

**The God Who Blesses  
Psalm 67**

Brothers and sisters, the Psalm we just read is a very nice Psalm to read isn't it... It's full of wonderful words and imagery and inspiring themes; graciousness, blessing, harvest bounty, God's face shining on us, salvation to the ends of the earth, peoples praising God, nations full of gladness and joy. God ruling people with equity – justice and fairness. It's a wonderful Psalm to read, it makes you feel inspired as it paints an idyllic picture of what the world could be like.

If this Psalm could be a picture, it would be a Thomas Kincaid painting... And the truth is brothers and sisters we crave such pictures of the world because so much of what we see and experience is in fact quite the opposite.

As last Sunday's message identified, when we go through trials and troubles in this life we feel like God is not gracious to us, that He's not blessing us but punishing us or abandoning us to our circumstances and letting us get beat down.

And if we pay any attention to the news and social media, what is going on in the world these days is far from nations full of gladness and joy. Russia is still at war with Ukraine, Canada's prime minister has bungled and strained our diplomatic relationship with India at the moment, the Chinese Communist Party has been meddling in our domestic affairs.

Additionally, Morocco is mourning the loss of life from a devastating earthquake, and severe drought has Europe facing lower harvest yields this year... not to mention the lingering effects of gov't over-reach from the pandemic, energy shortages, supply chain disruption, and a drastic cost of living increase for us here due to our fed government's financial mismanagement and increasing carbon taxes.

And the people of this world do not seem to know the ways of God or give Him praise. Instead, there are pride parades where people praise sexual depravity and deny God's created design for male and female, and Sundays are now the day where most people will do anything else but attend worship to offer praise and thanks to God...

So... being saddened and disheartened from the reality we see all around us, it's completely understandable how much we appreciate reading an inspirational psalm like Psalm 67 and the view of the world which it offers us – it's a small blessing in and of itself, and we like blessings.

But, lest this small blessing be accused of being nothing more than a nice picture – like a Thomas Kincaid – we must remember that this is a scripture picture, it is God's Word and as such there is power in it. It is far more than a nice picture which inspires us – it actually contains the key to making this picture a reality for our world.

So let's take a closer look at the details and the structure and content of this Psalm and hear what the Word of God has to say to us about blessing and obedience this morning.

Now when this psalm was written as a worship song for Israel to sing praise to God way back in the day – they were the only ones singing praises to God out of all the nations on earth.

They were the only ones who knew God's ways and received His guidance and experienced joy and gladness from this.

The other nations around them worshiped idols, false gods and used sexual immorality and human sacrifice in their worship practices. The nations around Israel were afraid of their gods but they did not Fear the one True God.

Israel was a small nation, a group of people that had been enslaved in Egypt, wandered in the desert, and their claim to be God's chosen people who had received God's laws irritated and angered the nations around them. They were a peculiar people, not much liked, often at war being attacked by the nations around them.

So, this Psalm functioned in a similar way for Israel as it does for us – it gave them a picture of a world where things were different than what Israel knew and experienced at that time.

A world where their God ruled ALL the nations, not just them. Where ALL the different peoples in the world praised God, not just them. A world where God had fulfilled His promise that

ALL nations on earth would be blessed through Abraham and His descendants, not just the nations next to Israel but nations from the ends of the earth! They would hear and know and praise the One True God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the Living God, their Covenant God – Yahweh and come to worship Him and know His ways.

But the reality was so different from what Psalm 67 portrayed.

And to make matters worse, since God had promised to bless all nations through Abraham’s descendants the nation of Israel had a significant responsibility to be an example for the nations around them so Psalm 67 would be true, however Israel generally floundered in this task in two ways.

First, Israel themselves struggled to be obedient to God’s rule and guidance, to praise Him alone and be the example of a royal priesthood and a holy nation. They were happy to receive all of God’s blessings but not so keen to have to show their gratitude through obedience. So, if Israel, with all of its divine advantages struggled with this – how could the gentiles

nations expect to successfully know God’s ways and worship Him in thankfulness.

