

Psalms 67

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[0 : 0 0] But I want us to look at Psalm 67. It's a psalm that I've often come back to, I've preached on it a number of times. And the reason I want to look at it, particularly today, is because in many ways Psalm 67 should be the DNA of our congregation.

It should be what we're about. If you're a visitor, we're delighted that you're here, hopefully. Hopefully, as you understand Psalm 67, you'll understand what is the heartbeat of our church family.

And we want to be thankful this weekend. And to do that, I want you to look at what's behind Psalm 67, and then look more closely at the psalm, and then to think about what's life like beyond Psalm 67.

And so firstly, as we get into Psalm 67, there are two really important pieces of background to this psalm that you and I need to grasp. The first is the blessing that's given to Aaron, and then secondly, the promise that's given to Abraham.

Blessing to Aaron, promise to Abraham. And without those two bits of background, it would be very difficult to understand Psalm 67. So let's look just at verse 1.

[1 : 1 2] May God be gracious to us, and bless us, and make his face to shine upon us.

That sounds, isn't it, very, very familiar. And if you're part of this church, why is it familiar? Because that is the benediction, that is the blessing that I use every Sunday morning. It's much loved by us, and by all the people of God down through the ages.

It's Numbers chapter 6. Let me read it to you from chapter verse 22. Number 6. Where it says, The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to Aaron and his sons, and thus you shall bless the people of Israel, and you shall say to them, The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.

It's a wonderful expression of God's desire, and God's plan, and God's devotion to bless his people. He actually tells Moses, tell Aaron, and the other priests, to announce his blessing.

[2 : 3 1] Because that is precisely what God wants to do for them. God wants to bless his people. God wants to be gracious to his people, and to give them peace. He wants to turn his face towards them, to make his face shine upon them.

It's a picture, isn't it, of God's desire for intimacy with his people. God wants to bless you. He's still holy.

Of course he is. His face shines. Do you notice that? Not everybody's face does that. Yet he turns his holy face towards his people, with a heart determined to bless them.

And here the psalmist says, he takes that blessing, and he turns it into a prayer. They would be very familiar with these words. By this time, Psalm 67 is written.

And he takes up this invitation, that this blessing represents, and he turns it into a plea. And he says that God would do indeed, as he intends.

[3 : 3 7] It's a petition that God would be gracious to his people. As gracious as he's taught them already, that he would be. And so the first significant background reason of information you need is, is this is the blessing of Aaron, that he's praying.

The second thing is, the promise given to Abraham. And so do you remember that promise? Genesis chapter 12. Genesis chapter 12. Let me read it to you.

Where God says to Abraham, And the Lord said to Abraham, Go from your country, and your kindred, and your father's house, to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you.

And I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. And I'll bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you, I will curse.

And in you, as you get it, all the families of the earth will be blessed. God tells Abraham what he's going to do for him. What he's going to do for him, and all his descendants.

[4 : 41] And remember, this is way before, this is hundreds of years, before number six. Right at the very beginning, of Israel's relationship with God. Can you see the connection?

The promise to Abraham, and the blessing to Aaron. And they both have, don't they, as their central theme. What is the big theme? God's determination. His deep determination to bless his people. That's what's made Abraham's descendants special. That's why the Israelites, were unique. Because God's face, was turned towards them, in a way that it wasn't turned, towards other nations.

And God was going to bless them, like no others. And yet, through them, he would bless all the nations. All the families of the earth.

And that's the other significant part, of God's blessing to Abraham, that we need to remember. That God says, Abraham, I will bless you so much, that through you, and your descendants, as all people, that on earth, do dwell, will be blessed.

[5 : 48] So I thought of an illustration, I'm not sure it's mine. If it is mine, it is a magnificent illustration. Alright? And I'm going to copyright it. If it's not mine, let's not find out who it was. So, do you remember in the 1970s, there was a champagne glass tower?

And do you remember that? Children, I've got, put a drawing on your little sheet, so that you can see what it's like. Show the adults next to you. And it's now a little bit, kind of kitsch, isn't it? A little bit old fashioned. I've not been to a wedding, when they've done it.

But back in the 70s, it's all the rage. So you'd have one champagne glass at the top, wouldn't you? And then you'd have it resting on four champagne glasses, and then the four champagne glasses were resting on eight champagne glasses, and then 60, 32, 64, you know the pattern.

And there'd be one little glass at the top, in a kind of triangle, in a kind of pyramid. It was like a tower, tower, with a wide base, going up to a narrow single glass.

And the moment of truth came, wasn't it? When the happy couple would pop the champagne, and the champagne would be poured into the single glass, wouldn't it? And it would fill up, and fill the single glass, and then it would overflow, into the four, and then the eight, and then the 16, and then the 32, and then the 64.

[7 : 10] And they'd keep pouring into that top glass, until all the glasses were full. It was a moment of kind of celebratory theatre. The champagne poured into the single glass at the top, and the pouring would continue down, until all the glasses were filled, with champagne, castigating over them.

