

## **Blessing Promises: Our Spiritual Inheritance**

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This sermon is about your future, and more specifically about your spiritual inheritance. It is about things that will benefit you and me for eternity. I am talking about eternal blessings.

I am not sure if you have noticed the overuse of the word “love,” for example, in society today. It is used incorrectly far more than it is used correctly. Pop culture songs are rife with the wrong usage of this word, as are romance novels, TV shows, and movies.

Another overused word, and its various forms, found especially in the mainstream Christian community, are, ‘bless, blessed, and blessing.’ We hear bless you after a sneeze; have a blessed day upon parting company; or “wow, have I been blessed,” after receiving something expensive or some strongly desired material thing. One woman even said something similar to: “I’m so blessed. God gave me the exact bikini that I wanted!” (laughter) Really? Is God her genie, waiting at her beck and call to give her what she wants?

In mild defense of the general public's multiple uses of “blessed,” dictionary.com defines the adjective blessed four ways: 1) consecrated, sacred, holy, and sanctified; 2) worthy of adoration, reverence, or worship; 3) divinely or supremely favored; 4) blissfully happy or contented.

Blissfully happy or contented for a moment of gratification is probably the most common usage. In mainstream Christian circles the prosperity gospel has become so popular that it is even having its influence on the church of God groups. We should be aware of how our choice of words can get in the way of conveying our true intent.

How many times have you heard the reply, “God has blessed me” or “I feel very blessed” to our question of, "How was your week?" The words simply roll off the tongue without a second thought, but is it the truth? Were they truly blessed?

There has been a trend among Christians to sometimes wrongly use blessing, blessed, and bless and our habitual response to the receipt of material things is to call ourselves blessed. It seems to be a natural reaction of someone who professes to be a Christian. “What a blessing this new house is”; “I am so blessed to have gotten this job”; “God blessed me with another good raise in pay.”

At first thought these phrases seem innocent and we may think, “Why wouldn’t I want to give God the glory for everything I have!” Now although they may be true statements in one sense of the word, are they truly accurate in their intent?

In some cases the genuineness of such “blessed” statements are called into question by the popular stereotypical label “humble brag,” which is defined by the Oxford dictionary as: “an extensively modest or self-deprecating statement, whose actual purpose is to draw attention to something of which one is proud.” The example sentence given of its use is this: “social media status updates are basically selfies, humble brags, and rants.”

Now there is an example of a “humble brag” from a major new age professing Christian leader that went this way: “I am truly humbled that you follow my Tweets. I pray they enrich your life and strengthen your ministry. God bless all 200,000 of you.” You get the point of this example here.

To think of material blessings as an indication of how well we are doing spiritually can be a pitfall to our spiritual maturing. It is one of those areas that we cannot see because it is so culturally ingrained in us that it has become normal, but should we continue to do that?

Think of it this way, when I say that my material acquisitions are a result of God's blessing, it can reduce the Eternal God to some kind of magical, wish-granting genie, who spends his time randomly granting material things to his human masters.

God is not like a parent who hands out candy and grants his child's every wish, because He knows granting the child's every wish will spoil and ruin his character. God certainly wants us to continually seek His will, but He does not always reward us with material things for doing so.

Consider this, when we call ourselves blessed because of material acquisitions it can be offensive to many members of the church who are living from day to day barely making a living. I have traveled to Africa and seen some of the conditions and how they live there. They are happy and joyous to have God's truth, but they have far less than we do, even in the middle class.

Under the philosophy of the prosperity gospel, diligent people in third world countries who are scraping by to feed their families are simply told that they must not be faithful enough to be in that condition. If they were faithful enough God would pull them out of their nightmare, so they are told to just try harder and God will show favor.

Now there is a serious problem with that. Nowhere in Scripture are we promised worldly ease in return for our pledge of faith. In fact the most devout saints in the Bible often died penniless, receiving a one way ticket to prison or death by torture, but they did however receive a promissory ticket to God's Kingdom, which makes all of the material blessings insignificant.

