

Let the Nations Be Glad: The Christian Experience of Missionary Zeal

Psalm 67:1-7

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If you have your Bibles I'd invite you to turn with me to Psalm 67. We looked at this Psalm about two years ago at the time of the Missions Conference. You may not remember it but I do. The Missions Conference Committee had chosen the theme "Let the Nations Be Glad." And they had done that in part based on John Piper's wonderful book called *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions*, which is maybe my favorite book on missions right now. In that book, in large measure, Piper expounds some of the truths of this Psalm, Psalm 67. It is a great, missionary Psalm. In fact, we've noticed some missionary themes running from Psalm 65 to 66, and we see them again here in Psalm 67. The idea of the nations being blessed through the witness of the people of God has been a central hope of the church ever since God called Abram out of the Ur of the Chaldeans and confirmed the covenant of grace with him. All the way back in Genesis 12:1-3 the purpose of the believer to glorify God has also had in view the blessing of the nations. We are to live to God's glory that the nations might be blessed in Him and that the nations might glorify God. The prophets long for a day when the Gentiles, the peoples, the nations of the earth will come to Mount Zion and will worship the true and living God. And the Psalmists constantly sing of that hope and teach us to do it as well.

And so when Jesus comes to His commission to His church, when He tells us to "go make disciples of all the nations," He's saying that that's not something brand new. That is rooted in the covenant of grace as it is revealed in the Old Testament. It's an Old Testament hope. And so having been saved by His love and grace, our heart's desire becomes to see a day when the nations, *all* the nations, will revel in that same love and grace. In short, we want the nations to be glad in and through a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. We want *them* to share in the blessings which God by His grace has showered upon us. And this Psalm breathes that spirit.

This Psalm has been called "the Old Testament paternoster," "the Old Testament 'Our Father who art in heaven.'" And though it is unfamiliar to many, this Psalm is one of John Stott's favorite Psalms. And, of course, as we've already mentioned it is the basis of the theme and title of John Piper's outstanding book, *Let the*

Nations Be Glad.

There are three stanzas in this Psalm: Verses 1-3 give us the first stanza; verses 4 and 5, the second stanza; and 6 and 7, the third stanza. There are two musical interludes: one at the end of verse 1, one at the end of four indicated to give us time to reflect upon a truth. The “*selah*’s” in this Psalm seem to put an exclamation point on two, important thoughts that we run into in verses 1 and 4. And so as we come before God's word tonight, let's pray together that through the preaching of His word and through the blessing of His Spirit we will know the purpose and the hope that we have in the covenant of grace and that we would be changed by it. So let's pray before we hear Psalm 67.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your word. We ask that You would nourish us and build us up and disciple us in it. We ask, O God, that we would have the heart for Your glory and for the blessing of the nations through the gospel of Jesus Christ that is expressed by the Psalmist in this Psalm, that our Christian experience would mirror the zeal of the Psalmist for the nations to rejoice in the knowledge of the true God, and that our lives would be changed as we grow in this longing for Your glory. We ask that You would open our eyes to behold wonderful truth in Your word. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Hear God's word.

For the choir director; with stringed instruments. A Psalm. A Song. 1 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.

Amen. And thus ends this reading of God's holy, inspired, and inerrant word. May He write its eternal truth upon our hearts.

This Psalm contains a thanksgiving and two petitions and an acknowledgment that would change our lives if we would fully embrace them. If you look at it, verses 1-3 is a prayer. It's both a prayer of thanksgiving for God's provision and favor, and it's a petition for His blessing on the nations. Then if you look at verses 4 and 5 you'll see another petition. There we see a petition that the nations would rejoice over God's just judgment and providence. And then in verses 6 and 7 you'll see an acknowledgment that God's temporal blessings to us are to the end for the purpose of the blessing, the *spiritual blessing* of the nations. And I want to look at each of these three stanzas with you tonight.

Verses 1-3 give us this prayer of thanksgiving and petition that God's blessing to His people would be for the sake of all the peoples. Then in verses 4 and 5 this prayer that the nations would rejoice in God's judgment and providence. Now think about it. There's a stretch: That the nations would rejoice in God's judgment and providence. But that's the prayer nevertheless. And then, finally, in verses 6 and 7 that God's *temporal* blessings to us would serve the interests of His *spiritual* blessings to the nations. Let's look at this Psalm together.

