

Why Should God Bless Us?

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I think it will be next Sunday that we return to the Sermon on the Mount and the Lord's prayer that we've been studying but we suspended it for a time for the summer to be able to deal with a few other matters and we are going to take one more Sunday here this morning to build on something that we started last week, and I invite you to turn to Psalm 67 for our text this morning. Psalm 67 is our text this morning. For those of you that have not been with us on Tuesdays throughout the past couple of years, we've been studying through the Psalms. We began in Psalm 1 and we're working our way through all 150 and in our sequence of that, we are at Psalm 67 and I have been meditating and studying this Psalm for a number of weeks. It has really gripped my heart as I thought about our church, as I thought about our future, and it's so gripped me that I wanted to bring it to the full church, not the smaller subsection of those that come and be with us on Tuesdays. There are so many good things that happen on Tuesdays in our midweek study and if there is any way for you to make that a priority in your life schedule, I would encourage you to do so. It's an important part of the life of our church.

But today we come to Psalm 67 on Sunday because it is such a magnificent Psalm, because it meant so much to me and has for many weeks. I really wanted to share it with you as the overflow of my heart wouldn't let me do anything else, to be quite candid. So in Psalm 67, let's read it here as we begin. The inscription reads

1 For the choir director; with stringed instruments. A Psalm. A Song. God be gracious to us and bless us, And cause His face to shine upon us--
Selah. 2 That Your way may be known on the earth, Your salvation among all nations. 3 Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You. 4 Let the nations be glad and sing for joy; For You will judge the peoples with uprightness And guide the nations on the earth. Selah. 5 Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You. 6 The earth has yielded its produce; God, our God, blesses us. 7 God blesses us, That all the ends of the earth may fear Him.

Well, last Sunday we looked at the Great Commission from Matthew 28, "Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." You know the text. It's quite striking to me that in the Providence of God, our sequence of the Psalms which began over three years ago, brought us to this

particular Psalm at this particular time in the life of our church. It speaks of taking this real and true God to the nations, it's really a prayer that God would enable us and help us to do that, and it raises this question, it sets our aspirations and our goals to the farthest horizons of the inhabited world and encompasses every nation that has ever walked the face of the earth in its scope, and yet at the same time it causes us to stop and ask the question most searching of all: why is it that we want God to bless us?

Now, I assume that you are like me. In various ways, you ask for God to bless you; you want God's help in your trials; you want God's blessing on your family; you want your loved ones come to Christ and it's all good that we do that. We are intended to live a life of dependence upon God. He invites our prayers. He welcomes us as a loving Father would welcome his children to the dinner table and we are blessed to serve a God like that. But beloved, there comes a time in the life of individuals in your life today, there comes a time in the life of the church, where as we pray and we ask God to deepen and broaden our impact, there comes a point where we simply have to ask the question why are we praying that way, and the truth of the matter is that it's very easy for us to pray these things and to ask for God's blessing for purely selfish reasons. "Well, of course I want God's blessing. I want life to go well. I want life to be easy for me. I want more of what this world has to offer and I believe that God can give it to me and I have been taught to pray this way." Well beloved, there just comes a point and today is the point in the life of our church, in the life of ourselves individually, where we ask this question: why is it that we want God to bless us? Do we want God to bless us simply for the sake of our own happiness? Do we want God to bless us so that we could have the good life for ourselves? Do we want God to bless our church just so that we can feel good about what's happening and we see a few more people in the pews? Is that it?

