

Blessed to Be a Blessing

TEXT: Psalm 67

PHBF 05.27.12

Scr. Reading: Ps 67:1-7

Exodus, Part 1: Getting Out

May – graduations, open houses, wedding showers, “a time of harvest,” blessing, prosperity. Why would God give us all this?

Why the Exodus? Why would God bless these people this way? [BTW, please take all the bookmarks! Although we will create 2 more next year, by which time you’ll have lost your first one and you’ll want to have the whole set.... So we’ll keep a few around.]

The Prayer for Blessing

Two main subjects in this psalm: blessing and spreading.

1. Blessing:

v 1 *May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us,*

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

2. Spreading:

vv 2-3 *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!*

v 4 *Let the nations be glad and sing for joy...*

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

Both come together in v 7:

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

How exactly these two subjects relate to each other is the next point.

For now, I just want you to notice again the first subject: blessing, particularly 2 things that should amaze us—the fact of blessing and the form of God’s blessings.

Verse 1 is an adaptation of the priestly blessing God gave to Aaron to pronounce over the people:

Numbers 6:23-27 ²³ *“Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them, ²⁴ The LORD bless you and keep you; ²⁵ the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; ²⁶ the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. ²⁷ “So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.”*

The mere fact of God’s blessing should be amazing in itself. Zoom out a bit and think about this in the larger perspective. In a world marred by sin and under God’s judgment, all we should reasonably expect is curse and punishment. Life should be unbearable, burdensome, miserable, a curse, like living on the surface of Mars or Venus. (Israel hadn’t merited anything other than curse, like the rest of the nations.)

But when God—all contrary to what we should expect—puts His blessing upon us, life isn’t merely possible or bearable; it’s actually enjoyable. Amazing. The fact that God blesses people at all is simply amazing.

How much more so when you consider the form of His blessings (v 1).

- “Be gracious to us” – mercy, treating us better than we deserve
- “Bless us” – Num 6 blessing included 3 areas: protection (v 24 “keep”), favor (v 25 “be gracious”), and peace (v 26)
- “Make face shine” – God’s inward pleasure, His good disposition toward someone; a few translations render this “may God smile on us.” (cf. **Pro 16:15** “In the light of a king’s face, there is life” and **Ps 44:3** “nor did their own arm save them, but your right hand and your arm, and the light of your face, for you delighted in them” and **Ps 80:3,7,19** “Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved!”) The opposite is his hidden face (Dt 31:17-18, Job 13:24, Ps 13:1, Ps 27:9, Ps 69:17, Ps 104:29 etc) or his face set against (Lev 17:10, 20:3,5,6 etc). When God hides His face, His people’s wellbeing is endangered.

For Israel in the Exodus, God’s blessings meant liberation, prosperity, national identity, protection in battle, provision for material needs, being God’s treasured possession, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation (Ex 19:5-6). Lavish blessings!

For the church, Paul writes:

Ephesians 1:3 *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,*

And then he lists nearly a dozen blessings in Eph 1:4-14:

- He chose us (v 4)
- He loved us (v 4/5)

- He predestined us (vv 5, 11)
- He adopted us (v 5)
- He lavished grace upon us (vv 6, 8)
- He redeemed us (v 7)
- He forgave us (v 7)
- He made known to us the mystery of His will (vv 8-9)
- He bequeathed an inheritance to us (v 11)
- He sealed us with the Holy Spirit (v 13)
- He uses us to the praise of His glory (vv 6, 12, 14)

God is a good God and He delights to bless His people! He's happy to make you happy. His Father's heart thrills to see His children smile. Pause a moment and ponder 3-4 things God has blessed you with *that He didn't have to*. (That would be everything!)

No wonder we sing: "Amazing grace! How sweet the sound!" and "Grace flows down and covers me!"

The Purpose of Blessing

The Copernican Revolution (1543 *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres*) – the paradigm shift away from the geocentric model to the heliocentric model of the heavens; changed everything, not just astronomy—philosophy, religion, culture; was a central impetus for the scientific revolution (still feel its effects today when science is pitted against the Bible or even what appears true to the senses)

If we could get the message of this psalm in our hearts, it would create a Copernican Revolution with regard to how we view our blessings. It offers us a complete paradigm shift that will radically change how we pray, how we save and spend, how we view our health, children, influence, skills & training, time, talents...

What the purpose for blessing (at least in this passage)?

Psalm 67:1-2 *May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, ² that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations.*

"THAT" – the all-important purpose clause, the reason for asking God to

bless: "his way would be known, his saving power among all nations." This same purpose is implied in verse 7:

Psalm 67:7 *God shall bless us; let all the ends of the earth fear him!*

Here's the connection between blessing and spreading: God blesses His people so that they will bless others. Blessing (noun) is for blessing (verb). Just like snowfall in the mountains eventually melts and runs down to water the valleys, so God blesses His people for those blessings to flow out and enrich others.

This has been God's plan since the first announcement of blessing to Abraham:

Genesis 12:1-3 *Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² 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. ³ 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."*

Why the Exodus? Why would God make and keep this promise to Abraham and his family? The blessings God gave Israel were meant to reach all the people groups of the world.

How does this work exactly—blessing for the purpose of spreading? Verse 2 indicates that God's blessings will reveal His "way" and His "saving power." The blessings of God are tokens of His favor which show the nations His "way" – the kind of God He is. They are meant to gain the attention of the nations, outsiders, anyone who is not following God, and provoke them to make Israel's God their own: "Look at how Israel is kept safe, fully provisioned, filled with joy. What a great God they must have. We should find out more about their God."