I. The believer longs for God's glory to be served through the salvation of people from every tribe, tongue and nation / The Church's desire for the salvation of the nations (1-3) [A prayer of thanksgiving and petition that God's blessing to His people would be for the sake of the peoples]

In verses 1-3 we see this Old Testament believer longing for God's glory to be served through the salvation of people from every tribe and tongue and nation. And this is an example to us about the church's desire for the salvation of the nations. The superscription, the heading over this Psalm doesn't indicate it, but the comments that are made in verses 1 and 6 have led some commentators to suggest that this Psalm was written at the time of a harvest festival celebration. We can see a Hebrew farmer looking over his fields and thanking God for the way that God has poured out blessing on him, supplied his needs and the needs of his family. And this expression of thanks is turned to God in petition for His blessing on the nations.

Now we've commented that Psalm 65 and 66 and 67 all show a concern that *all* the nations would come to a true knowledge of God. Not just that God's people in Israel would know the true God and love Him and worship Him and serve Him, but that God...His people in Israel long for all the peoples of the world to come to a saving knowledge of Him. And so this Psalm is very much based around the promise of God to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3, not only that God would be a blessing to Abraham, but that Abraham would become a blessing to all the families of the earth. That idea runs all through this great Psalm in both its praises and its petitions.

But you will have noticed that this Psalm begins with a recounting of Aaron's benediction, "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." But it has a bit of a twist on it, doesn't it? "God be gracious to us and bless us and cause His face to shine upon us," and then there's a pause. Now I want you to understand that this is not self-centered or self-preoccupied. It's an acknowledgment that all of the blessings which have been received by this farmer and by Israel in this particular year of bounty have come from God Himself. But the focus of the rest of the Psalm makes it clear that this is not a self-centeredness or a self-preoccupation: "Lord, bless me. Lord, bless me. Lord, give me more. Lord, give me this. Lord, give me that."

No, the concern of this Psalmist as he thanks God for His bounty to him is to turn and ask for God to pour His spiritual bounty out upon the nations. And so this initial prayer in verse 1 is a prayer of adoration and thanksgiving to God expressing his gratitude to God for God's abundance and bounty shown to him.

But as soon as that prayer of adoration is done, if you look at verse 2, the focus of the Psalmist turns to petition, a prayer that God's favor to His people would lead to His knowledge and salvation being experienced among and by the nations. In other words, this Psalm, having begun with adoration and praise to God for His bounty, quickly becomes a missionary prayer. It quickly becomes a petition that God would bless the nations. And it is a great and a daring prayer: "That Your way may be known on the earth, Your salvation among all nations," verse 2; verse 3, "Let the peoples praise You, O God. Let all the people praise you." It's a prayer that all the peoples would come to a saving knowledge of God and praise Him. The Psalmist longs that all the peoples would join in this quest for God's glory. And the logic is this: 'Lord, you have blessed us so that they would be blessed and You will be glorified.' That's the logic: 'Lord, you have blessed us so that they, the nations, will be blessed and that all of us together will praise You and glorify You.'

In other words, the Psalmist is not simply looking at his blessings from God in terms of his own self-interest and thanking God for that bounty, but the Psalmist is using the occasion of his reflection on God's bounty to him as the opportunity to turn his eyes to the needs of the nations and call for God to show His spiritual...His *saving* blessings on the nations. The Psalmist is devoted to God's glory. He longs to see not only himself and his children and his children's children enjoying the bounty of God; he longs to see the nations enjoying that bounty. And so this occasion of God's blessing to him, this occasion of his having a good crop, having a good harvest season, preparing for a long and prosperous winter—becomes the occasion for him to lift up a missionary petition for the sake of the peoples.

And there's a message for us in that, isn't there? Our eyes, when we see the bounty that God has heaped on us, can never be focused simply upon our enjoyment of the bounty that God has given to us nor even in our thanksgiving to God for that bounty that He has given to us...but our eyes must turn to the nations. We must ask the Lord, like the Psalmist, that the nations too would share in His bounty. And so the believer longs for God to be served and praised through the salvation of people from every tribe and tongue and nation. This is an expression of the church's desire for the salvation of the nations. That's the first petition in verses 1-3.

