

A scorpion and a frog were on the edge of a river. And the scorpion said to the frog, would you give me a lift across to the other side? And the frog said, why would I do that?

You're going to sting me. And the scorpion said, I won't sting you. Why would I sting you?

We both would drown. And so they jumped, he jumped on the back of the frog, and they were going across the river, and halfway across the scorpion stung the frog. And the frog said, why did you do that?

And what did the scorpion say? It is my nature to sting. I'm sorry, but it's my nature to sting.

Bit of a sad way to begin a new series in May. Did you know that it is our Father in Heaven's nature to bless? It is His very nature.

The eternal God, who is a triune community of oneness ever present, all powerful, is predisposed to bless His creation. It is His nature to bless. Throughout May, Lord willing, we will explore a series entitled Blessed to Be a Blessing.

And so this morning, the title of the message is The Plan of Blessing, The Plan of Blessing. In the Old and New Testaments, there are two main words for blessing that are used. In the Old Testament, the first word for blessing is Barak.

The core idea of Barak is to bless by speaking life, favour and empowerment. It also means to kneel, to kneel down and bestow favour or benefit. It's normally used of God.

Blessing is people with fruitfulness, provision, protection and presence. Genesis 12 verse 2 says, I will bless you Barak and you will be a blessing. Number six, the priestly blessing that we've read recently, The Lord bless you and keep you Barak.

It's relational and a spoken blessing. And this is important. It's a blessing that shapes identity and declares a future destiny.

It's like speaking that preferred picture of the future, a vision. The second word is Asha or Ashrei. But Asha means to receive the blessing, to receive the blessing.

The blessed are in a state of flourishing happiness and wellbeing. It's more about condition than declaration. Asha is often translated happy, fortunate, blessed.

Psalm 1 says, blessed. Asha is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked. Psalm 32, blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven.

Asha describes the life that flows from God's blessing. In a joy, stability flourishing like a tree by streams of water. So, Barak, God's speaking blessing over us, Asha, living in the reality of that blessing.

God declares, Barak, you become Asha. In the New Testament, Barak is the word, ulegeo. The Greek word ulegeo is a word that is where we get eulogy from.

It's to speak to bless by speaking good over someone. The u is good, the logos is word or speech, so to speak good. And that's what Stuart read for us, Ephesians 1.

Praise be to the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us, ulegeo. In the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ, it's that idea of the spoken blessing giving favour, declaring a new reality.

And then ashar in Greek is the word makarios. Makarios means deeply happy, flourishing and whole. And it's used by Jesus in the Beatitudes, Matthew 5.

Blessed makarios are the poor in spirit. James 1, blessed is the one who perseveres. Same word, makarios is this state of being blessed with a life that flows from God, in a flourishing regardless of circumstances.

So there are two movements of blessing. God speaks blessing, barak and ulogeo. God declares favour, identity and promise.

And then humans live in that blessing. Old Testament, ashah, New Testament, makarios. A life of flourishing wholeness and joy.

So we will come back to that, but that's the foundation of this whole message and really the whole series.

So in Genesis 12, there's a very significant passage of scripture, Genesis 12, one to three. If you have it there in your Bibles, please turn to it or just watch on the screen.

The Lord had said to Abram, Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you, Barak. I will make your name great and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse. And all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. God's plan began with blessing.

It's His nature to bless. And then if you read through Genesis, which many of us have, it's this constant theme, isn't it? Abraham blesses his son, Isaac.

And then Isaac blesses his son, Jacob. And Jacob blesses the 12 sons, the 12 tribes of Israel. And then Moses blesses Israel in Deuteronomy.

Words of spoken favour declaring future destiny in God. And then we come to Exodus 20. In the second commandment, God is giving instruction about how to live the blessed life in the blessing of God.

And He says in the 10 commandments, the second commandment, you shall not make for yourselves an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth below or in the waters below.

You shall not bow down to them or worship them for either Lord your God, I'm a jealous God punishing the children for the sins of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.

But showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments. God's heart is to bless, to speak favour, to speak good over his people for how long? Generation after generation after generation.

The thousand, there is not a literal thousand, it's just beyond, beyond what you could imagine. Forever it is God's heart to bless. Imagine there is an old man, very old man, he's about to die and he decides to plant a tree.

So he digs a hole, puts a sapling in it, it's a fruit tree, fills it with dirt, gives it some water and sees what happens. But you might ask the question, why would he plant it when he's about to die?

He may never sit under its shade, he probably will never eat of its fruit, but why would that old man plant a fruit tree? Because he's thinking beyond himself, obviously.

He's thinking about his children and their children and their children, generation after generation. When he plants that tree, he's declaring something, Barak. He's declaring there will be life here.

He's declaring, he's speaking into the future. There will be fruit here. There will be shade here.

That's Barak. That's Ulegeo. Speaking a future into existence through blessing.

Years later, a child sits under that tree, and fruit is eaten and shade is enjoyed and life is sustained. That's Asha. That's Makarios.

Living inside the blessing that was spoken. Amen. God is a tree planter.

