

A Prayer for Our Community

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Date: 17 November 2019

Preacher: Rev. Murdo M Campbell

[0 : 0 0] Well, would you turn with me this evening to the book of Psalms, the book of Psalms and Psalm 67. The book of Psalms and Psalm 67. To the choir master with stringed instruments, a psalm, a song. May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us.

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

Now this morning we were considering the words of Mark chapter 10, where Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem to die on the cross in the place of sinners. But on his way to the cross, as we saw this morning, Jesus passed by the community of Jericho. And there on the outskirts of the community of Jericho was this blind man, Bartimaeus. And when Jesus passed by the community of Jericho, blind Bartimaeus, he took what was for him his last opportunity. And he cried out to Jesus, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. And as we were saying this morning, in relation to Jesus passing by, we said that the faith mission, they will be passing by our community once more. God willing, this Thursday evening to Sunday evening, the faith mission will be back in our community for a short mission. And they're only passing by for four evenings to just remind the unconverted in our community about the gospel and the urgent need to respond. But this time, the faith mission, they won't be bringing a tent like they brought in the summer. The mission meetings, as you can see in the intimations, they'll be each evening in the Barbison Brew Community Centre. And I know that, as I said this morning, I know that for many of you, you came along to the mission tent when it was here in the summer, and you enjoyed it. And you came back a few times. And the thing is, you're invited to come back again. You're warmly invited to come. But maybe for some of you here this evening, you were invited to come when the faith mission were here in June. But you didn't come.

This is another invitation to you, to come. It's another opportunity for you, to come. As I've said before, don't knock it until you've tried it. So come. Because it's not the faith mission who are passing by. It's Jesus who's passing by. And you know, my unconverted friend, there's one thing you don't want to miss. It's when Jesus is passing by. But this evening, we come to this well-known psalm, Psalm 67. And I want us to consider this psalm because it reminds us of what must accompany our efforts of outreach and evangelism. Because we can be so active in our outreach and evangelism as a congregation. We can have the faith mission with the most powerful preaching and the most eloquent sermons presented to the unconverted of our community. We can have door-to-door invitations.

We can run Christianity Explored courses and Discipleship Explored and Back to Church Sunday and Testimony evenings like tonight and Curry evenings and Congregational dinners. We can do all these things. But unless we're praying for the Lord to move in our community and bless all our efforts, then we're doing it in vain. Is that not what we were just singing in Psalm 127?

[4 : 32] Accept the Lord to build the house. The builders lose their pain. Accept the Lord the city keep. The watchmen watch in vain. My friend, unless we're praying for the Holy Spirit to work in the hearts and lives of the unconverted, we're not going to see blessing. And I'm sure you know this already.

But for me, and maybe for you this evening, it's a great reminder. A reminder that we need to keep praying and not give up. And that's even as why as Kirk Sessions from both congregations in the Free Church and the Church of Scotland, we've organized to gather together for prayer as brothers and sisters in order to seek the Lord's blessing on our community. And as we look at this psalm this evening, I want us to see that Psalm 67 is a prayer for our community. Psalm 67 is a prayer for our community.

And I just want us to look at this psalm under three headings. Three simple headings. Prayer, praise and promise. Prayer, praise and promise. So Psalm 67, a prayer for our community. The first point, prayer. We see that in verses one and two, where the psalmist says, may God be gracious to us and bless us and make us face to shine upon us that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations. You know, when the psalmist opens Psalm 67, we find him on his knees in prayer.

And with not so much as even lifting his head, the psalmist begins his prayer with the most beautiful words, may God be gracious to us. Literally, he begins his prayer by saying, gracious God, gracious God, and you know, my friend, that's the prayer of someone who acknowledges that they're utterly helpless without God. That's the prayer of someone who acknowledges that they're completely dependent upon the sufficiency of God's grace. That's the prayer of someone who knows that every providence and every circumstance and every situation in life is in the hands of our gracious God. And you know, my friend, whatever you may be going through tonight, and however you felt when you came into church this evening, and whatever is going on in your home and in your life, you know, the psalmist reminds us from the outset of his prayer that the God whom we come before in prayer is a gracious God.

