

And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Genesis 12:3b

“God bless you.” Those words came from Jenny after a sneeze escaped me. I asked her if she knew why people said those words after someone sneezed. She told me she had just heard other people do it, which is probably why most of us do it.

As I understand it, the act of saying “God bless you” after a sneeze goes back to a time when illness was believed to be caused by evil spirits. People thought that when you sneezed you expelled an evil spirit. It was a good thing, so they responded with a blessing. Most of us know that illnesses aren’t caused by evil spirits, and we speak a sneeze blessing without realizing that it comes from this old superstition.

The Scriptures have many examples of blessings, including the act of God blessing people. David Lose points out that God’s blessing is usually twofold. God blesses so that the person blessed can be a blessing. We see this clearly in the promise to Abraham. God says, “I will bless you so that all the families of the earth may be blessed in you.” In other words, Abraham was blessed to bless. God granted Abraham a blessing, but God expected Abraham to use his blessing as a blessing for others.

It is easy to forget that the blessing of God is twofold. For instance, we hear and see the words, “God bless America” a lot. God has blessed, does bless, and will bless America, and I pray that God continues to bless us. However, if Lose is right, and I think he is, then God expects us to use those blessings to bless others. We are blessed to bless.

Another example, we are told to count our blessings so that we can give thanks to God, but how many of us count our blessings and wonder how we can use our blessings to bless others? It would seem that the greatest act of giving thanks would be to use our blessings as God intended. Most of the time, I think we pray for God’s blessings so that our lives might be better, and not so that we can make the lives of others better. If we are blessed to bless, then asking God for blessings shouldn’t simply be to make our lives better, but to wonder how we can be a blessing to others.

Blessed to bless. It’s how God works. This week as we count our blessings, let’s think about how we use those blessings to bless others. Let’s find ways for God’s blessings to us to flow through us.

Pastor Parnell