

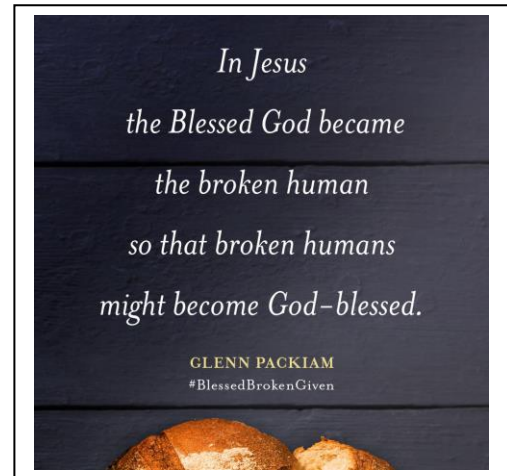
SUNDAY 8TH October 2023

Blessed Broken Given, Week 2:

Blessed

Scripture: Genesis: 1:27-31 and 2:1-3

Last week, we began a series about bread. Well, not bread exactly, but on what Jesus did when He had bread in His hands. He *blessed it, broke it, and gave it*.



Bread is, in many ways, the perfect metaphor for our lives because it's common and ordinary, and sometimes cracked and broken. But in Jesus's hands, it becomes sacred and miraculous. Today, we're going to talk about the word 'blessed'.

What does it mean to be blessed? The ancient Greek word means "to be in favour with, of one mind with, and in tune with the will of God."

Imagine that an alien was to land on our planet and observe how we use the word, 'Blessed' and determined it's meaning *solely* by how it is used on social media. The alien might conclude that being #Blessed is about having beautifully made lattes and perfect kitchen remodels, Instagram able vacations and beautiful spouses.

But that has nearly nothing to do with what the Bible means by blessing. Many of the things we associate with a blessed life—

health, provision, beauty, and more—are, of course, gifts from God. But they are like hints and shadows of the real and true blessedness. To reframe how we think about blessing, we're going to have to go back to the beginning.

‘And God saw that it was good...’ ‘And God blessed them...’

Our origin story is rooted in the origin story of the whole cosmos. God established blessing from the origins and foundations of the world. If we want to understand who we are and what makes us blessed, we must go back to the creating, ordering, and blessing of the world.

When the Bible tells us the story of the beginning, it begins with a Person, God. “In the beginning, God...” All things have their origin in God. In the ancient world everyone knew that *some* god or collection of gods were responsible for the material world. For people in ancient times, the questions were not “Did god make this?” and “How?” but rather “Which god made this?” and “Why?” The questions of which god and why are massively significant, and these are the ones the Genesis account wants to answer most clearly.

Like an artist working with vivid contrasts to make a subject stand out, God reveals Himself in the Scriptures in a way that is especially stunning against the landscape of other origin stories from the ancient Middle East. To the question “Which god made the heavens and the earth?” many of Israel’s ancient neighbours would answer

with names of regional gods who were power hungry and jealous, making deals to gain more jurisdiction and stopping at nothing—even murder—to rule over all. To the question “Why did they make humans?” the answer would be that humans were made to be slaves of the gods—to do work the gods didn’t want to do.

This is *not* very good news. When you start to compare the Genesis account to the other ancient accounts, you see how Scripture reveals a different kind of God.

First, there is *only one God*. Genesis reveals that YHWH is the supreme, sovereign God. In contrast to the many other ancient Middle Eastern beliefs, one God stands apart as the sole sovereign ruler over all creation: Genesis depicts no division of divine jurisdiction. Unlike the way their neighbours thought, Israelites did not have a separate god of the sea, god of the land, or god of fertility. There was and is only one God. These words were repeated at holy Israelite assemblies: “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one.”

As the lead character in the opening scenes, God not only exists but also acts. God is all through the opening passage as the only active character. There are no rivals and no one else adding input or ideas. There is simply God, who speaks, forms, makes, calls, and blesses.

Secondly, the sole sovereign God creates the world *on purpose* and *with purpose*. As we noted previously, some ancient beliefs

saw creation as the result of a bloody battle among the gods, the result of mutated divine excretions, or the gods' way of getting cheap labour around the universe.

The God of Genesis, however, sets out to make the world carefully, deliberately, methodically, and even poetically. Genesis 1 and 2 were meant to be a purpose story, a song about why we're here and why it matters. And just what does Genesis say about why we're here? It tells us we are here because God called us into being. God made us on purpose and with a purpose in mind. Not for cosmic labour but for divine relationship.

Thirdly, God *blesses* what He makes. Not only is God the sole sovereign and an intentional creator, but He is also the God who loves and blesses what He creates. This is different from other ancient accounts of the beginning of the world.

From the beginning the God who creates also blesses what He has made. And why wouldn't He? After all, He meant to make it. He called it good. The word *good* has many meanings, but in some cases, it can be linked to what we might call "beautiful." In a very real way, all that is good and beautiful in the world is the result of God's blessing.

