

Psalm 67 offers a sweeping benediction to a sequence of praise psalms (65-68) designed to offset the cry for deliverance that prevails throughout Book II (Pss 51-64; 69-71). This interlude of pure praise shifts the focus from danger and deliverance to devotion and thanksgiving. After the dark night of the soul, the morning sunrise dawns on a beautiful day. The worshiper is refreshed and renewed by the Spirit's rhythms of grace. With every fiber of his being the psalmist resists the bland recital of religious rhetoric. David's doxology draws worshipers out of themselves and into thanksgiving and praise. Blessing God is based on being blessed by God. God's grace always goes before, making it possible for us to praise God and be a blessing to the world.

The Scope of Blessing

*May God be gracious to us and bless us
and make his face shine on us –
so that your ways may be known on earth,
your salvation among all nations.*

Psalm 67:1-2

The scope of salvation history stretching from Abraham's blessing to the apostle John's vision encompasses all the nations and extends to the ends of the earth. The Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you" (Gen 12:1). God's command to Abram to "go" is inked in our praying imagination to Jesus' great commission to his disciples, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt 28:19-20). Salvation history is bracketed by the means of grace and outreach to the nations. The Lord said to Abraham, "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you. . . . I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen 12:2-3).

We hear echoes of Aaron's high priestly benediction in the opening verses of Psalm 67. Numbers 6:24-26 is a highly priestly blessing over the nation of Israel: "The Lord bless you and keep you. . . ." The psalmist's prayer is given by the people for the sake of nations: "May God be gracious to us and bless us." God's people are blessed so that God's "ways may be known on earth, your salvation among the nations." Psalm 67 is a priesthood-of-all-believers-prayer on behalf of the world. Aaron's priestly prayer for Israel has become David's prayer for the nations. We need God's grace and blessing to make known God's ways to the nations.

In a similar way, Jesus prayed for his disciples to impact the world. In his high priestly prayer in John 17 Jesus prayed that his disciples would be one, one with the Father and the Son, so that the world would believe that the Father sent the Son. Jesus put his own credibility on the line, when he tied the oneness of all believers to the mission of the Church. Incredibly, we are the answer to Jesus' prayer for the world. "When people believe that *God* (and no one else) sent *Jesus* (and no

one else) in *the* mission of salvation — then people are finally at home with life’s central reality. The Church does everything she can – from faithful preaching and praying to loving outreach and service – to seek this faith in a deceived and uncentered world.”¹

David’s prayer, “May God be gracious to us and bless us,” lines up with Jesus’ beatitudes, “Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God.” The Beatitudes offer a profile of blessing that counters anything the world has to offer. Jesus summed up his theory of happiness as eight fundamental emotional attitudes, eight convictions of the soul, eight character qualities of the inner person. Jesus paints a portrait of his blessed followers from the inside out. Each beatitude is a description of grace-shaped receptivity to the will of God. The beatitudes are not a list of legalistic prerequisites or moralistic preconditions. They frame an attitude of heart that turns to God in humility for God’s blessing. They picture what God’s grace does in a person’s life. We are poor and in need of God’s riches, sin-sick and in need of God’s forgiveness, humble and resting in God’s promise, hungry and in need of God’s provision, seeking to help, but in need of God’s help more, focused and in need of God’s vision, peacemakers and in need of God’s peace, and persecuted but protected by God’s promises. This is what it means to pray for God’s grace and blessing.

The blessing of God and the mission of God are inseparable. The redemptive trajectory encompasses the nations. The apostle John emphasized the church’s universal mandate to be a faithful witness to a lost and needy world. Seven times the phrase “tribe and language and people and nation” is used in The Revelation, but never in the same form twice.² The global outreach of the gospel brings salvation to all the nations. The psalmist deftly and beautifully covers the all-encompassing nature of this salvation in a line that all too easily rolls off our tongue without impressing us with the magnitude of its meaning. How easy it is to say, “*May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine on us,*” without comprehending our need for God’s grace and mercy, without grasping the full range of God’s physical and spiritual blessings, and without being filled with gratitude for God’s affection toward us. The people of God are blessed for a purpose: to make known the ways of God to the nations for sake of their salvation.

In a word, salvation, comprehends all that we have been given in Christ. We are saved from “sin and death; guilt and estrangement; ignorance of truth; bondage to habit and vice; fear of demons, of death, of life, of God, of hell; despair of self; alienation from others; pressures of the world; a meaningless life.”³ We are saved for a purpose, to love God, others, and ourselves. We are saved for freedom, mission, and community.

