

# A Message to the Whole World

Psalm 117:1-2

*Halifax: 11 November 2007*

## **Introduction:**

Today, I am going to break from our series in Ephesians to present to you a new Psalm of focus.

- Most of you know that every few weeks we adopt a Psalm that relates to our regular sermon series...
  - And that on the first Sunday that Psalm is adopted, I preach from it,
  - and then on that Sunday and the Sundays that follow, we sing it every week.
    - This helps us to get to know these Psalms, and also focuses our devotion on a theme related to our regular series.

As we are now ready to begin chapter 2 in our sermon series on Ephesians,

- I have selected Psalm 117 to correspond with it.
- In Ephesians 2, Paul speaks about how the grace of God came to us when we were dead in trespasses and sins...
  - and how God's grace came to the Ephesians when they were Gentiles...
  - The Gentiles (or Goyim to use the Hebrew word) are the nations who are without God—the nations who were strangers to the covenants of promise...
    - without God and without hope in the world.

It is these Goyim that are being called to praise God in Psalm 117!

- I want you to see first of all that they are **all** called...
- secondly what it is that is used to ignite their praise...
- and thirdly, what all this means to you...

## **I. Here is a call for *all* the Goyim to praise God.**

- It is a universal call.

A. This is the shortest Psalm in the Bible, but it is huge in its scope.

1. In fact, the very reason it is so short seems to be to drive home how far it reaches.
  - Its brevity has a way of setting off the fact that this call reaches all the way around the world!
    - The brevity sort of acts like a back drop—as a contrast to its compass...

- It drives home the single point that all men everywhere are called to worship the true God,
    - no matter what they may profess...
    - no matter where they may live...
    - no matter what their background may be.
2. The universality of this call is brought out by parallelism...
- a. Parallelism is a common feature of Hebrew poetry in which the poet makes the meanings of the words rhyme rather than the sounds.
    - You say the same thing twice using different words...
  - b. The first phrase in Psalm 117 is “Praise the LORD all you Gentiles” and the parallel phrase is “Laud Him all you peoples.”
    - The two words that are chosen to describe the ones called, “all you Gentiles” and “all you peoples”,
      - emphasise the universality of the call...
- 1) The Gentiles (or Goyim) refer to the unbelieving nations...
    - Here is Israel, this little tiny nation in a great big world, and in this psalm that God gave them to sing,
      - They are summoning all the unbelieving nations of the world to come and worship God!
  - 2) The second word, “peoples”, is a rare word and in the two other uses of it, it refers to very small divisions of people—something like a family or a tribe.
    - This highlights the fact that it is not just nations, but individual families within those nations that are called to praise God...
    - The call is all inclusive!
- B. The praise of God is indeed an obligation that bears upon all.
1. There is only one true God and everyone is to praise **Him** in the way that **He** wants...not in their own way.
    - a. This call to the Goyim is a call to worship God because of His mercy to the house of Israel...
      - The mercy that was promised to them and at last delivered when Jesus Christ came into the world.
      - Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life,
        - and everyone is commanded to come to the Father through Him.

- In the Old Testament, He was revealed in Israel’s worship, and their worship was the only way to come to God...
  - And now He is revealed through the preaching of gospel, telling the world what He has done.
  - There is no other way to worship God.
- b. Now I know that a lot of people want to say that this is incredibly narrow...
- and I suppose it is—but that does not make it wrong!
  - $2 + 2 = 4$  is a narrow statement as well—
    - I mean, there are so many other numbers out there besides 4!
    - Shouldn’t we say that all the other choices are just as valid?
      - No, 4 is the only correct answer—all other answers are wrong unless they add up to four.
  - There is only one true God and only one way to worship Him.
    - This little Psalm calls the whole world to embrace the one true religion that came to us through Israel.
2. We live in a day when diversity is constantly praised...
- a. Now I will be the first to promote diversity in the places that God has appointed it...
- For example, He has made a distinction between male and female—and that is a distinction that we are to rejoice in rather than obliterate.
  - The Bible will have nothing to do with sending a woman into combat or putting her in a pulpit.
  - At the same time, it wholly condemns a man who wears the clothing of a woman—or a man who treats his wife like a man!
  - The Bible also glories in diversity of callings, diversity of gifts, and diversity of function...
    - we are to glory in the diversity that God has appointed...
- b. But our society gets it all wrong...
- We glory in sameness where God has appointed diversity, and diversity where He calls for sameness...
    - In particular, we glory in diversity of religion—
      - the Bible calls this kind of diversity “idolatry.”
  - Idolatry is the worst thing you can ever do.

