

Should God Bless South Africa? -1

By David de Bruyn

The national anthem begins with the words God bless Africa. It is a supreme irony that millions who do not believe in God, or are in no personal relationship with Him, sing these words with enthusiasm – God bless us!

There was a time when the words, “God bless South Africa” meant something else. They were a prayer. They were a request, for the God of heaven, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, to bless South Africa. Today, however, reflecting the times we are living in where every man is a law unto himself and submits to no one, those words are no longer a request, but in a sense, a demand. They are an expectation. They are a chant that we say, and supposedly, God, upon hearing those words, must move in and bless. God is no longer the Sovereign King, He is the servant, the one who must bless as soon as we order it. Today we use the term ‘God bless Africa’ as if saying it means it will happen. We say those words like once they are out our mouths, God is compelled to bless.

Not a day goes by without someone calling on God to bless us as a nation, as a church, or even as a family

It seems though that two questions are never satisfactorily answered in all that we hear about blessing. They are firstly, what exactly is God’s blessing? What does it mean if God blesses you- what will it look like?

The second question which is almost never asked is: what pre-requisites must be in place for God to bless? As John MacArthur puts it in his booklet so named: *Can* God Bless America? The same is true for us. Does simply chanting God bless South Africa guarantee it? I think it is better to ask – *should* God bless South Africa? Is it fitting for God to bless South Africa now, or would it be a contradiction? Does God bless indiscriminately, or are there things that must be in place before He blesses?

Maybe we should even back up further, and ask a question that no one wants to even speak out loud – can God curse South Africa? Psalm 9:17 says: “The wicked shall be turned into hell, *and* all the nations that forget God.” God can, and does, destroy nations. God gave this ominous and at the same time encouraging warning in Jeremiah 18:7-8: “*At what* instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy *it*; ⁸If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.” Clearly, according to those verses, God does choose to destroy nations, and only repentance stops that from happening. Jonah preaching to Nineveh and their repentance is a good example of this.

How does God curse a nation? I believe most often – He stops restraining the sin in that nation, and allows it to destroy the country. God speaks of this a lot in Romans 1. Three times it speaks of God – giving the unbelieving world over – or giving them up. There comes a time that God says to man – have thine own way. When that day happens, it is the death of that country. Jim Nelson Black wrote a book called, ‘When Nations Die’. In

it, he looked at the historical collapse of various civilizations and tried to identify common elements. He came up with 10 factors that seemed to be in every civilization before it decayed and collapsed. : 1. Increase in lawlessness 2. Loss of economic discipline 3. Rising bureaucracy 4. Decline in education 5. Weakening of cultural foundations 6. Loss of respect for traditions 7. Increase in materialism. 8. Rise in immorality 9. Decay of religious belief 10. Devaluing of human life. That sounds like an ominous warning when we look around, not only at our own country, but probably worldwide.

Rome followed this pattern. Beginning with strong families and sound political structures Romans believed in "duty, honesty, and honor" and in being "earnest, tenacious, well disciplined, frugal, and self-sacrificing". But as power, wealth, and lust took over Roman hearts, high taxes, adultery, and perverted sexuality destroyed families and the nation began to decline.

Having seen how and why God curses a nation, I think we can already guess what the Bible's pre-requisites will be for God's blessing a nation. But before we see that, let us ask and answer that crucial question- what is God's blessing?

The words for blessing in the Old and New Testament are used variously to mean different things. Sometimes, they refer to praise and honour. Blessing in this sense means to worship, to give praise and honour to someone. In this sense it can mean to confer benefits on someone.

Another sense in which it is used means a general sense of happiness. To be blessed – is to be glad, joyful, a recipient of things that delight the heart.

When we speak about God blessing humans, it is in this second sense that we mean it. God providing humans with what they need to be happy, contented and satisfied.

Now, this happens in two senses. God blesses in a general way, and in a specific way. God's general blessing is on the whole world. When our Lord taught that we should love our enemies, He was telling us we should do so because God does that. He said in Matthew 5:45: "That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." So there is a real sense in which God blesses all. He gives all humans some measure of the joys of life- some pleasantries, whether they be sunshine, food, some laughter and happiness. Many who reject Him still experience the gracious general blessing of God.