Well, when you take that mindset and put it up against Psalm 67, what you find is this: is that Psalm 67 calls us to much loftier aspirations. It calls us to higher goals. And in an oversimplification, perhaps just a bit of the overall message of Psalm 67, you could see this coming out of the pages of Scripture by the authority of the word of God, the psalmist having given us a model for the mindset in which we seek the face of God and it is this: we seek the blessing of God so that he might use us to extend his salvation to others. The blessing of God is simply a means to another end. As we seek God, as we pray to God, there is to be in our mindset cultivated that there is something beyond me, there is something beyond the walls of this church that greatly matter, and it is all of those who do not know him, it is all of those who do not give God the praise that he is due. God deserves glory from all the earth because he is the God of all men, he is the God over all the universe, and by right of creation, he deserves the worship of every man, woman and child that ever walks on the face of this earth. And we look at that, we look at the situation and we say, "But that's not happening," and our love for God compels us, "O God, work in a way that would extend your praise, that would extend your salvation so that others would join that which rightly should happen. That which consumes my heart, Father, I want others to participate in."

There is also the sense of humility and human compassion that should motivate our thinking about things, that would forbid us from collapsing into a purely self-centered

approach to walking with Christ. We look about us and we think about it and we say, "Oh, do you know what? I was once a lost sinner. I once was doomed to destruction. And what did God do? He had grace on me. He led me to faith in Christ. He saved me not through anything that I had done but out of a sheer act of mercy that he had determined to do before the beginning of time. He showed mercy to me that I did not deserve. Christ came for a sinner like me and he worked in my heart and led me to faith in Christ and now all of my sins are forgiven through sheer mercy." And I look out and I say, "There are so many around me that are just like I was. Yes, they are guilty. Yes, their lives are perverse and godless and all of that, but I was just like that. God, I don't want to keep this just for myself. God, if you have been good to me like that, I desire others to share in the blessings that you have given to me, the spiritual blessings that you've given, the forgiveness of sins, the knowledge that heaven awaits. Father, I would have everyone share in the goodness that you have shown to me."

So Psalm 67 calls us to think outside the walls and Psalm 67 takes it to the lofty goal of thinking about nations as we think this way. You know, God first laid this foundation, this first thought of the expansive nature of his rule and his kingdom in the very beginning of his people in the Old Testament. We'll get back to Psalm 67 in just a moment but I want to take you back to Genesis 12. Turn back to Genesis 12 so that you would see that this consuming passion for the nations that we find in Psalm 67 was nothing new; that this was inherent and embedded in the promises that God made to Abraham when he first spoke to him in Genesis 12, when he first made lofty promises to Abraham about the blessing that would come through his seed.

Look at the call that God made to Abraham in Genesis 12:1, he said, "Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; 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 he goes on. These are great promises to Abraham, staggering that an individual man would be on the receiving end of grace initiated by God toward him with promises that extend far beyond his lifetime. And as we see in verse 2, it goes to his seed and as we see in verse 3, beyond his seed to all of the earth. In verse 3, God said, "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." When God called Abraham out and established the start of his people through his seed that would come through Isaac, Jacob, the 12 tribes of Israel and on down through the centuries culminating in the coming of Christ, the true one great seed of Abraham, what I want you to see is that Scripture is premised on the beginning of the people of God, you could say in a sense, is premised on a promise that from the very beginning had all the families of the earth in mind, had all the families of the earth as intended objects of the blessing of God. That has consequences. That has consequences. The people of God in the Old Testament, the nation of Israel, were intended from the beginning to be priests that would proclaim the glory of God to the nations.

You can see a little bit, there were times where this happened, so often they fell short of it. Jonah, the reluctant missionary turned out to be one proclaiming this one true God to the people of Nineveh in the book of Jonah and in chapter 3, the whole city repented, 3

and 4. They all turned, repented of their idolatry and turned to the one true God. The Queen of Sheba heard of the glories of Solomon and came and saw that. But in large part, the nation failed in that objective. They became self-centered. They became exclusive so that by the time of the coming of Christ, they hated the Gentiles and wanted nothing to do with them and had become a people that had utterly missed the point of their existence.

Well, beloved, Christ did his work, Christ lived his life, conducted his ministry, and when it was all said and done, he had been crucified, he was raised from the dead and as we saw last week, what was on the lips of Christ? Having done his work, what was on the lips of Christ? He says, "Go into all the nations," and you see Christ restoring the people of God back to what the original call was to Abraham in Genesis 12, to bring an international perspective to the Gospel and to the purpose of the existence of the people of God.