And he's a gracious God who speaks into our situations and into our circumstances. And he reminds us in his word, my grace is sufficient for you.

[7 : 55] My strength is made perfect in weakness. Gracious God. That's how he begins. Gracious God. And then there's the request. Bless us. Bless us.

And that's why we find the psalmist on his knees. He's on his knees before the Lord in prayer because, as we've said before, the word bless, it's a royal term, which literally means to kneel.

In the sense of kneeling in reverence and humility and honour, you're kneeling before a king. And the image that the word bless seeks to portray to us in the Bible is the image of a king standing up from his throne and his subject is before him.

So the king would be namely King Jesus. And those who are coming before the throne of King Jesus, they're coming in reverence and humility and honour.

And they're in the presence of King Jesus and they're kneeling before King Jesus. And how they would kneel is that they would kneel with their head bowed and their hand outstretched and their longing to receive something from the gracious hand of the king.

[9 : 09] They know that they don't deserve to be there. They know that they have no right being there before the king. But they come longing. Longing that he'll give them something from his gracious hand.

And you know, that's what the psalmist is doing. He's on his knees, praying for his community, saying, gracious God, bless us. Gracious God, bless us.

And you know, that's what we need to be doing, my friend. We need to come before the throne of grace, on our knees before King Jesus. And we need to come with our head bowed and our hand outstretched, longing to receive blessing from the gracious hand of King Jesus.

And you know, that's why we're encouraged to come boldly to the throne of grace. That we might obtain mercy. We're to come to the throne of King Jesus in order to receive the blessings of grace and mercy for our community.

We're to come to the throne to receive the blessings of grace and mercy. And you know, when I think of grace and mercy, I often think of them as twins.

[10 : 21] Because grace is when God gives to us what we don't deserve. And mercy is when God doesn't give to us what we do deserve.

Grace is when God gives us his favour, his forgiveness, his fellowship, which we don't deserve at all. And mercy is when God withholds his justice and his judgment being poured out upon us, which is what we do deserve.

And you know, that should be the prayer for our community. That in his grace, King Jesus would give to those in our community. Those who have no interest in the gospel. Those who do have an interest in the gospel.

Those who are not committed to Jesus Christ. That in his grace, King Jesus would give to those in our community what they don't deserve. What none of us deserve. He would give to them the blessing of salvation through Jesus Christ.

And in his mercy. All in his mercy. He would withhold his wrath and judgment from them. And bless them. Gracious God.

[11 : 32] Bless us. Do you know what a prayer? Gracious God. Bless us. But you know, as he's on his knees before the Lord.

The psalmist, he goes on to say. Make his face to shine upon us. Make his face to shine upon us. And what we have to see is that these words, they're based on the Aaronic blessing.

At the end of Numbers chapter 6. That's what we read earlier. At the close of Numbers chapter 6. We read that Moses, the leader of God's people. He asked Aaron, the high priest, to bless the people.

Moses asked Aaron, the high priest, to pronounce a blessing. A benediction over the people. And so as the high priest, Aaron would lift his hands before the people.

And he would pronounce the benediction. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you.

[12 : 34] The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. And you know, my friend, the Aaronic blessing was a benediction of blessing over the people.

And that's what the psalmist is praying for his community. He's praying that the high priest would pronounce his benediction over his community.

He's praying that the Lord will show favor to his community by shining his face upon them. But you know what I love about this psalm?

Is when the psalmist says, gracious God bless us and make his face to shine upon us. Gracious God bless us and make his face to shine upon us.

His prayer is not to see the face of God. Because the psalmist knew that no one could see the face of God and live. No one could see the glory of God and live.

[13 : 38] But the psalmist, his prayer is, make his face to shine upon us. You know, my friend, the psalmist, he longed to see the face of another.

He longed to see the face of another pronouncing his benediction over his community. The psalmist longed to see the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

He longed to see his face shining upon his community. And as John reminds us in his gospel, that as the New Testament church, as those living now in the 21st century, we have seen his face.

We have seen the glory of God. When the word became flesh and dwelt among us, he tabernacled among us. And John says, he tabernacled among us all so that we might see his glory.

