

# God's blessing to the Nations

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Amen. Thanks very much, Heather. Do keep that psalm open in front of you if you've got a Bible with you as we look through it together. It's only a short psalm. I've just read it there, only seven verses long. And yet, I think it's a great psalm.

This is a psalm with an enormous global and eternal scope. It's a psalm that helps us see who we are as a church, what it means to be God's people, and also the mission that we have been brought into as God's people.

I say we're taking a break from John just for this week, but actually we'll see again, as we did from John chapter 20 last week, that God's people have a purpose as God in his grace uses us. It's great to be able to turn to different parts of the Bible, and actually we see the consistency of the message, the consistency of the word which God speaks to us.

Also, to say if you're here this morning and you're not a Christian, or you're still kind of asking questions about that, as always, we're so glad to have you with us here. I hope that you'll be able to see in this passage how God's plan has always been reaching out and looking to bring people in to know him and to love him, and that you'll be left in no doubt, as we work through these great verses this morning, that you're invited to be part of that, and not only invited into that, but also that you'll see that that is the greatest invitation there is.

That is a very, very good news. One final word then of introduction on this psalm, which is just a bit of a recap, that you might remember at the start of this year, we spent a good chunk of time as a church looking at the life of Abraham from the book of Genesis. I'm really aware, and I'm as guilty as this is the next person.

[ 1 : 4 7 ]     It can be easy, can't it, to really spend a while looking at something, getting into it, feeling like we know what's happening, and then we kind of move on to the next section. Suddenly we're in John, and we forget everything that ever happened back in Genesis.

But let me, before we dig into Psalm 67, let me take you back to those foundational words in Genesis chapter 12, with which we began Abraham's story, which really tie into this psalm that we're looking at this morning.

In Genesis 12 verse 2, God says to Abraham, I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

We saw that being worked out in the life of Abraham a few months ago. We saw how that continues into the church today. And really that is the theme of this psalm, that God blesses his people in order to be a blessing.

God blesses his people in order to bless the whole world. More fully, I think we could say, and this is how we're going to look through this psalm, we could say God blesses his people in order that the whole world might come to know him, and in order that the whole world might come to praise him.

[ 3 : 0 3 ]     Because it is knowing and praising this God that is the greatest blessing there is. So let's work through this psalm, which really begins with God blessing his people. It ends with the world giving God the praise he deserves.

And those ends are joined together, are connected by the world coming to know God through his people and the blessings he pours out on them. So three stages really.

The first, God blesses his people. God blesses his people. And really this brackets the psalm at the start and at the end. That first verse, have a look, such a great opening verse.

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us. A cry, a plea, a prayer that God would bless his people.

And as we so often see in the Bible, a prayer that can be directed to God with such confidence because it is something that God has already promised he will do.

[ 4 : 08 ] The us, really, that this psalm speaks about is, in the original setting, the people of Israel, those descendants of Abraham. And they knew that they could confidently ask, confidently call out to God to bless them.

Because as we read just a moment ago, God had promised Abraham he would make him a great nation and would bless that nation. And we see that worked out through the pages of the Old Testament.

Abraham, sorry, Israel becomes this nation, this great multitude. They are rescued from their enemies. They gain possession of the land that God promised to them. They are blessed by God in so many ways.

And so this isn't a prayer for something that hasn't happened. It's a prayer that God would continue to be gracious and to bless and to make his face shine upon his people.

That last phrase there, his face to shine upon them, perhaps that sounds a bit strange to us. Really, it's speaking there about God's presence and oversight of his people. His watching over them.

[ 5 : 15 ] One author calls it his life-giving smile would be upon them, which I think is a great phrase, isn't it? So this psalm begins with a prayer of blessing for God's people, a blessing that has been promised, a blessing that in a whole host of ways has been received, and a blessing which God continues to pour out.

And the Bible makes it really clear that today it's Christians, it's the church who are those who inherit that title, that privilege of being God's people.

And in the same way, we have been promised and have received and continue to receive God's grace, God's blessing, God's life-giving smile.

And ultimately, all of that is seen in Jesus Christ. And so God blesses his people. How has he done that? He's done that in the gospel.

He's done that through sending his own son, Jesus, who lived that perfect life where we all fall short, who died in order to pay the penalty so that we could all be forgiven, who rose again, showing the new life that is there for all who trust in him.

[ 6 : 33 ] And a new life that is not just more of the same, but as we've been seeing in John's gospel, is this eternal life with God, our heavenly Father, the fulfillment of all of this blessing.

And as we read this psalm through the lens of the Old Testament, we see that God has blessed his people. He has blessed us incredibly through Jesus.

We see not only that, but he continues to do so, that God continues to provide for us. He continues to give us strength through his Holy Spirit. He continues to help us through the hardest of times.