- Idolatry is when worship god in your own way...
  - when you change the way God is worshipped and so change (or try to change) God.
- You pervert what you believe and say about Him and say that He is something altogether different than He is...
  - Instead of praising **Him**, you praise your own version of Him...
  - You praise what is a lie instead of what is true.
    - That kind of diversity is universally condemned in scripture.
- God has made Himself known through the things He has made, and everyone needs to come to terms with Him...
  - quit pretending that He is something that He is not!
  - Romans 1 says there is no excuse for idolatry because everyone knows what God is like through the things He has made.

C. This Psalm anticipates the calling of the Goyim to forsake their idols and turn to the true God.

1. Israel sang it long before Christ came,

- and there were many Gentiles that came to know Israel's God in the Old Testament times...
  - Many of David's mighty men were Goyim...
  - Ruth, his great grandmother, was a Moabitess who came to worship the true God...
  - Jeremiah was rescued from the pit by a pious Ethiopian...
  - King Nebuchadnezzar praised the God of Israel when he learned of him through Daniel.
  - The people of Nineveh repented when Jonah preached to them.

TRANS> But these few who came could hardly be called the nations coming to praise the LORD.

2. That did not happen until Christ came...

- a. Before Christ, the Goyim are said to have been in the darkness...
  - 1) When Christ came, a great light shined upon them.
  - 2) In Ephesians 2:11-12, Paul reminds the Ephesians what they were before Christ came:
    - Eph 2:11-13: Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the

flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

- They were not worshippers of God at all... they were without hope!

3) Notice, though, how Paul says: “you were **once** Gentiles (or Goyim).”

- Understand that the word “Goyim” is often used in scripture as a synonym for “unbelievers,”
  - The Word “Israel,” on the other hand, is often used to refer to those who were once Goyim, but are now the people of God.
  - To those who were once unbelievers, but who now the faith that Jacob showed when his name was changed from Jacob to Israel—
    - when this man Jacob who had sought to get on by his cleverness at last came to understand that blessing only comes from the LORD...
      - We are told that he wrestled with the LORD and would not let Him go until He blessed him...
      - He finally came to understand that God’s blessing was his only hope.
        - It was then that he ceased to be a Goyim and became and Israelite.
- The Goyim are without God, but the Israelites are the people of faith who trust in God for their wellbeing.
  - That is why Paul says that not all Israel are Israel...
    - there are many among the physical descendents of Jacob who do not have faith, so they are not true Israel...
  - And at the same time, Paul refers to Goyim who believe as the true Israel—for they are no longer Goyim but fellow heirs with Jacob through faith.
    - Believers are
      - the New Jerusalem,
      - the true Zion,
      - the seed of Abraham according to faith,
      - the true circumcision who worship God in the Spirit and put no confidence in the flesh,
      - Jews inwardly whose praise is from God.

- That is why, brothers and sisters, we who were once Gentiles are able to sing Psalms.
  - It is only in recent times that we have forsaken the singing of Psalms,
    - and a large part of the reason in modern times is because of that theology that glories in Israel after the flesh...
  - When we sing of Jerusalem and Zion and Israel,
    - we are not singing of Jerusalem according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.
    - We sing as the Israel of God who trusts in God...
  - Many of our modern hymns are idolatrous because they present our own version of God.
    - The Psalms present God as He wishes to be known and as worshipped and as He is in truth.