Now what blessings are we promised in Scripture? The theme of blessing in the Bible is the blessing tied to the covenant. Such blessings were already introduced when God called Abraham: “I will bless those who bless you and by you all the families of earth shall be blessed.” Thereafter the very idea of the covenant is connected to blessing.

There are five patterns that permeate these references to blessings that we find in the Old Testament. One is promise, as God promises to bless those who keep His covenant. The second is the conditional nature of the blessing, or blessing as part of the test of obedience of people.

For example, when Moses prepared the Israelites for settlement in Canaan in Deuteronomy 28-30; or when Samuel instituted Saul as king in I Samuel 12; or a prophecy of judgment for Israel's failure to obey God's covenant obligations. The premise is that the covenant blessing is conditional.

The third pattern is that blessing is conceived as being, in some sense, a reward for obedience. This is the way the Old Testament treats the idea of blessings. These ideas permeate the scriptures that tell us about that.

The fourth pattern is the theme of grace. Although God rewards obedience, it is His grace that leads Him to do so. Human merit is never assumed. As Moses delineates a special status of Israel, he makes it clear that God's blessing is solely a result of His love.

**Deuteronomy 7:6-9** “For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; . . .

Verse 9 says “mercy for a thousand generations,” which is related to the covenant, the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments. That right there shows that the commandments were never done away with, that they were always intended to be forever. Then we move on to the blessings of obedience in verse 12.

**Deuteronomy 7:10-14** . . . and He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face. Therefore you shall keep the commandment, the statutes, and the judgments which I command you today, to observe them. Then it shall come to pass, because you listen to these judgments, and keep and do them, that the Lord your God will keep with you the covenant and the mercy which He swore to your fathers. And He will love you and bless you and multiply you; He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your land, your grain and your new wine and your oil, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flock, in the land of which He swore to your fathers to give you. You shall be blessed above all peoples; there shall not be a male or female barren among you or among your livestock.”

Now these blessings are not all material, most of them are to the Israelites who did not have God's Holy Spirit, which was most of them. Some of the blessings are for power, prestige, knowledge, wisdom, and so on, which are intangible objects.

The fifth pattern is that the opposite of blessing, resulting from obedience to God, is always assumed to be a curse resulting from disobedience. Building upon the Old Testament patterns of blessing, that is, the covenant of race, the emphasis of blessing in the New Testament is the spiritual state of those who belong to God's Kingdom.

A chosen nation is not as much the location of God's blessing, but individual believers are, that is, the covenant of grace. Whereas blessing in the Old Testament always retains a heavy, though not exclusive emphasis on physical prosperity, blessing in the New Testament era finds very little place for material prosperity. Now this in no way contradicts John Ritenbaugh's offertory sermonette, it actually adds to and enhances it. We are to try to be prosperous, as he said.

In Matthew 5, blessing is overwhelmingly conceived as a spiritual inheritance reserved in heaven for the faithful. In fact, in the Beatitudes, Jesus pronounces blessing on those who suffer deprivation in this life. What blessings does Jesus Christ spell out very clearly? Well there is an example in Matthew 5 as well as in Luke 6 both of which contain the Beatitudes.

**Matthew 5:1-12** And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

So where do you see, “Blessed are the comfortable; blessed are the rich; blessed are the vacationers; blessed are the Mercedes driver, and so on?” Rather than saying that “I am blessed” when it comes to material things, it is better just to say, “I am grateful” and give glory to God. My emphasis here is that we should think about what we are saying before we say it.

Christ was quite clear, even still we ignored it all when we commandeer the word “blessed” to make it fit neatly in our socially re-engineered culture, creating a living game of monopoly where every player buys and sells as much as he possibly can to become richer than the other players, while accrediting God for rewarding us for clever business skills.

Truth be told, only God knows why He puts some of us in wealthy families and others in poverty-stricken ones. Granted, people do have influence and impact on their own successes and failures throughout their lives, however we have no say or control over when and where we are born and what kind of family we are born into.

