

# Psalm 67

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Preacher: David MacPherson

[ 0 : 0 0 ] I don't know if we've got any dreamers in the congregation. There's been a lot of talk about dreamers on the news in connection with a decision that Trump took about canceling a program that allowed underage immigrants who had come to the States as children with their parents, who had lived there for how many years, to be able to continue there legally. And the program was called the dreamers program. And Trump decided to cut the program. I'm not making a comment on that decision, though I could, but I won't. But the point is that in connection with that news item, there was a lot of talk about those who would be affected, a lot of human stories about those who had a dream and were pursuing that dream, the American dream of making it a success and doing whatever it was they were planning to do, studying, becoming doctors or lawyers or whatever it was that their dream was and how their dreams were being curtailed by this decision of the executive.

And I was thinking about this idea of dreaming, big dreams. And just out of curiosity, I googled dream quotes. I thought there's got to be people, famous people who have said something about dreaming.

And I was curious as to the kind of sentiments that might have been expressed. And I was, I say I was surprised. I don't know if I was surprised, but I was struck by the amount of nonsense that is said concerning making your dreams come true. And a lot of it, a lot of the nonsense, well, you can see if you agree with me that it's nonsense, but a lot of the nonsense revolves around the idea that we have it within ourselves to make our dreams come true. That's the kind of language you have. If you only pursue your dream, you can make it come true. You just need to go for it. And if you go for it, anything's possible, whatever you want to do, it's possible. If you pursue it with all your might, words to that effect. I'll just mention one of the folks who expressed an opinion on this.

It was Walt Disney of all people. And he expressed himself in this way on this matter. He said, all our dreams can come true if we have the courage to pursue them. And I was thinking, well, try telling that to a Somali teenager who's had all his family's life savings stolen from him by people traffickers. You know, I think he probably had a, he had a dream and he probably had a lot more courage than Walt Disney, but his dream isn't coming true. And sadly for many, it won't come true.

Sadly for many, the dream ends up at the bottom of the Mediterranean. So this idea that, you know, if you just pursue your dream, then it will come true is, you know, romantic and nonsense.

[ 3 : 12 ] Now, making that comment, I hope that what I'm saying doesn't sound unduly cynical or somehow suggest that I'm averse to dreaming big dreams. Not that, but rather I think that as Christians, we need to make sure our dreams are in sync with God's purposes. Indeed, some of the most stirring portions of God's Word are those where we are brought face to face with men and women of God dreaming big dreams for God's glory. And we're confronted with them and we are stirred and we ought to be stirred and not only moved emotionally, but also have a desire to buy in to the big dreams that men and women of God have dreamt in the past and some of which we can buy into and we can also be part of. And I think that's what we find here in Psalm 67. I think the psalmist is dreaming big dreams or certainly voicing bold aspirations concerning all the peoples of the world. Let's just see what he aspires to see, to witness, to become a reality, what it is that he asks God to make happen.

There from verse 3, May the peoples praise you, O God. May all the peoples praise you. May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples justly and guide the nations of the earth. May the peoples praise you, O God. May all the peoples praise you. And he goes on. Now, this is a big dream.

This is a big aspiration. He is a psalmist. He's not identified. It may be David. It may be another author of this psalm. But he is somebody who lived in the Middle East, in little Palestine.

And yet he has this vision for all the nations of the world, some known to him, some unknown. But his vision, his aspiration is that all of them would join in the praise of the God of Israel.

For the one who writes this psalm, his God was no local, regional deity. No, his God was the God of the universe, the God worthy of the praise of all peoples. And his great desire is to see a day when that would happen. He's dreaming, big dreams. He's asking of God for great things to happen.

