a dark cloudy, rainy day, a day of drear and misery. It is a day of mourning, for we have cursing rather than blessing and death rather than life. In the day when God’s face is turned away from us we are in the darkness and blackness experienced by Adam and Eve shortly after their sin. They hid from God, they turned from Him, and in so doing removed from themselves the countenance of God which had looked in favor upon them. The turning of one’s face from another is a universal sign of contempt and anger, wrath and indignation. We may think of a time when perhaps our parents were so disgusted with an action of ours that they turned away from us, they could not even look at us for the deed which we had done. And thus putting this analogy in the context of our study this evening, to have God’s face turned away from us is a sure testimony of His wrath and indignation toward our corruption and sin, it is the opposite of a benediction, but contrariwise it is a curse of the worst sort, the very curse placed upon Adam and Eve in the Garden, but missing the blessing of promise. That is the very thing that unbelief is, the curse of man’s sin, without the hope of the promise. It is rejecting God’s benediction, and instead receiving His curse.

However, in contrast to that is the turning of God’s face toward us in mercy. It is His face turning toward us in favor. God’s mercy is defined as: not giving us what we deserve. In truth we deserve all the cursing of God, that is, to have Him turn His face away from us, and take with it all good in both body and soul, we deserve everything enumerated in Deuteronomy and much more. In truth we deserve the damnation of our souls, for that is what the Law of God declares. And for this reason the natural man fears the Law of God, he fears the wrath of God, he fears the punishment of God, he is afraid of God Himself, for one can neither believe, nor love God because of sin. And thus it is of God’s mercies that we are not consumed. His mercy is deeper than the deepest ocean, higher than the highest mountain. It is greater than our sin, if we can even fathom such a thing, and it refrains from doing to us what we most truly deserve: utter annihilation. And so it is that one of God’s benedictions is in not giving us something. It is the blessing of nothing, receiving nothing from God according to the state of our natural man. And so at this time of Advent it is most blessed to remember the mercy of God shown unto us in the face of His Son, whose face being shown to us is the face of God. It is turned toward us as the warmth of the sun on a rainy dreary day. In fact we hear in Malachi: *“But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings.” (Mal. 4:2)* And thus the warm Sun shines upon us in mercy, and it is also:

1. **Shining upon us in grace.** We read verse twenty five of our text: **read verse here.**  Here in this portion of the benediction we are given two blessings, first that God’s face shine upon us, a reference to turning toward us in favor, not giving us what we deserve, and also to be gracious unto us. It is not repeating the same thing. Contrary to what many say concerning mercy and grace, they are not the same thing. They are not synonyms of one another. Rather they are showingus two different gifts given unto us by God, one is not giving us wrath, the other is giving us love, love which we do not deserve in the least. We have not merited it, we do not work for it, we cannot choose it, we cannot decide to take hold of it. Paul says: *“If by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.” (Rom. 11:6)* You see it cannot be both.If salvation is by grace, then works must be excluded, if salvation is by works then grace is excluded. Neither one can be in participation of the other. They are mutually exclusive. And thus salvation is declared by God to be by grace, which excludes man from participation in the work of salvation, and thus it is a gift, a blessing, a benediction of God upon mankind in general, and on Christians in particular. Just think on what is here being conferred upon us by God, it is His undeserved love toward man, He sheds it upon us as the warm rays of the sun are shed upon us on a cold, rainy day. What a gift given at the time of Advent and Christmas! We often pass over the meaning and importance of Christmas, beholding it more as a story of Jesus’ birth than looking at His birth as a gift given directly to us, the shedding of God’s grace upon us in the form of a little infant child. This is told to us in the well known words of John: *“And the word was made flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, this was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me. And of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time: the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” (John 1:14-18)* You see Jesus Christ, the infant who lay in a manger is the very face of God shining upon us. He is the manifestation of God’s mercy and grace. When one sees and believes in Jesus Christ He receives the benediction here pronounced in the book of Numbers. He is the very benediction itself. And thus when we hear these words each and every Sunday we receive in our hearts the benediction of God given unto us in the form of our Savior. He is very mercy and grace. They are given through the giving of Him. And thus each and every Christmas, yea rather, every time we feel and see the mercy or grace of God we may celebrate the birth of our Savior in joy and hope of salvation, for we have each received both the mercy and grace of God by faith in that gift given so long ago in Bethlehem. It is a gift given to each individual person, as was declared to the shepherds, and even to the wise men. They received it like as we do, in faith. Therefore dear Christians, as we get ever closer to Christmas Day, may God’s face shine upon us, and ever remind us that we were not given what we deserve, but rather given what we do not deserve: life and salvation by Jesus Christ. Merry Christmas indeed to all who believe this! Amen.