

It was a couple of weeks after Pentecost in the city of Jerusalem. Peter and John were going, as they usually did, to pray at the temple at 3pm.

And as they were walking along, climbing the steps to the temple of Jerusalem, they were talking about the scriptures and the fact that they now saw how Christ fulfilled them all.

As they approached the temple, they became vaguely aware of a presence in the left of field, in a weak voice. They looked over, and there was a man, a beggar, on his knees with a wooden bowl outstretched.

He was looking down, and he was asking for money. In front of Peter and John, there was another man also going to the temple to pray. This man saw the beggar and tapped his pockets as if to say, I have nothing to give you.

As Peter and John approached, they walked straight up to the man and asked for him to look at them. Peter said to the man, Silver or gold, I do not have, but what I do have, I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.

And he bent down and reached out his hand. He took the man by the hand, and this beggar who was lame, who couldn't walk, stood to his feet, and he ran around the temple courts, running and jumping and praising God.

He walked in and he prayed to God with a gratitude that was very real for him. This is a story from Acts chapter 3. Peter and John were blessed to be a blessing.

They were a conduit of the blessing of God. As you know, it is May Mission Month at Northern Life, and we're in a series titled Blessed to Be a Blessing. Last week we had a message titled The Plan of Blessing, that it is God's nature to bless.

His heart is to bring good into the lives of his people. So we are blessed. This week, our message title is The Conduit of Blessing.

Really, it's the second part of that title, Blessed to Be a Blessing. That's what we're looking at this morning. It's worth pausing probably and defining blessing.

When we say that we are blessed to be a blessing, we're not talking about being healthy, wealthy and happy. That would be a worldly definition of blessing. Yes, God desires that we be healthy.

Yes, riches are not inherently evil. Jesus said the love of money is evil, but God provides for us. And yes, it's good to be happy, but that's not what we talk about when we talk about blessing, what it is to be blessed.

Dallas Willard said that blessing, I think that's my only Willard quote for today, is the projection of good under God into the life of another. That's what it is. To bless someone is to say, God bring good into your life.

Did you know when somebody sneezes, do you know why we say bless you? Because they thought a demon was coming out of the person when they sneezed. And so it makes a lot of sense to say bless you when a demon has just come out of a person.

God bring good into your life. That's what we're talking about when we talk about blessing. We wanna be a church that is blessed to be a blessing, to bring the good of God into the lives of others.

We wanna be like Peter and John. What I do have, I give you. How do we do that?

How do we receive the blessing of God in order to bless others? That's our question for today. John Wimber was the founder of the Vineyard Movement of Churches.

And he has this really helpful idea that for anything in the Bible to be lived in our lives, in our context, in our experience, you need three things, theology, model and practice. Theology, model, practice. You need a theology first.

You need to understand what the Bible teaches on this particular topic that you're trying to live in your life. It has to be sound. It has to be solid.

It has to be from scripture. What is the theology? And then secondly, you need a model.

How does that kind of overarching theology apply to our lives? What does it look like? And thirdly, you need practice.

You need time to fail, to try again, to rely on the grace of God to improve. As we seek to be a church, that is a blessing to the world. We need a theology, a model, and we need to practice.

So that's what we're going to look at today.

Firstly, theology. Our journey to be a blessing starts with understanding the theology of the conduit of blessing, understanding what it means for us to be a blessing from the Bible.

Did you know that this idea that we're talking about is actually a pattern woven throughout the entire Bible? This idea that God blesses in order that that person might bless the world. Have you ever seen the story of the Bible depicted like this?

This is the history of the universe from start to finish, from the beginning to the end. That is the Messiah, Christ in the middle. And these are the stages of the story of the Bible.

This is an hourglass. You might have seen the Bible kind of illustrated as a circle, maybe, or a list, or maybe an arc. But this is another way of telling the story of the Bible.

The movement in is what the Bible calls election. Tricky word, but we're going to go there. And the movement out is vocation.

The pattern of the Bible is that God chooses one from the many in order to bless the many by the one.

This is what it means for God to choose someone, that they might, the word vocation means calling, that they are called to bring the blessing of God to the world.

We're going to race through the history of the entire universe this morning as a way of thinking about what it is for us to be blessed and to be a blessing.

Firstly, creation, Genesis 1 and 2, God creates a good world, good, good, good, good, good, good, six times good, but not very good until humankind is placed in the garden. The picture that we get is that creation is full of raw potential.

It is good, but it is not complete. Genesis 1 and 2 is not the end of the story, but the beginning of the story. And that's why God created humans.

