



Let The People Praise

Psalm 67

Grace Church | 7.4.22

Every once in a while we need to zoom out of our small, seemingly insignificant lives and ask a question: *what is it all for?* Such an existential question may seem like a daunting, terrifying one for many. Modern man, especially, has trouble with this question. Take away his legs to stand on tribal religion, on mythical polytheism, or even on communal ideas—make him individualistic and enlightened—and the hardest person to understand is himself.

One particularly philosophic modern novelist, Walker Percy, tried to probe the depths of this phenomena in his book *Lost In The Cosmos*, a satire that pokes fun at how difficult it is for us to answer the question: who am I and what am I here for? Here is a taste:

“One of the peculiar ironies of being a human self in the Cosmos: A stranger approaching you in the street will in a second's glance see you whole, size you up, place you in a way in which you cannot and never will, even though you have spent a lifetime with yourself, live in the Century of the Self, and therefore ought to know yourself best of all.... Why is it that of all the billions and billions of strange objects in the Cosmos - novas, quasars, pulsars, black holes - you are beyond doubt the strangest?

What a curious thought, to be able to learn so much in this life, and yet still be lost as to self. But already we've got good news. In Christ, we know exactly who we are and what we were made for. The cosmos is indeed strange, but it speaks to us of a revealed mystery: God. And so if I could summarize the Christian understanding of self it would be very simple: you are created in the image of God. Even better news is that definition of self comes with a purpose. To be created in the image of God means that your purpose *is* to image God. You are created to show him, mirror him, make all his beauty and glory and “Godness” known to all people everywhere. You were created for mission.

So today we honor the Bixler family, and commission them to a specific mission. They are going to be part of Peak Trinity Church in Bakewell, England, to help that body be a church-planting church. They are missionaries. But so are all of us. So if that is true, let me expound to you three aspects of each and every missionary: those called by God to image God in the world. In Psalm 67 we have a missionary Psalm: that is, a psalm about God's glory being shown to all people everywhere. Here we see the missionary purpose, the missionary plan, and the missionary promise.



The Missionary Purpose: To Make Jesus Known

How often are you bold enough to pray like **verse 1**? You remember the story of Jacob, who became Israel? He held onto God until he received a blessing. Why? Because he knew that God is in the business of graciousness. To pray for God to be gracious is to pray for God to be God. And God will never be anything but himself. How do I know? Because the prayer in this psalm for blessing and grace is linked to God “shining his face”. In some ancient cultures, a king would show his disdain or his favor upon a subject with a request not by speaking directly to them, but by contorting his face. The psalmist here prays that God would cause his face to “shine” with favor. What is graciousness, except undeserved favor?

The reality is that every human being on earth has received unmerited favor from God. Were God to stop his face from shining on the earth totally: were he to turn away, the whole earth would descend to chaos. Morally, naturally, spiritually, you name it. Even now Christ is said to “uphold the universe by the word of his power”. So God is shining his face, in a way that is called common grace. In Waco and in Bakewell, there are none who escape his grace.

But the prayer here is also a unique prayer. It’s the prayer of confidence, a prayer well-acquainted with the character of God. Remember when Moses asked to see God’s glory, he had to hide behind the cleft of the rock. For God to shine his face upon us *truly* would be too much for us to bear. So what we are asking here is for a taste, the hem of his robe. But it assumes that God will reply. This makes sense when you consider the context of this prayer of Israel.

This is an echo of the blessing given by Aaron in Numbers 6:24-26. It’s nearly word for word, except one note is that the tense has changed. Instead of saying “may God be gracious to *you*”, the Psalm says, “may God be gracious to *us*.” It’s as if the psalmist is trying to tell his Hebrew audience something: that God’s plans for grace are far greater than we can imagine. In Numbers 6 the blessing is for the “you” of Israel. In Psalm 67, the prayer is that God would bless the “us” of all people.