Like a cliff top, with a waterfall, kind of flowing over the top. And that's what this promise to Abraham is like. Abraham's glass, which is empty in Genesis 12, God says, I will fill it, and I'll fill it to the brim, and it will overflow, and it will overflow, and I will keep on pouring out my blessing, until it's overflowed.

And God fills Abraham's glass, so that it flows over to his family, and to his tribe, and to his nation, until every country on the earth is blessed.

And so what I hope you can see, as we turn to Psalm 67, that you can see that there's this coming together, of these two really important themes. The psalm merges two ideas.

The blessing of God's people, and the overflowing of that blessing, to the nations of the earth. Two points. You see the blessing of the Lord, and the promise of the Lord. So the blessing of the Lord, we've seen Psalm 67, it opens, doesn't it, by talking about God's blessing on his people.

[8 : 42] But it closes that way as well, look at verse 6 and 7. The earth is yielded to its increase, and God our God will bless us, and God shall bless us, that all the ends of the earth fear him.

What kind of blessing are we talking about in verse 6? Well it talks about the land yielding its harvest. God blesses his people, by prospering the work of their hands, and making it fruitful.

He blesses them with food to eat. He provides for them. Verse 4. Verse 4 also speaks of, doesn't it, about the just rule of God, and the way that God guides the nations.

And you can see that there too, and that too is a blessing. It's a blessing from God, the provision of leaders and law. His protection against the danger, against the powers of evil, and providence over things.

You rule the peoples justly, with equity, with fairness. And you guide the nations of the earth. But of course, verse 2 speaks of, the great blessing, doesn't it?

[9 : 55] It speaks of God's salvation. There can be no blessing, greater today than that. But God made a way, even in the day of this psalm, is for men and women, and boys and girls, like you and I, to be made right with him.

To have our sin dealt with, and atonful. To know his love, and to share in his promises. He rescued them from their enemies, and he brought them to rest, in their own land, in the blessings of salvation.

And what the psalmist is saying, the blessings of salvation, deserve to be known, even beyond the borders of Israel. Because God has made a way, for Gentiles, for non-Jews, for people like me and you, to be welcomed into his family, and his kingdom.

And so those are the kind of blessings, that the psalmist writes. Not all the blessings. But they are the ones, the psalmist mind. They are the kind of reasons, he gives for why God, deserves to be praised.

So secondly, the praise of the Lord. The blessing of the Lord, and the praise of the Lord. And what is really interesting, as I've studied this psalm again this week, is this psalm, isn't really talking about, the praise of God's people.

[11 : 17] The psalm is not drawing, a connection between, the blessings upon Israel, the people of God, and Israel's praise. Instead, it's wanting to draw, a connection, between the blessings of God, upon his people, Israel, his church, and upon others.

And that flows to the praise, of all the peoples on the earth. It's not what we might have expected. Normally, it's the people who be most blessed, who are most full of praise, as well they might be. But the focus here is different, isn't it? And that's because, this psalm, is not just a psalm, with number six, in the back of its mind, but with Genesis 12, in its mind.

Listen again, to the counterintuitive logic, for it's one, may God be gracious to us, and bless us, and make his face, shine upon us, that your ways, may be known, on earth, your saving power, among all nations.

Similarly, in verses 3 and 4, let the peoples, praise him, oh God, let all the peoples, praise you, let the nations, be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples, with equity, and you guide the nations, upon the earth.

[12 : 36] That repetition, in verse 3, is striking, it says, let the peoples, just in case, if you didn't get it, let all the peoples. The psalmist longs, not just for, all his people, his prime, his nation, to praise God, but for all the peoples, to praise God.

And for emphasis, he repeats himself, to make sure, that you're not missing the point. Do you see, the psalmist has, in the back of his mind, that God's intention, from the very beginning, was that God's blessings, for the descendants, of Abraham, would overflow, to the nations, of the earth. And here, the psalmist, reflects for a little bit, on that, if that takes place. Then all the nations, of the earth, will join us, they'll join in, with Israel's praise, and the psalmist, knows, that is what, God deserves.

His greatness, and his majesty, are too vast, to be worshipped, by only one nation. One people, alone, don't have within them, all the songs, that need to be sung, to worship God, for his, unlimited, limitless goodness.

One people, will not contain, all the people, needed to bend, their knees, in adoration, given the sheer worth, of God's kingship, to the world. And the psalmist, knows, that when people, are blessed by God, and they recognize, those blessings, for what they are, and when they, allow their hearts, to feel, what it makes sense, to feel, in response, they will be humble, they will be grateful, and they will be elated.

[14 : 26] And those people, find it hard, not to speak, of God's goodness. And that is how, his praises grow. The chorus, swells, more and more, as people speak, of what they have, experienced.

And their, abundant blessings, meet with, abundant praise. And you know, in one sense, this is what, the word evangelism, really is. I get very, nervous, about talking about it.