But there is a more specific kind of blessing. This is the blessing that comes to God's people. Those who receive Christ as Saviour, those who are born-again are blessed in a special way.. No – if blessing corresponds to happiness, joy, satisfaction, then God's blessing is Him providing you with what will provide the deepest possible joy. And what is that? God told Abram in Genesis 15:1 : "Fear not, Abram: I *am* thy shield, *and* thy exceeding great reward." What was Abraham's greatest blessing? His large amount of livestock? His huge household? His large collection of material possessions? His influence? The size of his household?

No, it was God Himself. God was Abram's exceeding great reward. Because God is the deepest satisfaction of the human soul. If the gifts of health and wealth are to be preferred for joy over God Himself, then what God has created is greater than Himself. His creation has somehow outstripped Him for glory and honour. No, the truth is, when we make health and wealth a more satisfying thing than God Himself – there is one word for that, it is called idolatry.

So we understand that the greatest blessing is God Himself. Ephesians 1:3 backs this up when it says: "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ." Every spiritual blessing is found where? – In a person – the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the consummation of blessing. He that has the Son is blessed, he that has not the Son is cursed. It really does come down to that.

Therefore God's blessing is when He gives what is necessary to know and love Him. It is when He chooses to reveal Himself in His Son Jesus Christ. Having a Bible in your hands, a clear Gospel preached, the Holy Spirit to teach you, prayer, the local church, being able to worship in freedom, having Bible colleges, Christian bookstores, Christian radio and television – this is God's blessing – for it is God pointing people to Himself in His Son Jesus Christ..

A nation is blessed if it knows the true God. That is what Psalm 33:12 says: "Blessed *is* the nation whose God *is* the LORD; *and* the people *whom* he hath chosen for his own inheritance." When a nation on top of that has ample Biblical teachers, colleges, ministries, churches – it is all the more blessed. Financial health and wealth may sometimes aid this pursuit of God, but it may also hinder it. It all depends on the state of the people. Often comfort is more an enemy to the Gospel than persecution. As such, sometimes God withholds these things to stimulate growth. Does that mean God isn't blessing? Not at all- so long as He is working to reveal Himself to a nation – He is blessing. If you found a group of persecuted Christians in Red China, and asked them if they were blessed, what would the response be? They would tell you how excited they were for the 3 Bibles they had amongst their group of 200, and they would tell you how God had blessed them in that none of them had been arrested in the last month. And they would be right. God's blessing is upon them, enabling them to seek Him and find Him – the greatest reward of all. The physical health and wealth is a side-issue. Blessing is God revealing Himself and providing the means for you to seek and find Him.

So when a nation prays – God bless us, they could mean two things. They could mean – God, bless us in a general way – provide our nation with things necessary for everyday physical life. But they could, and should mean, God, reveal yourself increasingly to our country. Let your ways be known, let your Gospel be preached, let people turn to you in droves, let righteousness break forth as the dawning of a new day.

Having defined what blessing is, we must move on to the next question – how do we obtain it? Is it as simple as some have said – pray- "God, bless me!" Well, consider the logic for a moment. If there is a nation living in outright rebellion toward God, would it be fitting for God to bless them in the two ways we have described?

Should God rain down the pleasantries of life on a country that lives in rebellion to Him? Should God send a richer understanding of truth to a nation that remains indifferent to

Him? While we understand that any of God's blessing is an act of grace, for God to bless rebellion and unbelief would be a form of sanction, a form of encouragement for such things to continue. For God to bless unbelief, pride and rebellion would be to literally, bless what He condemns. God would be speaking out of both sides of His mouth to curse and bless the same things.

However, I believe that God can bless a physical nation in this day and age. When He does this, it will be for the sake of His people within that land, not for the sake of unbelievers who happen to keep some of God's moral laws.