Second, given how the Gentiles were often attacking, conquering and oppressing the nation of Israel, those feelings of animosity became mutual. Israel was not at all interested in allowing the nations to join them in their worship of God, rather they began to use God’s laws to justify their self-righteous exclusiveness and treated the gentiles with disdain.

Now brothers and sisters, as Christians we still struggle in the same way... don’t we.

It seems things have only gotten worse in our world since this Psalm was written, the advances in culture and technology and human achievements have not solved the underlying problem that people, the nations of this world take God’s blessings for granted and do not show their gratitude through obedience to His ways.

And just like Israel we, the Church, have the calling and bear the responsibility to help bring about the world described in Psalm 67 and the fact that we see such a discrepancy between this psalm and the rest of our world only shows that like Israel, we are floundering in this task.

Because brothers and sisters our sinful nature is quite happy to receive all the blessings of God as outlined in the first half of this Psalm in vs. 1-4 – but is absolutely resistant to wanting to respond in the obedience that is outlined and required of us in the second half of the Psalm, vs. 4- 7.

We all love the blessings in the first half of the Psalm, vs. 1 God being gracious to us, having his face shine on us – living in His favor with the good things in life... And we would love God to save others as well – straighten them out so they stop the evil things they are doing, turn from their perverted ways...

And who would turn away more people from coming to praise God on a Sunday morning?? Not us – let's pack this place out and raise the praise!

And it's quite obvious we need the gov't of Canada to line up the laws of the land with God's Law and how glad and full of joy we will be when that happens!

So we love the blessings in this the first half of this psalm.

But we have to be honest that we shy away and ignore the obedience God requires of us in the second half of this psalm – through which God would work to bring about these blessings to those outside of the church; the obedience of public praise, speaking out about how God would guide nations, taking the good news of Jesus to people all over the earth – but especially to our own community. We shy away.

Or maybe we have the order mixed up, we're thinking that if we've been obedient to God then as a result of that obedience God should be responding to us with blessing. We're the good people who deserve everything in the first half of the psalm unlike those who do not obey God.

Either way brothers and sisters – the discrepancy between

what we see in this psalm and what we see in the world around us is the evidence of our own disobedience to God, and the world's misguided attempts to make a better world through technology, education, charity or ideology.

But the good news brothers and sisters, in spite of our disobedience, the Word of God will accomplish its purpose. Isaiah 55:11 God declares *"so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."*

Psalm 67 is God's Word and it has power and that power is focused to achieve God's purpose in how this Psalm is structured. Through the arrangement of this psalm the central issue of what is wrong with the world and the solution to that is identified. We are shown the proper place for obedience is in response to blessing, not the other way around; and finally we see how this relationship between obedience flowing from blessing contributes to fulfillment of God vision for all peoples in the world to know Him and worship Him. So, let's look at the structure!

Now you may have already noticed that vs. 3 and vs. 5 are identical. That's our first clue, and this structure puts vs. 4 in the center. Taking a closer look at vs. 4 shows us that the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> line of this verse both focus on "the nations" which means that the 2 line of the verse is centered between them and thus is the central point of this Psalm.

Now this parallel structure is most clearly defined in the middle section of this psalm, but we can extend this parallel structure to the first and third sections of the psalm as well because they both deal with "blessing" and "the earth."

And if we extend the pattern, contrasting vs. 6 and vs. 2, and vs. 7 with vs. 1 then the themes found in the first two verses explain what the last two verses are actually speaking about.

You'll see in the sermon handout how this works, vs. 2b says *"your salvation among all nations"* and the parallel structure make it corresponds to vs. 6a *"the land yields its harvest."* Which means that the harvest vs. 6 is really talking about is

the harvest of people being saved. See how that works? We'll come back to this in a bit.

