

Psalm 67

“The God Who Blesses Us”

June 25, 2023

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Pentecost Season

Our sermon text this morning is Psalm 67, which is printed on the back of your order of worship.

This is God’s holy and inerrant word. It is more precious than gold, even much fine gold. It is sweeter than honey, sweeter even than the drippings of the honeycomb.

Psalm 67

*To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments. A Psalm. A Song.*

*May God be gracious to us and bless us  
and make his face to shine upon us,      Selah*

*2 that your way may be known on earth,  
your saving power 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 judge the peoples with equity  
and guide the nations upon earth.      Selah*

*5 Let the peoples praise you, O God;  
let all the peoples praise you!*

*6 The earth has yielded its increase;  
God, our God, shall bless us.*

*7 God shall bless us;  
let all the ends of the earth fear him!*

Thus far the reading of God's word. It is absolutely true, and it is given to you because your Father in heaven loves you. Let's pray...

*Blessed Lord, who caused all the holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear this portion of your word, and to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest these words, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

Every week at the end of our worship service, after we have confessed our sins, received forgiveness, sung our hymns, prayed our prayers, heard the word read and preached and received the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, I say something like this:

Now, as you go from this place, go with the blessing and the name of your God resting upon you. May it be for you as a crown upon your head and a mantle about your shoulders.

And then, I lift my hands in the air and say these words:

*The Lord bless you and keep you;  
The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;  
The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace. Amen.*

It's important for you to know, beloved, that this practice of blessing God's people is rooted in the actions and plan of God himself, instituted by God more than three thousand years ago.

In Leviticus 9, we read of the very first worship service that took place at the Tabernacle immediately after the ordination of Aaron and his sons as priests for Israel.

After Aaron offered the proscribed sacrifices for Israel, Leviticus tells us that when Aaron came out of the tent of meeting, he lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them. It's right there, at the very first service of Israel's worship.

The blessing of God's people by the appointed representative — the priest or pastor — is a fundamental part of the worship that God instituted for his people to receive the renewal of his covenant with them so that, as they depart from worship, they might be assured of God's presence remaining with them.

In Numbers 6 we read that the Lord gave instruction to Aaron so that he might know precisely how he was to bless the people, and the reason for that blessing.

We read there: *The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 23 "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them,*

*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.*

*"So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them."*

The last verse of that text is fascinating. So shall Aaron (and the priests) after him, the Lord says, *put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.*

The blessing proscribed by God in Numbers 6 to be pronounced at the conclusion of the worship of his people is no mere well-wishing, it is not just a petition that God might be gracious and kind — no, this blessing is the way which God himself ordained for his very name to be placed upon his people — it is a binding of God to his people and a binding of the people to God so that God would indeed bless them with his presence as they depart from his worship.

Fascinatingly, Jesus' last recorded act on earth before his ascension to heaven was to bless his people. As Luke records in the 24th chapter of his gospel: "*And Jesus led his disciples out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven.*"

Remember, Jesus ascended to heaven to take up his new ordained role as the great final High Priest, who would serve his people in Heaven in the true tabernacle, the temple made without hands, the true dwelling place of God.

And so, we can be confident that the words that Jesus used to bless his people as he ascended to heaven as the greater Aaron, were the same given to the first Aaron more than a thousand years before:

*The Lord bless you and keep you;*

*The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;*

*The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace. Amen.*

And this is why in our tradition, only an ordained pastor may give the benediction at the end of Lord's Day worship — because it is fundamental part of his service as a representative of Jesus to his people — and thus it should only be pronounced by one whom the church has set apart for this service.

And this is also why, at least in our church, the benediction in Number 6 is the only benediction we use at the end of our worship — because these are the precise words that God instructed his ordained representative to speak to his people in order that his name would be put upon them, and these are the words through which he has promised, by his own divine oath, to bless them.

When you receive the benediction each week, beloved, know that you are receiving something real — not just a petition, not just a general well-wishing — no, you are receiving the name of the true and living God being put upon you as God himself ordained for it to be done.

But what should be our response to the benediction that we receive every week? What we do to do with this remarkable blessing, this sealing of the name of God upon us? Perhaps you've wondered that.

I want to argue this morning that Psalm 67 is rightly understood as a congregational response to the Number 6 blessing.

Look how our psalm this morning begins. Imagine a congregation praying or singing these words in response to receiving the Aaronic benediction:

*May God be gracious to us and bless us  
and make his face to shine upon us,*

These are words of reception. This is a prayer asking for the Lord to do what he has promised in the blessing that the congregation has just received, using the very words of the blessing proscribed in Number 6.

But why does the congregation pray for God to bless them? For what purpose are they blessed? Listen to verses 1-3 as a whole:

*May God be gracious to us and bless us  
and make his face to shine upon us,      Selah  
2 that your way may be known on earth,  
your saving power among all nations.  
3 Let the peoples praise you, O God;  
let all the peoples praise you!*

In this psalm, the blessing of God is for the sake of the world.

The psalmist is teaching the congregation to pray for God's blessing to rest upon them in order that God's way might be known upon earth and so that God's saving power would be known among the nations.

The congregation then prays for the expansion of God's kingdom, saying: "*Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you!*"

And then, in verses 4-5, the Psalmist continues this grand vision for the blessing of the nations, saying to God:

*4 Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,  
for you judge the peoples with equity  
and guide the nations upon earth. Selah*

*5 Let the peoples praise you, O God;  
let all the peoples praise you!*

This connection between our reception of God's blessing and the consequent blessing of the nations might not seem like an obvious one.