We have free will to grab opportunities that may come our way, or to just let them slide by. If we take advantage of the opportunities set before us, a relatively comfortable life may come our way, but that is not guaranteed. Again this is not to say that we should not try to work hard and do well. We do have to put forth the effort because everything matters.

Look at Mr. Armstrong, he was very wealthy before his calling, but God brought him down nothing, to where he could not even afford to buy a loaf of bread, then God raised him up from there. But that is what it took to prepare him for what his commission was to be.

Did God choose us from others for more material wealth because of the diligence of our prayers or because of our faith? I think this is where people tend to get confused at times. The Old Testament shows the Lord God blessing the carnal nation of Israel with material blessings when they obeyed His law, and cursed in material ways when they disobeyed His law.

The heroes of faith who had His Holy Spirit (Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, David, and others) were blessed with material blessings when it involved God's people as a race or nation. However,

individually we see the Old Testament faithful as primarily blessed spiritually, with non-material things.

We can find exceptions to that, such as Abraham who was a very wealthy man and so was David, but generally speaking it is the spiritual blessings that we should focus on in these men, what they had been given by God.

The New Testament is less about the nation of Israel and primarily about the spiritual church of God, therefore we find material things de-emphasized, downplayed, or even discouraged at times. I will give you four examples here:

**Matthew 19:23-24** Then Jesus said to His disciples, “Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

**Luke 18:22-23** So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich.

**I Timothy 6:9-10** But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

**Revelation 3:16-18** So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked [then we are given the spiritual solution in verse 18]—I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich [spiritually]; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.

More warnings than these about the rich can be found in the New Testament. Individually we see the New Testament faithful as blessed spiritually with little or no mention of material blessings because God is working with members of His church on a spiritual level more so than a physical level.

Times of spiritual blessing happen so that we can bless others who have great need. And when God endows us with blessing, it is not so we can bask selfishly in the luxury of the blessing, but rather for us to use the blessing to benefit others. Blessings are for service to others, not for selfish personal gain.

I would like to add that, here at the Feast, we have been very blessed with a great deal of money to spend; God's money; second tithe that we have saved all year, and we should pass some of that on to the people that serve us, the waitresses and waiters, the housekeeping staff and others. We should want to give of the blessing that God has given to us, whether the people are in the church or not.

Blessing presupposes a benefactor and a recipient, and quite often there is a mediator who pronounces or confirms the prospect of blessing from God to a human recipient. In the Bible blessing is ultimately from God, but this whole introduction has been a brief description of how the Bible generally views blessings.

So now let us dig a little deeper into more of the principle of blessings to answer the question, what does blessed mean for us?

**Ephesians 1:3-6** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

So what does it mean to be “blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ?” To answer this question we must first educate ourselves about the meaning of certain Greek words translated into our English words “blessed” and “blessing.”

The first word is *eulogeo*. It is the most common word for blessed and it is from the Greek verb which means to eulogize. Breaking it down, it is: *Eu* which means “good” or “well” and, *Lego*, just like the blocks, which means “to speak.” So *eulogeo* literally means good or well spoken.

The word with which Ephesians 1 begins, is *eulogetos*, a form of *eulogeo*, which means well spoken of. So Ephesians 1:3 means, “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is worthy to be well spoken of.”

There are two distinct adjectival noun forms of *eulogeo*. The first one is *eulogetos*, which is used exclusively of God the Father and God the Son. Why? Because when an adjective ends in *-tos* it refers to an inherent quality or worthiness. God and Jesus Christ are inherently worthy to be well spoken of. It is part of their being.