The glory is of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. But you know, it was when the apostle Paul, when Paul reminded the community church in Corinth of the gospel.

[14 : 45] He was actually reminding them that Psalm 67 has been fulfilled. Paul said, The God who commanded light to shine out of darkness has also shined into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

And that's what the psalmist was praying. Make his face to shine upon us. Make his face to shine upon us. You know, my friend, what a prayer for our community, that our gracious God would cause his light to shine upon us so that sinners in our community will see the face of Jesus Christ.

That's his prayer. May God be gracious to us and bless us. Make his face shine upon us, that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations.

But then the psalmist, he goes on from the section of prayer to speak about praise. That's our second point. Prayer and praise. We see that in verses 3 to 5.

He says, Now, Psalm 67, it's often referred to by the Israelites as the menorah psalm.

[16 : 21] The menorah psalm. Because, as we can see, Psalm 67, it's a prayer for our community. But it's also a prayer for all the countries of the world. It's a prayer for the nations to experience the blessing of God and to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

It's a prayer that the light of God's salvation would be made known and spread throughout the world. And the Israelites, they referred to Psalm 67 as the menorah psalm.

Because, as we've been studying in the midweek meetings, the menorah was an item of furniture inside the tabernacle. The menorah, which is the Hebrew word for lampstand.

The menorah was a golden lampstand that was situated inside the holy place of the tabernacle. And the menorah, as we've seen over the past few weeks, it has seven branches and it was made from pure gold.

But it was the only source of light in the holy place. It was the only source of light. And the menorah was to burn day and night in the holy place as this source of light.

[17 : 32] Therefore, the reason the Israelites refer to Psalm 67 as the menorah psalm is because it's a prayer. It's a prayer that the light of God's salvation would be made known and spread throughout this dark world.

And like many of the psalms, the prayer of Psalm 67, it's based entirely upon God's gracious covenant with Abraham.

That's what we read about in Genesis 12, where the Lord called Abraham, called this idolatrous man out of an idolatrous place called Ur of the Chaldeans and said to Abraham, you will be a father of many nations.

That's what his name was to mean, Abraham, father of many nations. And the Lord promised Abraham, 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.

I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonors you I will curse and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed. My friend, it was in this covenant of grace that the answer lay to all the problems of sin.

[18 : 43] Because in the covenant of grace, the Lord promised Abraham that through him blessing would come. Through his promised seed, there would be a promised son that would bring the promise of blessing to all the dark nations of this world so that all the nations will turn from the darkness of their sin and sing praise to the Lord.

And that's what the psalmist is praying for. He's praying for praise according to the covenant promise. He's praying for praise according to the covenant promise.

He says in verse 3, 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 the earth.

Let the peoples praise you, O God. Let all the peoples praise you. And you know, that was also the great missionary vision of the psalmist in Psalm 100.

We were singing that. That was our opening item of praise. The psalmist of Psalm 100 was praying for praise according to the covenant promise. He was praying that all people that on earth do dwell would sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.

[20 : 03] He was praying for praise according to the covenant promise. And we see that clearly here in these verses of Psalm 67 because the word praise is repeated again and again and again.

And it should emphasize to us the psalmist's longing. His longing for his community and his longing for the countries of this world that they will be given the desire to praise the Lord.

Because you know, is that not the response of those who are converted? The response of those who are converted is they praise the Lord. And they praise the Lord because they have experienced the light of God's salvation.

They praise him from the depths of their heart because they have come to know the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. They praise the Lord because they've experienced the light of God's salvation.

That's what the psalmist says in Psalm 40. The psalmist in Psalm 40 talks about a day in his life when he didn't praise the Lord.

[21 : 10] But when he cried to the Lord for mercy the psalmist said he took me from a fearful pit and from the miry clay and on a rock he set my feet establishing my way and then what does he say?

He put a new song in my mouth our God to magnify many shall see it and shall fear and on the Lord rely. He praised the Lord because he experienced the light of God's salvation.

And can you say that my friend? Can you say that you have a new song in your mouth because of what the Lord has done for you?

Can you say that you praise the Lord from your heart because he has taken you from a fearful pit and from the miry clay? If you can't say it you know that that's our longing for you.