But let's focus on the central point of this Psalm that we've identified, vs. 4b *"for you [God] rule the peoples with equity."*

This is what it's all about, this is the solution to what is wrong with the world and wrong with us, and the rest of the psalm flows out in both directions from this central point.

And what this tells us is that when God rules the people with fairness and justice, it leads to God's guidance, which brings us gladness and joy, and that leads on either side to praise – it is a reason to praise God, for everyone to praise God.

And when we praise God brothers and sisters, publicly... for all to hear and see, that spreads God's ways. The content of the praise contributes to spreading the knowledge of God's ways. And the knowledge of God's ways leads people to salvation. And this is a blessing from God in their lives and living by God's ways results in a harvest of righteousness in their lives.

This is how the structure of the Psalm communicates what God intends for His Word to do and what it has been sent to accomplish. So even though Israel was disobedient and exclusive, God's Word worked through them and as John 1:14 says, that *"Word became flesh and dwelt among us!"*

This is what moves this good news from the text into our lives brothers and sisters. The Word becoming flesh in Jesus Christ.

Because if God's rule over people is central, then we need to be reminded that in Jesus Christ, there is the one and only human being whom God rules perfectly with equity, justice and fairness – because Jesus is fully human and fully God.

Now equity is different from equality, as the definition goes equality is treating everyone the same, equity recognizes that we do not all start from the same place and that adjustments must be made correct to imbalances.

So through Christ God rules with equity and corrects the imbalance between all the rest of humanity with regards to

their obedience by crediting Jesus' obedience to them and having Jesus take their punishment instead.

So the central message of Psalm 67 point to the good news of the gospel brothers and sisters! And everything else flows out of this, on either side, in blessing and obedience. Amen?

Let's see how this plays out. Look at vs. 4a *"the nations be glad and sing for joy"* When Jesus was born the message of the angel is Luke 2:10 was *"I bring good news that will cause great joy for all the people."* See the connection?

That's the blessing side, now let's jump down to the obedience side in vs. 4c *"guide the nations of the earth."* And we ask what is Jesus' relationship to the nations? Well in Mat 28:10-20 Jesus commands *"go make disciples of ALL nations... teaching them to obey everything I've command you!"*

So we see how the blessing of the good news leads into the obedience to Jesus guiding the nations, and specifically how that entails discipleship and following Jesus' teachings.

Then we return to the blessing side, working out to vs. 3 *"May the peoples praise you, God; may all the peoples praise you."*

The good news of Jesus, his birth, his life, his death and resurrection – the gospel as a whole and the great joy it brings naturally gets expressed in praise to God.

As 1 Peter 1:8 says when someone believes the gospel of Jesus, they *"believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy..."* which comes out as praise and it is such a wonderful blessing to praise God for this.

Now jumping back down to the obedience side, as we go out to make disciples we are not always going to be received as a blessing by others – in fact they will take offense to it and persecute us for sharing it with them. That is what happened to Paul and Silas in Philippi, and they ended up in jail.

And yet in obedience to our Lord who said in Matt 5:11 *"Blessed are you when people... persecute you... because of me."* Paul and Silas praised God and sang hymns while they were in jail...

Brothers and sisters, we don't praise only when we experience blessings, sometimes we praise God as an act of obedience – we offer the sacrifice... of praise. Like Paul and Silas did.

And as a result; God moved in a blessing, and so we jump back up to the blessing side for vs. 2. And if we stay with the story of Paul and Silas the blessing from the obedience of praise was that the gentile jailer and his entire family and many prisoners received salvation in Jesus Christ.

So the gospel was spreading from out from Jerusalem towards the ends of the earth – which is exactly what vs. 2 is all about, salvation among all nations and God's way in Jesus Christ being known on the earth. What a blessing for Paul and Silas to see this!

So... you know how this works now, we go back down to the obedience side in vs. 6 and as we already explained, and as our example of Paul and Silas illustrates the reference to the earth yielding its harvest are to be understood in terms of people receiving salvation.

