

A Psalm of International Gladness

Unique Service

Well welcome this morning. I have been so blessed to see the outpouring of enthusiasm and excitement. We had dozens of people float through the open house Monday, and then all week long people just out of sheer excitement and desire to serve were coming out in droves and were vacuuming, weeding the beds, vacuuming, and packing at the old facility and cleaning out closets and vacuuming, weed-eating, spraying weeds, mowing the field in the back. All of that was without even an ask. You guys are awesome. Thank you for your work this week. There's more to do, but man, it's fun to feel the energy and excitement.

Today's service I hope will be special service for us. Today we are going to have a shorter message and then a corporate time of prayer to ask for the Lord's blessing.

And the message, I hope, will set us up for the time of prayer so we can pray together in one spirit. So open your Bibles to Psalm 67.

And as you are turning their let me talk for a moment about values. In our family, we have certain values that are unique.

For example, our family is particularly excited about dumpsters. Even my wife as petite and lovely as she is has a

certain fondness for these things. This week, we were at this building here and I look over and my son Brock is up to his hips in the dumpster on this side of the building and he's swimming around with an ear to ear grin like he's in a pool of gold coins. We love dumpsters because we love the idea of rummaging through some trash heap and restoring something or finding some raw material that we can make something out of. So that's our family values.

Now another family might run into that same dumpster and not necessarily understand why we value it as we do. They might actually just consider it trash. Can you believe it? And what I'm trying to point out is that we interpret the reality before us very differently depending on what we value. It has tremendous impact on our decisions and our joy.

Now, why do I start with that? Because today we are addressing the subject of blessing and blessing is inextricably linked with this idea of treasure. In fact, one of the ways you can define blessing is being given those things you treasure.

Our whole life is a life spent trying to increase our proximity to our treasure. Not only that, our emotional condition is linked to it.

- When it's taken away from us we experience sorrow.
- When we acquire it suddenly we feel joy.
- When we sense a threat to it we feel fear.

- When we allow it to fill our heart we feel satisfied.

So treasure is a big deal in the Bible. And so with that introduction, let's read one of my favorite Psalms. It's a simple Psalm that has to do with blessing. It's almost homely in its style. But it speaks very profoundly about true blessing around a very unique value. Three times in 7 verses he speaks of God blessing him. And see if you can pick out what the Psalmist values here. If blessing is getting what you treasure, then what is it exactly that the Psalmist treasures?

Psalm 67:1-4, May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, Selah that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations. Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you! Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth. Selah

Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you! The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, shall bless us. God shall bless us; let all the ends of the earth fear him!

Now if you just read this super quick or just read the first line only you might be tempted to say the Psalmist is praying rather selfishly. The Psalmist is treating God like some genie in a bottle. Give me stuff I want. Bless me.

And quite honestly, this is exactly how many of us pray.

Essentially our prayers are some form of this, "What do I have to do to please you so you will give me these things, so you will answer my prayers,

- so I'll have my career,
- so I'll have my professional success,
- so I'll have my friends,
- so I'll have my health,
- so I'll have my looks,
- so I'll have my family,
- so I'll get married,
- so I'll have my children?

What do I have to do? Is that what the Psalmist is doing here? Is the Psalmist only concerned about material blessing? Give me some bread. A lot of commentaries point out that this is probably some harvest hymn they sang. It says in verse 6, the earth has yielded its increase, Our God shall bless us. Is it that simple. I want food. I get food. I am blessed.

No, the Psalmist is not rejoicing over the gift, but the giver of the gift. Three times he says, "Let the peoples praise you, O God."

To be sure, the Psalmist is praising the Lord for blessing him with food, just like we praise God for the good gifts in our lives. In fact we pray the same thing. At every meal, thank you Lord for the food. Lord thank you for this new house. Lord thank you for this car. Lord thank you for the raise at

work. As a church today, we are corporately praying, Lord, thank you for blessing us with a new facility. Thank you so much! Lord what a blessing this new facility is.

But why is the food or car or job a blessing? Why is building a blessing? How do you know if something is a blessing? Is money a blessing? Sometimes. But sometimes it is not. It's as common as sand to hear of men who have been undone by money. To some money can actually be the worst curse.

Does money in this passage sound like a blessing to you?

1 Timothy 6:9-10, But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. (ESV)

So to this guy money is certainly not a blessing. So how do you know when money or bread or a new building is a blessing? This Psalm gives us two answers to that question.

What is True blessing?

- Gifts are blessings when they direct our affections to God

Do you see this in the Psalm? Again, four times he says, "Let the peoples praise you." Their affections have been

captured. God gives the people a gift, and the response to that gift is praise to the giver! How are material things a blessing? They are blessing ONLY if they point us to the GIVER of the blessing.