Our longing for you as a member of our community is that you'll praise the Lord with all your heart. But you know what really gets to me about this psalm is that even though the Israelites referred to Psalm 67 as the menorah psalm and they said that Psalm 67 is their prayer that the light of God's salvation would be made known and spread to all the dark communities and countries of this world.

[22 : 39] But you know even though this is the psalmist's prayer what's so sad is that the Old Testament church they didn't practice what they prayed.

The Old Testament church didn't practice what they prayed. And I say that because when the Israelites were meant to be a light in darkness they were meant to be this light to the nations.

They were meant to be like the menorah psalm the light shining in the darkness. They were to be the light to draw all the nations to come and worship the Lord. And that's what the psalmist of Psalm 67 was praying about.

That the light of God's salvation would be made known and spread through the dark communities and countries of the world. But the Israelites didn't practice what they prayed. Because instead of being a light to the nations the Israelites hid their light.

They veiled their light. They kept their light of salvation to themselves. And instead of being outward looking towards other nations and towards other communities they were inward looking.

[23 : 48] Instead of being open minded and willing to fulfil their commission. Their commission of being a light in darkness. Instead of being open minded they were narrow minded. Instead of being gospel focused they were focused just upon themselves.

And they were focused upon themselves to the point that they were convinced that the ungodly communities and countries of this world well they didn't deserve the Lord's salvation.

And you know the tragedy was that the Israelites withheld the gospel from those who were lost. They were hiding and veiling the message of salvation from those who were on a highway to hell.

They didn't practice what they prayed. And you know my friend it should be a warning to us as the church in this community to make sure that we're not guilty of burying the light of God's salvation.

because we're not to hide the grace of God in our lives. We're not to veil the gospel of Jesus Christ. That's what Paul warned the church in Corinth.

[24 : 56] Because having explained to the Corinthians that the gospel is the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ Paul says if our gospel is hid it's hid to those who are lost.

If the good news of the gospel he says is veiled it's veiled to those who are perishing. And you know my friend if we are hiding our gospel if we are hiding our light we are hiding it from those in our community who are perishing.

And sadly my Christian friend you know we can veil our gospel. We can veil the gospel by not only keeping it to ourselves and saying nothing to those whom we come into contact with but also by the way we live our Christian lives.

We can veil the gospel by our Christian character conduct and conversation. We can veil the gospel if our lives are not worthy of the gospel. We can veil it and hide it and even hinder the gospel from those who are lost.

And you know it's a great sin it's a great sin to hide the gospel from those who are lost. And my friend we're not to fall into the same sin as the Old Testament church who didn't practice what they prayed.

[26 : 21] The result of the Old Testament church for not practicing what they prayed was exile in Babylon. that was God's judgment on them. We're not to fall into that same sin.

That's why Jesus says to us in the New Testament to the New Testament church to us in the 21st century Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount you are the light of the world.

You are a city set upon a hill that cannot be hidden. He says nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket just like the Old Testament church did but they put it on a stand.

They put it on a stand like a menorah a stand that gives light to the whole house and Jesus says in the same way let your light so shine before others that they may see your good work and glorify your father in heaven.

My friend Psalm 67 is a prayer for our community and it ought to remind us that we must practice what we pray. We must practice what we pray because our king he has given us a great commission a great commission to go and make disciples of all nations but you know what I love about our king's commission is that he commissions us with a promise he says lo I am with you always even to the end of the world the king issues his commission with a promise and that's what we see in the closing verses of this psalm we see a promise so psalm 67 it's a prayer for our community and we see prayer praise and lastly promise promise we're we're told we're told in verse 6 the earth has yielded its increase

[28 : 20] God our God shall bless us God shall bless us let all the ends of the earth fear him in these closing verses the psalmist's prayer for his community and indeed the countries of this world his prayer it moves from what you could call supplication to expectation where there's now this air of expectancy in his prayer where he looks forward to seeing the blessing of God in his community the psalmist he knows that if the Lord's people practice what they pray then our gracious and merciful covenant God is under obligation to respond it's not what the Lord said to Solomon you know Solomon's prayer I love it in 2nd Chronicles 7 the temple had just been rebuilt and the Lord promised

