

Text: Psalm 67

“The Big Picture of Blessing”

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Rev. Rob Szo

If you want to learn about the many ways God wants to bless you, do a quick search online using the words “God” and “bless.” You’ll be amazed at how many ways God wants to bless you, many of them having to do with finances and health. You guessed it, with many of these sites, you’ll be blessed with money and an ageless body and mind. Much of what you’ll find online is about the ‘prosperity gospel,’ which in a nutshell says that God wants you to be wealthy and healthy. If you’re not, you’re doing something wrong, or you haven’t read the materials offered by the website. There are also some good websites that will teach you biblical principles of blessing, but there are so many others that sound deeply suspicious.

The Bible does talk about God blessing his people, and we have stories in the Old and New Testaments of God doing just that. But the blessing Scripture talks about is so much more than it appears on the surface. We tend to think about blessing in a narrow, individualistic sense; we easily say: “I’ve been blessed, or my family has been blessed.”

Let’s consider Psalm 67 today and what it teaches us about the ‘big picture of God’s blessing.’ This psalm is a good one for deepening our understanding of blessing and helping us see how God uses his blessing.

If you haven’t spent much time in the Book of Psalms, I’d encourage you to do it. The Psalms are incredibly rich and deep reflections on life with God our Saviour. They run the gamut from joy and peace to sadness and suffering. But through every Psalm is the thread of God’s voice, speaking to his people, hearing their prayers and constantly and faithfully renewing their hope by pointing us towards him. Psalm 67 is a very short psalm, but a great one to dive into.

The psalm contains one of those lessons I mentioned last week, when I talked about developing some habits in your Bible reading. I mentioned the importance of paying attention to repeated words and phrases. We have

this in the psalm today, as we hear the repeated words “bless” and “praise.” This is a prayer for God to bless his people and a prayer for the people of the world to praise God.

Notice what it says in verses 3 and 5, as the same phrase is repeated word for word. Depending on the version you’re using, the sentence starts with either ‘May’ or ‘Let’ (the meaning is the same).

*“May the people’s praise you, God; may all the people’s praise you.”*

This prayer is repeated for emphasis, and captures the theme of Psalm 67. The theme is the hopeful prayer that the whole world would come to praise God.

But how is that going to happen?

The Psalm gives us some indication, by showing us that the whole world will come to praise him when his blessings are made visible.

*The first way God’s blessing is made visible is in the way God works in the world.* In the middle of Psalm, in verse 4, it points out what we Christians know already: God rules the world or judges the world fairly, or with ‘equity.’ This is a very important thing to all people; we all want to know that there will be real truth and justice for those who have suffered injustice and oppression. We can’t imagine that God would be the God of love if he simply let injustice and oppression slide, as if it didn’t matter. For the millions who have suffered and continue to suffer, there needs to be justice. When we’re talking about God’s justice, we’re talking about complete and perfect justice. With God we don’t worry about corruption, or secret deals between lawyers. We don’t worry about evil dictators getting away and living the rest of their lives free and secure. Psalm 67 points us to divine justice, which is meant to fill us with confidence and hope.

Verse 4 also prays for the nations to be glad and sing for joy because God guides the nations of the earth. This is the perfect complement to God’s justice, because it says there’s a plan within human history. We don’t know the inner details of the plan, we don’t always like how the plan moves

forward, but the psalm says that God is the one in charge of history. This changes history from a series of random events to a forward-moving series of encounters with God. True, there are many times when people make their own decisions and cause huge suffering and misery for others, but behind the events of human history is the deeper knowledge that God's will is being worked out through human decisions. Even when these decisions are purely evil and inflict a massive amount of suffering, God is still in charge.

When we get into this area, we get into the area of the two ends of the same spectrum: on one end we have God's will and power, and on the other end we have our human freedom to choose. We have choice, but our choices serve to reveal God's will for his creation. It's part mystery and part exercise in faith and discernment.