Imagine the people of God living in exile in Babylon, not feeling very #Blessed. They strain their eyes to see something of God's hand and

train their ears to hear something of God's voice, when suddenly, they remember: *This world was made by God!* This tree, this stream, this flower, this fruit—everything that flourishes around them—flourishes because God has *blessed* it. The blessing of God on the material world would have been a source of consolation and a spark of worship in an otherwise difficult land of exile.

Good and beautiful. Is that how you see yourself?

Maybe on a good day. But we often struggle to see ourselves as good *or* beautiful, let alone both. We're too aware of our shortcomings or our plainness. *I'm not good; I'm a bit of a mess, actually. And beautiful? Well, I wouldn't say that. Maybe just ordinary.* The Genesis story grounds us in God. God Himself made us on purpose and for a purpose and blessed us by calling us good and beautiful. That is our origin story.

Being blessed is not a state—it's a story.

It's an origin story. It's the story of how you began and why. It's the story of God the creator calling you into being on purpose and for a purpose. It's the story of God taking delight in you and naming you as good and beautiful. It's the story of God the redeemer pursuing you, calling you, and returning you to who He made you to be. The God who called light out of darkness calls you out of darkness and into light. In doing so, He brings you back to the beginning, to *your* beginning. This is where it starts: ***You are blessed.***

Maybe that's not where your story is today. Maybe that's not what others have told you about yourself.

Genesis tells us a few more stories of God blessing people. In Genesis 12, God calls Abram and blesses him. But in Genesis 16, God interrupts a female, Egyptian slave on the run, and blessed *her*.

A female Egyptian slave. Nothing could have defined her more as an outsider. In her day she would have been considered the opposite of blessed. To be a ***female*** in the ancient world meant being regarded as valuable only insofar as you were useful...to a man. Whether for offspring or pleasure or domestic labour, a woman's usefulness was something she had to prove.

She was thought to possess no intrinsic value. To be ***Egyptian***, in the eyes of Israelites, meant being an enemy. Later generations of Israelite children, listening to these stories of their heritage, would have marked this slave as belonging to the wrong group. To be a ***slave*** meant having no freedom and no future. Slaves had no rights, no inheritance, no destiny. There is no reason we should know her name. She should be ancillary to the story, an outsider, invisible to God.

Hagar is on the run because Sarai, barren wife of the newly blessed Abraham, was jealous and resentful toward her. Genesis says that Sarai was harsh with Hagar. Things had gotten so bad that she

thought fleeing into the wilderness with no provisions and no plan would be better than staying in that house. Hagar, pregnant with Ishmael, was prepared to die in the desert.

Hagar thought it was over. She was sure no one would help, and no one would come to her rescue. But God. God found Hagar by a well in the wilderness. She had stopped at a spring for what could have been one last drink. And then an angel of the Lord met her there and called her *by her name*.

The angel asked Hagar two questions: *Where have you come from? and where are you going?*

When God asks a question, He's not launching an interrogation; He's staging an intervention. These two questions were about *origin* and *destiny*. Hagar thought she knew her origin and her destiny, where she had come from and where she was going.

But God was about to rewrite her story. God told Hagar to go back to Abraham's house, not because God condoned Sarai's mistreatment of her, but because there was no other way for Hagar to be saved. She would die in that wilderness.

Right from the start, God made it clear: He wants everyone to be able to get in on the blessing. He desires all to be swept up in his saving and redeeming love.

When Hagar understood this, she was in awe. She had seen *God!* Hagar responded by naming God. *“So, she named the Lord who spoke to her: ‘You are El-roi.’” Translated, this term means “God sees me.” Hagar then said, “In this place, have I actually seen the one who sees me?”*

Maybe you think you missed the Genesis 1 blessing. Maybe you find yourself on the run from a place of pain and suffering, convinced that God does not see you.

I’m here to tell you today, that God sees you. I am the messenger He sent to find you in the wilderness, to ask you where you think you’ve come from and where you think you’re going. And then to tell you that God is re-writing your story. Your origin is better than you thought. And so is your destiny.

The bread that Jesus took and blessed did not become *something else*; it became what bread was made to be. Material things are not the opposite of sacred things. You see, the whole created world was made to be a container of God’s glory.

To be blessed is to be returned to our origin and destiny; it is not simply to be restored, but to be re-story-ed.

The God who called light out of darkness...

The God who called Abraham out of his father's house...

The God who called Hagar out of the wilderness...

...is calling you. God has come to bless you today. He has come to re-write your story, to return you to your origin and your destiny.

Place your life in His hands today. If you want to live for God, you must be ready to say and do what seems strange to the world.

You must be willing to give when others take; to love when others hate; to help when others abuse. By giving up your own rights in order to serve others, you will one day receive everything God has in store for you.