What is so superb about this is that it provides even more proof of the deity of Christ. Here is a sampling of scriptures that expresses this:

**Mark 14:61** But He kept silent and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked Him [speaking to Jesus], saying to Him, “Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” [*eulogetos*]

**Luke 1:68** “Blessed [*eulogetos*] is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people.

Another variation of *eulogeo* is *eulogemenos*, which means one that will prove him/herself worthy to be well spoken of; or one made to be well spoken of, as those who will survive, spiritually, the persecutions of the last days and of whom Jesus will say what we will read in Matthew 25:

**Matthew 25:34** Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, [speaking of the elect] inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

This is what we are to be blessed with, to be worthy to be well spoken of. This is a far greater blessing than any material blessing we could ever have. Also Mary, the expectant mother of Jesus, was a well spoken of woman, as it says in Luke 1.

**Luke 1:42** Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!”

Now what do we mean when we say, “Bless me God”? It actually means, “God, speak well of me.” Is this presumptuous of us? We must remember that God’s words are equivalent to His actions and the worlds were made by the words of His mouth. Things happen when God speaks.

So when we ask Him to bless us, or to speak well of us, whose concept of “good” is He going to adopt? Does He adopt what He considers good for us in the context of eternity and infinity, or what we think is good for us?

He will do what He knows is good for our eternal good rather than for our immediate good. His thoughts are for the long-term future good and for the good of others. So when we ask God to bless us we are asking Him to intervene in our lives and to bring about that which *He* knows is best for us, not what, in our faulty human reasoning, *we* think is good for us.

Let us look at three example of how the apostle Paul uses this Greek verb *eulogeo*. It is used once in Ephesians 1:3, and I will insert defining phrases into the text here to help us better understand the verse.

**Ephesians 1:3** Blessed [*eulogetos*, inherently worthy to be well spoken of] be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed [*ho eulogesas*, the one who did intervene in our lives in bringing salvation to us which constituted His best well speaking or acting for our benefit] us with every spiritual blessing [*eulogia*, well speaking or good interference of us] in the heavenly places in Christ.

This last phrase means that what He directly or indirectly brought about in our earthly lives was the best preparation for our eternal heavenly existence.

The second most used word in the Greek for “blessed” or “blessing” is *makarios*. (It is not a dance). I want to focus on this word because of what it means for us. In the beatitudes, Jesus Christ indicates not only the characters that are blessed, but the nature of that which is the highest good.

“Blessed,” as found in the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 and in Luke 6, is *makarios*, denotes the quality of deity. God is inherently *makarios*. He is something which no one else is—He is God. We cannot yet become God of course, but we can become what He is—*makarioi*.

**Romans 9:5** Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed [*makarios or makarioi*] God.

Christ called His disciples, *makarioi*, blessed, for His sake because of who He is and what He has done for them. The person who accepts Christ acquires God's nature and he/she becomes *makarios*—blessed. God is inherently both *eulogeo* and *makarios*; we are *makarios* when we are begotten.

The verb form *makarizo* occurs only twice: once in Luke 1:48, after Mary was informed that she was going to bear the child, Jesus. She said:

**Luke 1:48** “Henceforth all generations will call me blessed. [or “they will recognize my blessedness that I was indwelt by God, by the Son I bore.”]

To be blessed, *makarizo*, therefore means to be indwelt by God because of Jesus Christ. There can be no blessedness without Christ indwelling in man. No one who is not saved in and through Christ can not be *makarios*. *Makarios* means also “to be fully satisfied because of Christ.”

Now which would you rather have, the most wonderful material blessing you can think of, or to be blessed and being fully satisfied because of Jesus Christ? There is no comparison between the two.

**Luke 6:20-23** Then He lifted up His eyes toward His disciples, and said: “Blessed [*makarios*] are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed [*makarios*] are you who hunger now, for you shall be filled. Blessed [*makarios*] are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed [*makarios*] are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, for in like manner their fathers did to the prophets.

Wow! That almost leaves you speechless. The blessed, *makarios*, person will sacrifice material things for the sake of the Son of Man. He will share His blessedness since material things will never really satisfy anyone in the same manner that Christ can.

