

"THE MANTLE OF BLESSING"

2 Kings 2:9-14

George Patton: Sought blessing from General Pershing. An important dimension in life: Blessing.

I. THE TRUTH OF BLESSING

- A. Life is more than physical/natural – there are supernatural dimensions in life
 - 1. **V9 double portion of your spirit...**breath/wind; A supernatural dimension
 - a. More than facts/knowledge: Things happen that are supernatural – God is involved
 - 2. The Bible speaks of a supernatural dimension called blessing: 640x
 - a. *To bestow good/to cause to prosper*
 - 3. One person can bestow a supernatural dimension on another
 - a. OT: Abraham/Isaac/Jacob all blessed their sons. b. Moses/Aaron blessed the COI:
 - 1. This helps in times of transition
 - a. *Adulthood* b. *Marriage* c. *Travel* d. *Death* e. *Challenges: war, entering into the promised land*
 - 4. This is a natural process: Usually family - father
 - a. Words of value are spoken b. Meaningful touch: Hug/pat; OT – they touched while blessing
- B. This is a deliberate process
 - 1. OT: Often involved a ceremony where a blessing would be officially conferred
 - a. Conference/laying on of hands... b. Sometimes a father would officially speak/bless
 - c. Elijah cast the mantle on Elisha: A foretaste of official transference

II. PURSUING THE BLESSING

- A. This is not an accidental dimension
 - 1. You have to pursue this dimension
 - a. V9 Elisha asks for it/cries out for it; I want what my Pastor has!
 - b. There is the effort involved to pursue it: *3x Elisha says I will not leave you until you're taken up...*
 - 1. *Time/effort/obedience/patience*

III. AFTER THE BLESSING

- A. It's not enough to have someone lay hands on you/say some words
 - 1. We have had men with hands laid on them – who aren't even saved today!
 - 2. There must be ongoing personal decisions
 - a. **2 Kings 2:14** *Then he took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and struck the water, and said, "Where is the LORD God of Elijah?" And when he also had struck the water, it was divided this way and that; and Elisha crossed over.*
 - 1. Taking up the mantle: Believing what was bestowed
 - 2. Striking the water: Acting in faith
 - 3. Where is the Lord God of Elijah?
 - a. Connecting himself to Elijah/comparing himself to Elijah (reference points)

