

Sermon 7-16-17 Psalm 67 God's grace is ours

Dear Blessed by the Lord:

As God's children we seek God's blessings....

- For our spiritual health and salvation in the life to come
- For our physical health and well-being in the life here and now
- For our family and friends and fellow believers
- For our enemies as we are commanded to pray for them

Psalm 67 teaches us to seek God's blessings so that our "gladness in God" will spread to all nations. The Church of England appointed this psalm to be read in every worship service. The opening verse of this psalm reflects the blessing that the priests of Israel were to pronounce upon the people.

"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you, the Lord lift up His countenance and give you peace." Numbers 6

This psalm is also rooted in God's covenant promise to Abraham. God told Abraham: "And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing, and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." Genesis 12:2-3

The message of Psalm 67 is this: "Seek God's blessing so that our gladness in God will spread to all the nations."

Seek God's blessings.

God is ready to pour out His blessings on His people. God's blessing is rooted in His grace.

Verse 1 **"May God be gracious to us and bless us and make His face shine upon us."**

- Do we pray for ourselves?
- Do we pray for our marriages?
- Do we pray for our children?
- Do we pray our church?

Use the words of verse 1 in prayer seeking God's blessings.

We all need God's grace and His blessing.

- But God's grace may be hard for us to grasp sometimes
- God's grace runs contrary to our sense of fairness and justice
- We have been trained to work hard and to earn what we get
- Our pride tells us that we deserve to be rewarded because we worked hard

But God's grace humbles our pride and says to us: **"You deserve My judgment, but I am going to give you My favor."**

Grace means that we get blessings that we do not deserve.

- We can't earn grace or it becomes a wage not grace
- Romans 4:4-5 "Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness."

We deserve God's judgment for our sins, but He gives us a free pardon and eternal life through Jesus who paid our debt. The Christian life from beginning to end depends upon God's grace.

- We received Christ because of God's grace
- We walk in God's grace Colossians 2:6 "Continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught..."
- We enjoy all of God's blessings because of His grace that He planned for us in Christ. Ephesians 1:3-6 God chose us before the creation of the world

However, grace is not easy to receive because our pride makes us think we earned or deserved it.

- Whatever we have in Christ is a gift to us.
- We are sinners deserving of God's judgment
- We bring nothing to the table
- We must admit our helplessness and our sinfulness
- We ask God for His grace realizing it is something we can never earn.

God's blessing means that we can enjoy His favorable presence. We pray in Psalm 67 that God's face may shine upon us.

- To have God's face shining on us is the opposite of a scowling or angry face.
- To have His face shining towards us is the opposite of having Him turn His face away from us with indifference or disgust.
- It means to have His smile or favor upon us.

The believers of the Old Testament interpreted God's face to be that of the Messiah. God's face would shine on His people in the person of Christ, who is the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person.

Jumping to the end of Psalm 67 we find God's name repeated 3 times.

"...God, our God, will bless us, God will bless us."

We cannot separate God's blessing from God Himself.

- He is the blessing, to have Him as our God
- You can have everything that the world counts as blessings, but if you don't have God, you are not truly blessed.

King Solomon found this out when he wrote the book of Ecclesiastes. He had all the blessings of this world but he found out that without God everything was meaningless. We may not have anything that the world counts as blessings, but if you have God and His smiling face in Christ, you are still truly blessed.

God's blessing is not just for individuals but for groups as well. The blessing prayed for here is "to us"

- The pronouns are plural
- The prayer is for God's chosen people to be blessed
- The aim of God's blessing, that His way and salvation would be known among all nations, cannot be accomplished by individuals working independently, but only by His people working together.

This is why we belong to....

- A circuit of 8 other congregations
- A district of 212 other congregations
- A Synod of 6000 other congregations

Some believers think they don't need the church.

- Maybe they have left the church because they have been hurt or disappointed by the church
- Or they are afraid that if they get involved too closely with other believers, they will get hurt again.

So some avoid church...or they attend infrequently and never really get involved in what is going on with the ministry.

The Bible is clear that we experience God's full blessing when we congregate together as His people in community.