Now, the kind of ministry that we have become accustomed to over the past several decades have conditioned us to lose our focus as men have told us that we need to seek our best life now and teaching us to focus on your purpose and your experience with God, and this idea of those outside our walls and those outside the sphere of our own little lives gets lost. Well, here's the thing, here's the thing: as the people of God, as those who have been on the receiving end of great mercy in our Lord Jesus Christ, we naturally, and speaking to you as Christians, not assuming that each and every one of you are a Christian because that's just not the case, there are some within the walls of this room that need to repent and come to Christ. But speaking as the gathered people of God as we come together here, here's the thing: we love this Christ who saved us, we love this one who gave his life and shed his blood on our behalf to cleanse us from our sins, and we love him so much, here's the thing, we want to identify ourselves with his purpose, with his mission, with his view of the nations, with his view of what the purpose of his salvation is. We want to think like him. We want our heart to beat in rhythm with his. We want to be people that want what he wants rather than simply being consumed with what we want. And this is revolutionary, really. This is so counter to everything that conditions you in the fleshly carnal motions of your own heart; of that which the world conditions you to think, to demand what is yours, to get what is yours and to fight for it if you have to; that which the devil would condition us to, to draw us away from Christ and from his purpose and to replicate the selfless giving nature of Christ as he gave himself to us, the devil would draw us away and make it self-centered rather than thinking about giving ourselves up for the benefit of others, for their spiritual good, for their salvation.

Well, Psalm 67 is going to give us a great dose of correction for this and I realize that for many of you, there are probably very few of you that have read Psalm 67 recently and so I sympathize with you as we come to it. Let me just point something out to you to kind of familiarize yourself with the text that we are going to consider here this morning. I want you to see in kind of an overview fashion before we go through verse by verse, I want you to see the emphasis of this Psalm on the nations and on the peoples. Look at verse 2, the purpose of his prayer, "Lord, I pray this way so that Your way may be known on the earth, Your salvation among all nations." Verse 3, "Let the peoples praise You," he repeats himself for emphasis, "Let all the peoples praise You." You can sense that there is

this growing surge of passion that animates what he's writing and he says, "Let the peoples praise You, O God; nay, Let all the peoples praise You," as it just bubbles up within his heart. "Let the nations," verse 4, "the nations be glad. Guide the nations," verse 4. Verse 5, "Let the peoples praise You." Verse 5, "Let all the peoples praise You." Verse 7, "Let all the ends of the earth fear You." Do you see it, beloved? You can't read this Psalm without realizing that you are being introduced to a realm of thought, a call of God, a cry of a godly man that encompasses, that his arms stretch somehow supernaturally around all of the earth and embrace them in the scope of his prayer. That is the emphasis of this Psalm and when we realize, as we saw last week, that the emphasis of Christ before he ascended into heaven was go into all of the nations, we realize that our view and our scope of the purpose of our existence has been greatly greatly expanded.

Notice the repetition. I pointed it out briefly but let me point you to the repetition that is in this Psalm. Verse 3, "Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You." Then he says it again in verse 5, "Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You." Now, for those that are spiritually dull and sluggardly in their thinking and you say, "You know, you said it once, why do you need to keep saying it?" Well, the reason that he needs to keep saying it is that saying it once didn't exhaust the fullness of what was on his heart or the urgency of the content of his request. We know when something is important to you, you'll talk about it repeatedly. When something is on your mind and something engages you, you get animated about it, you repeat yourself as you're talking about it. Well, if you can do that on earthly things, then somehow let us enter into sympathetically the passionate urgency of this Psalm is to repeat himself again and again. "Lord, I ask You again and again and again, let all the peoples praise You." He is showing his urgency and underlying it all, underlying it all, this hymn writer from the nation of Israel, ultimately what he's saying is, "Lord, this blessing that we have as your people, I can't keep it for myself. I can't keep it to myself. Others need to share in this goodness that you have bestowed upon us. This is the reason that we exist. The scope of those who are praising you, the range of people praising you, needs to expand for the sake of your own ascribed glory. And for their sake, O God, let them praise you." So that's the spirit of this Psalm and it's going to challenge us here today in the 21st century as we go through whatever so quickly this morning.