I believe Scripture teaches that God often blesses a household, city or country for the sake of His people that are dwelling there. You see this in the life of Joseph. Potiphar's house received the overflow of God blessing him. God blessed Jacob, as he stayed with Laban. God blessed Daniel with wisdom, and it was a blessing to the Babylonians. God's blessing spills over onto others. God may bless the unsaved in His grace, but His special blessing is for His people.

What are the prerequisites for blessing then in the life of a believer?

Righteousness. God blesses righteousness, because it is an approval of His own character. In a sense, righteousness is the blessing, while it also brings the blessing. But the Bible is clear that righteousness is the reason God brings either His general blessing, or more of His special blessings.

³⁴ Righteousness exalts a nation, But sin *is* a reproach to *any* people. (Prov. 14:34)

Scripture points out that when a nation has righteous rulers, and righteous subjects, God will bless that physical country. But take note what we mean by righteous rulers or righteous subjects. We mean those who have been made righteous by God, and continue to flesh that out. How are we made righteous? When we receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour by faith. At that moment Christ's righteousness is imputed toward us – it is counted on our behalf. 2 Corinthians 5:21: "For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Romans 4:5 says: "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness". This, and this alone is what makes a righteous ruler or a righteous subject – someone who by faith has turned from sin to Christ. A righteous ruler is not a ruler who denies Christ but is nice and fair. A righteous subject is not one who rejects Jesus but happens to keep the civil laws. No, a righteous person, in the Bible, is one who has been made righteous by God's power, and then lives that out by God's power. When a nation is increasingly filled with citizens made righteous by the blood of Christ, God's blessing is already upon that nation, and gives reason for it to continue.

"Take away the wicked *from* before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness." Proverbs 25:5

Now consider the verses dealing with the rulers being righteous:

It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness: for the throne is established by righteousness. Proverbs 16:12

When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn. Proverbs 29:2

The king by judgment establisheth the land: but he that receiveth gifts overthroweth it. Proverbs 29:4

“For the transgression of a land many *are* the princes thereof: but by a man of understanding *and* knowledge the state *thereof* shall be prolonged.” Proverbs 28:1

Speaking of corrupt, self-indulgent rulers versus righteous, godly ones, Ecclesiastes 10:16-17 says “Woe to thee, O land, when thy king *is* a child, and thy princes eat in the morning! ¹⁷Blessed *art* thou, O land, when thy king *is* the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness!”

1 Timothy 2:1-2:

“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks, be made for all men; ²For kings, and *for* all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” Paul did not pray that soon a Christian king would take over. He prayed that the present authorities would rule correctly, such that Christians would be able to live out their calling in peace. Why should we bother praying for those in authority? Because of Proverbs 21:1: “The king’s heart *is* in the hand of the LORD, *as* the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.” God is sovereignly able to cause a ruler to do exactly according to His plan. Our prayer is that God will turn a ruler’s heart firstly to Himself, so that he or she may be saved, and secondly that they would make decision and laws that honour God’s Word. We ought to pray for those in authority, not reviling them and forever rebuking them. Evil needs to be challenged, yes. Yes, bad legislation and foolish decisions ought to be spoken against in a good democracy. But the New Testament pattern knows nothing of belligerent, contentious Christians marching on Rome to give the emperor a piece of their mind.

In contrast to this spirit, hear Peter’s words: “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; ¹⁴Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. ¹⁵For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: ¹⁶As free, and not using *your* liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. ¹⁷Honour all *men*. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king. 1 Pet 2:13-17

What will put to silence the ignorance of foolish men? Our protesting spirit? No – our submission and honourable behaviour.

God bless South Africa is not a chant that God must obey. He is the sovereign. It is a prayer. It is tantamount to saying – God, save more people, and use us to spread the Gospel so that you can bless further. Let us be realistic. God can bless South Africa, according to His sovereign will. Should He bless South Africa depends on the hearts of

the people. God will not bless what He speaks out against in His Word – unrighteousness. Righteousness does not come through the law, it comes through believing the Gospel. Perhaps the alteration of one word might bring it home to us: “Go ye into all South Africa and preach the gospel to every creature.”
May God bless the Republic of South Africa.