Let's connect this to what we talked about last week. Last week we talked about the fact that this world is absolutely inhospitable to the deepest desires of the human heart. The human heart wants to love something that will last forever. You want to invest in something that will never disappoint you. What thing can you love in this life that will not disappoint? Answer: Nothing. At some point it will all get stripped away.

- Every plant you ever plant will someday get chopped down, get over-fertilized, get destroyed by a gopher or bug or just wilt from old age.
- Every dog, or cat or bunny or salamander you ever love will die.
- All the work you invest in will break down and betray you, every person you love will die.

Our love cannot last in this life; this is an undisputed universal reality. To argue this would be to argue that men and women do not die. No, if we decide to love something, then plan to have your heart broken. If you decide to love something, then count on being disappointed. All love in this life ends. There is, however, one exception: The love of Jesus Christ for you and your love of Him.

And so for a Christian, a blessing is a gift that enables you to love Jesus Christ more and to see his love of you more. For a Christian a true biblical blessing is something that redirects your affections away from temporal loves, away from the world, away from even the gift that was given to you and love the giver of the gift. And interestingly, it helps you to love temporal loves in the right way, in a way that doesn't disappoint. It helps you to love them the same way you love a flower. You know it will wilt, but you love it for what it is - and nothing more.

Let's think about an example. I really like tools. Recently my dad upgraded his milling machine and he decided rather than sell it, he'd give it to me. Now of course I love the tool, but the tool is just a chunk of steel, a heavy chunk of steel mind you. And to decide to love the tool as an end in itself is guaranteed to disappoint. It's guaranteed to fade. It's guaranteed to wear out. As much as I loved the gift, what was a thousand times more meaningful to me was that the gift showed me that my dad cared for me and loved me and thought of me. And that initiative of my dad toward me, increased my affection for my dad.

That is exactly how the Psalmist here is thinking about the material blessing of grain. The blessing evidences his love and care for you. And the reason it is a blessing is not because of the thing. The thing is needed and an important part of life, but what far, far and away eclipses the thing is what the gift of the thing represents. You could give up ten

thousand things, but what you can't give up is your treasure.

The alternative, by the way, is to treat God like a government welfare check. I'm stereotyping here, but it's easy to get a check from the government, this big impersonal, powerful entity, almost deity-like and to not be thankful for the giver of the check, but just tolerate the giver because you need the gift. In fact, it's common to even begin to feel entitled to these gifts, and feel irate when the gift isn't given. The love in that case is for the gift not the giver.

Do you see the difference?

And what you see in the Psalm here is a love not of the gift, but of the giver of the gift! Is the true blessing the grain and the bread and the full stomach? No. The true blessing is that the grain is an evidence of having the face of the Lord shine upon you!

- Oh, don't you want the face of God to shine upon you.
- To be happy with you, to be please with you, to communicate with you.
- What the Psalmist really wants is the smile of God upon him.
- To intercept the face of God look such that there is uninterrupted fellowship, pleasure, and relational depth.
- It means that he is for you.
- It means that he is with you.
- It means that he loves you.

That is a kind of love that will only increase. It cannot be taken away.

That's why it's not ultimately about the grain and bread. It's not the building. We could have just as easily lost 100k through this transaction and experienced a tragic death in our midst. And the blessing might actually turn out to be the loss, because the loss is what redirected our affections back to the all-satisfying person of Jesus Christ.

Anything that redirects your affections to the all-satisfying person of Jesus Christ is a blessing. The blessing is more of Christ. Bless me Lord, with more of who you are. That is ultimately what we want, to be satisfied with you.

So when is a gift a blessing? First, gifts are blessings when they direct our affections to God. Or to say it like our mission statement, when they point our affections to the all-satisfying person of Jesus Christ. Secondly,

When is a Gift a True blessing?

- Gifts are blessings when they direct our affections to God
- Gifts are blessings when they direct the affections of others to God

So there is a way in which gifts given to us can actually be a blessing to others in that as we are blessed and as our affections are redirected to the all-satisfying person of Jesus

Christ others see it and are similarly moved.

Now before we get too far, let's think about the original recipient here. The Psalmist is praying on behalf of the nation of Israel, "Bless us Lord!" Why? Verse 2 - that your way may be known upon the earth, your saving power among the nations. Let the people's praise you. Let the nations be glad.

So do you see how the blessing of God upon Israel was supposed to be used almost as an evangelistic tool among the nations.

Now this is hard for us to understand because we are so individualistic. We can hardly think the way these ancients thought. In order to understand this way of thinking you have to realize that in the ANE national identity and community was everything. It was almost impossible to separate a nation from its god or gods.