II. The believer longs for God's glory to be served through the rejoicing of the nations over Him / The Church's desire for the nations to rejoice over

judgment and providence (4-5) [A prayer that the nations would rejoice at God's just judgment and sovereign providence]

Now the second petition is no less striking. It is a prayer that the nations would come to rejoice over God's judgment and His rule, His just judgment and His providence. This Psalmist is longing for God's glory to be served through the rejoicing of the nations over Him, but rejoicing over Him about two doctrines that pagans normally hate. I mean, get into a conversation with an unbeliever and it won't take you long to find out that the idea of God's judgment is not popular amongst pagans. It's one of the first doctrines they want to get rid of. And the idea that God is ruling and overruling and guiding and providing and conducting the course of history through His own providence is not a doctrine that is high up there on the pagan's list of favorite Christian doctrines. And yet the Psalmist wants the peoples to praise God—notice at verse 4—for His uprightness, the fact that He is going to judge the peoples with uprightness and guide the nations on the earth. And, of course, the only way that the nations are ever going to rejoice in those things is if they have bowed the knee and they have embraced the promises of God, and if they have trusted in Jesus Christ. And so this petition is being lifted up, 'Lord, we want every tribe and tongue and people and nation to come before You and praise You because of Your just judgment and rule over the nations.' It's a longing for the salvation of the nations and it's a longing that the nations having been saved would turn and praise God for who He is in His judgment and in His providence. It's a beautiful thing to think of the judgment, the just judgment of God.

One of my favorite scenes in JRR Tolkien's Trilogy of *The Lord of the Rings*, is when Aragorn is handing out judgment in The Hall of the Kings. And many of you may have read the story, but in the story there is a guard in the city of Minas Tirith who actually is responsible for saving the prince because his father had gone crazy and was about to kill him. But in order to save the prince, that guard had to kill other guards in a sacred hall and then had to leave his post, both of these were tremendous crimes in that city. And so after all the battles are over and the king is handing out judgment in his hall, that man is brought before him for judgment. And here's the scene as Tolkien describes it.

"In the days that followed his crowning, the king sat on his throne in the hall of Kings and pronounced his judgments. And embassies came from many lands and peoples, from the east and the south, and from the borders of Mirkwood and from Dunland in the west. And the king pardoned the Easterlings that had given themselves up and sent them away free, and he made peace with the peoples of Harad; and the slaves of Mordor he released and gave them all the lands about the Lake Nuren to be their own. And there were brought before him many to receive his praise and reward for their valor. And at last the Captain of the Guard brought to him Beregon to be judged." Now this was the guard who had left his post and who had killed a man in the Hall of the Kings.

“And the king said to Beregond, ‘Beregond, by your sword blood was spilt in the Hallows where that is forbidden. Also you left your post without leave of lord or of captain. For these things, of old, death was the penalty. Now, therefore, I must pronounce your doom.

“All penalty is remitted for your valor in battle and still more, because all you did was for the love of the Lord Faramir. Nonetheless, you must leave the Guard of the Citadel and you must go forth from the City of Minas Tirith.” He was banished because of his crime. “Then the blood left Beregond's face and he was stricken to the heart and bowed his head. But the king said,

“So it must be, for you are appointed to the White Company, the guard of Faramir, the Prince of Ithilien, and you shall be its captain and dwell in Emyn Arnen, for you are appointed to The White Company in honor and peace and in the service of him for whom you risked all to save him from death.”

And then I love this sentence, “And then Beregond, perceiving the mercy and justice of the king was glad, and kneeling kissed his hand and departed in joy and content.” And, my friends, we will see a *real* judgment—not a fictional judgment, a *real* judgment—and a far greater judgment than this. And like Beregond we will have our breath taken away from us when we see the combination of justice and mercy that is meted out by the King of kings in that great Day of Judgment.

But I want to tell you the only ones who will be praising God for His just judgment in that day will be those who have been redeemed. For the unbelievers and those who have spurned the overtures of God's grace, though they will not be able to cast aspersions on the justice or the mercy of God's judgment, yet they will gnash their teeth. And so, my friends, we yearn to see the nations embrace the promises of God so that when they see the King their breath will be taken away with us at the glorious combination of His justice and His mercy, and they too will kneel and bow and kiss His hand and go out with joy and contentment. And this is the prayer of the Psalmist. He wants to see the peoples of the world embracing the glory of God's promise and grace and rejoicing in His justice and in His providence. So there's a second petition...

