

Psalm 67 - A Psalm of Blessing July 2024 Grenoble

Do you ever hear a song on the radio or children singing and then the tune replays in your head for the rest of the week. Sometimes it's uplifting and sometimes annoying, depending on the song. *I just can't get this song out of my head!* Hymns can do the same thing. A favourite song sung in church can stay with me for days.

Today's psalm is a song which was to be played with stringed instruments. It is based on a prayer that the Jewish people knew well and would be sung at services and festivals. The prayer can be found in our Old Testament in Numbers 6. It is often called the Aaronic Blessing as it was given to Aaron by God to bless the people.

The Lord bless you and keep you

The Lord make his face to shine on you and be gracious to you

The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. (Num6:24-26)

Can you see how similar these words are to v1 of our psalm? I wonder if the psalmist had just been to a festival and heard this prayer sung; whether it went round in his head and then wrote his own version. Verse 6 mentions *the earth yielding its increase* so it was probably written for a harvest festival.

Let's take a closer look at his new song. **Psalm 67**

It's a song of blessing. How often do we ask God to bless us? When we sneeze, often someone says *Bless you*. Maybe we say grace at meals, a blessing over food. Perhaps you sign a card or email with *God Bless*. Gary and I are frequently asked to hold services of blessing for a marriage, wedding anniversary or the birth of a baby. As a vicar of two country churches in England, I have just had two pet services to bless the animals including a tortoise, dogs and ponies. More non-church goers come to that than normal services! For people in the countryside, that's a great way of outreach. I wonder what would be the equivalent here.

What does *Bless* mean? It is used to ask God to look at us favourably, to give us a holy seal of approval and protection. Is this psalm rather selfish wanting this blessing for ourselves? Not at all. As you read the psalm it starts and ends with personal blessing but the majority of the words are about God blessing others, all peoples and all nations. In fact, v2 tells us that the purpose for God's blessing us is so that God's '*way may be known in all the earth, your saving power among all the nations.*'

It's an outward looking prayer that longs for God to be known everywhere and for all people to praise him. That was God's calling to Abraham and the Jewish people. It is our calling today too.

An interesting modern parallel happened during the Covid pandemic. A church worship group in America wrote a song using the words from the Aaronic blessing. They called it 'The Blessing', a song that you know here. It became very popular, with over 3 million views on YouTube. It was a moving prayer for people during the pandemic and continues to be so today. Different countries took this song and made their own version. It went from country to country asking for God's blessing for the world.

In May 2020 over 65 UK churches came together online to sing a blessing over the land. They wanted to give hope and encouragement. They backed up this blessing song by supplying over 400,000 meals to the most vulnerable and isolated. This alongside phone calls to the isolated, pharmacy delivery drops and hot meals to the NHS frontline hospital. They said, 'Our buildings may be closed but the church is very much alive!'

Beyond the US and England, compilations were made in many European countries, in Australia, Canada, Central & South America, Africa and Asia. "The Arab World Blessing" featured singers from 16 Arab-speaking countries in the Middle East, North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt, and South Sudan.

In France, more than 100 churches united to sing "La Bénédiction France" in order to bless, praise and call for the protection of God. We will sing it later.

This is an encouragement for us to use our prayers and our songs to focus on the world. As we pray for God to bless us, be inspired to pray for others. We face many difficult issues. Wars, political instability, climate change and economic instability are all issues that makes us aware we are facing these things globally. If the news makes you depressed or feel powerless, then prayer is our weapon. We can make a difference in praying to God.

When I was a hospital chaplain, I would ask people what they would like me to pray for. I was often surprised and humbled how many people would give me a list of world needs rather than their own, even though they were very ill. Whatever our situation, we can bring our world to God. Let's take our role to pray for others seriously.

Magnificat

Our gospel reading echoes similar ideas to our psalm. Here is Mary, young, pregnant and unmarried. In this passage, we see her trusting God that her baby will be a blessing to the world. We know it's true but I doubt that many of the people then believed her. It's not surprising that she hurries away from her home town to visit her cousin Elizabeth near Jerusalem. Elizabeth was a godly woman who did believe her and also believed God's promises. She was miraculously pregnant herself. She says '*For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy*' (Luke 1:44)

Mary responds with the song we call the Magnificat. She rejoices that she is blessed and chosen. Her praise however soon turns away from herself to the world. Far from being a prayer for personal protection, she is amazingly political.

*He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly: he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty. (LK 1:51-53)*

Mary is blessed because she will be part of making a difference in the world. She knows that she is bearing God's Son Jesus, who will fulfil the promises that he gave to Abraham to bless the world.

We won't ever be asked to do what Mary did, but we can follow her example of wanting God's righteousness and blessing on the world. What challenges do we have in Grenoble? How can St Marc's be a blessing to the city, the country, the world? When Gary and I worked in Dinard in Brittany, people were very curious about the English speaking church. They would visit and ask questions. As an English speaking Church in Grenoble, does it attract a certain amount of curiosity? If so, that is our opportunity. Or perhaps you have some other USP. Let's pray about how you can reach out more. Let's be praying for ways and opportunities to bring God's blessing on this place.

We have looked at two songs of blessing. Both start with knowing God's blessing on us but their main purpose is to bless others. The longing to make a difference in the world is central to us as believers in Jesus. The psalmist wants all nations to be able to come to that place where they will sing God's praises. They won't just be tunes going around in our heads but be in the heads of the world too. May we join in with those praises too. Amen