[ 5 : 35 ] And his passion for the glory of God is all the more remarkable when we consider that many of his own people, many of his own contemporaries would, I am sure, have looked with suspicion on his vision for worldwide praise. You know, we read that and we say, well, that's great. We maybe don't, maybe doesn't resonate as much as it might. Our agreement with what he says may be somewhat intellectual. We might say, yes, I agree with that, even though we maybe don't get too involved in making it happen or being part of making it happen. But I'm sure that the one who wrote these words would have been faced with people who would have said, why do you want that? Why do we want these pagan nations to join in the worship of our God? You remember Jonah, how Jonah, his great rejection of the idea of going to Nineveh wasn't the hardship involved. It was the idea that these pagans would be brought to repentance was abhorrent to him. And I imagine there were many like Jonah who might have read this psalm and said to the author, you know, what are you talking about? But this man who wrote this psalm had this big dream, these big aspirations, these big requests of God. Well, what can we say about his dream or vision? Well, it's a wonderful vision for our sin-sick world that every people, every nation be gathered together, be joined in this shared activity of acknowledging God, of experiencing his salvation, of rejoicing in him. And this is a vision that we can make our own. We can make it our own in a very practical way in Aberdeen today because we live in a city where in great measure the nations of the world have come to us. I was hearing, I don't know if I mentioned this to some folk, probably just in conversation. I don't think I've mentioned it in the context of a sermon, but I was seeing a statistic about Aberdeen, about births in Aberdeen, and it relates either, it may be 2016, it may be 2015, but in the very recent past. And the statistic is that 39 out of 100 births in

Aberdeen in the year in question, either 2015 or 2016, were children born to mothers who had not been born in the UK. And some of them may have been UK citizens, they may have become UK citizens, but you're talking about nearly 40% of births in Aberdeen. It's a quite astonishing statistic are children born to mothers who were born in other parts of the world. And that just, you know, illustrates or demonstrates to us what an international community we are part of, and the opportunities that that affords. You know, as God calls us to go to other nations, by all means, let's follow that call. And we support and we're enthusiastic about those from our congregation who have done that. But the reality is that we can reach the nations of the world here on our doorstep. But how will the psalmist's dream come true? The psalmist identifies three important steps that need to be taken for his dream to come true. What I want to do is just identify these three steps and not only identify them, but hopefully make them our own, not just individually as Christians, but as a congregation of God's people, as we look to buy into the psalmist's dream or vision. And the three steps required, identified in the psalm itself, that in a sense lead into the fulfilling of this vision are as follows. We find them in the first couple of verses of the psalm. First of all, we need to recognize our great need. The first step. The second step is that we need to enjoy and experience and be conscious of our great heritage and our great privileges. And then thirdly, we need to fulfill our great responsibility that leads into this reality of the nations of the world learning about and responding to the gospel. So, let's look at each of these in turn. First of all, we have to recognize our great need. Where does the psalmist begin as he will then go on to express this great vision? Well, he begins there with these words in verse 1, may God be gracious to us.

That's where he begins. May God be gracious to us. He begins by recognizing that he is a sinner, that he stands in need of God's grace, that he is part of a people who are sinners, who are needy, who stand in need of God being gracious to them. We are sinners in need of God's grace and forgiveness.

When we lose sight of that and when pride and self-sufficiency begin to take hold, that robs us of blessing and makes us incapable of being of blessing to others. And so, this is where the psalmist begins and this is where we must begin by acknowledging our great need. God be gracious to us.

And as we ask for God to be gracious to us, so we receive His grace. We receive His forgiveness. We recognize then our great need of God's grace. We've been thinking this morning about our own spiritual condition apart from Christ, how we can do nothing to save ourselves. We can do nothing to earn our forgiveness. We stand in need of God's grace. And so, we with the psalmist begin here.

[ 11 : 39 ] May God be gracious to us. But then, there's a second element that we find just immediately following there in verse 1. And that is what I'm describing as enjoying our great heritage.