We continue to enjoy the privileges of the gospel as we live as God's people under his care. God blesses us through Jesus in the gospel. And from that, blessing flows out into every area of life.

Now, we saw earlier how the guys in Kresh are currently learning about saying thank you to God in response to who he is. I think that's something that all of us could work on, recognizing and thanking God for the many ways he blesses us.

[ 7 : 50 ] A lot of people I meet really put me to shame here. People who I think are going through such a hard time, people who are objectively going through real struggle, and yet their focus and what they are so quick to speak about is how God is good to them.

It is God's kindness to them. It is God's blessing and presence with them. I don't know if you know people like that. I don't know if people like that come to mind for you. I think the danger is that so often we say, well, it's great that they are able to be so positive.

It's great that they have that attitude. So often we speak as if that attitude is a kind of fixed thing, well, that we could never have that. And I'm sure that comes easier for some than others.

Some people have that natural disposition, but all of us, I think, should be recognizing and thanking God for his many blessings. That should be the normal pattern for us as a church and for us as Christians, grateful for the ways that God has blessed us in Christ.

A normal Christian should be a grateful Christian because every day God blesses us in so many ways. That these blessings that come through Christ and these blessings that point us to Christ, whether that is even the friends we have, the church community we're part of, whether that is the food that we eat.

[ 9 : 16 ] G.K. Chesterton, a writer from 100 years ago, wrote this, you say grace before meals, all right, but I say grace before the concert and the opera and grace before the play and pantomime and grace before I open a book and grace before sketching, painting and swimming, fencing, boxing, walking, playing, dancing and grace before I dip the pen in ink.

That's a lot of hobbies that man had. I don't know if he had children or not. But his point there is learning to see, isn't it, all of these things as gifts from God.

That every aspect of life as blessings from God that we thank him for as they point us to Jesus. And the ultimate blessing of the gospel.

And as we recognize that, as we kind of cultivate this gratitude, as we recognize how God has blessed us, that helps us as we move forward, be confident that God will continue to bless us.

And that's how this psalm ends. It's thought this was originally a harvest psalm. Have a look down toward the end there at verse six. The earth has yielded its increase. The idea there that as the people look out over the fields and give thanks for the crops that God has once again provided, that they use that kind of past provision as the encouragement, the confirmation that God would continue to bless his people.

[ 10 : 47 ] The earth has yielded its increase. God, our God, shall bless us. As the church, as Christians, we can pray Psalm 1 of this psalm.

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us. We can pray that knowing that God has done that for us in Christ, that he continues to do that for us day by day with the presence of his Holy Spirit with us.

And that this past provision is the confirmation that he is faithful to continue that blessing in the future. As God's people, even in the midst of struggle and hardship and a fallen world where things are hard, blessing doesn't mean the removal of all difficulty.

But as God's people, we can be eternally secure and eternally thankful because we know that God blesses his people. It truly is the best news that we can have.

That is a blessing and that is news that has eternal consequences for us. So God blesses his people. That's the opening. That's the foundation of this psalm.

[ 12 : 00 ] But this psalm doesn't then stay there. It builds on that foundation. Perhaps the most significant word in this whole psalm is right there at the beginning of verse two.

You might want to have a look there. That little word, that. May God be gracious to us, that. May God bless us, that.

May his face shine upon us, that. So that, in order that. The blessing that God pours out on his people then has a purpose or has a knock-on effect, we might say.

What is that purpose? That your way may be known on earth. Your saving power among the nations. And so God blesses his people so that the world might know God.

Let's look at that together now. God blesses his people, point one, that the world might know God, point two. Again, this was God's goal for the people of Israel in the Old Testament.

[ 13 : 01 ] That in a world where different regions, different nations follow different local gods, that these nations would look at God's people and not say, wow, what great people they are.

Aren't they big? Aren't they strong? No, they would look at God's people and say, wow, what a great God they have. I would like to know that God. That they would be jealous, almost, of the God of Israel.

And again, into the New Testament, that the church picks up that mantle of not only those who have been blessed by God in the gospel, but also the ones who are blessed that the world might know God.

Jesus himself says to his followers, you are the light of the world. It's through Jesus' followers and the blessing he pours out on them, on us, that the whole world is to know God.

As we rejoice in the gospel of Jesus, as we live out that eternal security he brings, as we enjoy that salvation, as we demonstrate that thankfulness to God for all that he has done, the idea then is that our lives are to be like a billboard, demonstrating to the world what God is like.

[ 14 : 21 ] A mirror reflecting his kindness, that people might see him. God blesses his people that the world might know God.

So what is the world to know? What does the church reflect or signpost about God? I think there are three things highlighted in this psalm. Firstly, verse two, God's saving power.

That your way may be known on earth, your saving power among the nations. Again, the greatest thing to know about God, the thing that we want our friends, our community, our world to know, is that he is a God who saves.

