

Psalm 67:1-7**All Nations Praising God**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Since today is the first time in quite a while that we've been able to worship together as a whole parish, it's quite fitting that our psalm for today is a reminder that praising God for his many blessings is always a good thing to do. We certainly thank and praise God when we notice the good things he gives us, but we should be doing it even when we're not particularly aware of God's blessings. It is easy to look around the world and instead find reasons for fear or despair or anger. We see leaders blaming each other, and conflict all over the place, and yet we are still blessed by God, and we would do well to remember that.

In Psalm 67, the reminder of God's blessing is that the earth will yield its harvests. And God's creation is not a bad place to start when we need reminding of God's blessings. You'll see different things depending on the seasons, but trees bearing fruit, fields yielding grain, green pastures filled with livestock, all tell us of God's blessings. But we can add more to it than that. We can be reminded of God's blessings by looking at the beauty of creation, or the birth of a new generation, or the existence of good government and peaceful society, or having loving family and friends, or having good health and good access to medical care.

When we take the time to stop and think of all that God blesses us with, we can come up with some pretty long lists. I wonder what the top of your list would be. What always grabs your attentions and makes you thank God for his provision in your life? And on the other hand, what might you need to deliberately look for because you know God blesses his people, even if you don't see it at first? And as we choose to look, we see examples of where God is at work, and we praise God for his goodness. And we realise that all over the world, people whom we have never met are also doing the same thing.

It's so easy to forget about God's goodness to us. It's so easy to be distracted by the worries and cares of this world. You probably know people who are completely distracted, and pay no attention to God. Maybe you've even heard them say, "What has God ever done for me?" They presume that every good thing in their life is the result of their own hard work, forgetting that life itself is a gift from God. It is good for us to be reminded of that. Good for us to take stock of our blessings, and pray to the Lord that he would continue to bless us.

God has indeed blessed us richly, and we do rely on God's continued blessings. But this psalm has one more important lesson to teach about God's act of blessing: God blesses for the sake of mission. "May your ways be known throughout the earth, your saving power among people everywhere" it says. This makes for an excellent mission prayer. It prays for the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham that all nations will be blessed through his offspring. Every bountiful harvest reminded Israel of the blessing promised to them in the land, but the 'harvest' in this psalm is primarily the harvest of souls through the gospel.

The other readings for today all fit this general theme of God gathering a harvest from all nations. The prophet Isaiah says the Lord's house will be called a house of prayer for all nations. St Paul, writing to the Romans, explains that salvation for the Gentiles is not a rejection of Israel as God's chosen people, but a fulfilment of their calling. And in the gospel reading Jesus praises the faith of a Canaanite woman who knew she did not belong among the people of Israel but came to Jesus seeking mercy anyway.

So, as we pray this psalm, as we ask for God's blessing, we do so with an external focus. We ask for God's blessing, not to wallow comfortably in what he blesses us with, but that we might be a blessing to others. We ask for God's blessing that it may glorify him, and that all peoples and nations would know God and praise God.

For the writer of this psalm, this is critical. Israel was God's chosen people, and claimed an everlasting covenant with the one true God. The gods of other nations were mocked as dead useless idols. The Lord God was the only living, active, and true God. And as her pagan neighbours look on, Israel asks God to demonstrate his power and authority. They want to show their neighbours what God could do for his people, what difference he made to them. For if God does not bless them, then why would their neighbours take any notice of their claims? What good is a God who can't care for his people?

Much the same can be said for the church today. If non-believers look in and see fear and mistrust and anger, then why would they believe the message of forgiveness and peace and salvation? God has indeed given us these good things, but if we lose sight of them, then we are not reflecting the light of God into the lives of those who need it. So, this psalm should certainly be our prayer too. That God would be merciful to us and bless us. That we would know God's presence and favour. Not for our own sake, to give us an easy life, but that God's grace would shine through.

And let us pray that we would daily be reminded of God's blessings so that we may praise God for his goodness to us. And as we do so, God will do as he promised. He will gather the exiles of Israel. He will have mercy on those bound by the law. He will make his house a place of prayer for all nations. The earth will yield its harvests, and all will come to know that the Lord is God, that he is the only source of true blessing, and that salvation is found in him alone. Amen.

May God's peace, which passes all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds safe in the risen Lord Jesus. Amen.