God elected them, if you will. God shows the human creature out of all creation to be a conduit of his blessing, which is the second stage, humanity.

Genesis 1 verse 26, God said, Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.

God said, Rule. That's what he told human beings to do. And this rule is not a rule that crushes creation, but one that is supposed to bring it to flourishing.

Human beings are blessed in Genesis 1 and 2. In fact, you know how numbers are really symbolic in the Bible, especially the Old Testament. 1, 3, 7, 12, 40, significant numbers.

God blesses three things in Genesis 1 and the start of Genesis 2. Firstly, the sea creatures and the sky creatures. He blesses them.

He says, Be fruitful. Thirdly, God blesses the seventh day and he makes it holy. But the middle of the three blessings is God blessed humankind.

Verse 28, God blessed human beings and said to them, Be fruitful, increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it, rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.

Right from the start of the story of the Bible, we see God has chosen, this is election language, chosen human beings in order that they might bless creation. And so this is what the graph is supposed to look like.

God chooses human beings and they expand that blessing back out to creation. But, you know that that is not what human beings do. They fail in their vocation.

Humankind do not fill the earth with the blessing of God, but they fill it with violence and wickedness. So what does God do? He chooses one man, which brings us to stage three, Israel.

Genesis 12 verse 1, 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.

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. Are you picking up a key word here?

Bless, bless, bless, bless, bless. God's desire is to bless the one in order to bless the many. Abraham has, of course, a son called Isaac.

Isaac has a son called Jacob. Jacob's name is changed to Israel. Israel has 12 sons.

And by the start of the Book of Exodus, that one man, Abraham, has grown into the nation of Israel. This is God's plan, to bless the one in order that the many might be blessed.

Exodus 19, God says, You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.

This is election language, choosing. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.

God chooses one to bless the world. That was Israel's purpose. The graph was supposed to open out again.

But as you know, Israel failed in their vocation. And so the prophets of the Old Testament cast their hope onto one person from the nation of Israel called the Messiah, the one who truly will bring the blessing of God to the nations.

Which brings us to the fourth and climactic stage of salvation history, Messiah. The word Messiah means anointed one, and that was Jesus. Anointed by the power of the Spirit to bring the blessing of God to the world.

Every healing, every deliverance, every miracle, every teaching, every parable, Jesus was bringing the blessing of God to the world. That's what he did. Now, you can't only bring the blessing of God to a world that is set in opposition to God.

There's a curse that has infected this world, and so Jesus dealt with that as well. At the culmination of history, Jesus took on himself the curse of sin in order that the blessing of God might come through him to his people and out to all nations.

That's what Paul says. And from Jesus, the hourglass of history begins to open out. The fifth stage is the church.

Jesus called 12 guys to be with him, to become like him, to do as he did. As the gospel grew and grew and grew, more people were added to that gathering, Jews and Gentiles, and it became called ekklesia in Greek.

That means gathering, assembly, called out ones, or as we call it, church. Jesus is reconstituting the people of Israel around himself. And Peter, who was one of the early leaders of this church, wrote these words in a letter to one of the churches.

You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession. This is election language. This is Exodus 19.

God choosing his people. But look at what Peter says. That you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness and into his wonderful light.

This is election for vocation. God chooses the one in order that the many might be blessed. Which brings us to the final, sorry, the second last stage, all nations.

The gospel spreads from Jerusalem to all nations. Jesus said at the very end of the gospel of Luke, this is what is written.

The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

I'm going to send you what my father has promised, but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high. The blessing of God through Christ to His church is meant to be spread to all nations as the gospel goes out.

This is what May Mission Month is all about. Bringing the good news to the ends of the earth, bringing the blessing of God to the world. And this is the part of the story that we live in.

And we look forward to the consummation of history. Stage seven is new creation. When Jesus returns, he will make all things new.

Revelation says there will be no more tears or mourning or pain or death or brokenness. All things will be made new. Shalom, wholeness, perfection will fill the earth.

Or, in one word, blessing. That is the destination that God is taking this cosmos. So stepping back and looking at this whole graphic, can you see how God's heart is to bless the world by blessing the one?

Can you see how this idea of the conduit of blessing is the shape of the entire Bible? God's way is to bless the one in order that they might be a blessing to the world. We are blessed to be a blessing.

The reason God chooses is for the vocation of spreading his good news. This is theology. We have to think right about what the Bible says.

We have to have our heads screwed on and think right about God, about his world and about our place in it. We are blessed to be a blessing. This is the plan of God.