As Paul the apostle writes in Philippians: *"continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose."* Paul says something similar in Ephesians: *"In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will..."*

Towards the end of the psalm we get another reason for praise to be given to God from all corners of the world. This reason is given in v.6: *"The land yields its harvest;[or 'the earth has brought forth her increase'] God, our God, blesses us."* Again, this is one that just about anyone can get behind and agree with. We look around and see how the land brings forth food for us to eat. Not all people have easy access to this food, and there's drought in some parts of the world, but there's certainly enough yield to share with others. Despite human greed, the earth does yield its harvest and many try to share this with the poor and the hungry.

The hope and prayer of Psalm 67 is that the whole world would come to know the justice and guidance of God, would come to see and enjoy the harvest, and would respond to this knowledge with joyful singing and gladness. The hope and prayer is that all people would come to see the Lord God as the one who deals fairly and lovingly as he guides the nations of the world and provides food from the earth. Our hope as Christians

should be for others to come to faith in Jesus as the one who fulfills the promises of Psalm 67.

Jesus reveals God's perfect justice on the cross, as he died for our sins. He was judged in our place and we've been set free. He'll return to judge the living and the dead and perfect justice will be revealed for all to see and acknowledge.

If we look for guidance, Jesus promises this in John 14: *"the Advocate, the Holy Spirit...will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."*

When it comes to giving thanks for the harvest, Jesus taught us to pray: *"Give us this day our daily bread,"* and to frame our prayer in a way that honours God as 'Our Father,' as the one who is worthy of our praise.

The second way God's blessing is made visible in the world is the first way mentioned in the Psalm and is the main thread running through the Old and New Testament.

Verse 1 sounds like the standard approach to blessing, as it says: *"May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine on us—"* This sounds great! We love to pray that God would bless us and make us aware of his holy presence with us. But then verse 2 says that we're asking God to bless us *"so that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations."*

*This is the big picture of God's blessing.* This opening prayer in Psalm 67 takes us out of the realm of personal blessing and into the realm of blessing for the world around us. In the psalm, the people of Israel are asking God to shine on them, but to make the light reflect off them and onto others. The bigger purpose is to show others that God is the God of salvation and to have them respond to God in faith.

There's really no room here for selfishness, because the purpose of God's blessing is not to have it only stay with us, but to have others see it, be drawn to it, and find salvation in the light of Christ. This is the ultimate working out of God's purpose as others come to salvation through the blessings God gives to his people. God's people are those who have faith and stand in the line of Abraham, who believed God and was called 'righteous.'

There's a town in Norway called Rjukan. The town suffers through winter with no natural light, because it's deep in a valley. For about six months of the year, there's no natural sunlight in the town. One man in the town had a plan, and built three large mirrors on a mountain to beam sunlight into the town's square. The three mirrors rotate during the day to catch and reflect the rays of the sun. If you want to see if yourself, I'll post a link on the website under today's sermon. Or search online using the words 'Norway,' 'mirrors' and 'sunlight.' It's amazing to see in the video how the mirrors shine light directly into the square, even in the middle of winter.

This is the image psalm 67 has for the people of God. The light of Christ which blesses us is meant to shine into the lives of others; this light will drive away the darkness of sin and bring salvation. As people who follow Jesus Christ, we're obviously blessed in many ways. We can't count the blessings Jesus gives us. The purpose of our lives as followers of Jesus isn't to simply enjoy these blessings ourselves. The bigger purpose is captured in verse 2: *"so that [God's] ways may be known upon earth, your salvation among all nations."* We know that not everyone will like this light or even want this light. There are many who live as enemies of Jesus. That's not the point or the purpose. Our calling is to reflect the light of Christ for others to see. Of course we're meant to enjoy the light ourselves, but as ones who have the light only by the grace of God, we should never keep the gift to ourselves, but share it widely and generously. The light is meant to shine and then be shared.

The Good News of Psalm 67 is that this Saviour has called us to himself for salvation. His purpose is to save us, and in saving us he brings glory to God the Father and the Father brings glory to God the Son. And the blessing you have received is a powerful witness to your new life in Christ. You are blessed so that others will come to see Jesus as the one who judges, guides and brings salvation.

Amen.