Let's look at the first point which is found in the first verse here in Psalm 67: the prayer for blessing. The prayer for blessing. He opens up praying for blessing in verse 1 when he says this, look at the text with me,

1 God be gracious to us and bless us, And cause His face to shine upon us.

Now I want you to see something right from the start and to see the way that this prayer opens, the Psalm opens. It is framed completely as a request – mark it – it is framed as a request for undeserved favor. He's saying, "God, be gracious to us. God, extend favor and goodness to us which we don't deserve. Lord, we forfeited any claim on your blessing. I have no right to demand this. I'm asking, instead, in the realm and on the premise and on the basis of your grace and of your favor. That's what I'm asking for." And the tone of his

prayer is this, the essence of it is this, "God, we are your people. We belong to you. You have already given us so much and we ask and I come and I'm asking for even more as we approach you here today. I'm asking you to extend it even further."

Now, this prayer for those of you that have read your Old Testament, this prayer you might say, this reminds me, this is an echo of something that I've heard elsewhere in Scripture. If you have that sense, good for you. This prayer is adapting the blessing that God commanded the priests of Israel to use on the people that came to give sacrifices. In Numbers 6, you don't need to turn there, but in Numbers 6:24 and 26, God commanded the priest to use this blessing that I'm about to read to you upon the people as they offered their sacrifices. The priests were to respond with this, "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 on you, And give you peace." So this was a priestly blessing given for the good of the people of Israel as they carried out the sacrifices that God had appointed in that divine dispensation.

The shining face is a metaphor for divine favor. You can think of a mom smiling at her child. You know that she is ready to give that child whatever he asks. If a king looked on his subject and had a smile on his face, there would be an assurance in the subject, "The king is favorably disposed to me. He's ready to give me what I ask." So a shining face, a smiling face, a bright countenance, is an indication of someone that is ready to receive you and to receive you well and to give of themselves for your benefit. So here in verse 1 of Psalm 67, he's saying, "God, be gracious to us. Bless us. Shine your face upon us. Receive this prayer with favor, O God."

Now, there is a word "Selah" there on the margin, if you see it there. Selah is a word that calls for a pause in the thought. Stop and think about what has just been said. Meditate. Give some thought to what's been said before you move on to the rest of what is written. So the pause here is accomplishing this: he's just made a prayer that you and I can all relate to, "God bless us. God be gracious to us. Shine your face upon us. We want your blessing." But when you pause, when you think about your own prayer life in light of this pause, beloved, there comes a point where spiritual growth, the glory of Christ compels us to say, "Why am I asking this? Why am I asking for the blessing of God? Why do I want the blessing of God on my life?" Well, once you've asked that question and an unsettling question it is and you realize, "Okay, what's the purpose of this?" you're ready to move on to point 2 here; having gone through the prayer for blessing, point 2 now, we come to: the purpose of blessing. The purpose of blessing and this particular verse, verse 2, the beginning opening word of verse 2 is what really stops us in our tracks, that little word "that." "That," indicating purpose.

Let's just step back for just a second. We use the word "that" to express the reason that we're doing something, quite often. I could say, "So, Tim, why are you going to the store right now?" "Well, I'm going to the store in order that I might get groceries," and I realized Tim wouldn't answer the question exactly like that but you see the pattern of grammar that's in there. "I'm going to the store that I might get groceries." That's the purpose for which I go to the store; the word "that" expresses it. Here it's translating the

Hebrew infinitive of purpose, showing the purpose of the prayer that was just given in verse 1.