The blessed ones, in and through Christ, must be distinguished from the happy people. Those who are happy can be believers or unbelievers. The Eternal never stated that He came to make all our circumstances happy, but rather to change us so we can acquire the right attitude toward our circumstances which may be an abundance or lack; health or illness; and so on. We especially need this when we are at the Feast, away from the comfort of our homes and things are not going perfectly for us.

Another occurrence of the verb *makarizo* is in James 5.

**James 5:11** Indeed we count them blessed [*makarizomen*] who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.

Suffering in the life of the faithful does not detract from our joy because our joy does not emanate from circumstances but from the indwelling and all sufficient Christ. Joy and rejoicing are such an integral part of blessings, it is no wonder that the Old testament visions are filled with the vocabulary of joy, often expressed as a promise from God. Isaiah 60 describes this joy.

**Isaiah 60:5** Then you shall see and become radiant, and your heart shall swell with joy; because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the Gentiles shall come to you.

Verse 10 of Isaiah 61 prophesies that the saints of the Millennium will say this:

**Isaiah 61:10** I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation . . .

Now notice who the blessed of the Lord are in Isaiah 65.

**Isaiah 65:18-23** But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing, and her people a joy. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in My people; the voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, nor the voice of crying. “No more shall an infant from there live but a few days, nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; for the child shall die one hundred years old, but the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for as the days of a tree, so shall be the days of My people, and My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth children for trouble; for they shall be the descendants of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them.

So the Millennium, though one thousand years in duration, will be a mere pinpoint of time compared to the eternal state of blessedness that we will receive and are already beginning to receive. During the Millennium Jerusalem will be a place of joy, also the Eternal Himself will rejoice over it because sorrow will vanish.

The descendants of the blessed the Lord will benefit greatly because of their righteous, elect parent’s blessed state of being. The Millennium will be a period of unprecedented joy and prosperity. In verse 16 it says that the former troubles will be forgotten.

The state of the church will be so spiritually prosperous and the benefits conferred upon its members will be so full and so gracious that it will result in the greatest gladness. There will be joy derived from clear and glorious views and understanding of God's truth; from sin overcome; grace imparted; and holiness promoted, and from cherished fellowship with God. The state of blessedness, if I can use that term, is beyond our comprehension.

Building on the backgrounds of the Greek words that are translated as “blessed” and “blessing,” we can begin to understand the essential importance of the seven blessings in the book of Revelation. I find it interesting that there are seven times in the book of Revelation where the word “blessed” is used about us. We are obviously interested in taking note of that and seeing what it says. You have read it many times but maybe in this context it will take on a little different meaning.

These seven blessings are directed toward the saints. The word “blessed,” in these seven cases, is *makarios*. Seven is the number of perfection or completion in the Bible. Remember that *makarios* means to be indwelt by God because of Jesus Christ and it also means to be fully satisfied because of Jesus Christ.

The first of these “seven blessings” is given to the one who reads, hears, and keeps God’s Word.

**Revelation 1:3** Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.

This verse is immediately followed by the greetings to the seven churches. These seven church eras or characteristics are each evaluated for their attitudes, spiritual strengths and weaknesses in chapters 2-3.

Now under this first blessing in the book of Revelation there are seven rewards or promises to the seven church eras or attitudes. In a sense, you could call those blessings as well. They reveal that if a saint overcomes these shortcomings and sins, great and wonderful spiritual rewards are promised and result.

For example, to Ephesus, in Revelation 2, He promises:

**Revelation 2:7** “To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”

The Tree of life, first mentioned in Genesis 3:22, was in the Garden of Eden as you know, later it reappears in the New Jerusalem where it bears abundant spiritual fruit and those who eat of it will never die. Eternal life is not a reward, it is a gift from God. Salvation is a gift from God. Apparently the paradise of God will be identified with the New Jerusalem in the eternal state.

The second one is to Smyrna, in verse 11, where He promises:

**Revelation 2:11** “He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.”

The reassuring word of Christ to Smyrna is the same to all suffering and persecuted Christians, as stated in Hebrews 12:11.