Solomon that blessing would come if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways then then will I hear from heaven and forgive their sin and heal their land if my people pray the psalmist says if we practice what we pray then God our God will surely bless us if we practice what we pray blessing will come blessing will come if we're found on our knees like the psalmist with our head bowed and our hand outstretched longing to receive from the gracious hand of King Jesus what we don't deserve my friend blessing will come if we're faithful at the throne of grace and faithful in the means of grace and faithful in our walk of grace

God our God shall surely bless us that's what he says God our God shall surely bless us and you know that's gave the psalmist this air of expectancy that's why he closes his prayer for his community in verse seven he says God shall bless us let all the ends of the earth fear him literally he's saying let all the ends of the earth bow before him the psalmist prays that everyone will fear the Lord and bow their knee before King Jesus in fact the psalmist knows that when Jesus Christ is exalted when Jesus Christ is lifted up before people blessing comes and every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father and you know that should be our prayer for our community the knees will bow and tongues will confess that Jesus

Christ is Lord because without him without the Lord we are utterly helpless it's only depending upon him that's why we're to come saying gracious God bless us and our prayer should be for this community that knees will bow and tongues will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord do you know my unconverted friend have you bowed your knee before King Jesus because that's our longing for you as someone who's in this community have you confessed Jesus Christ as your Lord because that's our longing for you as someone who lives in this community have you come to Jesus and asked him to be gracious to you because that's our longing for you as someone who lives in this community our longing is that you will bow your knee and confess him to be

Lord because the promise of your Bible is one day soon I don't know how soon but the promise of your Bible is that every knee will bow and every tongue will confess and every knee will bow whether they are in heaven or they are on earth or they are in hell and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father but you know far better for you to bow your knee in this life than to bow it in hell far better for you to place your trust in Jesus and in his salvation and experience his blessing than cling to all the false idols of this world far better for you to cast your lot in with him for time and for eternity because you know my unconverted friend that's our prayer for you and our prayer for this community that our gracious God will bless us and he'll bless us by making his face to shine upon you

[33 : 54] Psalm 67 a prayer for our community and so my Christian friend let us pray for our community and seek the Lord's blessing on our community may the Lord bless these thoughts to us and let us pray O Lord our gracious God give to us even the prayer of the psalmist and Lord help us to be urgent help us to be earnest help us to be sincere to pray as we have been even taught Lord bless and pity us shine on us with thy face that the earth thy way and nations all may know thy saving grace and what better to know than the saving grace of God what better light to see than the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of

Jesus Christ and Lord we pray that those in darkness all that they would see a great light and that they would run to the light that they would walk in the light as though art in the light for thy promise is Lord that those who walk in the light will have fellowship with God's Son because the blood of Jesus Christ thy Son cleanses us from all sin Lord hear us then we pray uphold as we ask for we know that without thee we can do nothing but the promise is that with thee all things are possible bless us then we pray not because we deserve anything from thee but solely because the word of God who is gracious hear us then we pray go before us into the week that lies ahead another week that is unknown to us but known only to thee keep us for we ask it in Jesus name and for his sake amen we shall bring our service to the conclusion by singing the words of that psalm psalm 67 psalm 67 in the

Scottish Psalter page 300 and as we praise with these words let us pray with these words Lord bless and pity us shine on us with thy face that the earth thy way and nations all may know thy saving grace let people praise thee Lord let people all thee praise oh let the nations be glad in songs their voices raise thou justly people judge on earth rule nations all let people praise thee Lord let them praise thee both great and small the earth her fruit shall yield our God shall blessings send God shall us bless men shall him fear unto earth's utmost end the whole psalm to God's praise Lord bless and pity us shine on us with thy face that the earth thy way and nations all may know thy saving grace let people praise thee Lord let people all thee praise

O let the nations be glad and songs their voices raise thou justly people judge on earth who nations all let people praise thee Lord let them praise thee both great and small the earth her fruit shall yield her God shall blessings send God shall us bless men shall them fear unto earth's utmost end the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forevermore

Amen