What the Psalmist is asking then is nothing less than for the whole world to be filled with the glory of God—but not just his normal, sustaining glory—his special, gracious blessing, normally only reserved for his special people. This is a radical prayer. The blessing of Israel was that God was *their* God. That he would bless them above all others. This was the promise God made to Abraham—that God would covenant directly with him and his descendants. This was the promise shown again to Moses, when God said he would bring his people from Egypt and say “I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God.” Doesn’t it feel strange then for the Psalm to pray that God would make his way known on earth, that his saving power would be shown to all nations, **verse 2**? Israel was the one who *knew* the salvation of God: the witness of the Exodus, of the Judges, of the reign of David. What do other people know about all that?



Remember in Jesus' day the same sentiment reigned in the hearts of Israel. Exclusivity was their thing. They couldn't stand the Samaritans most of all. They used the Law not to show their obedience to God but first and foremost to set up exclusions to worship God. No wonder Jesus called the Pharisees "white washed tombs". Jesus also said something harsher about the Jewish scribes. He insisted that they had misunderstood their most revered patriarch—becoming sons of Satan instead of sons of Abraham. See, the global nature of the covenant was clear for those with ears to hear. God told Abraham in Genesis 12 he would be blessed in order to be a blessing to the nations. The God of Israel was to be the God of the world.

This is why Psalm 67 is a missionary prayer. It says: "I don't just want blessing for myself. I want it for everyone." It's a bold cry that asks for God to be gracious not just to his people, but to all people. I believe it's this prayer that has led the Bixlers to England. They are going to a people not their own, because it is their desire that they would be a blessing. They are laying down some of their blessings in order to ask God: "make yourself known on the earth".

Here is what I want all of us to see: In Jesus Christ, God has been made known to you. His face has shined upon you. You are infinitely blessed. Your sin has been taken away, and there is no chance in eternity that God will turn away his grace. It goes all the way down. But do you want that grace to shine to others? Do you long for God's grace to be revealed? Do you pray for it?

God's great salvation is Jesus Christ. That is his "way" and his "saving power". The greatest grace ever given to man by God, the greatest display of his shining, pleased face, is Jesus. I rejoice that God brought the Bixler's to our church. I rejoice that they have responded to the call to sell what they have and move to a place of great spiritual need. I rejoice, because what it does for us is it causes us to remember our great purpose: we are called to make Jesus known.

The Missionary Plan: To Bring About Praise

No wise man enters into a difficult endeavor without a plan. Let me tell you, after traveling with Matthew and Amanda, they are planners. But what about this desire to see God's salvation known? What is the plan to bring that about? Well actually this Psalm shows us it is very simple. God's plan to be gracious to all people everywhere starts and ends with praise. John Piper famously begins his book on missions drawing from Psalm 67, saying that "missions exists because worship doesn't."¹ The point of making Jesus known is so that, as we see in **verse 4**, the nations would be glad. God's plan for all the peoples of the world is that in every language there could be a song like the refrain we find in **verse 3 and 5**: let all the peoples praise you, O God!

The Bixler's are moving to England because they believe that in God's sovereign plan they will be most effective there to help people to praise God. We want to plant churches because we need more outposts of God's praise, for his fame and glory to spread. Every time my wife and I go to get

¹ John Piper, *Let The Nations Be Glad*



paint for a house project she comments on the Sherwin Williams logo and motto. “Cover the Earth” it says on their paint cans, with a picture of a globe being covered in paint. She is right: it’s weird. But the goal of the church is that: to pour out the praise and glory of God in the gospel until the whole earth is covered up from pole to pole.

And it’s not just rote, surface level praise God is after. It’s a “gladness”, a desire to want to praise God, to sing out for joy. That joy comes from an understanding of God’s *justice* and *guidance*. It’s a feeling Israel knew well, being freed slaves. It’s the kind of singing that kept our black brothers and sisters going on the horrors of southern plantations. Commenting on the spiritual songs of slaves in the American South, Fredrick Douglass said those songs were:

“tones loud, long, and deep; they breathed the prayer and complaint of souls boiling over with the bitterest anguish. Every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains.”