Salvation changes our relationship with God giving us acceptance with God, forgiveness, reconciliation, sonship, reception of the Spirit, and everlasting life. Salvation changes us emotionally giving us confidence, peace, courage, hopefulness, and joy. Salvation changes us spiritually giving us prayer, guidance, discipline, dedication and service. Salvation changes us personally giving us new thoughts, convictions, horizons, motives, satisfactions, self-fulfillment.

¹ Bruner, John, 1008. (Emphasis his).

² Revelation 5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15.

³ White, “Salvation,” 968. (This entire section on “salvation” is dependent on R. E. O. White’s article).

Salvation changes us socially giving us a new community in Christ, a compassion for others and an “overriding impulse to love as Jesus has loved.”⁴ Living into this new reality depends upon God’s blessing from start to finish.

The Song of Blessing

*May the peoples praise you, God;
may all the peoples praise you.
May the nations be glad and sing for joy,
for you rule the peoples with equity
and guide the nations of the earth.*

Psalm 67:3-4

The psalmist invites the peoples of the world to praise God for his rule, his justice, and his guidance. The people of God from every tribe, language, people, and nation, have much to sing about. Spurgeon wrote, “Nothing creates gladness so speedily, surely, and abidingly as the salvation of God.”⁵ Nigerian theologian Cyril Okorochoa distinguishes between thanksgiving and praise. “We thank God for the blessings that he has given to us. We praise him when we think more of the Giver than the gifts, and realize that he is the Creator and Lord of all; he is holy, all-powerful and all-wise, our heavenly Father, our loving and gracious Savior.”⁶ The peoples “are not merely confessing and realistically acknowledging how things are but rejoicing and resounding: that is, resounding with joy.”⁷

Spurgeon elaborated on what it meant for the nations to be glad and to sing for joy. “Some sing for form, others for show, some as a duty, others as an amusement, but to sing from the heart, because overflowing joy must find a vent, this is to sing indeed.”⁸ I have been around musicians who truly love the Lord and sing for joy. The impact of the indwelling word of God is evidenced in their singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in their hearts to the Lord (Col 3:16). Spurgeon looked forward to the day when the Lord would consummate his rule and reign, when “the age of song” would begin, and great multitudes from every nation, tribe, people and language would sing in a loud voice “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb” (Rev 7:10). That day will come, but in the mean time let those who have a passion for Christ sing for joy. Let them lift their voice in praise for God’s way (Ps 67:2a), God’s salvation (Ps 67:2b), God’s justice (Ps 67:4a), and God’s guidance (Ps 67:4b).⁹

The Source of Blessing

*May the peoples praise you, God;
may all the peoples praise you.*

⁴ White, *Ibid.*, 968.

⁵ Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, 129.

⁶ Okorochoa, *Psalms, African Bible Commentary*, 672.

⁷ Goldingay, *Psalms*, 302.

⁸ Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, 129.

⁹ Okorochoa, *Psalms*, 673.

*The land yields its harvest;
God, our God, blesses us.
May God bless us still,
so that all the ends of the earth will fear him.*
Psalm 67:5-7

In this interlude of praise (Pss 65-68) the emphasis is on God's blessing reaching the world through the witness of the people of God. The whole world is meant to come to the knowledge of God's ways. There is nothing narrow or limited about the scope of the blessing. The audience for God's works is the whole earth, all the nations, and all the peoples. Ten times in seven short verses all the inhabitants of the whole earth are referenced. Five references to the people of God come at the beginning and the end of the psalm. Instead of it being "us" against "them," it is "us" for "them." God's blessing is on a mission, invoking the knowledge of God's ways, leading to heartfelt confession, resounding praise, and fear-of-God reverence. This is how we are to pray for the world.

The psalm concludes with an emphasis on the singular source of all blessing: "God, our God blesses us." Jesus prayed the way the psalmist prayed on the night he was betrayed, "Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3). Living as we do in the "global village" Christians are reminded daily that the greatest offense of the gospel is its exclusive truth claim. The apostles clearly understood the absolute claim of Jesus and declared, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

The early church was convinced that Jesus was the culmination of a long history of revelation, the very self-disclosure of God. The exclusive truth claim of the gospel fits with the purpose of God's promise from the beginning. God chose one, small, weak, insignificant nation through which to make himself known and bless the world. The exclusiveness of the gospel is consistent with the character of revelation and the nature of God's own self-disclosure. There are not many gods to know, only one God makes his saving ways known to humankind. The apostles believed that the promise of God given to Abraham, that "all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you," is fulfilled in Jesus. And each subsequent stage of salvation history, from Moses to the Prophets, from Jeremiah to David, anticipated the Savior; not an ethnic Savior, not a cultural religion, not a tribal deity, but the Savior of the world. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son..." (John 3:16). The one and only way makes sense because of the one and only Son!¹⁰

¹⁰ Webster, *The God Who Prays*, 58-60.