

# Pentecost 2017: “Let ALL the peoples praise you”

(Psalm 67)

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**Introduction:** According to the Islamic calendar, our Muslim friends have now been in their **Ramadan** fasting for just over a week (May 27-June 25), as they seek to gain favor with Allah through their good works, devotion and submission. Meanwhile in the Christian calendar, today is the anniversary of **Pentecost**, when the Holy Spirit descended with power on the Body of Christ to equip the disciples for their mission to the nations of the world.

- Two contrasting commemorations, two worldviews in tension, two lifestyles in confrontation in this world, and two religions that for centuries have been in conflict: how would the Lord Jesus have us to respond to this issue? Keep in mind that Jesus Himself saw the multitudes of the world like sheep without a shepherd. As we study Psalm 67 today, may we pray for the nations of the world to come to know the Good Shepherd.

**V.1: “May the LORD be gracious to us and bless us, and make his face to shine upon us.”**

- These words are taken from the priestly blessing that God gave Aaron in Num. 6:24-27: “The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.’ So shall they **put my name** upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.” (LORD in caps refers to Yahweh.)

- These words represented the way the priests were instructed to bless the Israelites and express God’s favor toward them. In fact, it was **God’s way of “putting His Name” on His people**, so they would “feel the weight” and glory of His Name on their lives – His holiness, righteousness, and lovingkindness; and this would effect His lordship over them. When you feel the “weight” of God’s Name on you (“Yahweh” = “the One who IS”), it protects you from engaging in unhealthy activities and moves you to want to do what’s good and right.

- Today many people don’t want the weightiness of God’s name; they’d rather God be lite and frivolous, like our tastes and preferences. “May God bless us whatever we feel like doing” –

that's the philosophy of our age. "May this be accepted as the general norm: do whatever makes you feel loved" – which, of course, leads people into all kinds of sick and selfish behavior. But with the priestly blessing God was seeking to guard His people from all uncleanness, idolatry, and foolishness.

- In Ps. 67:1, the psalmist reorders the first lines of the priestly blessing and applies it in the first person plural, that is, to the people of Israel. Asking God to be gracious to us implies that we are in a condition of need and have no way to pay for God's favor (whether by bribe, merit or works). So the psalmist asks God to bless us with that which we have no way of deserving or earning.

- And what does it mean for God's "face to shine upon us"? A smile is what makes your face shine! So the psalmist is asking God to "smile upon us." Has God ever smiled upon you? In creation (= general revelation), He smiled on all humanity, providing us with everything we need. If the "distribution of goods" sometimes seems a bit unfair, we need to realize that's the part God put in *our* hands, so we are the guilty ones there. Then in giving us His Word (= special revelation), He smiled on us again, most dramatically in His Son Jesus.

## **V.2: "That your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among the nations."**

- So the psalmist was not asking for God's favor and blessing on their lives solely for egotistical purposes, but he seemed to have in mind a truly evangelistic motive: God's ways being made known, His salvation reaching the nations.

- We are never supposed to hoard God's blessings in our lives. They are always intended to be shared with those around us, flowing like a river that blesses everyone in its path. So the psalmist understood that God's blessings and favor would impact the nations by revealing to them His ways and His salvation.

- At times we have the mistaken notion that the Old Testament God was only interested in His chosen people of Israel, whereas in fact God always had His eyes fixed on the nations He desired to rescue (Rev. 5:9 says "every tribe, tongue, people, and nation" would be included in His kingdom).

## **V.3: "Let the peoples praise you, O God. Let all the peoples praise you."**

- The great longing of God's heart was that ALL the peoples might acknowledge His gifts and seek Him (the Hebrew word actually means to give thanks).

- If you or I seek others to praise us, that's egotism; so was this a selfish desire on God's part? Of course it wasn't, because God Himself is the very essence of goodness, love, beauty, and blessing.

- The desire that people should praise God simply expresses the longing for them to wake up to the truth and live according to reality, so that they might connect up with the One who is the Source of all help and blessing.

#### V.4: “Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations of the earth.”

- In the first place, the nations can be glad and sing when they come to know God’s ways and His salvation (v.2). That happens when we come to know Jesus, and He’s always our first reason for rejoicing.
- Then their joy will continue when they see how God judges the peoples with “equity” (the Hebrew word means “a level place,” i.e., without partiality): no one will have any advantage or disadvantage over anyone else in God’s court. So the nations will rejoice when they experience God’s good judgment on their behalf, in their favor.
- Who hasn’t been the object of unfairness or injustice some time or other? It hurts and can sometimes seem to ruin life. But God judges rightly, no matter how many “pending” situations we may observe in this world where His justice seems still to be lacking. Ultimately He will overrule the kingdoms of this world, so that someday they will all become His (Rev. 11:15). Jesus is our righteous Judge (Jn. 5:22-27).
- The psalmist prays that the nations know God’s judgments and let Him guide their way, because He longs to direct us in “paths of righteousness” (Ps. 23:3). He’s the **Good Shepherd**, all-sufficient, all-wise, who has provided us with what we most needed to be able to face all our challenges in this fallen world, namely, salvation!
- That salvation consists of **His lordship over our lives**: as He rescues us from self-rule, He’s freeing us from our condition of slavery to selfishness, lostness and waywardness, and He’s putting us under the safety of His perfect rule. That’s **what He proved on the cross**: that He’s the true Ruler, even over weakness, sin, Satan, and death! He triumphed on every front and overcame our every enemy – all on our behalf!