TRANS> The great change that occurred when Jesus came into the world was that the Gentiles began to worship God for the mercy that He showed to Israel...

- in openly redeeming them, not merely from Egypt, but from sin and Satan and death!
- b. Jesus Himself announced that the Goyim would praise God now that He had come...
- In Matthew 8:11, He said:
    - “And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.”
    - Its not a new religion, but the old religion brought to completion!
  - And in Matthew 12:21, He said:
    - “And in His name Gentiles will trust.”
- c. And that is exactly what did happen...the Goyim did begin to worship Israel’s God...
- 1) We read what Paul says about Psalm 117 in the passage we read earlier from Romans...
- Listen again to what he said in Romans 15:8-12:
    - Rom 15:8-12: Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises *made* to the

fathers, and that the Gentiles might glorify God for *His* mercy, as it is written: "For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, And sing to Your name." And again he says: "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!" And again: "Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!" And again, Isaiah says: "There shall be a root of Jesse; And He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, In Him the Gentiles shall hope."

- The Jesus that the true Jews had along by promise has now come and the Gentiles have joined the praise of true Israel.
- 2) They were in the darkness until Christ came, but after that God began to call them.
- In Ephesians 3:6, Paul explains that as an apostle, it has been made known to him now (and I quote)
    - "that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel,"
  - It was after Christ came that the Goyim began to praise the true God.
    - There are still many who need to start praising Him...
    - It is the duty of all to do so—it always has been...
      - But it was when Christ came that they began to come in droves.

TRANS> All this leads to our second point...

## **II. What is it that ignites the Goyim's praise of God?**

- Well, we have already seen—it is the coming of Jesus, isn't it?
    - But lets look at how that is presented to us in Psalm 117—
      - It gives three things that ought to ignite praise in every unbeliever...
      - Three things that God uses to stir up their praise...
- A. First, the knowledge of His mercy toward us ought to stir up their praise.
- After calling them to praise, it says, "for His merciful kindness is great toward us"
1. Now remember who it is that is speaking here!
- It is Israel speaking to the Goyim!
    - a. And it may seem strange, but they are calling the Goyim (the unbelievers) to praise God for His mercy to **us**—to Israel—to believers...
      - We as believers are calling the unbelievers to praise God for being merciful to **us**!

- This is how we are to ignite their praise!
- b. Now you will say—but how could that be?
  - Why would unbelievers want to praise God for His mercy to us believers?

TRANS> Well I'll tell you why...

2. Because it is only upon believers that God's mercy is seen!
  - a. Oh yes, there is a general mercy that God has—He gives food and clothing to all...
    - but the word translated “merciful kindness” in Psalm 117:2 is “chesed”
    - If you have been attending this church for very long, you know all about this word...
      - Hesed speaks of God's covenant love—that is, the love that He promised to His people and shows to His people...
        - The love that is theirs by faith...
        - It is His promised grace to them.
          - Hesed is translated in our English Bibles by the word “lovingkindness, steadfast love, love, mercy, kindness etc.
          - It does not speak of God's general mercy, but of the mercy that He shows to His people—to the elect—to the Israel of God.
            - the mercy that saves!
  - b. And that mercy was promised to Israel from ancient times, but it was not clearly revealed until Jesus Christ came.
    - 1) It was then that God's salvation was openly revealed in the sight of the nations!
    - 2) It was then that it was shown that God loves His people so much that He sent His only Son to die for their sins!
    - 3) It was then that it was made absolutely clear that it is not at all what we have done that saves us, but what God has done through His Son.
    - 4) It was then that we saw that God is so holy and so just that if we are to be forgiven, there is no alternative but that His Son must die.
  - c. Now this mercy of God for His people is so admirable—this glorious salvation is such a marvellous thing,
    - 1) that Israel is here taught call out to the Gentiles and say,
      - “Gentiles, all you Goyim, all you peoples, just look at this!
      - Just look at what God had done for us!



