



The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

August 31, 2014

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Psalm 67

WHY CHURCH?—

TO TEACH YOUR NEIGHBOR



“Let the people praise you, O God! Let all the people praise you!” What a beautiful wish is the refrain of this Psalm! It’s a Psalm of praise and thanksgiving to God from the whole world. Let all the people praise God—the One Who saves, the One Who provides, the One Who loves! It’s such a fascinating

Psalm where the idea of outreach, of evangelism, of missions, in both Old Testament and New Testament collide.

You see, the Old Testament believers sang this Psalm. They wished for missions, for the peoples of the earth to know their God who saves. But we, New Testament believers a few thousand years removed from them, might scratch our heads at that concept. How were the Old Testament believers mission minded? How could they possibly have in mind to proclaim God to the ends of the earth when God clearly stated, “Stay away from them!” They were forbidden to marry people from other nations around them. They weren’t supposed to mingle with them. If there were foreigners living in their land, either they were supposed to drive them away, or proselytize them—in other words make them Jews. That seems very different from what we think of when we talk about “evangelism” today. When you think of Old Testament believers you don’t normally think of the greatest missionaries of all time.

They had a different approach, didn’t they? When we think of missions today, we think of the phrase, “Go and tell!” We think of the Great Commission which we

read earlier this morning. As a result of going and telling the people of all nations, then “all the people praise God,” just as Psalm 67 says. But when believers in the Old Testament thought of outreach or proclaiming the Word to others, they didn’t typically say, “Go and tell!” Instead they said, “Come and see!”

God chose Abraham to become a nation—to become *His* nation. After God made Abraham into a great nation, he led them out of Egypt, to prove once and for all that they were *His* people. As he led them out of Egypt God claimed those people as his very own. God put his name on the people every time they packed up their tents in the wilderness. Every time those Israelites left camp, Aaron spoke a blessing, the same blessing we speak at the end of many of our services today. “The LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD look on you with favor and give you peace.” Did you notice this same blessing spoken at the beginning of Psalm 67? “May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us.” And according to Psalm 67, why does God show his people such blessing?—“That your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations.”

That’s exactly what happened. When other nations thought about Israel, they thought about their God. When Egypt thought about Israel, they remembered the power of God’s plagues against them, and they knew that it was the God of the Hebrews, the One True God, who led those people out with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. When the Assyrians thought of Jerusalem, they thought about the time when Sennacherib, the world power of his day with the

mightiest army, marched straight to the city's gates, only to have that army struck blind, turning and running to their own city, where the army stayed until that king died, because God was on the side of the Jews. When the Philistines thought about Solomon's Temple, they remembered when the Ark of the Covenant was brought to their temple, held captive, and their statues of their false gods lay fallen and cracked on the ground, with people plagued by disease and rats.

Other nations knew who the Jews were. They were God's special and chosen people, set apart from everyone else. And when they asked about that special God, who was powerful unlike any other foreign god, the Jews told them about that God's promises to send the Messiah. "Come and see," they could say, "that you may praise our God, that his ways may be known on earth, and his salvation among all nations." That was their evangelism.

Unfortunately too often those stubborn Old Testament people did not give glory to God and did not give a proper witness to his name. Too often they rebelled against him, and weren't good spokesman for his promises and his faithfulness.

How about us? The Old Testament believers said, "Come and see." But we, New Testament believers, were told by Jesus, "Go and tell!" "Preach the gospel!" We certainly have our work cut out for us, don't we? The unbelieving world today is just as hostile to the gospel as it was for the Old Testament believer, though perhaps in a different way. Have we given a proper witness for Christ? Have we made his salvation known to the ends of the earth? Have we made learning that salvation history, which includes us, our number one priority so that we can properly teach it to others, to our neighbors? Or have we too often been content to hold our tongues? Has our lack of properly knowing God's ways left us silent when given the opportunity to proclaim his salvation among the nations, as Psalm 67 says? Have we been a

part of the *go-and-tell* directive of our Savior that harvests souls, or have we ignored our Savior's Great Commission?

When we realize the truth about how often we fail to make God's salvation known among all people, we ought to be terrified at the truth of the words of verse 4 when it talks about God's justice, his rule, and guidance. We know what we deserve when we disobey God. We deserve his eternal judgment.

But notice the context of verse 4. It isn't spoken in threat, but it's spoken in joy. "May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples justly and guide the nations of the earth." As God's people, when we think about God's justice we are directed not to an arm stretched out in judgment against us, but we see his love pass over us as he punished all sin once for all against his Son on the cross. That's the heart of the blessings



spoken about in this Psalm. That's the heart of all the promises of the Old Testament shared among the nations. That's the heart of our God who brought out a harvest from the sinful world, a harvest of souls saved by the blood of the sacrifice of God's Son, Jesus Christ.

That's the true beauty of this Psalm. For the most part, as far as I know, our congregation is not made up of Jews. You see, you are part of the nations spoken about in this very Psalm. There are three different words in this Psalm for people. There is a word that is typically translated as Gentiles, those are the foreign nations outside of God's chosen people in the Old Testament. There is a word that is translated peoples, usually referring to tribes of God's chosen people, the Israelites. Then there is a catch-all term also translated nations, which makes no distinction between Jew and Gentile. You see, the real beauty of this Old Testament missions Psalm is that you can see the truth of John 3:16 even in this Old Testament song. "For God so loved"—not just the Jews of the world, not just believers of the world, not those who chose to serve God in the world, not any

distinction at all; no qualifiers or modifiers, simply the world—“For God so loved **THE WORLD** that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

That is God’s salvation. That is his history. He chose a nation—not by their works, not by their faithfulness—simply out of his love, to be his own and to send a Savior through them. That Savior was for the whole world, and that includes you! You are part of that salvation history, and you are the nations among whom God’s salvation has been proclaimed. You know the love of God because you know his Son Jesus Christ. You can point to those Old Testament accounts that show the power and the love of God to preserve his people. You can point to those New Testament Gospels that show God putting his plan of salvation into action to fulfill the promises of the Savior. You can retell God’s love as he made certain that this gospel was proclaimed to the ends of the earth. And best of all, you can tell your neighbors about how God’s love was proclaimed to you still today, and out of his love he made you his own, and put his name on you, and promised to bless you. And you can tell everyone you know how he continues to bless you personally because you are part of his plan of salvation—and so are they!

What happens when God’s salvation is made known among the nations? We are seeing it happen right here in our own congregation every time we gather together. “Then the land will yield its harvest, and God, our God, will bless us. God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth will fear him.” This harvest isn’t simply a harvest of produce or fruit or grain. It is a harvest of souls, with you being counted among them.

“May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations.” God certainly has blessed us because he has preserved his church that proclaims his Word to you still today. You have been blessed by God because you have been made his people. You know God’s love for yourself. Now you can teach it to your children, you can share it together with your church, and you can proclaim it to everyone the Lord has placed in your lives. Amen.

