

**Sermon: Among All Nations**

Psalm 67

Genesis 12:1-3, Acts 1:1-11

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August 15, 2010

OLCC,P – Orchard Lake, MI.

Psalm 67 –

**<sup>1</sup> May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, (Selah) <sup>2</sup> that your way may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations.** <sup>3</sup> Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you. <sup>4</sup> Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth. (Selah) <sup>5</sup> Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you. <sup>6</sup> The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, has blessed us. <sup>7</sup> May God continue to bless us; let all the ends of the earth revere him.

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My thanks to Ali Doyle for sharing her mission experiences in Egypt with us this morning! What an amazing experience that must have been! It was a pleasure to meet Ali at the New Wilmington Mission Conference, the 106<sup>th</sup> time this conference has taken place. It was a joy to share the week with others from our congregation: Betsy Telford and her daughter Laura, Dodie Berry, Sandra Crane, along with Jan and me. Let me share briefly with you some of our experiences at this conference.

Each day began with time in morning bible study with age appropriate groups of children, young people, and adults. Our teacher was the pastor of the local Presbyterian congregation in New Wilmington and he led us through a study on Ephesians 4 during the week. It was an excellent way to begin each day. This was followed by our morning mission study where we would hear updates on what was happening in mission around the world. There were many fascinating stories of what God is doing. The morning concluded with a large group outdoor meeting with a time of worship and a message by Saleem Ghubril, a Presbyterian pastor from Pittsburgh. He spoke during the week about Jesus' visit to his home temple in Nazareth where he preached from the words of Isaiah affirming the Lord's calling on his anointed one, just as we have received the same calling as the Lord's beloved sons and daughters.

Our afternoons were free for relaxation, conversation with other conference attendees, or activities such as various recreation pursuits or shopping in the town and surrounding areas.

Following dinner – and all the meals provided the chance to talk with missionaries attending the conference about their work – we attended another large group meeting with wonderful times of worship and singing followed by presentations from different people from around the world. A man from Nepal – once a completely closed and non-religious nation – spoke one evening sharing his faith story and stories of what God is doing in his native country. Another evening, a doctor from Egypt who worked with Ali and the other summer service team members shared what God is doing in his part of the world. And on Wednesday evening, missionaries in attendance at the conference were honored and recognized. Each one was introduced with their place and years of service noted. By the end of the time of recognition, we were told their service represented a combined total of 1,028 years of service in the mission fields of this country and around the world – amazing!

Psalm 67 teaches us to remember that the work these missionaries have done and continue to do yet today is blessed by God and part of God's plan for the world God created and loves dearly. It is a psalm used by the people of Israel at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles, the yearly celebration of the ingathering of the summer harvest. It is a psalm filled with praise and gratitude for God's blessings and goodness to them. "The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, has blessed us" states the Psalmist in vs. 6. And the psalm begins with an affirmation - "May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us." This affirmation recalls the words of Aaron's priestly blessing from Israel's past history. Just as people did then, we pray for God's blessing and favor to rest upon us, for God to provide for our needs and pour out his grace and favor in our lives and communities and families and world. But the psalm goes on to remind us of the reason we pray for and rejoice in God's blessings in our lives.

God blessed Israel, and God blesses us, for a specific reason - "that your way may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations." (vs. 2) God blessed Israel as their God so that they would reflect his glory and goodness in their lives and make God's power known to others. God blesses us and fills us with good things so that we might bear witness to God's saving grace and favor without which we would be hopelessly lost. The psalm speaks of praise for material blessings, the fruitfulness of the harvest, and affirms that these blessings should be

a visible witness to other people and nations of a God who faithfully provides for his own. It is the fulfillment of the calling given to Abraham at the time of God's setting him apart to be the leader of his children of Israel: "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." (Genesis 12:2) God would bring special favor to his children not only for their own good but for the good of all people. Through the ones God blesses he desires to spread and share that blessing with others as well.

Some years ago there was a very popular book being read by many believers named *The Prayer of Jabez*. It was written about a prayer offered by a little known individual in the Old Testament. The prayer went "Oh that you would bless me and enlarge my border, and that your hand might be with me and keep me from harm." (1 Chronicles 4:10) The book encouraged believers to adopt this prayer as a model for their own prayers seeking the blessing of God. That's all well and good, but notice how this prayer is completely focused on "me, me, me". Now it's not wrong to ask for God's blessing in our lives, don't get me wrong! But it is wrong if we are simply seeking those blessings for our own good. God's blessings are always given with the purpose in mind that we recognize them as gifts from God and use them for the wider purpose of sharing those blessings with others in God's name. We are to return praise to the Lord and refer others to the reality that all good gifts come from God's hand, including the gift of salvation and redemption that come through God's grace and mercy found in Jesus Christ .

Reflect today on these things. Count the ways God has brought blessing into our lives and the lives of those we love. We all have struggles, to be sure, but when we really stop and reflect, we have such abundant blessings from the Lord's hand! Now reflect as well on the ways we have given God the glory for these things and born witness to others that it is not our hand but the hand of the Living God who has brought us these good things. We are called to share among all the nations the good news of God's provision and saving grace – "Let the peoples praise you, O God, let all the peoples praise you!"