- Isn't it marvellous?
  - Oh come and join us in praising Him for it!
- 2) And I tell you that when the Gentiles look, and when they see what God has done, and they understand it,
- when God opens their eyes to it...
  - they cannot help but praise God for it!
- 3) And I tell you that when they do praise God for it, they have already embraced it as their own!
- They cease to be Goyim—without God—without hope...
  - And they become the Israel of God who trust in God!
  - The goyim begin to hope in God!
- It is impossible to **really** see this salvation for what it is and not embrace it...
    - To really see what sinners deserve...not just to see what God **says** they deserve it, but to really see that they deserve it...
    - And then to really see what Christ has done to secure their pardon—
      - that He actually bore the pains of hell for them on the cross!
        - You can't see all that and walk away from it!
        - If you do, you never really got it.

TRANS> So you see that the Gentiles who do not know God are summoned to praise God because of His mercy toward us who believe.

- But I want you to see that it is not only His mercy, but that His mercy is great toward us.

- That is the second thing...

B. Second, the knowledge of His **great** mercy toward us will stir up the praises of the sleeping Goyim.

1. The word translated “great” has a rich meaning...

a. It is the translation of the word רבג *gaw-bar'*

- This word רבג *gaw-bar'* refers to something that is mighty, something that prevails!

b. Let me give you a few examples...

- 1) Turn to Genesis 7 where we have the account of the great flood in Noah's day.
    - Look at what it says in verse 19:
      - Ge 7:19 And the waters **prevailed** exceedingly on the earth, and all the high hills under the whole heaven were covered.
      - The water of that flood overcame the earth.
  
  - 2) Now look at Exodus 17, verse 11.
    - This is that place where Israel is at war with the Amalikesites...
      - And Moses is up on the hill with Aaron and Hur, and he has to hold up his staff to intercede for them...
      - And this word *רבג* *gaw-bar*' is used here to describe what happens whenever Moses holds up the staff and what happens whenever he lets it down...
        - Exodus 17:11: And so it was, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel **prevailed**; and when he let down his hand, Amalek **prevailed**.
    - You see that the word *רבג* *gaw-bar*' is used to speak of the side that is stronger, or that is overcoming the other.
  
  - 3) This same usage is found in Isa 42:13 where it is used of the LORD prevailing:
    - It says:
      - Isa 42:13: The LORD shall go forth like a mighty man; He shall stir up His zeal like a man of war. He shall cry out, yes, shout aloud; He shall **prevail** against His enemies.
      - Once again it speaks of prevailing or overcoming...
2. So now consider what Psalm 117:2 is saying when it speaks of God's "great toward us hesed (or mercy)."
- a. It is saying that His mercy prevails over us:
    - "toward us" is more literally translated "over us" or "upon us."
  
  - b. This is hesed that prevails over us...
    - You see, we are, by the fall, natural enemies of God.
    - The Bible says that we are at enmity with Him and will not come to Him that we might have life.
    - God always conquers His enemies...

- but He has two very different ways of doing it...
  - Either He overcomes them by mercy or by judgement...
    - The ones overcome by mercy end up in heaven...
    - The ones overcome by judgement end up in hell...
      - It is all according to His choice.
  - We who believe were all once dead in trespasses and sins...
    - But His mercy prevailed against us.
    - It broke us down...
    - We were overcome by it!
3. Now why would this encourage unbelievers to praise God?
- a. Because they realise that those who believe were just as stubborn and obstinate and resistant as they are...
- And that is was not because we had a better heart or were stronger or did some great work that we received mercy...
  - It was because God's grace overcame us...it pursued us and it overtook us...
  - It prevailed over us and broke us and brought us to repentance because it is mighty—because God is mighty.

TRANS> And if God did that for us who now believe...