When he gave that promise to Abram, when he said, I will bless you and you will be a blessing, he was planting an orchard. There would be fruit that would come from those words.

Imagine you pull into Maccas one morning and you buy yourself a coffee. You order a coffee and you get around to pay for it. And they say, oh, it was paid by the next first person in front of you.

That your meal's been paid for. And what do you do? You can either say, yes, that's cool.

I got a free coffee this morning. Or you pay it forward and you pay the next person's meal. Right?

So the first one is the first blessing of Barak. I receive blessing, but it's not until I give it away that there's Makarios. I'm a conduit of blessing when that happens.

We're going to talk about being a conduit next week. The plan of God is to bless to the thousandth generation. I mentioned before in that little spiel that in 2019, we had an offering called A Thousand Brave Days.

And as I mentioned, we raised just over \$120,000 to support the dreams of NorthernLife for the first 1000 days. We believe that we're at another point in time.

We don't ask for money very often at this church, but there are times in the multi-generational history of the kingdom of God, where each generation has to step up and give sacrificially in different ways.

We give because we are blessed with the good favour of God. Not to get rich, not even because we are rich, though in contrast to the world, we are rich, all of us. We don't give to get rewards from heaven or anything like that.

We just give because we believe in the gospel. And we are blessed by the gospel and by the work of God in His kingdom. And we want to see that expand.

As the story of Israel continues, Israel fails again and again and again, don't they? And what does God do? He judges them in pockets, but really He keeps blessing.

He keeps blessing. They fail and He keeps blessing. They fail and He draws them back to repentance and then blesses them.

He's always blessing.

And then one day in history, the Son of God, God incarnate, Jesus Christ, the Lord of all glory, turns up on this earth. And what do you reckon the God whose inclination to bless does when He's in a human form? It starts with B, rhymes with lesses.

He blesses everyone. He turns up, He comes in contact with, doesn't He? His words constantly speak a new reality, a preferred picture of a better future, whether it's just speaking truth, acknowledging someone and speaking life by welcoming them.

Sometimes He uses words to forgive sin. Talk about blessing. Sometimes He heals people with those words of blessing.

He is just constantly seen blessing because it's the heart of the Father to bless. And then He does the greatest blessing ever. He gives Himself to take away the sin of the world.

He blesses, He speaks favour over the world. For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever would believe in Him should not perish and have everlasting life. Jesus had to die for that scripture to become a reality.

And He does. And it's the greatest blessing the world has ever seen. God is in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, taking the sin of the world.

He dies on a cross and He blesses the world. And the blessing is confirmed by the resurrection, the power of God to do what He said He would do in the cross. It's confirmed by the resurrection.

And then Pentecost launches it with the Spirit through the church to the world. The blessing of God, the goodness of God, the hope of God and His salvation was most fully declared, wasn't it? In the death and resurrection of the Son of God.

And He ascends to heaven and the story continues and finishes in Revelation 7. Let me read from verse nine.

After this, I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count from every tribe, nation, people and language, standing before the throne and before the lamb.

They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice, Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne and to the lamb, where the blessing of God is fully received in that moment.

As the flourishing of God's people in his presence forever, giving him all the glory. We've spoken this year of our theme for this year and next year, always ready. Always ready.

It came from just looking up in the New Testament, what does the Bible say we're to be ready to do?

And there are four readies, to be always ready, to see the Lord, Matthew 24, to be ready on a journey of holiness, to be ready clothed in His righteousness. Not scared of His coming, but looking forward to His coming, to see the Lord.

We need to be always ready to serve the Lord, Titus 3. Always be ready to do good when you can. We need to be ready to share Christ, 1 Peter 3, 15.

Always be ready to give an account for the hope that you have, but do it with gentleness and respect. And then Ephesians 6 talks about feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the Gospel of Peace.

So we talk about stewarding Christ, the fullness of the power of Jesus' name. Always ready to see, serve, share and steward Christ.

We can only be ready, always ready to see, serve, share and steward Christ if we live in the good blessing of God, amen. We need to be in the favour of God and experiencing His flourishing. I asked AI to give me another version of always ready.

So, you know, we started in 1903, the Titanic sinks. Barker College is started about that time in the A. The 1930s and 40s, where there's a war on, the Second World War.

This church was here. It was ministering in the name of Jesus, always ready. People were doing their devotions, reading, confessing their sin.

See, serve, share, steward Christ. They've been doing that all the way through.

In the 50s and 60s, where the cultural revolutions were really at their peak, this church was understanding, what does it mean for us to interact with that societal iteration of life in Australia? In the 70s and 80s, very different.

And in 1990s and 2000, this church was here on the corner of Pretoria Parade and College Crescent, just continuing to do the ministry of the gospel. And then now 2010 to 2026, we've got a war in Iran. We've got skyrocketing fuel prices.

Always ready. This church has always had to be ready, hasn't it? To serve the people that we have been given to love, in Jesus' name.

We've always called ourselves a light on the hill. We are blessed, amen. We are blessed as a people.