III. The believer longs for God's glory to be served through the temporal blessings given to us . The Church's desire that God's temporal blessings will serve a greater end (6-7) [An acknowledgment that God's temporal blessing of His people is unto the goal of His spiritual blessing of the peoples]

And then there's this third petition in verses 6 and 7, this petition of the Psalmist. He longs for God's glory to be served through the temporal blessings which are given to the earth, to us. “The earth has yielded its produce,” he says in verse 6,

"God, our God, blesses us." Why? "God blesses us, that all the ends of the earth may fear Him." We're back again to that harvest scene, and here's this Hebrew farmer and he's looking out across the bountiful harvest which has been yielded and he looks at the yield and he thanks God and he acknowledges that God has given it all to him. But he doesn't stop there. He's not just thanking God for His bounty. This isn't just a prayer over the meal, where we say, "Thank You, Lord, for this food that You've provided. Bless it to the nourishment of our bodies." He's not just saying, "Lord, thank You for this harvest that You have provided. May we really enjoy it this winter and in the year to come and do well when we sell it in the market." And, my friends, if we stop there we're not even living up to the vision of the Old Testament. We're sub-Christian if we stop there with just thanking God for what He gives to us.

No, you have to go a step further. He goes on to acknowledge that God gave him this bounty in order that all the peoples of the earth might know and love and fear God. He looks out over that field. How many acres it was, I don't know. Maybe he was a small farmer. He had 15, 20, 25-acres. I don't know. But he looked out across that acreage and he said, 'Lord, You've given me a bountiful harvest. Now why don't you save the world because of it? Why don't You use this bounty that You've given me to bring the nations to the knowledge of who You are?' And, my friends, that is a prayer so audacious that only Jesus could've fulfilled it. Do you realize how audacious Jesus' Great Commission was? He's standing around...What are there around Him in Matthew 28? His inner circle of eleven disciples or so...And let's say even that there was a larger group of the disciples there with Him, maybe, what?...thirty, forty, fifty, sixty at the most? And He says to them, 'Go disciple the nations.' Now there are more of us here tonight, my friends, than there would've been when Jesus spoke those words. You understand that. There are more of us in this room tonight than there would've been hearing Jesus first speak those words. But do you hear what Jesus is saying? 'Now, you,' right? 'Go disciple the nations.' Do you realize how audacious that is? And Jesus is doing it. He started with that little circle, eleven faithful disciples, and then the outer circle and then those who are brought to faith through their ministry, and through faith through *their* ministry and through faith through *their* ministry...and on and on and on and on. And here we are today and He's discipling the nations. And that Hebrew farmer that looked out and said, 'Lord, You've given me a great harvest. Now use that to bring the nations to Yourself.' That prayer is being fulfilled. That prayer is so audacious that only Christ could fulfill it. But He *is* fulfilling it. But that means for us, friends, looking at everything that the Lord has given to us...and then asking the Lord to use *that* to bring glory to Himself from all the nations.

We prayed tonight for Amos Magazee in Uganda. There are people on our prayer list from Peru to China to Europe—all the way around the world. And are we using the bounty that God has given to us so that the nations might be glad in God? My friends, even this Old Testament Hebrew farmer wanted the blessings of God given to Him to be used to bring the nations into the white hot worship of

the one, true and living God. The least we can do as Christians who have heard that Commission from our own Savior is to use every resource entrusted to us by God, and to long from the bottom of our hearts that the nations would be glad and would enjoy the bounty of free salvation in Jesus Christ, even as we have enjoyed it. God's glory and the conversion of the nations are the two, great themes of this Psalm, and those are part of the heartbeat of every Christian. May God cause our hearts to beat with that longing for His glory and the conversion of the nations. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, we thank You for Your word, and we ask that You would cause our hearts to love Your glory, and to so long for Your glory that our energies and our resources are turned to the pursuit of Your glory; and that the blessings that You have given us are turned to the end of the blessings of the nations, so that the nations too might join with us in Your praise. We ask, O God, that You would use the blessings given to us for Your own glory in the saving of the nations through Jesus Christ our Lord, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Would you stand and receive God's blessing? 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...that the nations may be glad. Amen.

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