

Song of Universal Praise

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[0 : 00] Scene one, snapshots of a world in chaos. The Israeli Prime Minister declared on Wednesday night of this week that a Lebanese guerrilla attack on his country's northern border was, quote, an act of war and vowed that Israel's response will be very, very, very painful.

And to the south, Palestinian militants said that Israel would pay, quote, a heavy price for the deaths of nine members of one Palestinian family killed in an airstrike on Gaza on Wednesday that destroyed a three-storey residential building.

On Tuesday, seven coordinated bombs exploded on Mumbai's western train line during the evening rush hour. More than 200 people died and hundreds more were seriously injured.

And a medical student at Mumbai's King Edward Hospital commented, the scenes are really horrible here. The floors are filled with bloodstains.

Many people came into the hospital with injuries. In fact, there were so many that I couldn't really count. Count. Scene two.

[1 : 27] Praise to God that nearly lifts the roof off. Our local church choir were taking part in a church choir competition all night so that they could get through the 27 choirs.

Thankfully, our group was number eight out of 27. So I stayed till one o'clock in the morning, heard them sing, and went to bed. What was like heaven was the one combined hymn.

All hail the power of Jesus' name. With a thousand choristers singing in parts. It was just beautiful. And almost lifted the roof.

Friends said that they could hear it nearly three quarters of a mile away. Scene two is a report back from Peter and Elspeth Young for visitors that are here this morning, part of our missionary family serving in Nigeria.

And they sent that report back just this month. Two pictures, starkly different, two diametrically different scenes.

[2 : 39] Two scenes which in effect capture the flow of the biblical storyline from Genesis 3 all the way through to Revelation 22 with the picture of the new heaven and the new earth.

Well, where does the Bible begin? Simply with God the creator. All peoples on earth owe him allegiance.

He's their creator. That is, we're not free just to pick and choose which God we will serve. There's only one God.

The eternal Father, Son and Holy Spirit who created the universe. And when we move through Genesis 1 and 22 with a picture of creation and come to Genesis chapter 3, the declaration of autonomy, we're going to do what we like by Adam and Eve, has consequences for everyone, including us.

And as early as the next chapter, Genesis 4, the evidence of the deadly virus of sin is most evident. Murder.

[3 : 56] Cain killed Abel. And mankind then just continued in a downward spiral into greater evil. And God judges manifest evil throughout the world in the flood.

But he doesn't obliterate all of his creation. In his grace, he actually preserves a line. A line through Noah. And when we come to Genesis 12, God calls a man.

Simply by the name of Abram. The forerunner of God's great missionary project. And God promises Abram this in Genesis 12.

Now the Lord said to Abram, See, God's promises are initially focused on Abram's descendants. The Israelites. But they have this universal scope. Because God goes on and says to Abram, I'll bless those who bless you.

[5 : 18] And the one who curses you, I'll curse. And in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

And as this theme of salvation then develops right through scripture, it becomes clear that God's going to use a great king He's going to use a great king as the agent of his saving work. And as we read through the Psalms, there's a lot that's said about God's great king. The language that's used, the exalted language that's used, makes it clear that this great king is more than just a mere human being.

In fact, his mission will extend not just to Israel, but indeed to all the nations. And so as we come to Psalm 67 this morning, we hear this just magnificent song of universal praise.

Psalm 67 has been described as a missionary psalm. Not surprisingly, it's been described that way by that great promoter of missions, John Stott, who's just dedicated his life to bringing a gospel to the globe and training up others to go out with the gospel.

[6 : 39] The psalm has a clear anticipation of the universal spread of the knowledge of God. As God's people are blessed in order, in order for them to be a blessing to the nations.

You see, the psalm has a heart for God's way, for God's salvation, for God's praise to be extended to all the nations. And so the psalm just teaches us that God's purpose is to be known and praised and enjoyed and revered among the nations.

And over the last month, we've looked at a number of psalms. And each week, I've sought to highlight the structure of the psalms, not just for structure's sake, but because by looking at the structure of the psalm, often that's a useful guide to try and understand the thrust of the psalm. And if you'd like to turn with me then to Psalm 67, you'll notice that it's a very simple structure. It's just divided into three little parts. There's verses 1 to 3, then the middle two verses, 4 and 5, and then the third part, verses 6 and 7.

But I want you to notice that the first two parts end with an identical refrain. Look at verses 3 and 5. Let the peoples praise you, O God.

[8 : 04] Let all the peoples praise you. And between these two frames, if you like, think of them as bookends, notice verse 4.