Isn't the blessing of God something he gives *us* because he loves *us*, because he's pleased with *our* faithfulness? Isn't God's blessing *our* special possession?

If we think this way, we've lost the biblical plot.

For at the very beginning of the story of Israel, God's blessing of this distinct people was to be for the sake of the world.

Remember the word of the Lord to Abram when he called him to go to a new land and said: *“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 shall be blessed.”*

You see, to bear God’s name, to receive God’s blessing, is actually something of a complicated thing.

We stretch out our hands every Sunday morning for God’s blessing, and that’s right. But we must not miss what that blessing means.

To be blessed by God, to have God’s name put upon us about far more than affirming our own personal hopes and dreams and desires — it’s about being caught up in the great story of God’s redemption of the world — it’s about being set apart for him, as a people for himself, so that he might use our lives as he would desire, for our good, and for his glory.

And that often looks different than how we might have imagined.

It certainly look different than how Abraham imagined, as he wandered the land of promise and waited years and years for his son to be born, and then finally, as the climax of his life, offered that promised son as a sacrifice to God. That’s what it meant for Abraham to be blessed by God.

Abraham’s reception of God’s blessing meant, as the writer of Hebrews puts it, that he died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that he was a stranger and an exile on the earth.

But why did Abraham receive this blessing? Why do we receive the blessing we receive every Lord's Day?

So that through him, and through us (as we participate in the Abrahamic promise through Jesus), all the families of the earth would be blessed.

We receive the blessing that we receive in order that the great story of God might continue, so that the blessing that God intends for the world might continue to spread to all of his creation.

In other words, to receive the blessing of God as we do each Sunday is to be sent out into the world walking in the way of Jesus, knowing that Jesus is with us, and that Jesus will use our lives for the sake of blessing others — for that is what he himself did.

Remember, the Jesus who blessed his disciples as he ascended into heaven is also the one who taught them saying: *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also."*

This is what it means to bear the blessing and name of Jesus, our High Priest.

To serve him and follow him. And to trust that he do for us what his Father did for him — make all of our sufferings, and even our actual, literal deaths, fruitful for the sake of the world.

And this is why being a Christian is a beautiful thing.

To be a Christian is not beautiful because our lives are easier, or less complicated.



To be a Christian is beautiful, because to bear God's blessing means that we are caught up in the story of God — we actually carry with us the name of Jesus like a crown upon our heads and a mantle about our shoulders — and the story of Jesus, just like our stories, is the story of death and resurrection for the sake of the world.

Beloved, I want you to see how this psalm ends. It ends with such a profound note of hope and exhalation. Listen to what the Psalmist says in verses 6-7.

*6 The earth has yielded its increase;*

*God, our God, shall bless us.*

*7 God shall bless us;*

*let all the ends of the earth fear him!*

The psalmist begins in verse 6 with a picture of the harvest. The earth has yielded its increase, he says. The rain has fallen, the sun has shone, the seeds have sprouted, and, in due time, the harvest has come.

And because the Psalmist rightly understands that all these things have taken place by God's hand, because of God's faithfulness, he knows also that God will bless his people.

*The earth has yielded its increase,* he says, and thus:

*God, our God, shall bless us.*

And then, in verse 7, he brings his prayer to a conclusion.

*"God shall bless us,"* the Psalmist says, *"let all the ends of the earth fear him!"*

What the psalmist is saying here is that the blessing of God is never ineffective.

God's blessing does just as God intends.

God *will* bless his people, and because of the blessing of God on his people, God *will* bring about the rich harvest of the nations of the world — such that even the ends of the earth will fear him.

Beloved, this is a picture of the ultimate success of the kingdom of God. This is a picture of what God intends to do.

Somehow, in the last 100 years in Christianity in the West, there has come to be an understanding of human history and human time that says that evil will get stronger and stronger and God's people will grow smaller and smaller and the church will decline, and then, just in time, Jesus will return and his tiny church that remains will be snatched out of the fire.

But beloved, that is not at all the vision that the Scriptures give.

The vision of the Scriptures is of the slow and certain expansion of the kingdom of God over time — like a seed planted in the ground that grows up into a great tree that is so large that the birds of the air make nests in all its branches.

The vision of the Scriptures is Jesus declaring that he will build his church, and even the gates of hell will not stand against it — that is, even hell itself will be invaded by the church he will build.

The vision of the Scriptures is Jesus sending out his apostles to go into all the world and to make disciples of all the nations, baptizing in the Triune name and teaching people everywhere to obey all that he has commanded — for he will be with them always as they go.

The vision of the Scriptures is that through the reign of Jesus and church that is his body, the earth will one day be as full of the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

The vision of the Scriptures is that of the voice of the Angel in Revelation who proclaims: “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever!”

Beloved, the blessing of God is real. And God’s blessing will have the effect that God intends.

Even today, God continues to bless his people — and he does it for this reason: so that the nations will be brought in to the kingdom of his Son — so that his way will be known upon earth, and so that his saving power will be enjoyed among all nations.

God indeed shall bless us. And all the ends of the earth will fear him.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

*Prayer: “Show the light of your countenance upon us, O Lord, and vouchsafe us by your perpetual blessing; that giving thanks to you in holy fear, we may attain to win the fruit of righteousness and join with the praise of all the nations of the earth before the face of your majesty; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”*