

A Missionary Psalm

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Text: Psalm 67

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Outline:

- I. Prayer for God's blessing V1
 - II. The Purpose of God's blessing VV2-5
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 - III. Confidence in God's blessing VV6-7
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Introduction:

Earlier as we looked at Psalm 2 we saw something of God's zeal to exalt Christ. Then, in Psalm 16 we considered the idea that what ultimately brings the greatest satisfaction, both in this life and the life to come, is God himself. Now, I want to consider a Psalm that ties those some of those themes together and that adds in another element.

In Psalm 67 we will consider a "Missionary Psalm" which highlights God's desire to save the nations, to be worshipped by the nations, and to have the nations find their satisfaction in him. So, the new element in this Psalm, and the theme of this Psalm, is that God wants all of these things not just for the people of Israel, but rather for people from every tongue, and tribe, and nation.

Obviously, since we are considering this theme from a Psalm, it was not new with the New Testament. In fact, this theme of salvation extending to the Gentiles goes all the way back to the time when God singled out for himself one particular people group; it goes back to the very moment when God called Abraham.

Derek Kidner says that the text for this Psalm is the Aaronic blessing found in Numbers 6:24-26 but the spirit of it is the Abrahamic hope. In order to understand this, we need to lay a little bit of groundwork by looking at God's promises to Abram. Flip back with me to **Genesis 12:1-3:**

"Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

This promise is reaffirmed and described in a slightly different way in **Genesis 22:17-18:**
"I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of

heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.”

So, the Abrahamic hope was that through the nation of people that God would raise up through Abraham, that not only Abraham’s descendents, but that people from all of the nations of the earth would be blessed.

In **Galatians 3:16** Paul teaches us that ultimately this promise to Abraham is referring to Christ. There he says: **“Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ.”** And Revelation 7:9 gives us a glimpse of the future fulfillment of this promise where we see people from every “nation,” who have been redeemed by Christ, gathered around the throne worshipping.

However, in light of verses like **Deuteronomy 4:5-8**, we should understand that God’s intention was for Israel to be a blessing and a light to the nations even before the time of Christ. That passage says: **“See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.” For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?”**

So, God’s original design, from the beginning, has always been to save people from every nation. And, even in the Old Testament, his intention was for Israel to be a light to the nations.

Unfortunately, throughout her history, most of the people of Israel did not grasp this truth. The book of Jonah illustrates this point. God had compassion on the people of Nineveh and he desired to see them repent. Jonah, in his own words, acknowledged that the reason he did not want to preach to the Ninevites was because he did not want them to repent; he desired their destruction. In **Jonah 4:2** he said: **“O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.”**

The reality that God desired to bless all of the nations and not just the Jews also escaped most of the Jews of Jesus’ day. Consider with me the episode that is recounted in **Luke 4:18-30**. In that story Jesus is preaching in the synagogue in Nazareth. He reads from the book of Isaiah and then he tells the people that the text is about him; that he is the Messiah. This was a pretty incredible claim, yet it did not alarm the people. When he made this claim, it says in **verse 22**: **“And all spoke well of him and marveled at the**

gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?”

Jesus then began to explain to them that the messianic hope extended beyond them to the Gentiles. At this, it says, in **verse 28: “When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath.”** It goes on to say that they took him to a cliff where they intended to kill him. So, it did not make them angry that Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, what made them angry was that he claimed that the Messiah was also for the Gentiles.

I say all of that to say that, sadly, the truths of this passage, although present in the Old Testament, had escaped most of the Jews.

I. Prayer for God’s Blessing V1

As I said earlier, the text that is behind the beginning of this Psalm is the blessing that God told Moses to have Aaron bless the people with in **Numbers 6:24-26**. According to John Stott, this blessing was used regularly at temple services in Jerusalem.