**Hebrews 12:11 (NIV)** No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful., Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Now the third promise is to Pergamos, in verse 17, where He promises:

**Revelation 2:17** “To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden [that is, spiritual] manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.”

The hidden manna may refer to Christ as the bread from heaven, the unseen source of the faithful elect’s nourishment, strength, and salvation. Whereas Israel received physical food—manna—the

church received spiritual food. Jesus explains this concept in John 6. You are very familiar with this scripture. We read it every Passover.

**John 6:48-51** I [Christ] am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.”

The fourth is to Thyatira, in verses 26-28, He promises:

**Revelation 2:26-28** “And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—‘He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels’—as I also have received from My Father; and I will give him the morning star.”

Christ promises the faithful saints that they will join Him in His millennial rule. The word in verse 27 translated “rule” is the Greek word *poimanei*, which means to shepherd. This indicates that they will not simply be administering justice but will also, like a shepherd using his rod, be dealing with His sheep and protecting them as well.

Although Psalm 2:9 refers to Christ’s rule, John’s quotation of it relates to the ruling, that is shepherding, of the believer who overcomes. The faithful saints will be given authority by Christ whose authority comes from, and which He receives from, His Father.

Now moving on to the fifth promise, to Sardis, in Revelation 3:5. He promises:

**Revelation 3:5** “He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments [or righteousness], and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.”

The statement that their names will not be erased from the Book of Life presents a problem to some people. A person who is truly born from above remains regenerate as long as he continues to obey God and overcome his sins. While this passage may seem to imply that a name could be erased from the Book of Life, actually it only gives a positive affirmation and assurance that their names will not be erased.

The letter to Sardis is a searching message to churches today that are full of activity and are housed in extravagant buildings, but are so often lacking in evidences of God’s character. Christ’s Word today is to remember, repent, obey, and overcome, just as it was to the church in Sardis.

Now the sixth promise is to Philadelphia, in verse 12, in which He promises:

**Revelation 3:12** “He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.”

The church in Philadelphia received no rebuke from Christ, instead they were commended and given a promise because they had been willing to endure patiently. Enduring patiently is an ongoing process. Just as our sanctification is an ongoing process, so is patiently enduring. He also promised in verse 10:

**Revelation 3:10** “I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.”

This is an explicit promise that the Philadelphia church will not have endure the hour of trial or tribulation that others will have to, which is unfolded beginning in Revelation 6.

Now additional promises were given, Christ promised “I am coming soon,” a concept repeated quite often in the book of Revelation. The thought is not simply “coming soon,” but rather coming suddenly or quickly. Revelation 1:1 and 2:16 mention that.

They were exhorted, in the light of His coming, to continue to hold on to what they had and they were to hold on to the truth and to one another as brethren at all costs. Unity is emphasized throughout the book of Revelation, unity of the church, and it is something that we are seeing disintegrate among the greater churches of God, as they continue to splinter. There *must* be loyalty to Christ and God the Father first, but there also must be loyalty to each and every one of the brethren—in our congregations that we worship with and people that we live with as well. That is so important but people in the greater churches of God, generally, just do not seem to have it as a top priority.

Everyone who is an overcomer will become a pillar in the temple of God and this is of course symbolic of the permanent place of God's Kingdom for the faithful elect. Ultimately the entire New Jerusalem will have no physical temple.

**Revelation 21:22** But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

In contrast to earthly temples and earthly pillars which fall, the faithful Spirit's elect will continue forever in the temple. Christ specified that He was referring to “the city of My God,” that is the New Jerusalem. He repeated His promise, “I will also write on him My new name,” because the faithful have identified with Christ by faith and he will identify Himself with them. The promise given to the Philadelphia church and the challenge to continue to be faithful is certainly God's Word to His whole church today.

Finally, the seventh promise to Laodicea in verse 21, He promises:

**Revelation 3:21** “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.’

Our lives are to be imitations of Christ, today and forever.