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

And the idea is, hmm, we'll pause a bit. Think about that. Meditate on that for a moment. Maybe even just play a little musical instrument. Think of an electronic synthesizer back in that ancient time of Israel.

Just play away and think about that verse. Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon the earth.

You see, these bookends, verses 3 and 5, they focus our attention on God's sovereign and gracious rule. Let the peoples praise you, O God.

[9 : 04] 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. It's a great missionary psalm. And the psalmist, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he's just filled with this great hope, the hope of the worldwide victory of God.

And friends, this is the hope that's fuelled the modern missionary movement over the last two centuries.

The purpose of God is to be known, verse 2, praised, verse 3, enjoyed, verse 4, and revered, verse 7, among all the nations.

And the church, us, we have a vital role to play in God's purpose. Well, that's the big picture of the psalm.

[10 : 09] So let's just take a few moments and look a little closer. The psalm begins with the language from the Aaronic or priestly blessing found in Numbers 6.

God told Moses to have Aaron bless the nation of Israel, saying, and you'll know these words well, 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. But the psalmist's focus is far broader than Israel.

See, the blessing on Israel is to extend, to include the salvation of all nations. Look with me at verse 1.

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us. The psalmist knows sinful mankind's greatest need.

[11:11] God's grace. May God be gracious to us. And God's blessing is inseparable from his presence or, as we read there, his face. Notice, make his face to shine upon us.

The shining of God's face in scripture is regularly associated with the anticipation of deliverance, of the anticipation of salvation. So, for example, Psalm 31, verse 16.

Let your face shine upon your servant. Save me in your steadfast love. Or the psalm we're going to look at next week. Psalm 80, verse 3.

Restore us, O God. Let your face shine. Why? So that we may be saved. And linking with verse 4, there's a quality of judgment which is reflected in the divine light, in God's shining.

You might just turn back a couple of pages to Psalm 50 and just notice this close association of God's shining, his face shining, and judgment.

[12:25] The mighty one, God the Lord, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting. Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth.

Our God comes and does not keep silence. Before him is a devouring fire and a mighty tempest all around him. He calls to the heavens above and to the earth that he may judge his people.

Gather to me, my faithful ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice. The heavens declare his righteousness, for God himself is judge.

You see, there's this link, and we see it in Psalm 67, between God's face shining and the judgment that comes with divine light.

The psalmist begins Psalm 67 with, may God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us. And I want you to notice very particularly just how verse 2 starts.

[13:33] Just one little word that's so important in understanding this psalm. May God be gracious to us, bless us, make his face to shine upon us, then, that, in order that, your way may be known upon earth, your saving power among all the nations.

Friends, God's revealing a critical truth in this psalm. God blesses his people. Why? For the sake of the nations.

I wonder if you noticed, just as Matthew was opening this morning with the service in the prayer book, Psalm 96. Sing to the Lord, praise his name, proclaim his salvation day after day, declare his glory, where?

Among the nations. His marvellous deeds among all the peoples. And then the prayer book just goes on and quotes 1 Peter. You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.

Why? That you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. God blesses his people.

[14:52] God blesses the church in order for us to be a blessing to the nations. Friends, this was the foundational truth of the promises that were made to Abraham that I read from Genesis 12.

It's the theme that's picked up by Isaiah. God declared to Israel through Isaiah, I'll give you as a light to the nations that my salvation may reach where?

To Israel, just to the borders of Israel, to the end of the earth. So God promises blessing to his people. And on this side of Pentecost, on our side of Pentecost, is people the church because he wants us to be a blessing to the nations.

So what should we do then as God's people? Pray for blessing on ourselves for the sake of the nations. And this week I just spent some time and reflected on how God has blessed Holy Trinity Doncaster over many years as we have sought to be a blessing to the nations.

This is not meant to be a conclusive list, but let me just highlight a few areas that quickly came to mind. For the sake of the nations, God has blessed us with Christ-centred, gospel-focused leadership that goes back well before Paul's tenure.

[16:29] For the sake of the nations, God has blessed us with an expanding Mandarin congregation and with a number of new converts going back to China. For the sake of the nations, God has blessed us with a church community that has a real, genuine heart for world mission.

And this is just reflected in so many ways in the life of our gathering together. It's reflected through the very energetic and committed Missionary Outreach Fellowship, MOF.

I mean, it's just such a joy to go and see these people meeting monthly with those in attendance ranging from young adults through to those who are, well, maybe not young adults.

And apart from just this great energy of MOF, it's interesting that we come to do Psalm 67 today after yesterday just having two activities for raising funds for mission.