PATTON'S BLESSING

Valiant dreams came naturally to him. They had been encouraged from childhood. His father first fueled his imagination by reading to him from Homer's Iliad and Odyssey and the novels of Sir Walter Scott. Young George was fed a steady diet of Shakespeare, as well. Visions of heroes and epic deeds were blended with religious faith in his early life, and this came through Bible reading, the lessons of Pilgrim's Progress, prayer, and his family's devotion to church. Though his coarse language and love of war drew more attention than his religious life in later years, Patton was a man who read the Bible daily, sought God on his knees, seldom failed to meet with his chaplains for prayer before a battle, and knew Scripture and Christian theology well enough to debate experts. His early military career gave him reason to hope for greater glory. Distinction came rapidly. He competed as the army's representative in the pentathlon event of the 1912 Olympics, entered Mexico in search of Poncho Villa with General John "Blackjack" Pershing, and rose in rank largely because of his skills as a tank commander. He served heroically in France during the First World War, earning the Purple Heart and the Distinguished Service Medal. He returned home to acclaim as an armored warfare strategist and, despite the difficulties of American military life in the 1920s and 1930s, continued to rise in rank to become commander of the US Second Armored Division. This was the post he held on the eve of World War II. We come, finally, to the moment in Patton's life that portrays a vital truth of genuine manhood. It occurred in the weeks just after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The United States found itself suddenly at war with both Germany and Japan. Patton was given command of the Western Task Force with a single objective: drive German forces from North Africa. To achieve this Patton needed to defeat the legendary German tank commander Erwin Rommel and his Afrika Korps. He would lead the first great battle initiative to be undertaken by the United States Army in World War II. He had dreamt of such a moment all of his life. These dreams sustained him through the arduous years of training, combat, and dreary duty at remote outposts. He was as prepared as his own effort and schooling by the army could make him. Yet Patton knew he must have something more. His mentor from his earliest days in the army had been the revered General John Pershing. Patton had been privileged to serve on Pershing's staff during World War I, had fought in Mexico under his command, and had continued to enjoy Pershing's favor in the years after. He had grown to love Pershing, a general who demanded steely discipline from his men yet routinely slept beside them on the ground and endured dangers at their side. Patton had learned from Pershing's instructions and explanations, but he had also gained from the man's example. There was more to Pershing than skill and experience, even more than personality and character. Something invisible seemed involved in his sway over men, his strategic assessments, and his rule over himself. Patton concluded that the art of command is about more than what is seen. There are mystical qualities involved; empowerings that some men have and others do not. The art of command is about more than merely the sum of experience. As he prepared for a role in the greatest war mankind had ever known, Patton knew he would need this empowering, this grace, if he were to be a success. This certainty led him to visit his old mentor at Walter Reed Army Medical Center just before leaving for Africa in 1942. Pershing had been ailing for some time and had become a permanent resident at the hospital. Patton greeted his former commander tenderly, moved once again by how profoundly the man had shaped his life. The two spoke of the war and of the state of the nation. When it was time for him to leave, Patton rose from his chair and said, "I came here to get your blessing, General." This moved Pershing, and he replied, "Kneel down, Georgie." Patton knelt beside the old man's chair, allowing Pershing to lay his hand upon the younger warrior's head. He then said solemnly, "Goodbye, Georgie. God bless you, and keep you, and give you victory."⁸ When it was done, Patton rose, snapped to attention, and saluted his general. Pershing stood unsteadily and returned the salute. Patton left and later said he was thinking as he drove away from Walter Reed that he would never see General Pershing again. He was right. The words of this blessing were few, and those looking on at the time surely thought them insignificant. Patton did not. He had come to respect the invisible realities of both life and command. He also understood how an older generation might have something supernatural to impart to the next. He wanted the empowering he had seen in Pershing's life. He believed—on the basis of his Bible reading, his Episcopal faith, and the history he knew so well—that such empowering might be transferred from one man to another, from the fathers to the sons. He wanted a hand placed upon him and the grace of God invoked by one who had known that grace in his own life. General George Patton would not think himself ready for his great task until that grace came also to him. He believed Pershing's blessing would make it so. It is an important moment for us to observe, and we could not have understood it had the movie image of Patton been our only point of reference. The truth is that profane as Patton was, he was also a believer—in the existence of God, in the truth of Scripture, in the historic battle between good and evil, and in power given to men that they might fulfill their purpose. This was the reason he wanted the blessing of his military father before stepping onto the broader stage of his destiny. Men are designed to live with a sense of connection to their ancestors. They want to feel they are living out a commission from their fathers. Whether they realize it or not, they want to be sent into the future, to know importance in their lives that comes from heritage, tradition, and a generational purpose. In short, they want to belong to their ancestors in ways that liberate them and give their lives deeper meaning. For centuries, men spoke of death as being "gathered to their fathers" (Judges 2:10 NIV). This created a sense of accountability to those who had come before them. Sons would think of themselves as carrying on the purposes of their fathers while also believing they would answer to their fathers at death. They didn't take this as bondage or an oppressive set of demands from the dead. Instead, they lived more gallant and useful lives inspired by the hopes that rested upon them. For most men today, there is sadness in knowing this. I've felt it many times. Our broken families, generation gaps, and absentee or unengaged fathers leave men of my age longing for blessing and connection to the past but seldom knowing where to find it. We feel like generational orphans, like men without the fathers who might have laid one hand on us and another upon the past. We hunger for affirmation, impartation, and purpose. We want the blessing. We should not despair. There is a God, and he can be a father to the fatherless. He can lead us into fields of honor while assuring the preparation, blessing, and ennobling purpose that others have had.