

BEING BLESSED?

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[0 : 00] that you desired these words to be written, that you had these words written in such a way that in every generation and for every people group, they could speak to us.

They can only do this, Father, because it is ultimately your word. And we confess before you, Father, that we cannot understand your word purely by our minds.

Father, we know you want us to use the best of our mind, but even the best of our mind is not enough. We need, Father, your Holy Spirit to humble us and create within us a hunger to know your word and to hear your word, to know you and to hear you.

And, Father, this we ask, that you would so bless us that we have a desire to know you and to be known by you and to hear you speak to us and have you speak into our lives. Father, we ask that you would do this at this time.

As we open your word. And all this we ask in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. I might disappoint a lot of you this morning.

[1 : 08] You might find this sermon boring. It's a very unusual sermon for me. It's not one that I do very often. And it's going to be on Psalm 67, and you're going to need your Bibles if you have them.

But here's what happened. This is our last Sunday of doing Psalms, at least for a season. Next Sunday, we go back into the book of Luke, and we'll be doing Luke for quite a long season.

And so I, with the other people who've been speaking over the summer in the different Psalms, I asked each of the speakers to pick a Psalm. And I just sort of asked them to not all pick laments or not all pick happy Psalms, but have a bit of a variety.

And after they had picked, I've been praying about what two Psalms I would pick. And one of the Psalms I decided that I felt led to preach on was Psalm 67, which is what we're going to look at in a moment.

And the reason I chose Psalm 67, I mean, apart from the fact that I was praying and asking God to tell me what it is that we, the congregation, needed to spend time thinking about and hearing, was I knew a little bit about this Psalm in terms of how it's been important in other generations of Christians.

[2 : 21] that when the English Reformation was going on, and though Thomas Cranmer, who ended up being martyred as part of the English Reformation, as he was trying to order and put together how it is that Christians should worship, not only on Sundays, but throughout the week, and he wanted to try to create a means by which ordinary people could worship throughout the week, and also how they could worship on Sunday.

He was very aware of the fact that throughout Christian history, whenever there were reform movements within the church before the Reformation, there was always reform movements, and that many of the monastic movements had been part, when they first started, they were part of a Reformation movement within the church to call the church and call Christian people to pray, that throughout the centuries, a psalm, there were several passages of scripture that were important, and one of those passages of scripture that had been important in earlier reform movements, and whenever people had a heart to pray, and one of those psalms that they, one of those passages of scripture that earlier reformers thought was very important was Psalm 67.

And so, if you go back to Cranmer, and it was important in the Anglican tradition, in Canada, up until 1962, if you were to have done evening prayer, you would have found the text of Psalm 67 in the evening prayer service.

And Cranmer just took it out of, he was aware of the fact that earlier reform movements saw that this was an important prayer, an important psalm, for Christians to pray, and to sing, and to hear, and to think about.

And I knew this about Psalm 67, so I thought, well, we haven't talked about Psalm 67, so I'll pick Psalm 67, and that's what I picked.

[4 : 15] But here's the thing which is a bit different about this sermon. If you come to the church, you know that I, you know, I do a sermon, and usually there's, like, on the screen there'll be points, and I sort of come up, and I set tension, and I come up to the point, and then, and all, but here's what happened to me this week.

I sort of had a bit of a struggle with God all week, because, you know, I, I don't have Hebrew, so I have to depend upon academic commentaries that will help me with the Hebrew, and, and make sure that I understand the text, and I, I've done all that work all week, but, what, here's the funny thing, that, what kept happening, kept happening to me, is that I wasn't able to think of, like, like, like, points, I kept having to, pray, now, you see, this is a little bit of an awkward thing, for a sermon, because, you know, you have to get up, and, and actually sort of have points, in a sermon, but, I couldn't keep thinking of, really clear points, I just keep, kept feeling that I had to pray, Psalm 67, and so, you know, me being a, a typical, uh, male Canadian, I, um, I sort of wanted to maybe, you know, get, try to get the right thing going on,

I kept, of course, praying, you know, I always pray for God's direction, guidance, and I'm praying for God's guidance, and direction, and, and every time I come and spend time on Psalm 67, I keep praying, the Psalm, and trying to figure out how to pray the Psalm, and realizing how I'm not praying the Psalm, and how I have to learn from praying the Psalm, and, and then finally, and then finally, I realized that, that I wasn't really to do a proper sermon with you this morning, was that I was to sort of share with you Psalm 67 in such a way that hopefully you would want to pray it with me.