- When you think Philistine, you think Dagon.
- When you think Egypt you think Ra or Amun.
- When you think Assyrian you think Marduk.

And so interestingly, in the OT when a person wanted to convert to follow YHWH he had to, almost by definition, also become an Israelite. Do you remember Ruth in the OT. She was a Moabite. And her mother-in-law said to her after her husband died. Listen, you are Moab woman. Go back to your people. But Ruth said, no. "Your people will be my people

and your God my God." Do you see how inextricably linked the people is with their God. She's saying, "By staying in this nation and I am also going to worship with your God."

Now think of it this way. Israel was a nation and who was Israel's king? How was it structured? God was it's king. You've heard of democracy. Rule of the people. Or a monarchy the rule of one. Well Israel was supposed to be a theocracy. Ruled by God. So, if God is supposed to be ruling this nation, then if the nation falls apart and is not blessed, well that says something about the God who is ruling it, doesn't it.

This was exactly Moses' line of reasoning when the children of Israel rebelled at Mount Sinai. Do you remember this story? The children of Israel are seriously rebelling. They are prostituting themselves before this golden calf and God sees this idolatry and he says, step aside Moses. I am going to obliterate this people off the face of the earth and start fresh. This is ridiculous. And you want to know what Moses says?

Exodus 32:12, Why should the Egyptians say, 'With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people. (ESV)

Every Egyptian knows that Israel's God is YHWH and what would it say about their God if they all died in the wilderness?

God you must bless them so that the nations might know that you are a loving, merciful, gracious God slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness.

And you know what? It worked! God was merciful.

So the Psalm says, bless us, so that other nations who know that we are followers of YHWH, will look on us and realize that you are worthy of praise and worship. Do you understand that? This is how the Psalm was originally understood and received. But there is a major application for us today as well.

Our Version

Today, we don't have a theocracy. Politically speaking, we are more like the period of the judges where every man does what is right in his own eyes. But the principle still applies. Because you, as a Christian, are supposed to be a theocracy of one. Who do you say is running your life, is Lord of your life, is KING in your life? Who is supposed to be calling the shots such that your life is totally different because you are being controlled by the king of the universe. Do you see how this works?

You see, it's good to pray to God, be gracious to me, let your face shine upon me. Transform me! I want others to see me transformed so they will be attracted to you!

And Let me be super honest with you. What they will be attracted to in you will not be what is available in the world. They won't be attracted to the grain. It's not nice cars. It's not fancy buildings. That is not what will attract them. The world has a better path to those things than church, by far. If you want those things, don't come to the church.

What is going to attract people, will be a treasure that they walked by a thousand times, but never saw the value of it. Do you remember the parable of the treasure hidden in the field. This is a one verse parable:

Matthew 13:44, "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. (ESV)

One of the main things this parable is trying to communicate is that true treasure is hidden. Everybody in the town knows about that old rocky field out there. It's been for sale for 20 years and nobody wants it. It's just junky old land.

And most people look at the church, look at the people in the church, they look at the person of Jesus and they say, "I have no use for that and they throw it in the dumpster. "I'm going to chase after other things, the obvious treasures, what everybody can see. Money, power, sex, influence, beauty, popularity.

When we pray, God bless me so that others may be blessed, what we are saying, is let me experience the joy of knowing you so that others can see that there is a treasure that is far more valuable than anything they ever saw.

Listen, the guy who sells all that he has and buys the field that has a billion-dollar treasure in it doesn't go down to buy the bank and say, "Oh man, this lot costs \$25,000. I've worked so hard for this money. I had to have multiple garage sales. I laid aside these bills \$5 and and \$10 dollars at time. This money that I've saved is so precious to me. The guy isn't their whining about how painful it is. No, in his JOY he sells all that he has.

If for some reason the guy is even slightly deliberating, you say, "Dude, think! Just think!" You have to say, "Look at the value of what's been offered."

This is the greatest testimony to a watching world. To have your heart so ignited by Christ and so unattached to the treasures of this world, because God is infinitely more valuable. This is so confusing to a watching world. Why would he not care about all that? What am I missing such that he would walk away from everything I care about to pursue something I think belongs in a dumpster. There's got to be something I'm not seeing. Either he's stark mad, or I missed something.

God bless me with more of who you are. Lord have your face

shine upon me. That's what I want more than anything else. Do you see how as you treasure Christ, as you are satisfied in him, as you are blessed by him, whether you gain a house or loose a house. Whether you are healed or whether you are in the sick bed that the blessing and the influence becomes simply being satisfied in Jesus Christ.

Special Corporate Prayer Time.

We are going to close with a song that Praises the name of Jesus and then Nate is going to walk us through a corporate time of prayer and then enjoy some fellowship together!