You say, "Okay, here comes the purpose on the end of it. God, I'm asking for you to be gracious." Why? Verse 2, "That your way may be known on the earth. God, show your blessing to us. God, bless us so that the glory of your saving character, the glory of your saving power, would be known to others throughout all of the earth. That's why I'm asking for blessing. God, it's not because I want the good life now. God, it's not that I could see peace and prosperity that I could go through life unhindered by challenges, even though my Lord suffered, even though the Apostle Paul suffered and was rejected and despised. Lord, I don't want to identify with them, I just want your blessing so that it goes good for me and I can sail on smooth seas until you bring me to heaven." Do you see in light of the suffering of Christ, do you see in light of the suffering of the apostles who delivered the message to us, do you see in light of the martyrs who spilled their blood in order to help pass the faith once delivered to the saints and we sit on the receiving end of all of that truth that has been delivered to us through suffering, preeminently of Christ and then of those who have served him faithfully? Do you see how it is so selfish and so wrong for us to think about our prayer life, to think about our approach to God, what we want from God, to simply to be for our own well-being? "God, I want a salary that's a little bit more than what I've got right now." Or, "God, I want this problem to go away so that I don't have to deal with it anymore." Do you see, beloved, how we so easily take God's grace and blessing for granted and turn it into something that's just all about you and me? That's what we want to get away from. We want to move away from. The psalmist was not praying in that sphere.

Look at verse 2 with me again. He says,

2 That Your way may be known on the earth, Your salvation among all nations.

To ask for God's way to be known is a prayer that his character and the way that he deals with men would be understood in broader realms than they are as he prays; that men would see this, recognize it and acknowledge it. And think about it, my friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, here's the way that we need to be thinking about it: who is God and what is his way? What is his manner with men? I'll answer my own question. God, the God of the Bible, that God is a saving God. He is a God who delivers men from their dilemmas, delivers them from their disease. More importantly gathered together here in the 21st century as the people that have been saved by Christ, we know that who God really is is he is a God who delivers men from sin and from death. That's who God is and what we want is for that greatness of his beneficent character, his great greatness and his good goodness, we want that to be known more broadly than it is as we stand here today. That's why we are gathered together. That is why we exist. That's the content of our prayer. "God, let your name spread. Let your fame be known. God, let the great goodness and the good greatness of who you are be known more broadly than it is as I stand here today. And God, if you would somehow order your blessing on my life, on our lives, so

that that greater objective would occur, would be achieved, that's why I'm praying, Lord. It's not for me. It's not for me, it's for the sake of your glory and that others might know."

You see, beloved, when we talk about the God who delivers men from sin and death, the God who is able to intervene and help people in their dilemmas, especially their spiritual bondage to sin and Satan, what we realize is this, what we realize is this, there is always going to be wars and rumors of war, there is always going to be wicked people carrying out acts that captivate the attention of men long enough until the next act occurs, what we realize as we see the drifting flotsam of human history, the refuse of human life and human misery and human sin continually coming up on the shores of human existence, what we realize is that the God that you and I know is the God who is the answer to that miserable human condition. The God that is revealed in Scripture is the God who can deliver men and nations from that darkness. The God that you and I know in the Lord Jesus Christ is the God who should be praised everywhere. He is the God that should be sought by sinners in their darkness, by men on their deathbed, by children in the early years of their life saying, "Why has this life been given to me and what can I do with my life that would actually matter rather than seeking my own fulfillment?"

The God that the psalmist is praying to in Psalm 67, the God revealed Incarnate in the Lord Jesus Christ, the God who if you are a Christian has saved you, is the God who is the answer to everything. And because he is so great and because the human condition is so dark, it should be the captive thought of our heart, "O God, make yourself known and somehow enable me to be a part, an aspect of the spreading of that knowledge of you that your greatness might be known and that men might find mercy in their miserable condition." That's the way that we should be. That should be the condition of our hearts, every one of us that know Christ, consumed with his glory and thinking beyond our lives for the sake of those who don't know.