The great heritage as God's people of blessing and intimacy with God. May God be gracious to us blessing. What blessing is the psalmist speaking of? Well, I'm sure that without doubt, God's grace that He is seeking, may God be gracious to us, is in great measure the blessing that the psalmist cries out for. Experiencing and knowing God's grace is the greatest blessing that we can experience.

In fact, if we know and are the objects of God's grace, there's really nothing more we need. We think of what Paul discovered when he was crying out to the Lord to spare him from the thorn in his flesh. And what did he discover? What is it that God said to him that he needed to discover? My grace is sufficient for you. And that is true. If we have God's grace, then we have everything. That is at the heart of God's blessing upon us. So, when the psalmist says, may God be gracious to us and bless us, we shouldn't think of these as two distinct things. Rather, the blessing is in great measure, God being gracious to us. But it doesn't end there. The blessing, I think, is further elaborated on in what follows in that sentence. May God be gracious to us and bless us and make His face shine upon us.

So, the blessing refers back to God's grace and it refers forward to this picture painted of God's face shining upon us. And in the language there that the psalmist uses, we do see that we detect echoes, more than echoes really, of the Aaronic blessing that we read just a few moments ago from Numbers.

Let me just read again the words that Moses gave to Aaron as the priest with which he would bless God's people. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord turn His face towards you and give you peace. Now, there's something very powerful about this blessing. The language used, the vocabulary used, it is powerful. This picture of the Lord's face shining upon us, it's vivid. We're attracted to the picture being painted. But what does it actually mean?

[ 14 : 30 ] What is it that Aaron was asking for on behalf of God's people as he pronounced this blessing? Well, I'm sure there's a depth in what is being said that we can't exhaust. But as we scratch the surface, I think the language speaks to us of intimacy and friendship with God, God's face shining upon us.

The picture is of a God who is near to us. We remember Moses when he went up Mount Sinai and he was near to God and God's face in a measure shone upon him. And he reflected his glory as he came close to God, as he was in God's near presence. God's face shining upon us speaks of the blessing of God's near presence as he is near us, as he surrounds us. And also, I think this picture of God's face shining upon us is intended to highlight the consequence of that, which is that we are then to reflect something of his splendor, beauty and love. So, as his face shines upon us, so we then reflect something of that. Again, the picture of Moses coming down the mountain and reflecting even physically something of the glory of God, something of the splendor of God.

So, we too, not in a physical sense, but in a real sense, as we are near to God, as we enjoy his near presence, as his face shines upon us, so we in some measure reflecting something of him to others, something of his beauty and of his love. So, we're to recognize our great need. We're to enjoy this great privilege of blessing and friendship with God, intimacy with God. But that leads us into the third element, and that is that we are to fulfill our great responsibility, which is to be of blessing to the nations. Notice the key word that we have at the beginning of verse 2. It's the connecting word between verse 1 and what follows in verse 2. May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, and we might all say amen. That's what I want for myself. That's what I want for this congregation. That God be gracious to us, that he would bless us, that his face would shine upon us.

But then notice what the psalmist says, that, or so that, you know, there's a, there's intended to be a causal link between what, what is being asked for in verse 1 to what is being anticipated in verse 2, so that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among the nations.

There's to be a link between us being blessed, us enjoying and experiencing the grace of God, us knowing his face shining upon us, and others being brought to a knowledge of God, a knowledge of his ways, a knowledge of his salvation, indeed experiencing his salvation, and joining in his praise. We as God's people are blessed to bless. Again, that shouldn't surprise us because that's at the very heart of God's covenant purposes that God himself declares very clearly at the very beginning of establishing a covenant with Abraham and through Abraham with us, we who are Abraham's children. The very beginning in chapter 12 of Genesis, let's just remind ourselves of what God says to Abraham at the time of his call. Call of Abraham, chapter 12, verses 1 to 3, the Lord had said to Abraham, leave your country, your people, and your father's household, and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you. I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse, and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. Now, there's a lot there, but there's really just two things I want to particularly highlight here as they're echoed in this psalm, and that is that at the heart of God's purposes for his people is, first of all, that his people be blessed. There in verse 2,