We had the afternoon fellowship annual fundraising bus shopping tour. It's quite a mouthful, isn't it? What's the purpose of that? To raise funds for mission. And last night, of course, the trivia night.

[17 : 45] I didn't sort of put this illustration in with sort of the knowledge that a certain team would just absolutely sweep the pool.

But for those who are here, you'll know the significance of that illustration. We certainly thank God for those who are on our table. We have a church community which is genuinely committed and has a real heart for world mission.

For the sake of the nations, God has blessed us with a church community that practically, prayerfully, and lovingly supports our linked missionaries. For the sake of the nations, God has blessed us with just tremendous physical facilities.

And these facilities are literally used Monday to Sunday through the day every night for the promotion of the gospel and for the training and for the training up of people both within the parish and outside the parish for mission.

Local mission. Global mission. And for the sake of the nation, God has blessed us with a church community that's just made up of so many different nationalities and even as I look out this morning, that's so clear.

[19 : 03] not only does our meeting together of many different races serve as a great witness to anyone who comes in that followers of the Lord Jesus Christ are not divided by race.

We're one in Christ Jesus. Not only does it demonstrate that, but there are lots of practical benefits that flow from it. For example, for those who are visiting today, Paul Barker, our vicar is for the sake of the nations training up some Christian leaders in India, teaching them in the Old Testament.

And as well as that teaching, Paul is being encouraged and built up and strengthened by Christian fellowship. Christian fellowship extended by Vin Matthew's family.

You see, there are many practical benefits that flow from us being such a multinational church.

There are lots of other examples. I trust that you get the point of it.

God promises blessing to his people because he wants us to be a blessing to the nation. The psalmist continues in verse 3.

[20 : 20] Let the peoples praise you, O God. Let all the peoples praise you. You see, the thanksgiving of all peoples comes how? It comes as a result of their knowing the ways of God, verse 2, and their experience of his salvation.

So, God's purpose is to be known among all the nations. So the question is, well, but known for what? Well, in verse 3, God is to be known as the one and only true and living God.

You see, that just comes out of the first part. Let the peoples praise you, O God. An Israelite, a group of Israelites singing these words in a world of many gods surrounding them.

People worshipping many gods. God is to be known as the one and only true and living God.

Secondly, verse 4, God is to be known as a God of justice.

Let the nations be glad and sing for joy for you judge the peoples with equity. Judging or establishing justice is a primary responsibility of any monarch and God, the ruling king of the whole cosmos, heaven and earth, sets right things that are out of order.

[21 : 44] what's the principal thing as we just sort of look around us that's out of order? Sin.

And the fruit of sin is just so much in our face every day of our life. God has judged sin on the cross. Jesus, God's son, he bore our punishment for sin. on the cross. And the forgiveness that flows from the cross is appropriated, is brought to us as we turn to him in repentance and faith.

But what if we individually or indeed collectively as a nation continue to reject God's rule through his son, the Lord Jesus Christ? What happens then?

Well, the Apostle John fills us in, in John chapter 3. He writes, the Father loves the Son and he's placed all things in his hands.

[22 : 53] Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. Whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure God's wrath.

God does judge and he judges impartially. But God is no uncaring despot.

God is to be known among the nations as a gracious shepherd. Look again at verse 4. Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you guide the nations upon the earth.

And the verb that's used there, translated as guide, is the same one that's picked up at the beginning of Psalm 23. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in Greek pastures.

He leads me, he guides me beside still waters. These bookends of praise, verse 3 and verse 5, in Psalm 67, focus our attention in on verse 4, on God's sovereign rule.

[24 : 01] But the God whom we worship, the God who calls on all peoples to praise him, this God, he's not cold, he's not dispassionate, he's not distant, he's not an uncaring monarch.

No, indeed, this God is the good shepherd. shepherd. This is the good shepherd in John 10 who lays down his life for the sheep.

This God is the missionary shepherd who goes out to find the one lost sheep. The God who's to be known by all the peoples, the one true living God, is the one who saves.

Indeed, he's the only one who can save. he's absolutely just and he's a gracious, loving shepherd.

This God who is to be known by all the peoples can only be known through the Lord Jesus Christ.

And if I was delivering this message in Federation Square this morning, whether out loud or in people's hearts, there would be a screaming why in a pluralistic world, why can this God only be known through the Lord Jesus Christ?

[25 : 29] And the answer is simply from Scripture, because all the fullness of the deity dwells in him. The theme of blessing then returns in the last two verses.