Amen. So if you have your Bibles, please turn in them to Psalm 67, and, and that's what we're just going to do, and if you're not really interested in praying Psalm 67, then I, I guess you can have a little bit of a nap for a period of time, but I'm, not that I'm going to spend the whole time praying, but I'm going to sort of just share sort of how God was teaching me this week about the importance of praying, and, and for some of you, if you, if you, if you manage to track with this whole time, you'll hear that every time I prayed this morning, my prayers have been all informed by Psalm 67, and, and, and I really actually, I, the, part of the thing I could see about this Psalm is I struggled with it. You know how in, in our modern day, people talk about moral compasses, often with ethics courses and stuff like that, and, and people saying we need ethics in business, or ethics in government, or ethics in, in, in the workforce, and people talk about the, the need to have a moral compass, and, and I realized that Psalm 67 is a type of moral and spiritual compass that the, the Christians and the church regularly need to have.

[7 : 10] So I'm going to read all of 67, Psalm 67, it's just seven verses, and then, then we'll go back, and we'll sort of look at how we can pray this Psalm. So, Psalm 67, if you don't have a Bible, there's always extra Bibles up here at the front, and, uh, you're free to have one.

And here's how the Psalm goes. Actually, the, the little introduction to the Psalm goes to the choir master with string instruments, a Psalm, a Psalm. May God be gracious to us and bless us, and make his face to shine upon us, that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations.

let the peoples praise you, O God, let all the peoples praise you. Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity, and guide the nations upon earth.

Let the peoples praise you, O God, let all the peoples praise you. The earth has yielded its increase, God, our God, shall bless us, God shall bless us, but all the ends of the earth fear you.

And, uh, if you were a very old fashioned Anglican at this point in time, you would say, glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.

[8 : 25] Amen. Ha ha. That's just for the closet old Anglicans in the room. So here's the thing. I start to try to pray this psalm. May God be gracious to us and bless us, and make his face to shine upon us, that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations, that the peoples praise you, O God, let all the peoples praise you.

And the first thing that I realized was this, that on one hand, God was putting within me, I mean, he said, I could really, I mean, he wanted me to spend time in the commentaries, he wanted me to spend time studying the psalm, and thinking upon the psalm, but I kept, I kept having this pressure, that he didn't just want me to, to understand it, he wanted me to pray it.

And, and so not only while I was sitting there, in the, in the Starbucks, or other places where I was working on the sermon, but while I was doing other things, and one of the very, very first things I, I realized, is that it was hard for me to pray the psalm, because I kept trying to think of what I wanted to say, rather than remembering the psalm.

And it, it was as if God was speaking into my life, that George, too often you, and too often the church, we're filled with what we want to say, and we're not filled with just actually hearing, and being formed by what I want you to say.

So I realized I had to start paying far more attention, to the actual words, virtually memorizing the psalm, so that while I was riding my bicycle, or walking, or in other places, that the psalm, would, would come out of me as something that I had to pray.

[10:00] But, may God be gracious to us, and bless us, and make his face to shine upon us, that your way may be known on earth, that your saving power among all nations. Let the peoples praise you, O God, let all the peoples praise you.

And as I'm trying to learn how to pray this psalm, as I feel the pressure of the Holy Spirit, that I'm called to pray this psalm, and then it was as if the Holy Spirit convicts me, that I kept changing the words of the psalm, in a really important way.