So, what does that theology look like practically? This brings us to the model. We've surveyed how the entire Bible tells us that we are called to be a blessing.

This is what that might look like. The Book of Acts is full of models of people being a blessing to the world.

The early church in the Book of Acts are stewarding the most precious gift in the universe, the person, presence and power of the Spirit of God himself. They have the most incredible treasure, the most incredible blessing that they are stewarding.

And in the Book of Acts, we see a lot of models of how to be a blessing and how not to be a blessing. Think about the upper room of Pentecost itself, verse 4 of chapter 2 of the Book of Acts.

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. That means speaking Spanish and French and German and Latin from the top of the head as the Spirit enables. That's awesome.

That's really cool. Option one is for those disciples to say, how cool is this? I can delete Duolingo from my phone because the Spirit has just taught me Spanish.

Like forget my Duolingo streak. Option two is let's go preach the Gospel to all nations outside these four walls. As the Spirit of God has blessed us, let's be a blessing because that is God's heart.

Parthians, Medes and Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Frigia and Penphilia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs.

We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongue. Blessed to be a blessing. What about that story of Peter and John that we started with in Acts chapter 3?

Peter said, silver or gold, I do not have. So option one is to shrug, to tap your pockets, do that, empty. I have nothing to give you and move on.

Option two, Peter says, what I do have, I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk. Option two is, stewarding Christ blessed to be a blessing.

This is the unfolding story of the Book of Acts. But we also have models of how not to be a blessing to the world. Think of Ananias and Sapphira.

Do you remember all the believers were selling all their property, bringing all the money to the church and saying, what do you want to do? Give it to the poor, give it to people who need it.

Acts chapter 5 verse 1, a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold the piece of property. That's awesome. Praise God.

Blessed. With his wife's full knowledge, he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet. Blessed, but not a blessing to others.

What about Simon the sorcerer in Acts chapter 8? Some of the apostles go to a new town and the Holy Spirit does wonders through them. Incredible stuff.

And when Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money. And he said, give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may also receive the Holy Spirit. He was severely judged.

In fact, in church history, there's this thing called simony. Simony is from this guy. Simony is the practice of trying to buy a church office, as in trying to buy the papacy, trying to become a pope or a bishop with money.

This is a terrible legacy for this man, Simon. He's trying to take what can only be received. He's not blessed and he's not a blessing to others.

We could go on. The Book of Acts is full of models of people who are blessed to be a blessing, and of people who are blessed but are not a blessing to others. We could survey the entire book.

Models of believers who are blessed to be or not to be a blessing, and that is the question. How do we be a blessing? Willard and Shakespeare in one sermon.

That's good. How do we become a blessing to others? What's the model?

What does it look like? I think the model is that we want to be a river and not a reservoir. You know the difference between a river and a reservoir?

Both of them are fed by a stream of water, but a reservoir keeps everything it has and a river gives it away. We are called to be rivers and not reservoirs, called to be people who receive and give away.

Did you know there's, you know the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee in Israel? Both of them are in the Bible. Both the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee are fed by the Jordan River.

Both of them receive the same thing from the same river, but in the Dead Sea, nothing lives. Apart from microscopic bacteria, nothing significant lives in the Dead Sea. It's ten times saltier than the ocean.

Nothing lives. But in the Sea of Galilee, there's fish and there's sea creatures. There is life.

So fed from the same river, one is completely dead and the other one is full of life. What's the difference? The difference is the Dead Sea doesn't go anywhere.

It's a reservoir. It's the lowest place on earth, literally. If you're standing on the shore of the Dead Sea, you are standing on the lowest place on earth.

All the water goes in and it does not come back out. It is a reservoir, but we are called to be rivers, called to be people who receive the blessing of God in order that we might give it out. And that is the good life that God calls us to.

The way for us to move from being a reservoir to a river is to tear down the false beliefs that we hold. In other words, to correct our bad theology. So how about these?

Maybe these beliefs are something that we are tempted to hold on to. Selfishness. Everyone needs to look out for themselves.

I'm not gonna give away anything because everyone just has to care for themselves. This is selfishness. The paradox of the kingdom of God is that the good life is the life of giving away everything.

Jesus said, take up your cross, lose your life in order that you may find it. It is a paradox with God that when we give our life away, we actually find life in return. What about the false belief of emptiness?

This is the lie that I've not been given much. I don't have much to give. You have been given something.

It's an insult to your maker to reject what he has made you to be, what he has given you. God chooses foolish things to shame the wise. He chooses small things to shame the big.

He chooses weak things to shame the strong. Do you remember, do you remember this? What's the line?