- b. That means that there is hope for the Goyim, for the unbeliever—
- even for those who have been gripped with the depth of their sin...
    - those who have been humbled.
  - It is not of him who wills or of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy!
  - And I say, once they have seen that, they themselves have been overcome!
    - They have given up on themselves, and they realise that their hope is in God...
    - They cease to be Goyim and become Israel.
- c. Let us learn from this not to shy away from declaring the sovereign grace of God...
- There are those who say that the doctrine of election is not for unbelievers, but only for us to look back at after we have been saved and realise that we did not come to God, but He came to us...

- I would freely admit that such is the experience of many, but it is our duty to preach the whole counsel of God...
- The whole counsel of God is the best thing for believers and unbelievers.
- The truth is that the doctrine of irresistible grace is one of the very best things to break the proudest heart and to encourage the weakest heart.
  - If a person is really humble before God, he will be greatly encouraged to see that it is not by might nor by power of man, but by God's Spirit that we are saved...
  - And if a person is really proud, nothing is able to humble Him more than to realise that but for grace of God, he will never even turn to Christ...
    - Those who are self-righteous and think they can approach God by the works need to see God's grace that has prevailed over us—
      - That alone can humble them.
      - Jesus said to such persons, "You will not come to me that you might have live because you are in bondage..."
        - He told them that they were in bondage to Satan and to their corruption and could not lift themselves out.
        - Those who believed Him were slain by His word—they died—and then they found life in Him.
- I spoke of Jacob before and how he came to believe...
  - Consider how long God worked in his life to make Him Israel!
    - He kept showing Jacob that is was not by his cleverness and scheming, but by God's mercy that blessing came.
  - Jacob indeed prevailed when he refused to let God go,
    - but it was only because the LORD's mercy had prevailed over Him.

TRANS> Now let's consider the third thing in Psalm 117 that will stir up the unbelieving Goyim to praise God...

C. Third, the knowledge of the LORD's faithfulness will ignite the praises of the Goyim.

1. I say "faithfulness" because the word translated "truth" is the word "טֶמָה *eh'-meth*" which means faithfulness or truth
  - a. You can see how faithfulness and truth are related...especially when you remember what truth is...

- You are true, according to the Bible, when you act in harmony with what God says.
- Whatever is not consistent with God’s word is false—it will not last.
  - Lies are sooner or later exposed, and then they no longer stand.
  - If someone sells you a car and claims that it is in great shape when in fact it is not...
    - the lie will sooner or later be exposed...
      - either when you take it to a good mechanic to get it inspected before you buy it...
      - or after you buy it and the problems start to surface...
        - The lie will not stand...
        - The person who sold it to you will prove to be unfaithful.
          - The truth of the LORD endures forever, but the lies of the ungodly do not endure.

b. When the Bible speaks of “the truth of the LORD” as it does in Psalm 117:2,

- it speaks of the fact that what God says is absolutely reliable.
- You can stake your eternal destiny on it.
  - There is no falsehood in it at all.
    - It will never fail the way lies do.

2. I want you to think about this...

a. Look at the world—

- There are so many lies out there...
  - Take something like the doctrine of evolution—
    - You are told that certain things are true, but then when you begin to really investigate it, you find that it is all a crock of lies.
    - Lies cannot stand.
  - Or take the promises of the seductress.
    - She makes sin look so attractive...
      - but the one who gives way to it is like an animal going to be slaughtered...
      - Sooner or later he learns that it is all lies...

b. But who has ever been disappointed for trusting fully in the LORD and His promises?

- 1) When He told Abraham that He would be his God,
  - My, oh my, did He ever mean it!
  - He was willing to go so far as to send His only Son to make that happen!
  - The promise was absolutely reliable even though Abraham could not see how God would ever fulfil it!
  
- 2) All those years the people of Israel waited, trusting God...
  - and then, in the fullness of time, the LORD came through on all His promises.
  - The Scripture says that all the promises of God are yea and Amen in Jesus Christ...
    - Jesus is the truth of God realised... the Amen.
      - everything that God promised comes together in Him!
  
3. Do you see how God's faithfulness to us—His doing what He promised for His people—ignites the praise of the Goyim?
  - a. They look on and they see how faithfully God has done all that He said He would do for His people...
    - They see how He has redeemed His people through Jesus!
  