Dramatically in Revelation 3:20, Christ pictured Himself as standing outside and knocking on the door. The latch is not shown, but it is assumed to be on the inside. Christ's appeal is for those who hear to unlatch and open the door, which puts responsibility on each and every one of us.

To them Christ promised that He would go in and dine with them. With Christ on the outside there can be no fellowship or genuine spiritual prosperity. With Christ on the inside there is wonderful fellowship and sharing of the marvelous grace of God.

This was an appeal to Christians rather than to non-Christians and this raises the important question concerning the extent of one's intimate fellowship with Christ. To those who respond, Christ promises to give the right to sit with Him on His throne and share His victory. Once again the invitation to listen and respond is given and ends with, "he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

The letters to the seven churches are a remarkably complete treatment of problems that face the church today. The recurring dangers of losing their first love (Revelation 2:4); of being afraid of suffering (Revelation 2:10); of doctrinal defection (Revelation 2:14-15); of moral departure (Revelation 2:20); spiritual deadness (Revelation 3:1-2); not holding fast (Revelation 3:11); and lukewarmness (Revelation 3:15-16), are all just as prevalent today as they were in the first century churches.

Now because these letters come from Christ personally, they take on great significance as God's final word of exhortation to the church, at least written down and passed through the centuries. The final appeal is to all called individuals who will hear. Therefore we have only one recourse in answering God's will and that is to do the will of God rather than our own human will.

Did you notice that none of the seven promises and rewards involve material things? Even better, the promised rewards are almost entirely spiritual.

These promises to the seven churches are under the first of the seven blessings. Again the first stated blessing, found in Revelation 1:3 is: "Blessed is he who reads, hears, and keeps God's Word." The next six stated blessings commend purity and perseverance, even to the death.

In the early church one would read aloud while the others listened. Revelation's message and its blessing can be received even by hearing it read, but only if that hearing is accompanied by obeying as well. Hearing represents receiving and accepting the Word of God.

The second of Revelations blessings is given to the dead who died in the Lord.

**Revelation 14:12-13** Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them."

Because the saints heed God's call to endurance, keep God's commandments, and strengthen their faith in Jesus Christ, they are blessed at death with the rest from their labors. The reward for their good works is permanently attached to them, it is accounted and credited to them.

Revelation's third blessing is given to the one who stays awake keeping his garments on.

**Revelation 16:15** "Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame."

Jesus interjects a summons to spiritual vigilance, repeating His rebukes to the complacent churches of Sardis and Laodicea because He is coming like a thief at an unexpected moment and His soldiers must stay awake and dressed so that they are not caught without righteous covering. If they do not carry out their duty and responsibility—to watch and put on the righteousness of Jesus Christ—it will humiliate them and disappoint God.

Revelation's forth blessing is given to those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

**Revelation 19:9** Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God."

Those invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb are faithful, converted people who belong to His beloved bride—the church, who have been called through the gospel of grace. This marriage supper of the Lamb was anticipated in the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins.

**Matthew 25:10** And while they [the virgins] went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.

John is twice reprimanded in a sense, "you must not do that," for an attempt to worship the angel. Instead John is commanded to worship God alone. This is a dramatic confirmation of the deity of Christ, the Lamb who is rightly worshipped. Notice the worthiness of Jesus Christ lamb in Revelation 5.

**Revelation 5:8-11** Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth." Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, . . .

The fact that He was slain, or made as a sacrifice for sin, was the reason to what is ascribed to Him here in verse 12:

**Revelation 5:12-14** . . . saying with a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!" And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: "Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!" Then the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever.

To bless someone is to desire that he may have joy, prosperity, that he may be successful, respected, and honored. To bless God or to ascribe blessing to Him is the state where our hearts and minds are full of love and gratitude, and where we desire for Him to be honored, loved, and obeyed universally as He should be. The words expressed here are the desire that the universe would ascribe to the Redeemer all honor and that He would be loved, adored, and revered completely.

Revelation's fifth blessing is given to the one who shares in the first resurrection.