I don't want to, make you feel guilty. And we often, get stuck, and very nervous, about evangelism, because it becomes, something that we'd, rather not do. It sounds like, a kind of obligation, that's laid upon us.

And something our neighbours, and our friends, will really resent, if we do it. But if we had a better grasp, of passages like Psalm 67, we'd see it instead, simply, as the swelling chorus, of praise. We'd see it, as people, so elated, and so grateful, that they can't, not talk about God. We'd see it, as simply people, taking delight, in something good, and wanting, to share it with others.

[15 : 41] We'd see it, as people, just wanting to share, what they've experienced, from God. And if we, saw it like that, maybe, people like myself, and others, we'd do it, without, the self-consciousness, and all the angst, that goes through it.

Do you notice, in Psalm 67, the psalmist, calls God, our God. In verse 6. Our God.

That was true for Israel. He was their God, wasn't he? Uniquely so. And as a result, they were uniquely blessed. But he was not their God, to be monopolised.

He was not their God, to be kept to themselves. He was, and is, a God, too good, not to be shared. A God, too good, not to be shared.

And that's the fundamental, conviction, this son, so, what should we say, as we look beyond, Psalm 67, as we live, in the light of it. A couple of things.

[16 : 55] Firstly, like the Israelites, who first sang this song, we, we will be faithful, to its intent, if we know, God's blessings, and see them, for what they really are.

God has provided for us, as he provided for them. We have, don't we, our daily necessities, cared for, and so much more.

It's a place we live in. He continues to rule the world, verse 4, as it says, and we benefit, don't we, from stable government, in this country, relatively stable.

And we benefit, from, their protection office. We benefit, from his providence, in guiding our lives, whether we're conscious of it, or not.

And above all else, we know his salvation, and we know it, even better than the psalmist did.

Because we know, don't we, in full technical, that we have been made, right with God, in Christ.

[18 : 03] That if we've trusted, in the Lord Jesus, our sins have been, atoned for, and we are loved, by God, in Christ. And we have a share, in all the promises, that Christ has made.

And so as I've reflected, this week, it's actually hard, to think of people, in any place, at any time, in history, who know better, than we do. Who know better, than we do, what it is, to have, the face of God, shining upon us.

We are quite literally, drenched, with his grace. It is almost, embarrassing, isn't it, how much, blessing we enjoy. And we will never, forget that.

And that is part, isn't it, I hope, of what this weekend, is about. Of recognizing, the goodness, and the blessing, of God, upon us, in these last, 20 years. Because it's, as we remember, God's grace, towards us, for what it really is, we'll join in the praise.

And the deeper worship, and this deeper worship, that Psalm 67, is calling for, it's not, trying harder, to praise God, or worship him.

[19 : 17] it is simply, the call, to reflect on who he is, and what he's done. And as we reflect, on who he is, and what he's done, and when we do that, like this Psalm, our hearts, will drift naturally, in the direction of praise.

And we'll find, our voices, joining the swelling, chorus. It is one of the things, that I love about this Psalm, the way it depicts, praise spreading, and expanding, over all the earth.

And that means, we don't praise God, in a vacuum. We are part of, a heritage of praise, that goes back, 3,000 years to this Psalm. And even further.

And we don't just, praise God on our own. We praise him, as part of a choir, that gets bigger, and louder, with every new voice, that is added. And so, if there is, a group of people, in a borough of West London, called Ealing, in a city, called London, in a far off, island, called the United Kingdom, and this very day, they are praising God, then the prayer, of the heart, of Psalm 67, must have gone, a long way, to being answered.

And yet, isn't the desire, of our hearts, this morning, that we long, to see the prayer, of Psalm 67, answered more and more. That we long, to see God's blessings, continue to overflow, until every voice, praises him.

[20 : 55] We long, for people, from the ends of the earth, to fear him, verse 6. And so, we strain our ears, to listen out, for the song, that all the nations, might sing.

And we look, for the day, when the blessing, that has reached us, reaches the ends of the earth. And so, in this 50th anniversary, we are rejoicing, and giving thanks, for far, far, far, more than 50

years.

From Abraham, to Aaron, to Jesus, to us. We're part of the same story. The promise, of God, poured out, that all the world, will be blessed.

And those of us, who are people of faith, like Abraham, who've received, the salvation, offered to us, by Abraham's seed, to the Lord Jesus Christ, we to have embraced, that vision, of God, for all the earth.

And that's why, our church, God willing, in the next 50 years, will continue, to send people, to other nations, to tell the gospel. And that's why, we'll sacrifice, to fund church plants, to happen in other places, like Oxford.

[22 : 14] And that's why, we'll send men and women, to train for gospel ministry, and seek to share, God's goodness, with those around us here. And that's why, we'll pray earnestly, for all who are lost, because this psalmist, his desire, is our desire, that may God, be gracious to us, and bless us, and make his face, to shine upon us, that your ways, may be known on earth, and your saving power, among all the nations.

Amen.