Here is what the original blessing was in **Numbers: “The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.”**

James Montgomery Boice says that a shining face is the opposite of a frowning or a scowling face. A face turned toward someone is the opposite of a face that is turned away in anger or indifference. A shining face also is meant to communicate the idea of favor and of a warm, personal, friendly relationship.

So, although the invocation of this blessing can include the request that God bless us materially, or that he help us in a certain situation, the real blessing that is being asked for here is that of a gracious personal relationship with God.

This ties in with what we saw in Psalm 16. In that Psalm we considered the idea that, although God gives us gifts and he wants us to enjoy them, ultimately he wants us to find our satisfaction in him and that God himself is the greatest thing that we possess. So, it is not at all a selfish thing to ask God to continue to bless us with an intimate relationship with himself.

I would exhort you again to recognize that the greatest thing God offers you is God. Christ is not a means to something better than Christ. Christ is as good as it gets!

II. The Purpose of God’s blessings VV2-5

In verses two through five we see three more reasons that it is not wrong or selfish to ask God to bless us. These three reasons are all related to the nations and we can see a progression in them.

1. That the nations might be saved V2

We see the first reason in verse 2. Here we find the prayer that God would bless them in order that God's way would be known on the earth and in order that his saving power would be known among all nations.

So, in verse 1 the prayer was for the blessing of an intimate knowledge of God. The prayer of verse 2 is that the Gentiles might receive this same blessing. It is a prayer that they might come to a saving knowledge of God.

In its original context, especially in light of verse 6, this prayer probably did include a prayer for God's material blessing. Some have suggested that the original occasion for this Psalm may even have been a harvest festival.

John Stott says that the original intent here was an appeal to God to fulfill his promises to his people in order that the watching world, in seeing God's faithfulness to his people, would be drawn to the one true God. The promises of material blessing that they had in mind probably would have been taken from Deuteronomy 28:1-6, where God promised to bless the land if the people were faithful to the covenant.

We have promises similar to this in the New Testament. For example, in **Philippians 4:19**, Paul tells the Philippians that: **“my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory.”**

Lest we get carried away into “prosperity gospel” type of thinking, we should come back to the very point that I want us to see in this Psalm. The focus of this Psalm and the reason for asking for God's material blessing was not so that the people might live luxurious lives of ease. It was so that God's faithfulness might be demonstrated and so that the nations would be drawn to the true God and thus saved.

Also, as I said earlier, the primary blessing that was being asked for was that of a relationship with God.

2. That the nations might praise God VV3,5

You may have heard someone quote from the John Piper book *Let The Nations Be Glad*. The book actually takes its title from this Psalm. Something that Piper says in the book is that missions exists because worship doesn't. That is to say that missions is simply a means to an end; worship. There will be a day when missions is no longer necessary but worship will last forever.

This is similar to something that we saw in Psalm 16. In that Psalm, we considered the idea that God does not save us just to keep us out of hell. Neither does he save us just to go heaven. He saves us in order that we might worship him.

Among other places we see this idea in **Isaiah 43:6-7**, where God in speaking of his people who have been scattered says: **“I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of**

the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.”

There God says that he created his people for his glory; in order to exalt himself; in order to worship him. Further along in **Isaiah 43:21** he says that these are: **“the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise.”**

We find a similar idea in the New Testament in words addressed to the church in **1 Peter 2:9**: **“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”**

So, the second reason, other than enjoying God himself, why it is not selfish to ask for God’s blessing, is in order that the nations might come to worship God. This is the second step in the progression that I mentioned. First, people are saved. Second, they are saved in order to worship.

John Stott says this about this idea: “The greatest incentive in all evangelism is not the need of human beings but the glory of God; not that they shall receive salvation, but that they shall give to God the honor that is due to his name, acknowledging and adoring him for ever. We cannot be content until every convert has become a worshipper.”