And the way I kept changing the words of the psalm, is I would say, God be gracious to me, and bless me, and make your face shine upon me. That's not what the psalm says.

The psalm wasn't asking me to pray this psalm for me. The psalm, the word of God was asking me to learn to pray this psalm for us.

And day after day, I would be trying to pray this psalm, and it was as if the Holy Spirit kept having to say, George, what did you just say? What did you just say? You said me again.

[11:10] You shouldn't keep saying me. There's times when we pray for just ourselves. I mean, there's times when I should just pray for me. That it's not as if the Bible says that there's never times that I should just say, Lord, please help me.

Lord, please do this for me. It's not that the Bible never says that we should do it, but this psalm, which has been part of reform movements throughout the history of the church, that early reformers, whether it was Gregory or Galatianus or Benedict or Cranmer, recognized that learning to pray this psalm was really important for the church to have this form how we pray and how we understand the church and how we understand the world, that this part of God's word has an authoritative power that's to form how we are to understand how we are to pray, and it's asking me to pray for us.

It's asking you to pray for us. May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations.

Let the peoples praise you, O God. Let all the peoples praise you. Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth. Let the peoples praise you, O God.

Let all the peoples praise you. The earth has yielded its increase. God or God shall bless us. God shall bless us. Let all the ends of the earth fear you. So one of the things I learned when I was doing the commentaries is that it's very intentional in English that the requests are may and let, that these are prayers of humble desire.

[13:01] It's verb tenses of humble desire and that God wants to form within us humble desires and form and channel and grow within us humble desires as we approach it.

and therefore the first word is may and then the rest of it is let, let, let, let, let. And so the very, very first humble desire that I am to have for us, that we are to have for us, is to ask God for grace.

And, you know, I'm thinking about this. I'm in a Starbucks. I'm looking around at the room. In fact, I just had a conversation with a young guy.

I'd had quite a few conversations with him. We have a very, very unusual relationship. He can't get at all why anybody would want to know anything at all about the Christian faith.

He's young. He's good looking. He's in really good shape. He's financially successful. He's a hit with the ladies.

[14:14] And life is going very good. Why does he need grace? I mean, that's what he says.

And the fact of the matter is, is that a lot of us in the church are just like that young man. That we don't really think we need grace.

I mean, we know we need grace sometimes because sometimes we feel really guilty. And sometimes we feel like we're really broken. Sometimes we don't feel like we're very successful. We feel like a failure. And so at times like that, to ask for grace is sort of easy for us, at least for the moment. But a lot of the time, we're sort of like our culture.

And if things are going very well for us, we don't really think we need grace. Because grace refers to God being kind and merciful to us.

[15:18] And I realized as I'm trying to learn how to pray this, how easy it is for me to actually think that like there's just sort of me. And I have these things and I have these abilities and I have these powers.

And we have these things and we have these powers. And we don't sort of really need to depend upon God's mercy and kindness because it's a little bit like if somebody was to go out with me after church and offer to buy me a coffee, they say, no, no, it's fine.

I can cover this. I don't need your grace. I don't need your kind. I can cover this. And so we sit in church and we hear language of grace, but actually sort of in our hearts, we don't really feel we need very much right now unless we're very broken.

But this psalm says, may God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations.

Let the peoples praise you, God. Let all the peoples praise you. The psalm is wanting me to pray for us, wanting us to pray for us, that we would receive grace from God, that we would receive God's mercy and kindness.

[16:33] Many of us struggle with thinking that God owes us something. And we get angry and mad at God when things don't go the way we want because we think he owes us.

And this psalm isn't talking about anything like that. It's saying that who I am is a person. Who is George? Who is Church of the Messiah? It is a community of people that as a community and as individuals, we always need the kindness and mercy and grace of God.

That there's no time, no instant that I do not need kindness from God. So the psalm says that there's these three things.

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

Let all the peoples praise you. And the second thing that this psalm is asking us to pray for is that God would bless us. And I realized as I'm trying to think about this that first of all, I have a very, very weak understanding of blessing.