If you know the living God through Jesus Christ, you're filled with His Spirit. Matthew 5 says, you're blessed.

If you don't have any legs, if you don't have any eyes, it doesn't matter how tough life is, the Beatitude says, you are more than happy if you know the King of the Kingdom.

I would put it to you that a healthy church that is embedded long-term in a community is hard to beat when it comes to finding an investment worth investing in.

I would put it to you in the name of Jesus that since Pentecost and the giving of the Spirit, since the canonised Word of God, and its ability to be in our hands, there is nothing more potent for the kingdom than the local church.

I am putting that to you, and I want you to think about that, because often we haven't thought about that.

Sometimes you think, oh, the best thing you could ever give to is a parish church organisation, or a mission organisation, someone doing interesting things around the world.

I would argue that those people that run Parachurch, they come to you and I, they come to the local churches and say, would you support us? If there are no local churches, we lose the power of the kingdom.

We need strong, godly, faithful and fruitful, by the grace of God, churches on street corners, amen? We really do. For 123 years, as we've said multiple times, this church has done what we might call normal ministry.

Normal ministry. God has blessed us with himself through the power of the gospel and given us flourishing, that we might bless others. So for 123 years, we've been turning up to sing songs here.

Week in, week out. And you might look at that and go, oh, you know, church, it's sort of boring, it's pretty powerless. They just sing songs.

Yeah, part of it is singing songs. Part of it is praying in different ways. They sang different songs in the 20s.

We sing a few songs that are the same, few hymns. But we're worshipping the same God, amen? Worshipping the living God and proclaiming His truth week after week, Sunday after Sunday, Bible study after Bible study.

We have always been running normal ministry programs, like youth groups, kids' programs, Sunday schools, play group, homework clubs, school scripture, kids' hope, one-on-one ministering with kids in schools. Normal ministry. We care for people.

We teach people to live the way Jesus said that we could live. We do it in small groups and large groups. It's what you call normal ministry.

And we give money in consistently strategic ways to support cross-cultural workers around the world. We've done it for a hundred and something years, and Lord willing, we will continue to do it.

We support one another to contend for the faith that has been entrusted to us. And most of us don't get to travel to interesting, romantic even, and scary places. We just keep coming here, and we work to eke out a living.

And yet God blesses that local church. It matters. Healthy, fruitful, faithful, local churches.

Here our sense of purpose is wrapped up in to love God, love others, and make disciples. And we tend to do it weekly, daily, through normal ministry and life. We are blessed, and we want to pass on that blessing.

You know, Jesus was a bit of a people watcher, wasn't he? He's always been watching, he's the word. He's always been watching history, and he knows human beings.

One time in Mark 12, he was watching, let me read from verse 41. Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts.

And in fact, it was a dumb thing that they would hire trumpeters. So as they came to put their offering in, the trumpeters would go, da da da da da da. It's like Lord Farquad from Shrek.

But that didn't do much for Jesus. What he noticed was a poor widow who came and put in two very small copper coins worth only a few cents. Calling his disciples to him, isn't that an interesting little line?

It's like check this out, check this out. Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth, but she out of her poverty put in everything, all she had to live on.

This woman was blessed, Euloguo. And so she became a blessing, Macarios. This is not suggesting that we should do anything silly.

Give in a way that is unwise. That's not what we're talking about. But it's interesting, isn't it?

There's only a few times that Jesus is blown away. It was a centurion's faith, wasn't it? And a poor widow, a poor widow who just believed it's reminiscent of the woman who came to pour out the alabaster jar of perfume, isn't it?

It gave everything because of a recognition of the worth of the one being poured out over. God's heart is to bless. His plan is to bless.

The son's heart is to bless. And the church's heart, our church, our heart is to bless, amen? To bless.

We want to bless by sharing the gospel in word and deed. Part of that process involves financial stewardship.

May we be blessed to be a blessing in whatever way we feel is appropriate to the situation that we find ourselves in as individuals and families.

In this season of our lives, may we take the blessings that we've been given and plant fruit trees for the next generation. Amen. Thank you, Lord God, for the immense blessing that we experience living in your favour.

Lord, I pray for those here today who have not made a decision to follow you and receive your blessing and live in it.

I pray you would prompt them to repent of their sin and put their faith once and for all in Jesus Christ, to love them, to die on a cross and rise again from the dead.

Lord, we thank you that we can come to the communion table now as the great symbol of blessing. We are blessed to come to the table as you invite us. We remember your perfect body when we eat the bread, broken for us.

And we remember the cup. Is your perfect blood poured out for us? You took the curse that we might be blessed.

And it is our privilege to drink of it again. Lord, we're just mindful of those black and white pictures and the footage we just saw before. And it reminds us, Lord God, that you are Alpha and Omega.

You are the living God who answered the prayers of the church in 1903 when they began this.

And as they met in a different environment around a table to share communion, it's your grace that they were celebrating, your unending love to the thousandth generation. And so we come around the table now with gratitude in our hearts.

In your name I pray, Jesus. Amen.