So having stated that, "God, this is why I'm praying for your glory, for the sake of the nations," he repeats himself. He emphasizes it in verse 3. He says,

3 Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You. 4 Let the nations be glad and sing for joy; For You will judge the peoples with uprightness And guide the nations on the earth. Selah.

He says, "God, as I look out at the nations and I see them in the darkness of their idolatry, I see them rightly under your judgment because they have forsaken the God who has revealed himself in creation, I see them pursuing that which you condemn and, God, my heart can't stand it, my heart aches and so, God, I ask you to seek them, to pursue them, to make your name known. Father, I would have all the nations know of your greatness. I would have all the nations say it. I would have all the peoples praising you and joining me where I am now in the sphere of your blessing and in your goodness." You see, part of what he's saying here is this: he recognizes that the nations don't realize who the one true God is. He realizes that they refuse to acknowledge him, the language of Romans 1, they suppress the knowledge of God. Their bondage is so great that they are dead in trespasses and sins, they are blind, and it's not just that they are in that condition, they are

also dominated by Satan, under the wrath of God, and what is more, they refuse the very light that would deliver them from their miserable condition. This is a horrible position for the great nations of the world to exist in.

So he appeals to the one person in the universe who can address that sad situation, the one person who has the power to change it. "O God, do a work so that they might know. God, a work of your grace is needed for the truth to be received. You need to open hearts or they will remain locked in prison with no key to escape the dungeon." At some point, beloved, we need to care about that more than we care about our own individual lives. This is why the martyrs could lay down their lives, why they could willingly spill their blood, why men could burn at the stake and as their dying breath is escaping their nostrils, they can pray, "O God, open the eyes of the King of England!" It's because we realize the great supremacy of our God and the great darkness in which people live and we are caught in a tension between the two, belonging to this God and yet sharing humanity with those that are in darkness, and the tension of that causes us to rise forth in prayer, "God, glorify your name! Bring salvation to these people! And Father, somehow use me in the process in all my littleness of faith and existence."

As you read this Psalm, verse 4, you see that he lays out the reasons why the nations should praise this God. Look at the end of verse 4 with me. He says, "For." "Let the nations be glad and sing for joy." Why? "For," because, this is the reason that they should be glad and sing for joy, "For You, O God, will judge the peoples with uprightness And You will guide the nations on the earth." Why should the nations praise God? Why should they praise the God of Israel and forsake every other God that they have ever known? Why should everyone in every corner of the Hindu peoples, why should the people in Muslim nations forsake Mohammed and others forsake Buddha, others forsake their materialistic, atheistic worldview? Why should they forsake that? Because there is one true God. He is revealed in Scripture and he is the God over all the nations. He is the God who will judge nations as well as individuals. He is the God who guides nations with righteousness and with goodness and according to his purpose. He is the surpassing God. He is the transcendent God and because he is over all of the nations, all of the nations owe him their praise, their obedience, because they derive their existence and individuals derive each breath from him. And they should be glad that their destinies are in the hands of a good God, an upright God, a sovereign God who has the power to right wrongs and has the power to judge evildoers so that they do not have the final word in the realm of human existence. A God like that should be praised everywhere. A God like that should be loved everywhere.

You see, what this Psalm teaches us, beloved, is that God's sovereignty is universal. He's not just the God of Israel, he's not just the God over Christians today, he is the God over all, and a God who is universally over all is a God who should be universally praised and that's the heartbeat of this Psalm. And as we bring it back into this room, those of you who are resistant and rebellious to Christ and have not bowed the knee to him, understand that you are kicking against the goads of the universal God who demands universal praise and that includes you and no wonder Christ is righteous to say, "Repent and believe in the Gospel."