[17:51] And I know, you know, once again, it's one of the interesting things about working on sermons in a Starbucks as you're just observing things going on and people and maybe hearing snatches of conversation.

And sometimes it's a bit of a reflection or mirror as to what's going on in my own life. And the whole idea of blessing has been sort of lost in our culture. Like in churches, often now, when we even talk about when I went to the service and I was blessed, I could really feel God's blessing.

It's sort of as if we have a communal time of a certain type of emotion. And if we have a communal time of a certain type of emotion or in my private life, I have a certain type of emotion, I feel blessed. And the world increasingly has this sense that if there is a God at all, he's tiny and puny and doesn't really matter. But there's other big forces that are going on in the world.

And there's things that we can accomplish and things that just are. And it's just we take it for granted that Canada has prosperity. We take it for granted that Canada has safety. We take it for granted.

[19:07] If we have health, we take it for granted. If we have minds at work, we take it for granted. If our bodies are working well, we take it for granted. We take it for granted. We take it for granted. And we don't have a sense, increasingly, that we are completely and utterly dependent upon blessing.

That every good thing that comes to us is a blessing that comes from God. And that blessing isn't just an emotion that we have by ourselves or with others, but that blessing, that everything good we have, whether it's a moral good, an aesthetic good, an intellectual good, a social good, an economic good, a physical good, or a spiritual good, that every single good thing that comes to us only comes from God as a blessing.

That it isn't that there's all these things that I just accomplished or that I just earned or that I just own or that I just possess, but that everything that I have or that we have is a blessing that comes from God if it's good.

Like with no exception. And that's not denigrating or making small the spiritual because it's a, God is asking me to understand and to pray that, to understand who God is.

This is one of the things that I realized as I was praying to God that what this text was telling me was to say in a sense, who's God? God is the blessed one who blesses.

[20 : 50] And who is George? And who is Church of the Messiah? George is one who only, who always needs blessing and is always dependent upon blessing.

Who is Church of the Messiah? Church of the Messiah always needs blessing and is always dependent upon blessing. And then we could go on further.

The George and Messiah often don't think of themselves as needing blessing or recognizing blessing. George doesn't recognize it. George is more comfortable with things, just taking things for granted that our church just can desire to just take things for granted.

But God doesn't say to pray that way. He says, George, I want you to pray in such a way that you ask for my blessing. That you realize, George, that you and the congregation always are dependent upon God's blessing.

that I want you to pray to have more blessing. And I want you to pray that to recognize that every good thing you have is a blessing that comes from you.

[22 : 05] And not to take it for granted with pride, presumption, and arrogance. Or with anger when others seem to have different blessings or more blessings. It's all blessing.

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

Let all the peoples praise you. May God be gracious to us to pray that God would pour out his kindness and mercy and grace upon us, that God would bless us, to pray that God would pour out his blessing upon us.

That's not only good things, not only a recognition that he is giving us good things and so he loves us, but also a power for those good things to continue to happen.

That's what blessing is. And then this very, very funny thing that he says that we're to ask that God would make his face to shine upon us. And it sort of struck me that it's so easy for me to just think and for us to just think that everything just sort of happens for natural reasons.

[23 : 21] That somehow, I know the rivers just flow and the sun just shines and rain just comes and things just work and everything is sort of just sort of impersonal and there's just me managing these impersonal things, but the word of God is reminding us it's very, very interesting that it uses the word face because it's so easy just to think of forces and energy and things which are impersonal.

But the Bible is asking me to long for seeing the face of God smile at us, upon us.

not to see the whole world controlled by impersonal forces that we try through our science and technology and intellectual abilities and other types of abilities to wrestle and to harness and to channel for our own good.

It's not telling us not to try to think, but to understand that everything that exists was created by God and that God holds all things constantly in existence and that behind and underneath and supporting and upholding every apparently impersonal force is God who has a face who is a person who upholds it and causes it to happen and to be.