From little things, big things grow. This is the heart of God. He gives us something small and he sees if we'll be faithful with it.

Jesus was constantly telling stories that to the faithful, he will give more. So don't believe the lie that you have nothing to give. God has given you something.

False belief number three is fear. If I give, I won't have enough for myself. Human beings, when we have a scarcity mindset, do silly things.

This is toilet paper hoarding in COVID. This is petrol buying in recent years. When we humans believe that there's not enough for all of us, we start to hoard.

It's motivated by fear. But the gospel transforms fear into faith, trusting that God is our provider, trusting that as we give our life away, he will provide what we need.

That's why Jesus taught us to pray in the Lord's Prayer, for what kind of bread? Daily bread. As in, you wake up and you say, God, would you provide what I need for today?

Not for tomorrow, not for next week. God has that sorted. What I need for today.

That's how we overcome fear. False belief number four is pain. It's the belief and it might, it's a fact for many of us that I don't feel blessed right now.

All I have to give is pain. I don't have anything good. Well, remember, blessing is the projection of good into the life of another.

And there are others in this room who are in the same season as you're in. Suffering.

That's why Paul says in 2 Corinthians chapter 1, he says, Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who comforts us with a comfort that we might comfort others. So even in the midst of pain, God has given you something.

You are learning lessons that could bless somebody else. The false belief number 5 is waiting. I'll give away when I have more.

It kind of sounds smart. It's like, well, let me take everything that I have now, multiply it first and then I'll start giving it away. That's not how the kingdom of God works.

If that is the belief that you have, you will never have enough to break the reservoir mentality. God desires that we give even what we have, a small amount that He might find us faithful to give us more.

We want to be a river church, not a reservoir church. We want to be people who are blessed to be a blessing, not just people who are blessed and hold on to it.

We don't want to be marked by selfishness, emptiness, fear, pain and waiting, but we want to be marked by generosity, abundance, faith, grace and readiness.

More than that, we want to be a church that receive with grateful, open hands the grace of God expressed in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Jesus said in John 7, Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.

Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers, not like a trickle, not like a stream, rivers of living water will flow from within them, and by this he meant the Spirit whom those who believed in him were later to receive.

Up to that time, the Spirit had not been given since Jesus had not yet been glorified. This is the work of the Gospel, that as God makes us alive, pours out his Spirit into our hearts, rivers of living water flow from us.

Not that we receive and bottle it up like a reservoir, but that the blessing we receive we pass on to a world that is in need. We are blessed to be a blessing. It says, up to that time the Spirit had not been given.

That is not the time that we live in. We live 2,000 years after the giving of the Spirit. In fact, in two weeks' time is Pentecost Sunday, which is the day that the Holy Spirit came on the church.

We are full of the Spirit of God. And because we have his Spirit, the rivers of living water flow from within us. We're blessed to be a blessing.

So that's the model. Rivers, not reservoirs. People who receive comfort and give comfort.

People who receive encouragement and give encouragement. People who receive blessing and pass on that blessing to other people.

Which brings us finally to practice. Theology, model and practice. By definition, you'll be glad to hear, this is where the preaching stops and the practicing starts.

We need to practice being conduits of blessing. Practice listening to the voice of God, calling us to give something in this conversation or in this situation. Blessed to be a blessing.

In a couple of minutes time, we're going to have morning tea. That's a really great time to practice being a blessing to someone.

With one ear open to their needs, to the person sitting and standing in front of you, and one ear open to the Spirit of God and what He would have you say and do in that situation.

We can practice being a river of living water, bringing life to everyone that we come into contact with. That's where the preaching has to end. We've seen a theology that God's heart is to bless the one in order to bless the world.

This is the shape of the story of the entire Bible. We've seen that the model of being a blessing is to be a river, not a reservoir, one who receives and who gives it away. And now it's time for us to practice.

So, typically, I would pray at this point. I'd like to bless you instead. The word benediction is what pastors often do to close a service.

Benediction means blessing. So, instead of praying, I would love to bless you with these words as the band comes up and then we'll worship together. Psalm 67.

Would you stand to receive this blessing from the Lord? Psalm 67. May God be gracious to us, and bless us, and make his face shine on us, so that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations.

May the peoples praise you, God. May all the peoples praise you. May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples with equity and guide the nations of the earth.

May the peoples praise you, God. May all the peoples praise you. The land yields its harvest.

God, our God, blesses us. May God bless us still, so that all the ends of the earth will fear him. Let it be so. And all the people said? Amen. Let's worship.