So, with that in mind, what's the call to obedience here? Well, it brings to mind Jesus' parable of the farmer in Matt 13 where seed that falls on good soil produces a good crop for harvest.

Thus, we must be obediently receiving the words of God's Kingdom as good soil, not allowing them be snatched away by the evil one, or choked out by the cares of life, or shrivel up by the trials of life. Our obedience is key to us being good soil.

Additionally, we remember our Lord's word in John 15:5 *"I am the vine you are branches, remain in me and you will bear much fruit!"* So, our obedience to our Lord's commands keeps us remaining in Him and bearing the fruit of the Spirit.

And Jesus also said in Matt 9:37-38 *"The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."* Our obedience is required to go out and bring people to salvation with the gospel message.



And lastly brothers and sisters, obedience brings its own harvest into our lives. We receive the blessing of seeing other people receive salvation – is it not a joy to see others receiving the joy of salvation? If our obedience keeps us in Christ Jesus and we bear much fruit – the Fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness and self-control, as Paul says in Gal 5:23 *“against these things there is no law.”* And this brings benefits to all areas of our lives.

So truly in these ways as vs. 6 says *“the land yields its harvest”* and it brings about its own blessing so that is as the rest of vs. 6 reminds us it is *“God our God blessing us”*

Which leads us, one last time, back up to the blessing side for vs. 1 which borrows heavily from the Aaronic blessing in Num 6:24-26 wt we all know so well *“The Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace.”*

Now Ps 67:1 borrows this and flips it around *“May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine on us...”* and since we’re working out way out from the center of this Psalm, which is the gospel of Jesus Christ... the inclusion of terms from the Aaronic blessing here is a statement that Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of what the blessing is speaking about.

So in Jesus Christ, God’s face shines on us. As Jesus himself says in John 14:9 *“whoever has seen me has seen the father”* and Hebrews 1:3 states *“the Son is the radiance of God’s glory and exact representation of His being.”* So, God’s O.T. blessings are all fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and in fact though it looks like they pre-date Jesus, they actually flow out from him.

So now we move from blessing to obedience one last time, back down to vs. 7 where the NIV translators have reflected a shift in time that has taken place. It says *“May God bless us still...”* May God continue to bless us. Why this time shift?

Because the work is not done yet brothers and sisters, we still need God’s blessing to move us to obedience, perhaps now

more than ever. Not only because many people and nations, Canada especially, need to be guided by God's rule in Christ - and Canadians need to return to publicly praising God in worship... but because we personally need to be reminded of the central point that God blesses us in His rule in Jesus Christ and the relationship between blessing leading to obedience.

You see we've been doing church for a long time now, and the gospel message can get lost and confused for us. You may be here at church this morning thinking that it's a good thing, because its being obedient to God and that because you're being obedient in this way you're hoping or expecting that God will bless you as a result. God already blesses you!

Or you may be here just for blessings, looking for inspiration, for grace and mercy and God's favor on your life. You are more concerned with getting at the blessings than getting to know the giver and offering Him your obedience for His blessings you already enjoy! But today it moves you to obey!

So, hear the good news this morning about the rule of God in

Jesus Christ and how that blessing leads out to obedience and then to more blessings and then to more obedience until as vs. 7 promises – all the ends of the earth, will fear God.

It is amazing and sobering and encouraging brothers and sisters, to know that the level of obedience motivated by the blessings God has poured into our lives, will be used by God to bring His salvation to ALL those He has chosen from the very ends of the earth, to the end of the age at His return.

What a blessing! But – there is more riding on our obedience this than we may have realized... So may God bless us **still!**

So that in the good time and the bad times we may praise Him. And Let us obediently work for the harvest. Because what God is doing at Valleyview is bringing the ends of the earth to us - where we are blessed to disciple all nations to fear God and obey everything Jesus taught us.

Truly brothers and sisters, God is being gracious to us, making His face to Shine upon us. So may God bless us still! Amen.