That I do not live in an impersonal empty universe. I am not a ghost and a machine. that the world is held in the hands of the personal God who maintains it who is bigger than all things and that I am to come to God understanding that he is bigger than all things and he is a person that he desires to smile upon me and to smile upon us.

[25 : 18] May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us. God wants us to pray this. He wants you to pray it in your private devotions.

He wants us to pray it together. He wants us to pray may God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us. But he doesn't want us to pray these things.

He doesn't want me to pray these things so that people will think well of me. Or that, I don't know, or that necessarily our church will get bigger or we'll have a particular reputation or that all of these blessings that we're to ask for God to show his grace and mercy upon us, to shower upon us, that he's asking us to shower his blessing upon us and he's asking us to have an awareness that we're

living our lives in such a way that he smiles upon us that we're dealing with shame and sin and other types of things in our lives so that he will smile upon us and that all of this is not about us. That for the entire rest of the song, it's all about God blessing us so that we can be a blessing so that as a result of the blessing coming into us and taking root in us but flowing out of us to not only just people who are like us but people who are even radically different than us that the result will be not that they are so grateful for us but that they will be grateful to God.

So listen to the psalm again. Listen to how he wants us to learn to pray. The first three things that were in a sense looks like it's a very type of self-centered things for us but then the entire rest of the psalm is how this impacts us to flow out of us to affect every single people group on the planet.

[27 : 25] May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us that your way may be known on earth. Your saving power among all nations.

Let the peoples praise you O God let all the peoples praise you. Let the nations be glad and sing for joy. Why? For you judge the peoples with equity and you guide the nations upon earth.

Let the peoples praise you O God. Let all the peoples praise you. The earth has yielded its increase. God our God shall bless us. God shall bless us.

Let all the ends of the earth fear you. may God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us.

Why father do we ask this for ourselves? Why is this that we ask this for our brothers and sisters in Christ for this local church and for me and you as part of it? We ask this father not so that people will think that we are really anything at all but we ask this father in such a way that your way your way and it's singular will be known on all the earth and your saving power among all nations.

[28 : 43] You know one of the real big challenges about this prayer for us is that it's so easy for us in our private prayer life just to pray about ourselves and the people we like. And it's so easy for us just to pray for people who are sick to get better and we don't in a sense pray for the people groups.

It's easy for us not to pray for missionaries and people bringing relief and it's easy for us to not maybe say it's easy for me to not say in my prayers father in this community I just look at the people groups even father in this community I look at the gay community I look at the music community I look at the theater community I look at the embassy community I look father the poor communities I look father at the different immigrant communities and peoples I look father upon the different language groups in this community father I look at the unemployed community I look at the high achieving high tech community and father as I look at these communities I ask people groups and the people groups of our cities and our country and the ends of the earth it is so easy for us to become spiritually self-satisfied narcissistic black holes and actually feel it's a sign of spiritual maturity

Why? So that my way will be known throughout the entire time. And every single people, every single people will come to know my way.

And every single people will come to know my Savior. And I want you to do it not so people will have you to think about you or remember you or anything like that.

Why do I want in the gay community and in the banking community and the immigrant communities and in the artistic community and the high achieving high tech community and in the mentally ill community and then outside of Canada that I wanted in Kenya and I wanted in remote parts of China and Mongolia and Tibet and Kazakhstan.

[31 : 45] I want all the earth to place. I have people in all these communities and my Holy Spirit is at work to bring them to a point where they will know my way and know my saving power and praise me.

And I'm going to use imperfect people like you. And I want you to pray for that grace and pray for that blessing and pray for the shining of my face.

So that all these communities really not even forget to pray that that would happen, but I just call you to pray. Pray for grace and blessing. Every people group, the people groups you like, the people groups you despise, the people groups you hate, I'm not asking you to hate them or like them or despise them.