True praise and gladness can exist in chains or in freedom, because it comes from the soul. It comes from faith. The psalmist is praying in **verse 4** that God’s great justice would be trusted—that although in the earth we see Satan’s dominion now, it won’t be that way forever. That although we feel *lost*, it’s God whose wisdom is guiding all things. What the Psalm prays would spread and cover the earth is not superficial worship of a distant, formless deity to lift the spirits, but a guttural cry of faith in the character of God.

How does God plan to bring about his praise upon all the earth? Simple: he uses his people. By blessing them, they become a blessing to the nations. Consider the blessings you possess:

1. **Spiritual security.** You are in Christ. Nothing can snatch you from his hand.
2. **Financial support.** God will not let his people go unprovided for. The Bixlers have seen this first hand.
3. **Like minded partners.** Praise God for the people of Peak Trinity.
4. **Loving Community.** Praise God for the people of Grace Church.

God has given you these blessings not so that you can hoard them, but so that you can use them. God has been preparing the Bixlers and their praise for years to get them to this point—he has been blessing them to be a blessing. So he is preparing you.

Jesus Christ is the ultimate blessing of the people of God. But his life was a poured out drink offering. It’s purpose was the blessing of the nations. In the death of Jesus, the curtain tore and a new, superior covenant was made. Justice was served onto him, equity was accounted for as sin fell on his shoulders. As he was lifted up like the serpent in the wilderness, he became the guide for Jews and Gentiles. Jesus used his great blessing to bring about the glorious praise of God’s name.



The Missionary Promise: He Shall Bless Us

Here I want to speak to our hearts as we close. I'm going to do this by speaking more directly to the Bixler family. But I want you to place yourself in their shoes. As we look at **verse 6-7**, we find a promise. Not only do we pray for God to bless us and therefore bless the nations, we actually believe it to be true. He "shall" bless us.

This doesn't mean it will be easy. The surest way to experience hardship is to follow closely after Jesus. He calls us to all sorts of uncomfortable things. But the surest way to experience blessing is also to follow Jesus. Picking up on the agricultural theme in these last verses, Jesus speaks of his life and the life of following him in his mission in John 12 by comparing our lives to a seed. What is required for fruitful flourishing is nothing less than death of self. "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

So let me leave you with a few realities, and some promises.

You will experience opposition. Do not be surprised when people hate you, are confused by you, or find you foolish. So they hated Jesus before you. **But he shall bless you.** Through opposition comes the resiliency of faith and the blessing of pleasing God above man. There is not greater place to be than with the peace of mind that though it cost all your social capital with others, you have pleased God. He smiles on you in Christ. What a blessing.

You will experience doubt. Who among us has never second guess ourselves? Try moving across the ocean to a new culture, away from family and all you know. Satan will come after you and your family with questioning "what ifs". **But he shall bless you.** Jesus says: I send my Spirit to guide you into all truth. What blessing it is that we have a guide, wisdom from God, who we can trust. If he has led you to where you are in faithfulness to God, you can remain there with a clear conscious, ready to fight doubt. The great blessing of God for doubters is that Jesus proved his doubters wrong when he rose from the dead, and one day he is coming to prove them wrong again forever.

You will experience famine. Chances are you will work for a long time and may not see a salvation. Perhaps in 20 years you will feel you have little tangible to show for your families sacrifice. There will be seasons where nothing seems to be working. **But he shall bless you.** God operates in millenniums, not weeks. What a blessing to serve an eternal God, who has promised he will not leave any field unharvested. Fruit will come—if not now, you will see it and enjoy it with God in paradise.

What are we here for? We are made to image God, to bring his praise to the nations. There is no greater joy than the world being filled with the joy of Jesus. Every single blessing you have is given for that purpose. God has blessed you, and he shall bless you. Christ will never leave or forsake you. He fell into the earth to die, but he has borne much fruit. As we pray now for the Bixler's, let's pray we too would follow Jesus to the ends of the earth.