Here's what I want you to see, beloved, here's what we need to think about at this point in the Psalm. Notice at the end of verse 4, there is another "Selah" there. Pause for meditation. Think about what has been just said. Think about the universal scope of this prayer; that all the peoples, all the peoples, God, all the ends of the earth, all the nations. It is impossible to think of a prayer that is more expansive in its scope. This is one of the greatest prayers in all of the Bible and here's what I want you to see about it as we look at this prayer in Psalm 67, here's what I want you to see: that preeminently Psalm 67 is a very unselfish prayer. It is a selfless prayer dominated by a passion for God's glory. Beloved, mark it, I say it sympathetically because the shortfall of what I'm about to say applies to my own life so much as well. Psalm 67 shows a passion for God's glory and the welfare of nations in a way that makes our usual prayers for earthly ease seem so meagerly and selfish by comparison, doesn't it? "God, me, me, me. Bless me. Bless me. Bless me." What if, what if the whole spirit of our prayer life was changed. "God, your glory, your glory, your glory. Bless others. Bless others. Bless others. And oh, God, incidentally, bless me but only for the sake, only as a means to this greater end that consumes my heart." What if that motivated us in life and before the throne of God?

He wants men to come to faith. He wants these men who are not currently in faith, these nations, he wants them to come to faith in the one true God. Today we want them to come to true faith in Christ for salvation and then not just that, but we want the aftermath of true faith to be shown in them expanding and offering their own praise to God so that others would join in this spirit and there would be an exponential expansion as more come to this kind of faith, this concern for the glory of God, this concern for the nations, that they would be more and more echoes of people having this mindset to earth rather than the selfishness that our own hearts and the world conditions us and teaches us that is actually the right way to be when nothing could be further from the truth. You live, my friends, for the glory of God. You exist for his glory. The chief end of man is to enjoy God and to glorify him forever. That should be reflected in the way that we pray. "God, bless us simply to call attention to yourself. Grant us to be human instruments to spread your glory to others that are now in unbelief."

Well, we've looked at the prayer for blessing, the purpose of the prayer for blessing, point 3: we'll look at the proof of God's blessing as he states it there in verses 5 and 6. He repeats the call to praise and gives another reason for people to respond. Verse 5,

5 Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You. 6 The earth has yielded its produce; God, our God, blesses us.

It's possible that this Psalm was written in response to an abundant harvest that the psalmist was experiencing, and in those days where a harvest was everything, the days without grocery stores and all of that, the harvest was the guarantee of provision for the next year. It was no small deal to have a good harvest and what he's doing is he's calling out, as it were, to the nations, "Look at the harvest that our God has given us. Do you see that he has blessed us? He has provided again. You see, he will bless you in similar manner. As he has blessed us, he blesses all of the people who come to him with his

goodness. Wouldn't you want to share in the goodness that we have?" So it becomes an occasion to repeat the call to praise. He calls them away from their false gods.

Then the psalmist goes on to explain to others the reason for the blessing. Look at verse 7. He says,

7 God blesses us, That all the ends of the earth may fear Him.

This particular verse could be understood in a few different ways because of the nature of the Hebrew verb that's at stake here. Some of you, those of you that are reading the English Standard Version will see that it is listed in a future tense, "God shall bless us." Here in the NASB, it is stated as a present tense, "God blesses us," and that would explain why the harvest has been good. But beloved, the grammar also allows this to be understood as a prayer as well. The context of all of the Psalm is a prayer. The grammar allows for that, although I understand that your English translations don't show that to you so clearly. But if it's understood as a prayer, you can see that he's closing where he began saying in a sense in verse 7, "May God bless us. May God bless us that all the ends of the earth would fear Him." And if that's the sense of the closing verse of Psalm 67 and every commentator you read will say don't be too dogmatic here, but if that's the sense of it, verse 7 simply concludes and reinforces the spirit of the prayer that has animated everything that he has said. "God, I'm asking for your blessing. God, may you bless us so that greater purposes could be achieved."

Friends, it's okay to ask for God's blessing. God is pleased to bless his people so we ask for his blessing and that's great, but what Psalm 67 does is it takes us by the hand, as it were, and says, "Come further. Come further in the reason that you ask for his blessing and understand that God's blessing on you is not something that's meant simply for your sake as if you were the center of the universe, as if you were a nation in and of yourself." You see yourself as having a part of something much bigger and that the purposes of God transcend your individual life and your spirit of prayer to God is to identify with him in his transcendent eternal purposes that he is working out, rather than simply simply only being contained to your sphere of concern in what you are doing in your life and how your life goes. A transcendent God has saved us. We exist for his glory. That means that our mindset and our prayers and everything about us starts to identify and look out for something greater rather than our own stuff.