- His blessings go to the nations when the believers are working together as His people in community.
- Our Synod's worldwide radio program "The Lutheran Hour's theme is "Bringing Christ to the nations." (Letters from listeners – 1930's)
- This program has survived throughout the years because of believers like you serving and working together in community as a congregation.

God's blessings are to be received and enjoyed not just as individuals but also as a community.

Psalm 67 reminds us that one reason God blesses us is so that we may bring to the nations the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Through that Gospel the nations will be blessed.

If God wants His goods to get to the nations, then He will fill the truck that's driving toward the nations.

- He will bless the church that's pouring itself out for unreached people
- When we move toward unreached people we are leaping into the river of blessings that is already flowing to the nations.

Yes, we seek God's blessings

- We pray "God, bless me and my family
- Bless me with a living and a home and food
- Bless me with happiness and contentment

But we want God's blessings to go beyond our homes and families to reach the nations of the world. We pray that God would bless us so that what we have may be used to further God's glory among the nations.

Jesus said: "But seek first His kingdom and righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."
Matthew 6:33

Seek God's blessing for the sake of the nations. We do pray in the Lord's Prayer: Thy Kingdom Come! What are we praying for with this petition?

True gladness and joy is found in God.

- Gladness in stuff is futile because stuff can be taken from us in an instant
- Matthew 6:19f **"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth...but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven..."**
- "But gladness in God is eternal; it cannot be taken from you."

God alone is the One all-satisfying portion of the soul, and that we must determine to possess and enjoy Him as such. Apart from God there is no happiness, no contentment, no gladness. Vv3-5

To sing His praises, people must know God as He is revealed in His Word.

- They must know His ways and His salvation
- The Apostle Paul says: "How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent?" Romans 10:14ff

So, pray for God to raise up workers for the harvest.

- Pray for faithful people to send workers who will be supported
- Pray for God to break through the spiritual darkness with His light
- Pray for God to open the eyes and hearts of people to see Jesus

As believers we don't fear God's judgment.

- When you know God and His salvation, His righteous judgment and His sovereign guidance of the nations is a cause for joy
- We want people all around the world to have what we have namely the forgiveness of sins and eternal life through Jesus Christ.
- Not just those around the world but those in our backyards, down the street and across town
- When we are glad in God, we will want to spread that gladness to all nations

Psalms 67 begins with the prayer that God will be gracious to us and bless us so that the nations might know His salvation, so that they will praise Him and be glad in Him. Then it ends with the same prayer, now fulfilled by faith...

"God blesses us, that all the ends of the earth may fear Him."

Praise by its very nature begs to be expressed and shared.

- If you see a great sunset at the Grand Canyon, you want to tell others about it
- Your enjoyment of it spontaneously overflows into praise
- If you enjoy God and the blessing of His salvation, you want to share the joy with others, so that they can enjoy Him, too.

Taking the Gospel to the nations involves cost, though.

- Time
- Energy
- Resources
- Lives

But we do it for the glory of God and for the gladness of the nations.

In November of 1858, John Paton and his new bride Mary landed in the New Hebrides Islands in the South Pacific. The islands were home to fierce cannibals.

- 3 months after landing Mary gave birth to a son
- 3 weeks after that she died of complications from childbirth
- Soon the baby also died

John Paton was devastated. However, he would later say that the fellowship with Jesus sustained him through his intense loneliness and pain.

Mary's last words before she died were: "Oh that my dear mother were here! She is a good woman, my mother, a jewel of a woman." As she spoke she did not realize that a fellow missionary had heard her. When she saw him she said: "You must not think that I regret coming here, and leaving my mother. If I had the same thing to do over again, I would do it with far more pleasure, yes, with all my heart."

Today, due largely to the lifelong efforts of John Paton and his wife and other faithful missionaries whom the Lord used, those islands are now 75% Christian. There are no more cannibals there. John Paton's parents were joyous to see their son go, although they knew they probably would never see him again on this side of heaven.

God blesses us materially so that we can bless others spiritually.

Verse 6 says: "Then the land will yield its harvest..."

Our material blessings when used for God's glory will be translated into spiritual blessings on the nations, the unchurched. When God blesses us materially, it's not so that we can spend it on selfish living. We use God's blessings to bless the nations by sending and supporting those that take the message of His salvation to those who have yet to hear.

To invest in the Gospel for the nations is to praise God.