Again, his saving power that is seen in Jesus, in the gospel. And this saving power, it is not just for those who currently know God. This is not a special secret that the church is to hide away.

No, we see here, it's to be made known among the nations, everyone, everywhere, to the ends of the earth. As the church enjoys and thanks God for it and finds their peace in that salvation that comes through Jesus.

[ 15 : 31 ] As Christians are able, and again, I say this carefully because this is not an easy thing, but this is what this passage is talking about. As Christians are able to face up to a tough world, but with a deep-seated and a certain hope that comes not from our circumstances or our power, but instead is grounded in God's saving power.

As we're able to live in light of this blessing that sustains us, then the world around us comes to see God at work. It comes to think, as we said earlier, well, that looks good.

I would like to have a hope like that. I would like to have a security like that. I would like to receive the rescue that that person speaks of and lives out.

The world around us would come to know God's saving power as we live in light of the gospel. What else does the world come to know about God? We see, secondly, in this psalm, his justice.

The middle line of verse 4, for you judge the peoples with equity. Through God's blessing of the church, then, the whole world is to see that God is a fair judge.

[ 16 : 50 ] We live in a world that is looking for justice. Justice is certainly not only a Christian concern. We hear so much going on in our world which is wrong and which doesn't seem to get the justice that it deserves.

Where can the world find that justice? Well, the psalm is saying, ultimately, as the world looks at the church, they should see that true justice comes from God and God alone.

Because as God blesses his people, he doesn't ignore their mistakes. He doesn't ignore the long things that we all do. The way God blesses his people isn't that those things are forgotten about.

As we trace the gospel story through the pages of the Bible, it's that those things are paid for by Jesus. That Jesus, God's own son, died for sin.

So it's just how seriously God takes justice. And that one day God will bring about true justice. there will be a reckoning for those who seem to have gotten away with it all here on earth.

[ 18 : 01 ] God will deal with wickedness. But in Jesus, through his death in our place, there is a rescue, there is forgiveness available, but that still ensures that justice is done as sin is paid for.

As the world sees how God blesses his people by bringing people who are far from him back to him. And yet doing that at the cost of his own son, the world sees how God is a God who judges fairly.

The world sees God's saving power, his justice. The third thing then in this psalm, the world is to see about God as they look at the church, follows on next in verse 4.

And that is this, that God guides the nations up on earth. Now one of the great blessings that God has given his people then is a direction and a purpose in life.

What is the meaning of life? You know, there's the huge question that people ask, isn't it? Searching for meaning can be something that is so challenging or upsetting or worrying for so many people or it can just seem like something that's so big that we just forget all about that and just get on with our day-to-day responsibilities.

[ 19 : 15 ] But you know, what's the point? And that is a great question. That is a question that strikes at the heart of what it means to be a human. And a great encouragement for us as a church, something we need to hold on to and remember is that the church has a rock-solid answer to that question.

In fact, the very first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, this kind of historic document about the foundations of the Christian faith, it asks, what is the chief end of mankind?

It's a kind of old-school way of saying, you know, what's the point? And the answer given is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. Again then, as the world looks at the church and sees a people with a purpose, people who know what life is for and people who are guided in that by God himself through his word as a light to their feet, then the world comes to know that God is a God who guides, that there is a God who brings direction in what is frequently a difficult and a confusing world.

And so God blesses his people and yet the stream doesn't stop there, it flows through his people so that the whole world might be blessed by coming to know God.

I was away last week at a kind of training thing and the person leading that was talking about thinking of ourselves not as pipes, thinking of yourself as a pipe, not a bucket is what he said.

[ 20 : 47 ] I'd never thought of myself as either really but the point was to make the point that these things, these blessings don't end with us like a bucket, rather we are like a kind of a pipe that they pass through to bless others.

I think maybe a sponge would be an even better picture actually that we soak up these great truths for ourselves that they go deep within us. We recognise the significance of this blessing that we have received and it's as we soak that up, as we are filled with that, as we dwell on that that we're able to be kind of squeezed out that it might flow on to others as well.

And so I suppose then that gives us perhaps the practical challenge of this passage which would be this, are we being like that sponge? You know, are people seeing that the joy of salvation in our lives?

Would people know that we are people who are blessed and recognise the attractiveness of that blessing? Are we able to speak about God and justice when people speak about that or hear about and struggle with the latest atrocity that comes onto our news feeds?

Not that that is in any way a simple thing or a quick answer. But are we able to bring God into the picture in these huge questions where there is so much confusion and so much hurt?

[ 22 : 12 ] Are we able to demonstrate in how we spend our time and our money? Are we able to demonstrate in what we talk about with other people that actually God has given us a greater purpose in life?

That in the gospel we have that blessing of true direction? Are these blessings evident in our lives to enable others to see them that the whole world might come to recognise these blessings and through them might come to know the God who pours them out on his people?