  - b. And realising that His promises are sure in Jesus Christ,
    - They come to trust in Him and to rest in His promises.
    - They come to believe that God will do what He says He will do...
      - That He will judge the world in righteousness by His Son,
        - and that those who believe the Son will have life...
        - and that those who believe not the Son will not have life, but that the wrath of God will abide on them.
          - And so believing, they will praise the LORD for His truth, for His faithfulness to do all that He has spoken...

TRANS> Now I hope you can see from this Psalm that the praise of the Gentiles that is called for here is their praise of God as the One who saves His people...

- They are not saved by looking at what He has done for them as individuals...
- But they are saved by looking at what He has done through Jesus Christ for His people...

- They praise Him for what He has done for His people, and in this way they cease to be Goyim and become His people who trust in Him.

### **III. What does all this mean to you? How does it apply to you?**

A. First, Psalm 117 tells you that **you** ought to praise God for His prevailing mercy and His enduring faithfulness.

1. We have seen that the call of this Psalm to praise God for His mercy to Israel is universal...
  - a. That means it applies to you whether you are a believer or not...
    - no one is excluded from this obligation.
  - b. If you are a believer, you are already praising Him for His marvellous salvation...
    - if you are not a believer, you are not praising Him—and this Psalm is calling you to do it!
    - Either you rejoice in His grace or you resist it...
    - Either you are a Goyim who needs to come and praise Him for what He has done for His people,
      - or you are one of His people who is praising Him.
2. Realise that the LORD saves you in order that you might praise Him.
  - a. That's what, in effect, He is calling unbelievers to do when He commands them to repent and believe the gospel...
    - They are to turn from going their own way and start rejoicing in the mercy of God in Christ to His people.
  - b. That's why it's difficult to believe that a person who isolates himself from other believers is truly saved...
    - He is not rejoicing in what Christ has done in His people...
      - Salvation is not a private thing,
        - it is a thing that brings us together with His people to rejoice in what the LORD has done for us.
      - When He saves us, He brings us together in the church (the ekklesia or assembly) to give thanks for our redemption.
        - The LORD Jesus is the one that calls us together to sing psalms to God, to hear the gospel, and to partake of the Lord's Supper.
        - He summons us together to rejoice that God has fully accepted His sacrifice for our sins.

TRANS> The first thing this Psalm means to you, then, is that **you** are to praise God for His Hesed, no matter who you are...

B. The second thing this Psalm means for you is that you ought to call others to see the mercy of God in Christ that they may praise Him.

- This song is to be on your lips as a believer. It is to be your song, you sentiment.
- 1. You are to tell the Goyim how good the LORD has been to us as His people and beseech them to come and worship Him.
  - You are to tell them what great things the LORD has done for you!
    - How His grace prevailed over you and brought you to Him that you might know Him and rejoice in His salvation forever.
    - You are to show them how good it is to be His child and to have hope in Him.
- 2. Too often we turn the gospel around to tell the unbeliever what God has done for **them**...
  - We may point out how He has preserved them and fed them and clothed them...
    - But we are to point out most of all what He has done for **us** through Jesus Christ.
    - We are to invite them to come and join **us**—
      - we are to bid them to repent and believe—to believe that God has accomplished this glorious salvation for us...
      - And to come and join us in praising Him.
        - to assure them that if they will repent and believe...
        - they will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit so that they can be His worshippers, sharing in the life that He gives to His own...
        - and that they will be pardoned for all their sins through Him, even as we have been pardoned...
          - because the promises of God are yea and amen in Jesus Christ.

Yes brothers and sisters,

- This is a little Psalm, but it speaks to a big audience...
  - Let us see to that we are busy making His grace known to the Goyim in order that they might come and rejoice with us in Jesus Christ.
    - in the mercy of God that has conquered us and in the faithfulness of God that keeps us.
  - Let us not stop until the whole world is praising Him.