You definitely shouldn't hate them. You definitely shouldn't despise them. Pray for my grace and life and my blessing and the shining of my face is so tall upon you and present upon you that every people group will have people who praise me.

and not only that, not only that, I kept reading the first three verses, but what I want them to know, verse four, the nations, the people groups, be glad and sing for joy.

images all the time.

But in all centers around this idea that Jesus is the one who comes to God whose death on the cross is a saving power.

And I don't add to that saving power. I don't create that saving power. All I can do is receive a power.

[39 : 26] Receive something that comes from God that when I receive it is actually a power from God, a power that reconciles me to. See, even as this song was written, even as it's calling us, it's not calling us to religion.

This song is calling me to religion. This song is calling me just to my own efforts. It's not calling me to develop mental habits whereby I, by myself, just always remember that everything is a blessing and that God is ultimately the giver of all the blessing and that God is the one who gives you grace and kindness.

That's what religion is. That's religion and spirituality is just where it's all somehow about now me.

Religion takes songs like this and turns it into being all about me and my accomplishment.

And this song, it, you know, use modern language, it deconstructs it. On one hand, it's teaching me how to pray at the same time that it's pumping me for knowledge.

That just as I am praying that God's saving power will be more among the nations. If I need to receive that saving power, it's never just my accomplishments that I need to receive something that only God can do and only God has done, and that is something that's a saving power.

[40 : 56] It's that the point of God saying, I need to receive it. I need to show blessing. It's a gospel.

I realize that that's why I need grace all. That's why I need to know that you need grace all. I'm going to be show grace. And that's not really what, and that saving power that grips me, and I realize that's a blessing that comes from God.

And if I am completely not dependent upon the blessing that comes from God, it's a saving power, I need to show blessing. And that saving power that comes from God is the means by which I'm reconciling to God, so that I am no longer in hostility against God, in anger against God, in rebel against God, but that it's a saving power that reconciles me to God so that I can stand only because of that saving power before the smiling face of God, that I believe that smiling face was.

And as the gospel grips, I learn on one hand that this is just a prayer that I need to pray, but also that it's not just about me and my power, it's about the power of accomplishment.

So the psalm constantly brings us back to the beginning. May God be gracious to us and bless us, and make his face to shine upon us.

[42 : 23] Why, Father, we ask this, we ask this, that your way may be known on our earth. We ask this so that your saving power might be known among every people here. We ask this so that all the peoples will praise you, God.

We ask this so that all the peoples will praise you. That's Father, heal our hearts, so that is our desire. Heal our hearts, so that is our desire. Heal our minds, so that is our desire.

That all nations will have a gladness. people in every people group will have a gladness and joy knowing that you are a perfect judge, that you are a sovereign God.

Father, we ask this so that all the world will know, people in every people group will know that you are the giver of all the things that are on earth and down to you. We ask you to bless us so that we in all the earth will know you as you really are.

We only know you as you really are because the saving power will only you can do. That we grow more and more day by day more than we need to receive.

[43 : 27] That we can never hold, that we can never possess, that we can never create, that we can only receive. Be said. Lord, please pour out your grace for us and bless us.

May your face always shine in us. Please do this in us so that your way will be known on earth and your saving power will be known among every people group on the planet.

Lord, as your grace and blessing falls upon us, heal our desires. Create in us a strong desire that people from every people group on the planet will praise you.

Lord, as your grace and blessing falls upon us, heal our desires so that we will join the people from every people group in singing with joy that you are the perfectly just judge and the sovereign God for any and every people group that calls upon us.

Lord, as your grace and blessing falls upon us, heal our desires and heal our minds. We praise you for all the ways you have blessed us and will bless us. We praise you that you are the blessed one

who blesses.

[44 : 47] We desire to join with people from every people group in knowing you truly with no hint of pride or presumption or arrogance. We thank you that your son Jesus by this death upon the cross for us is that promised saving power comes from your home.

And we receive as saviors and Lord and in his name we pray. Amen. It's time to take a posture of prayer.

for now. You may have some fruit, too.

In our fulfillment, again we won't come up in but he every we will and see you