And that leads us then to our final point, the final link in the chain of this psalm. God blesses his people that the world might know God ultimately that the world might praise God.

And that is the repeated refrain of this psalm. That's the chorus if you like giving the big idea of what this psalm is all pointing towards. Verse 3 and again in verse 5 let the peoples praise you O God let all the peoples praise you.

Coming to know about God there knowing about his saving power about his justice about his guidance knowing about God it is essential but the ultimate goal that that necessary final step the logical result in fact of coming to know about this God is to praise this God.

[ 23 : 37 ] That's our aim isn't it? Each Sunday for those of us as we gather who are Christians that we would grow in our understanding of God through his word not in the same way that we'd grow in our understanding of how to solve a maths problem or grow in our understanding of how to speak a foreign language or French verbs or whatever it might be but grow in our understanding grow in our knowledge of him in order that we might praise him more.

Praise him as we gather together and praise him as we scatter to praise him with our whole lives lived in light of and in response to his blessings on us in the gospel.

And that's as well our prayer for those who aren't Christians as we said this psalm is a psalm speaking about God's mission God's purpose for the whole world to bring people in. We say that time and time again if you're here this morning and you're not a Christian you're so so welcome we'd love to see you week after week after week we'd love you to be part of our church community we want to be really genuine about that and also to be honest with you that our prayer is that for those who don't yet know Jesus that they would come to know about God whether that is through our services or hopefully those people we know would come to know about God as we live our lives in this way that reflects his characteristics and his blessing to those around us our prayer though for those who aren't yet Christians is that they would not just come to know about God in this way but that they would come to praise God that they would come to fear him as it says at the end of verse 7 that fear of God which is recognizing his greatness and our smallness which is recognizing his perfection and our failures that is recognizing that he deserves our worship that he deserves we give our all to him that we commit our lives to him and that he has made it possible through Jesus for us to come to him that's our prayer that's our hope that's our goal we can be really honest and upfront about that as a church and the future of our life as a church we don't have to shy away from saying we would love to see more people become Christians because we really believe that is the very best news that we have to share with people and again that's what this psalm says isn't it look at verses 3 into verse 4 the very heart of the psalm let all the peoples praise you let the nations be glad and sing for joy again this psalm is telling us that calling people to praise God calling people to turn to Jesus is not a call for them to take on some great burden and say goodbye to their hopes and their dreams and any hope of happiness they ever had there might well be things in our life which need to change if we're following

Jesus but ultimately we're inviting people to find gladness and joy as the psalm says we're inviting people to receive and enjoy the blessing that God pours out on his people through Jesus Christ as a church we have one of our values being a joyful community we're able to say that not because we all have to kind of sit here and try and muster up that joy and just think happy thoughts we're able to say that because in the gospel we have certain unchanging good news in Jesus God has blessed his people through Christ we have that joy of salvation our task then the psalm says is that we need to find ways to display and to share that joy to reflect it to others not again not to be false not to pretend that everything is fine when it isn't but to display that joy to the world around us even in the midst of hardship so that the world might see that to know God and to praise him is to find true gladness and joy a gladness and a joy that can never be taken away a joy that the nations our friends our colleagues our community our world is invited to share

God blesses his people that the world might know God that the world might praise God if we count ourselves among God's people if we know that blessing that comes through Jesus let's live gratefully in a way that shows that blessing to others that all people might come to know God and praise God might find the blessing and joy that only God offers so that God might get the glory that only he deserves let's pray together heavenly father we thank you that you are the God who blesses your people we thank you that you have blessed us fully and richly in Christ we thank you that in him we have the blessing of forgiveness we have the blessing of redemption we have everything we need and that we are brought back to be your people and to live in glorious worship of you

[ 29 : 05 ] Lord we thank you as well for the many other benefits and blessings that you pour out on us we pray that day by day you would help us to be grateful people in the big things and the small things always remembering your goodness to us always remembering Jesus as the source of all these blessings and Lord we pray that as we remember that you would help us to live in light of those blessings so that others might see we pray that that would be what makes us salt and light in our world we pray that we would be visible in our gratitude towards you and that as we do that the focus would not be on us but the focus would be on you and all that you have done for us and Lord we pray that you would use us as your people that you would use us as your church in that way that others might come to know you and the result of that might be others coming to praise you Lord we pray that you would receive the glory that you are due we pray that our relationship with you and the relationship of those around us that they have with you would not stop at mere knowledge but would move forward into praise because you are the God who deserves our praise and we pray that as we are in our whole lives giving ourselves over to praise and worship of you that again we might be a light in the world shining your goodness to others that they may too come and know the blessing that is found in Jesus Christ

Lord we recognize that we cannot do this alone we cannot do this in our own strength please be at work in us through your Holy Spirit we pray these things would be done in your strength and for your glory we pray them all in Jesus name Amen Amen