So it is within the life of a local church as well. Look, God has blessed our congregation, God has blessed our church and I'm grateful for that and I thank him for it. I trust that you do too. But after five and a half years or so, we are at a point where we need to realize and understand and more consciously deliberate on the fact that this blessing has been given not simply so that we can enjoy the life of the local body within our own circle of relationships inside these walls. God has blessed us, God has purposes that would transcend, that would make us a platform for others to hear and to know and that is essential to the health of the church to embrace that, to know that and to understand it.

It was said about Martin Luther, the great Reformer, and I quote here, and I love this quote, it says that, "Martin Luther was many things but he was never selfish with the grace of God and the glory of the Gospel. 'What does it amount to,' he asked in a soul-searching way, 'that we have the Gospel in this little corner? Just reckon that there is no Gospel in all of Asia and Africa and that the Gospel isn't preached in many parts of Europe, in Greece, Italy, Hungary, Spain, France, England or Poland,'" as the world existed in his day. "What does it amount to that we have the Gospel in our little room when the whole world, the rest of the world doesn't?" is the point. And this writer said about Luther, "So we learn our final lesson from him. Not only should we be steadfast for the Gospel, we must be unselfish with it as well."

So I think about you and I think about our church, and in a spirit of response to this Psalm we say, "God bless us," but then we hasten to say, "not for our sake but for the sake of your glory. God bless us, not for our sake but that others would come to know Christ." Now as a practical matter, we have some things that we're working on to expand the scope of our ministry. When these things come out in the days to come, I trust that you'll have a responsive heart toward the opportunities that they present. We want to act on these things. We want to act on these in the coming days. The call to all of us right now is to search our hearts and to identify with this outward looking spirit that would bring glory to God and would be committed to being whatever vessels we might possibly be to spread the knowledge of this great saving Christ to others who have not heard.

Let's bow together in humble prayer.

My friends, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is good news. It tells us what God has done for ruined sinners like you and me in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ, who is God Incarnate, left the glory of heaven to be born of a virgin, and during his earthly life, he lived in perfect obedience to the law of God. The Gospel is the good news that sinful men rejected him and crucified him, but as he suffered on that cross, he took the sin of men on his shoulders, endured the wrath of God and died in place of sinful man. He was buried and on the third day God raised him from the dead, and in that resurrection, God has declared for all to know that he has accepted the death of Christ as the payment for sin for the wages of sin is death. Death has been conquered in the resurrection of Christ. God has shown that he has accepted Christ in the place of sinners. Jesus has satisfied all the demands of God's justice. He has borne the full wrath of God and now today he has ascended to heaven where he sits at the right hand of God representing his people before God so that they may have free unhindered access to him.

Why is that good news for you, my friend? The Gospel declares that all who confess their sin and come to Christ will be saved. God will forgive all of your sins. He will declare you righteous. He will give you eternal life so that you may have your sins forgiven, escape eternal damnation, and live in heaven forever. My friend, that is the good news. It is the only good news there is and on the basis of the Gospel, my friend, I ask you: have you personally believed in Christ for your salvation? He invites you to come. He promises to receive you. There is nothing that hinders you from heaven other than your

own rebellion and unbelief. Lay that aside. Lay it aside, my friend, and come to Christ and be saved today, this moment.

O God, may it be so with everyone under the sound of my voice, and now being reconciled to you, our Father, we ask you to bless us not selfishly as perhaps we have asked in the past. We ask for your blessing whatever you determine to be best, not for our sake but so that Christ may be known by others throughout all the earth and that greater glory would be ascribed to your matchless and your holy holy holy holy name. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.

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