One commentator put it so well: "If Israel has the light of God's face, the world cannot remain in darkness." This is the purpose: blessing is for spreading.

Don't confuse the means with the end. Blessing was the means, not the end, God had in mind for Israel. Blessing came to Israel as a means of reaching the end: God's fame among the nations. Likewise for us, spiritually and materially. Blessing is for spreading.

God intends blessing to make us advertisers, not consumers. Consumers accrue and use and stockpile and consume goods and services. Advertisers draw the attention of others who for some reason aren't taking full advantage of what could be theirs. Which are you: a consumer or an advertiser?

To put it most pointedly, it's not all about you! Before Nicolaus Copernicus published his book, his world assumed the universe literally revolved around them. But they were wrong! And we are just as wrong when we assume our income, our talents, our savings, our health and strength, our children, our skills & training, our forgiveness, our adoption, our predestination, our redemption, our eternal inheritance all revolve around us.

"If Israel has the light of God's face, the world cannot remain in darkness." Is this how we respond to the light of God's face? Do we use our blessings to bless the nations?

In the great hymn "Come, Thou Fount," we sing: "O to grace, how great a debtor / Daily I'm constrained to be." So how to debtors to grace act?

Romans 1:14-15 ⁴ *I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.* ¹⁵ *So I am eager to preach the gospel...*

Debtors leverage every possible blessing they can for spreading. They spread the good news: "Have you heard what my God is like? Do you know the incredible things He has done for you and me in Jesus? 1. I am a complete mess. 2. Because of Jesus, my future is incredibly bright. 3. Anyone can get in on this!"

Why all this blessing? Because God trusts you. He trusts that you won't confuse the ends and the means. He trusts that you'll be an advertiser, not a consumer. He trusts that the Copernican Revolution is happening in you, and that you are finding your orbit around Him. Will you be trustworthy? How about a family missions trip, a connection with Providence, needs in the city, a plan to befriend and share forgiveness with a neighbor.

Don't overlook the fact that this psalm expresses a prayer. It's not a

command to reach the nations, though there are those in the OT (Ps 96:3, 7, 10). It's not a promise, though there are those as well (Ps 86:9, 102:15 – cf. even the last 2 verses of this psalm). It's a prayer, the cry of the worshiper's heart for God to bring blessing for the sake of the nations. The burning prayer of a world Christian is "Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you."

I have to add that I am so thankful to be part of a church where this prayer is prayed and answered so often—people passing God's blessing on to the nations, using their resources to spread God's saving power and let the nations be glad.

But I also want to point out what this says about the heart. For me to pray for all the peoples to praise God means... I've already surrendered my money to the cause. I've already surrendered my children. I've already offered myself, my time, my resources. It's impossible to pray sincerely for God to do something while simultaneously withholding the means He might use to answer that prayer. "God reach my neighbors with the gospel; just don't ask me to tell them" is not a sincere prayer.

Where do you get a heart like that? A heart that burns "Let the peoples praise you, O God"?

The Essence of Blessing

Notice what happens in the world when blessing is used for spreading. What would you expect to happen? What would increase and what would decrease? Morality up, sin down? Theology (truth) up, heresy down? Actually, no. Notice what the spreading accomplishes: praise (v 3), gladness, singing, & joy (v 4), reverence (v 7). It's happiness up; despair, depression, worry, fear, frustration, negativity, and sorrow down!

"Let the peoples praise you! Let the nations be glad and sing for joy!" This is an incredibly shareable message: "Be glad in God! Rejoice in God! Sing for joy because God delights to forgive sinners! He is happy to have mercy on you." It should be the most doable command imaginable: help people become filled with joy and praise.

Why? Does God's blessing and our spreading make people everywhere fat and rich? No! Notice what we are spreading:

- God's grace & favor (v 1 – "make your face shine")
- God's way & saving power (v 2)
- God's justice and guidance (v 4)

Here is where we see most clearly what the true blessings of God really are. Not full bank accounts, big houses, healthy kids, and lots of friends. The essence of God's blessing isn't material. It's not even the spiritual benefits of forgiveness, adoption, etc. The greatest blessing God gives is Himself—having Him as our God.

The sermon is coming full circle – the blessings of God aren't meant to make us fall in love with blessing. They're gifts to help us fall in love with God!

ILL: Piper – falling in love with the mailman

CS Lewis, "Meditation in a Toolshed" (from *God in the Dock*):

I was standing today in the dark toolshed. The sun was shining outside and through the crack at the top of the door there came a sunbeam. From where I stood that beam of light, with the specks of dust floating in it, was the most striking thing in the place. Everything else was almost pitch-black. I was seeing the beam, not seeing things by it.

Then I moved, so that the beam fell on my eyes. Instantly the whole previous picture vanished. I saw no toolshed, and (above all) no beam. Instead I saw, framed in the irregular cranny at the top of the door, green leaves moving on the branches of a tree outside and beyond that, 90 odd million miles away, the sun. Looking along the beam, and looking at the beam are very different experiences.

What happens when you look along the beam instead of at the beam? Gratitude gives way to adoration. Gratitude for blessing says "How good of God to give me this." Adoration says "What kind of wonderful God must He be, if the light of His face is this bright and beautiful?"

"One's mind," Lewis writes elsewhere (*Letters to Malcolm*), "runs back up the sunbeam to the sun."

It's about the Giver, not His gifts. One commentator (quoted in Spurgeon's *Treasury*), observing that Jesus is the way (Jn 14:6) and the saving power (1 Cor 1:24) of God, paraphrases: "Let your Son be known on earth, your Jesus among the nations." Well said!!

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