It's interesting, verse 6 is translated in our New Revised Standard Version, which we're in the church pews, in the past tense. And in a sort of curious way in Hebrew, the past tense can sometimes be used of the future.

It sounds a bit odd, but the past can be used of the future. And given the tenses as you read through the psalm, I think the idea of verses 6 and 7 is best captured this way.

The earth will yield its increase. Our God will bless us. May God continue to bless us. Let all the ends of the earth revere him.

Yes, creation, which has been under God's curse since the fall, Genesis 3, will one day be recreated.

[26 : 35] A new heaven and a new earth is coming. It is true, and we can totally count on it. It's a fact. And this new heaven, this new earth, is going to be populated by God's people.

God's people from all nations who revere him, those who worship the lamb. So, do you remember the two pictures that we started with?

Picture one, death, destruction. It's a picture of the fall. It's a picture of the consequences of the fall. It's a picture of a world in rebellion. But this is a world whom God, the missionary God, loves so much that he sent his only son to be the saviour, the redeemer, the deliverer, by dying on a cross, by God himself paying the price for our sins.

picture two, just a little glimpse, a little glimpse of God's people worshipping.

[27 : 54] A picture of God's people worshipping in the new heaven and the new earth as they sang all hail the power of Jesus name. Well, Peter and Elspeth Young, when they sent that report back this month, in fact, gave what they called two little glimpses of heaven.

The first one was the story about the choir. But they also went on and wrote about them attending a missionary conference in Thailand in April.

And they write, there were leaders there from all over the world. The worship times reflected these different places. There were people from the States, Solomon Islands, Western guitars, a musician and different instruments from Kyrgyzstan, African drums with singing and dancing.

And there's a dancer from Singapore. I haven't seen a dancer from Singapore, but they were at this missionary conference. They write, it was amazing. And they went on and they said, flying back over Nigeria, we realised that one day there will be people from each of these peoples worshipping before the Lamb.

Amazingly, also, God wants to use us to help this to be achieved. God's salvation will one day extend to the ends of the earth to all who revere him.

[29 : 20] And the Apostle John, writing on the island of Patmos, was given just an extraordinary glimpse of the future. Because he writes this in Revelation 7, the passage that Began's speaking from tonight.

After this, I John looked and there was a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, all tribes and peoples and languages. What were they doing?

They were standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, palm branches in their hands and they cried out with a loud voice saying, salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb.

And then John concludes the book of Revelation 22, but just try in a mind's eye to capture this reality of the future.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. And through the middle of the street of the city, on either side of the river is the tree of life, with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month.

[30 : 32] And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it and his servants will worship him and they'll see his face and his name will be on their foreheads.

And there'll be no more night. They need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light and they will reign forever and ever.

Friends, in a world of seeming chaos, in a world where the ugliness of sin is just right there before us every day, in a world of death and decay, if, underline it in your mind, if you're a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, then don't lose heart.

Just stay fixed on the eternal reality. See, the purpose of God is to be known, praised, enjoyed and revered among all the nations.

And we, the church, have a vital role to play in God's purpose. May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us.

[31 : 54] that, in order that, your way may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations. Peter and Elspeth Young clearly understand the teaching of Psalm 67.

Did you notice how they finished their little story? Flying back over Nigeria, we realise that one day there will be people from each of these peoples worshipping the Lamb.

amazing. Amazingly also, God wants to use us to help this to be achieved. Friends, all followers of the Lord Jesus Christ are called to be promoters of the gospel.

Each of us can play a role for our glorious missionary Lord and King. God has gifted each one of his people.

blessed us abundantly. Why? So that we may make his way known upon earth, his saving power among all the nations.

[33 : 03] I mentioned in the notices at the beginning that the parish prayer and praise night is on Tuesday night. I don't want to put a guilt trip on you, but what a tremendous opportunity for us to come together and pray for God's work among the nations.

God's work among the nations locally. God's work among the nations globally. And then one day we will all, as followers of the Lord Jesus, have the privilege of worshipping with people from where?

From every nation, from all tribes, from all peoples and languages. We'll stand before the throne, before the Lamb, we'll be robed in white, white palm branches in our hands and we'll cry out with a loud voice, salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb.

Psalm 67 is just a great song of universal praise. Psalm 67 is also a prayer. And Psalm 67 is a challenge.

It's a challenge for me, it's a challenge for you, it's a challenge for us to keep our hearts and our minds fixed on the eternal realities.

[34 : 21] Let the peoples praise you, O God. Let all the peoples praise you. Amen.