#### V.5: “Let the peoples praise you, O God. Let all the peoples praise you.”

- The psalmist again invites the nations to praise God and give thanks. It’s an invitation because God is not willing to violate anyone’s free will; He respects too much His image which He placed in us (ironic: God respects us even though we’re not really respectable!).
- So when we realize how kind and patient He is, of course it only makes good sense to praise and thank Him. In fact, Paul says “in all things” we should give thanks (1 Thes. 5:18), because it’s like recognizing His sovereignty over everything that happens to us. Our will doesn’t reach as far as we think it does or as far as we’d like it to; it has natural limits, put in place by God Himself.
- But “free will” means that for the moment God actually allows us to contradict Him, because He lets us do things our way (for now!). We don’t have to praise Him or give thanks (for now) if we don’t want to, because He’s allowing us to *exhaust the possibilities of our will*, since that’s the only way we’ll come to the correct conclusion about how much we need Him and see that He’s the only One worthy of our praise.

## V.6: “Then the earth will yield its harvest, and God, our God, will bless us.”

- This will be the result when all nations acknowledge God: the fullness of the harvest and God’s blessing, things working out the way they’re supposed to.
- This is the “eschatological vision” of God’s goodness flowing down upon the earth as He intended. Who doesn’t long for that fulfillment? But the great harvest the earth was waiting for was actually the coming of the Messiah to reap the lost souls bound in darkness, rescuing them through His cross and His Spirit.
- The great gift of the cross would have been incomplete without the Spirit. Paul said it in Gal. 3:14: “He redeemed us [bought us back out of slavery] in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles [= the nations] through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit” [= God’s breath]. That’s what we celebrate today at Pentecost: the promise that all nations would be blessed through Abraham’s descendant, which found its fulfillment that day when the Holy Spirit launched the Body of Christ into its worldwide mission.
- At Pentecost, God was **putting His name** on the “new humanity” and filling them with His own breath, so that people from every nation could come together (in the church) and rejoice under the same Head.

## V.7: “God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth will fear him.”

- But as long as there are still nations (and individuals) that do not recognize Christ’s lordship and right to govern, we continue living in a huge cosmic struggle on the earth.
- Human wills have been naturally contrary to God’s good will all down through history (since Gen. 3), producing unbearable situations all over the globe: from injustice and persecution to human trafficking, violence, cruelty, and we’re all affected by it, most recently, the terrorism in the concert at Manchester (22 deaths); the murder of Coptic pilgrims in Egypt (28 deaths); the truck bomb in Kabul, Afghanistan, last Wednesday (80 deaths, 100s wounded and traumatized); further incidents last night in London.
- Someone may ask: “Why doesn’t the Lord extend His hand and put an end to all this wretchedness?” The truth is He already extended both His hands on a wooden cross, giving us His teaching and example, His Word and deed perfectly harmonized, all His forgiveness, love, and power poured out in that saving act. This is the difference between the power of Islam and the power of Christianity: the power of Islam is human strength, the arm of the flesh and the sword, weapons of *jihad*, politico-economic power; the power of Christ is the power of love, the power of His Word planted like a seed in apparent *weakness*, but that’s precisely where God’s power is perfected.

**Conclusion:** Paul says in Rom. 10:12, “there is no difference between Jew and Gentile.” All come to be one in Jesus Christ: all the barriers fall between races and nations, between social classes, between the sexes. And the Holy Spirit is the glue that holds the new humanity together! For, as Paul says, “the same Lord of all is rich [in grace] to all who call on him, for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” He gives us His favor simply

because we invoke His name, not as if that were a magic formula, but because we have literally nothing to offer, so the remedy had to be as simple as calling on Him from a sincere heart of trust in His name.

- As we learn to call on Him, He's **putting His name** on us again; it's His act of taking ownership! God isn't the least bit intimidated by our problems, our rebellion, or by our wills that are contrary to His. He knows that in time His truth and justice will prevail, just as they already do in eternity (as we pray in the Lord's Prayer: "on earth as it is in heaven"). So with great patience and generosity He *invites* us to form part of His kingdom rule, even now in the midst of time, so that we can already begin to be glad and sing for joy even before the final harvest, since we too know that in the end every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Jesus as Lord of all (Php. 2:10-11).
- Today in the crisis of morality and corruption that plagues our society, like the crisis of leadership in our governments, in the culture wars and religious wars, in all of these, we actually see golden opportunities for the church, because we firmly believe that the benefits of having your character governed and transformed by God is of far more worth than any material pleasure or advantage that this world could offer us.
- So we have a testimony of good news to give, a blessing to announce to the world: **God has made His face to shine upon us** – on Muslims and Christians, on traditionalists and postmoderns, on great and small, on all the nations and peoples of this world. He wants them to know there is a Savior, and He's calling us to be His messengers of peace and blessing. **He longs to put His Name on the nations**, and we participate in that process first of all by praying for them: May we bless the nations in Jesus' name. May IBC be a blessing to the nations for Jesus' sake. May your life be a blessing to those around you. May our lives be a witness to Muslims around us as they celebrate Ramadan. May we be a blessing to the nation of Spain (our national missions emphasis starts this month).