[ 18 : 51 ] I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you. I will make your name great. So, God's people would be blessed. We can see that. We say that's true. We are a blessed people. But then what does he say? And you will be a blessing. You will be a blessing. So, it's not just that we are blessed, but that God's purpose for us as his people is that we would be a blessing to others. And who we are to be a blessing of is then clarified very explicitly in what follows in verse 3, and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. Now, we appreciate and we acknowledge that in these words there is a messianic promise. In these words, there is a looking forward to the coming of Jesus and how through Jesus all nations of the earth would be blessed. But the fact that we acknowledge that doesn't in any way take away from the responsibility laid upon us as God's people to both enjoy and receive and be grateful for God's blessing, but then in turn to be of blessing to others. And that's the very principle. It's the very order that the psalmist acknowledges here. May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us. Why? So that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations.

We are forgiven, blessed, shone upon that his ways may be known, that the peoples might be saved, that the nations might praise him. And there is here, of course, a very clear and explicit missionary challenge.

And I guess the question for us to work through, not something we're going to work through this evening, but nonetheless, the question we need to work through is how does that link, clearly established, clearly identified there in God, in God, in God originating this covenant with Abraham, clearly identified here in this psalm?

How does that link work? Or does it work in our own lives and in our life and ministry as a congregation? Is there a clear and discernible link between the blessings we receive and the blessing that we are to others?

To others around about us, here in the city, but beyond to the nations of the world. So there's these three steps. And what follows the three steps? As we follow these three steps, as we begin where we must begin, acknowledging our need of God and of the grace of God and asking that God be gracious to us, as we then enjoy the experience of God being gracious to us, of God blessing us, of God coming close to us. As we then, as a result of that, assume, take on our responsibility to share the good news with others. What follows? Well, what follows is what the psalmist declares as an aspiration, as a request of God in verses 3 and 4. And maybe what we can do is just read those verses, but remove the word may, recognizing that we are in a different time. We're not looking ahead to this happening. We're recognizing it happening in our own day and recognizing the privilege of being part of it happening in our own day. So as we follow the steps laid out, what is the outcome?

[ 22 : 41 ] Well, let's read those verses in that way that I've indicated. The peoples praise you, O God. All the peoples praise you. The nations are glad and sing for joy. Verse 5, the peoples praise you, O God. All the peoples praise you. May that be something that we witness, that we are part of, that we experience as we fulfill our great responsibility. Being blessed to then in turn be of blessing. As we kind of draw these thoughts to a close, let me just pose one or two questions to you. Have you recognized your great need of the grace of God? Have you recognized your great need of forgiveness that can come only from Him through His Son, Jesus? Have you come to Jesus for grace, for forgiveness? Do you enjoy your heritage or your covenant privileges of blessing and friendship with

God? And as you do, does that in turn lead you, spur you to fulfill your great responsibility to be a blessing to others? May that increasingly be true of all of us. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank You for Your Word. We do thank You that we are a blessed people. We pray that we would have a greater understanding, a greater grasp of the measure of blessing that we enjoy, and as we do, so we would know an ever greater sense of gratitude and joyful gratitude directed to You. We thank You that we're not only to be blessed, but that in Your purposes You would have us be of blessing to others. Indeed, that all the nations of the world might be blessed through us. We do thank You very especially for the way that that is a reality in the person of Jesus, how in and through Jesus the nations of the world are blessed. And we thank You that we are those who have come to know Him and are given this great privilege of sharing with others the good news concerning Jesus. We thank You for the opportunities that we have on our own doorstep. We thank You for the opportunities that many of us have day by day, be it in our workplace or at our place of studies or where we live, of meeting with and being able to share with others from all over the world our lives, but also our good news, the message that You have given us to share with others. Help us then so to live, and we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.