3. That the nations might be glad in God V4

Lest we begin to think that God is selfish and egotistical and that he only saves us in order to load us down with the burden of serving and worshipping him, we need to consider the third reason that it is not selfish to pray for God’s blessing. This is also the theme that we saw in Psalm 16. Knowing God and living to worship him is not burdensome but rather is the most satisfying thing that we can experience.

In verse 4 the Psalmist expresses the desire for the nations, having come to a saving knowledge of God, and in praising God, to be glad and joyous in God. This is the inevitable conclusion of coming to know God and of living to worship him; gladness. In giving us himself and in calling us to worship him, God is calling us to do that which will make us the happiest.

In this Psalm the particular cause of rejoicing is that God judges or rules the peoples with equity. That is to say that God is a good and just God; he is not corrupt. This is good news! Imagine how awful it would be if the God of the universe were a capricious and wicked tyrant.

So, here the Psalmist prays that the nations might come to gladly submit to God’s lordship and rule over the earth. Again, submitting to God’s lordship is not burdensome but can be done gladly, because ultimately nothing is more satisfying than living in fellowship with God.

III. Confidence in God's Blessing VV6-7

The Psalmist concludes in verses 6 and 7 with an affirmation of his confidence in God's faithfulness. He is confident that God will bless his people. There is some debate among scholars about the tense of the verb in the first part of verse 6. Some believe that it should be translated in the future tense; "the earth will yield its increase." However, most take it the way that the ESV does, in the past tense.

As I mentioned before, because of verse 6, some take the occasion of this Psalm to be some kind of a harvest festival. It appears that the idea of verse 6 is that because God has been faithful and has blessed us, we can be confident that he will continue to be faithful and that he will bless us.

Verse 7 ties everything together again. It reminds us of the universal scope of God's plan; he desires to save people from all of the nations, to be worshipped by the nations, and to be delighted in by the nations. Verse 7 restates those things by saying "let all the nations fear him."

Conclusion/Applications:

I believe that there are at least four applications for us of what we have seen in this Psalm.

First, it is not wrong or selfish for us to ask God to bless us. It is even okay to ask God to bless us by providing for our material needs. However, we should recognize that the greatest blessing that God offers us is fellowship with himself. We need to be careful not to view God as a means to something better than God. We should seek and be satisfied with God alone.

Second, we need to recognize why God wants to bless us. Obviously, he wants us to be happy in him. It glorifies him when we find our satisfaction in him. But it also glorifies him when we recognize that we are blessed in order to bless others. We are blessed in order that others might see the goodness of God and be drawn to him.

I would ask you: What are you doing with the blessings that you have received from God? Are you hoarding them? Are you spending them all on yourself? Or, are you seeking to use what God has given you to be a blessing to others? Are you giving sacrificially to advance the kingdom of God?

Third, we should share God's passion for the nations. We should desire to see them come to Christ and be saved. We should desire to see them become true worshippers. And we should desire to see them be happy in God. If we are passionate about God, we cannot not be passionate about the things he is passionate about. If God is passionate about calling out worshippers for himself, in order to give them what is most satisfying, himself, then we should share that passion. And, it should be costly for us. Either we

should give our lives to personally take the gospel to the nations, or we should give our money to fund them and our prayers to support them. God does not give us the option to not participate.

Standing behind each of the three things that the Psalmist desires for the nations is the command to love our neighbor as we love ourselves (Matthew 22:39). We love ourselves by desiring for ourselves what is best for us. Likewise, to love our neighbors is to want what is best for them. What is best for us and for them is to be reconciled to God, to worship him, and to find our satisfaction in him.

So, I would exhort all of us to love our neighbors, by sharing God's passion for the nations.

Fourth, and finally, we should trust that God himself will do the work. Just as the Psalmist closes with the confident assertion that God will bless them, we too can know that God will save sheep from every people group in the world. We know this because we get to see the end of the story in Revelation. May all of this inspire us to press on in the cause of missions both locally and abroad for the glory of God and the gladness of the nations in God.