**Revelation 20:6** Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

When the wicked are returned to bodily existence and condemned for evil deeds, they will be cast into the Lake of Fire and instantly consumed. The victors, hopefully that is us, who maintain their testimony of Jesus Christ and resist the beast, worship as priests, and reign as kings with Christ throughout the one thousand years of Satan's binding.

Revelation's sixth blessing is a repetition of the first blessing in Revelation 1:3, but there is a difference between the two, which I will point out. It is to the one who watches and follows the word of the prophesy of this book.

**Revelation 22:7** "Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."

In Revelation 1:3 Christ says that He will come soon. Here in Revelation 22:7, Christ adds that He will come rapidly, which adds a sense of frantic urgency. So He says tells us it will not be long now, but He also says that it will be so quickly that it will be mind blowing.

The purpose of these communications is not bewilder or confuse, but to reveal many of the things that must soon take place. We must watch and prepare. The coming of Christ is always soon, from the standpoint of the saint's anticipation for the future. Accordingly, a special blessing will be pronounced on those who believe and heed the prophesy of this book.

This is a solemn affirmation of the part of Jesus Christ who had made these revelations, that they are true, that they all will be promptly accomplished, and that the one who keeps the sayings of this book will be blessed and joyous.

Revelation's seventh and final blessing is given to those who do all His commandment. I find it interesting that all the way to the end of the book, commandment keeping is emphasized, thus showing that it is never done away with.

**Revelation 22:14** Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life [and the Kingdom of God], and may enter through the gates into the city [that is the New Jerusalem].

The Greek words, through which some Bibles translate "do His commandments," are translated more literally as, "wash their robes." A blessing is given to those who "wash their robes" in the conscience-cleansing blood of the Lamb. "Washing their robes" is a similar to phrase to "putting on righteousness."

The knowledge of how to keep and do God's commandments begins with fear of the Lord, that is, reverence and awe of God. This leads to righteous living and we become more like Christ who dwells in us through the Spirit of God. It is not our righteousness but we attribute it to the righteousness of Christ by the cleansing in blood of Christ the Lamb.

Jesus promises to come soon affirming His divine eternity and messianic authority. Christ will come to repay everyone for what each and every person has done, rewarding faithful servants and punishing every evil doer.

Now let us look at the whole context here. Jesus testifies to the churches.

**Revelation 22:12-16** “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.” Blessed are those who do His commandments [blessed are those who washed their robes], that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie. “I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star.”

Reward, in verse 12, indicates degrees of reward for faithful believers and punishment for lying unbelievers. As promised in Revelation 1:1, and here in here in verse 16, Jesus has conveyed His revelation through His angel and through John to His churches, both for our comfort and warning.

Now as I wrap this up I will summarize the seven blessings in Revelation here.

- 1) “Blessed is the one who reads, hears, and keeps God's word.” Remember Christ is coming soon.
- 2) “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.” This involves faithfulness.
- 3) “Blessed is the one who stays awake keeping his garments on.” This involves watching and readiness.
- 4) “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” This involves unity.
- 5) “Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection.” This involves worship and rulership.
- 6) “Blessed is the one who keeps the words of prophesy of this book.” Remember Christ is coming quickly.
- 7) “Blessed are those who do His commandments.” This involves obedience and dedication.

The word “blessed” in this list of seven blessings, means to be indwelt by God because of what Christ has done, and that He is our Savior. The result is that each of these blessings fully satisfies because of Christ.

The person who accepts Christ acquires God's nature and this describes the quality of deity. This is every Christian's potential because of being in the body of Christ. We have to be connected to the “root,” as He is called there in Revelation 22.

Please understand that I am not saying that none of the material blessings we have received during our lives are blessings. There are many times we receive material blessings and we should be grateful and acknowledge them and thank God for them. My point here is to just be careful and aware of how we use the terms “blessings” and “blessed.”

For the church it is the abundance of spiritual blessings, which far surpass the material blessings, that should be our primary focus because they are eternal.

**Ephesians 1:3** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.