

Psalm 67: A Missionary Prayer

What do you long for? What do you long for yourself, your children and Grandchildren or Nephews and Nieces, your church, your community? Some long for wealth or at least financial security, perfect health, status in the community, recognition, acceptance and love.

The un-named author of Psalm 67 longed for God's blessing above all other things, for himself and his people, Israel. It has a similar tone to Psalm 42 which begins: *as the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you O God. My soul pants for God, for the living God.*

It would appear from the title of the Psalm that it was intended for use as a song in Congregational worship. The title reads: *for the director of music. With stringed instruments. A psalm. A song.* You may remember that in the old 1662 Prayer Book, Psalm 67 was to be said or sung in the Service of Evening Prayer.

While the psalmist is largely concerned for God's blessing on God's people Israel, the psalmist has a much wider blessing in mind. He seeks God's blessing on the nations of the world. In that sense, this is a missionary prayer.

He would have known God's promise to Abraham, recorded in Genesis 12:3, that through him, all the peoples of the world would eventually be blessed. God's promise to Abraham, then Isaac and Jacob after him, would appear to be the foundation and motivation of the prayer.

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The promise to Abraham was partly fulfilled in Israel but much more was intended. It was supposed to be that through Israel, all the nations of the world would be told of the Lord. They were to be a missionary people, reflecting their missionary God! God took the initiative in choosing them. He reached out to them. They were to reach out to others. So the psalmist prays *that your ways maybe known on earth, your salvation among all nations*. Israel, as God's people, God's Church, was to be the instrument of reaching the nations.

The prayer continues: *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*. This praise and joy and singing would only happen when the people of other nations had turned to the Lord. And how would that happen? It would be through the missionary endeavour of Israel.

But they were not good missionaries! Remember the Prophet Jonah, who, when told by God to go to the Ninevites and call upon them to repent, got on a ship and went in the opposite direction. Jonah didn't want non-Jews benefitting from God's grace, mercy and love. He didn't want their sins forgiven.

And when God sent His only Son, how did the general population of Israel respond? While some saw in Jesus the promised Messiah, the promised Saviour, most opposed him and called for his execution. They were blind to the fulfillment of God's ultimate promise to Abraham. For it would be through the Lord Jesus Christ that all the nations of the world would be blessed.

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The Apostle Paul echoed the sentiment of the Psalm in his letter to the Romans when he wrote *I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, first for the Jew, then for the Gentiles.* The word 'Gentiles' means 'the nations'.

When Paul used the word *gospel*, he meant the Good News of the Salvation which is possible only through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Psalm 67 shows remarkable faith and vision that reflects the very heart of God himself who *so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have Eternal Life.*

It would be through Jesus that *all the ends of the earth will fear him.* It is in fact only through Jesus that people can know God; there is no other way. As the Apostle Peter said in the first recorded sermon of the early church: *salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.* (Acts 4:12)

Psalm 67 is a missionary prayer to a missionary God for the salvation of people of all nations.

How does this prayer impact us as the people of God to-day?

We too, are to be a missionary church! While we pray for God's blessing on ourselves, we also need to pray and work for God's blessing on those who don't yet know and love him.

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This will involve praying, planning, giving of our time, gifts and money for the Good News of Jesus to be made known throughout the world. It will involve taking initiatives to reach our own community for Christ, with all of those who claim to be Christians, living such good lives that people sit up and take notice. It will involve speaking about Jesus to our family, neighbours and friends. It will involve putting our money where our mouth is and supporting ministry here, elsewhere in our Diocese, in remote Australia through such organisations as the Bush Church Aid Society and throughout the world.

Let's commit ourselves afresh to praying and working for the spread of the Gospel. How are you involved in this mighty task at present? How will you be involved in this mighty task from to-day?