

Sermon for April 14, 2013 – Easter 3

Psalm 67

Theme: **Help us praise you, O God . . .**

- 1) For your wonderful blessings;
- 2) So your salvation may be known.

*For the director of music. With stringed instruments. A psalm. A song.
May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, (Selah)
² that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations.
³ May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you.
⁴ May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples justly and guide the nations of the earth. (Selah)
⁵ May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you.
⁶ Then the land will yield its harvest, and God, our God, will bless us.
⁷ God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth will fear him.*

I can't remember where, but I once read an account of an atheist who became Christian simply because of a dilemma he couldn't resolve: Jesus' resurrection. You see, as much as he proved it scientifically impossible and denied that it happened, there was still something He could not explain away: if Jesus' disciples really did "steal his body" from the tomb - how is it that they were willing to suffer and die for this grand hoax? Humanly speaking they had nothing to gain from it. Stranger yet were the actions of Paul. Why would he give up everything for Jesus – if his resurrection was faked? Paul's suffering for the sake of Christ rivals that of Job! Nobody labors and suffers for a hoax – if there is nothing to be gained by it? This particular atheist reasoned that the disciples and Paul must have seen something to cause them to witness Christ as tirelessly as they did. What they saw was the resurrected Christ!

Just think: the zeal the apostles had to praise God for his wonderful salvation still had its effect on an atheist some 1800 years later. Oh, that we had only an ounce of the zeal and enthusiasm the disciples had to praise God for His salvation. Imagine what would happen then! Actually, we don't have to imagine too hard. Our Psalm for this morning gives us a glimpse of what would happen; which we will consider this morning, under the theme: **Help us praise you, O God. . .** 1) *For your wonderful blessings.* 2) *So your salvation may be known.*

Part One: For your wonderful blessings

What made the apostles and all other Christians since them so zealous in praising Christ before others? It's the assurance of forgiveness Christ's resurrection brings. This is the greatest of many blessings that God showers upon the believer. And it is important for us to remember these blessings if we wish to have the same zeal those early Christians had in praising Christ before the world.

Our Psalm for this morning begins: *May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us.* This little prayer recalls for us the command the LORD gave Moses: *"Tell Aaron and his sons, 'This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: ²⁴ " 'The LORD bless you and keep you; ²⁵ the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; ²⁶ the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace." ' ²⁷ "So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them."* (Numbers 6:23-27)

Our prayer for help to praise God begins with a prayer for God's grace. What is grace? It is the LORD's underserved love for us sinners. It is seen in the fact that God loves us so much that He did not spare His only Son for us, but gave up him to save us all. (Romans 8:32) We pray that the LORD blesses us with a faith that is ready to recognize our sins and repent of them – trusting in His gracious love to forgive us for Christ's sake. And with this blessed knowledge of forgiveness, we ask that the LORD reminds us that we are his dearly loved children through faith in Christ Jesus. God loves us ever so dearly! Just as a father's face lights up at the sight of his little child running to him in love, so our heavenly Father's face shines on us as we run to him in prayer and meditation on all He has done. We are His children. He has adopted us through the blood of his Son, and has placed His name on us in Holy Baptism.

And why do we ask God to remind us of all his wonderful blessings? First and foremost so that we don't forget his love, that we don't forfeit his salvation by meeting it with indifference. Just as the parent of a soldier who died in combat never wants his nation to forget the sacrifice his son made – but always remember and appreciate it – so also our God wants us to remember and appreciate the sacrifice His Son made for us; lest we forget it and forfeit our forgiveness.

But our Psalm also speaks of another reason we want God to bless us with his grace: *that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations.*

Part Two: *So your salvation may be known.*

The LORD saved us for a purpose, and that purpose is that we might praise Him before the world so that others might hear of God's love for us in Christ, believe and be saved – for God *wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.* (1 Timothy 2:4)

Our Psalm continues: ³ *May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you.* ⁴ *May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples justly and guide the nations of the earth.* The Hebrew word translated as “praise” also has to meaning “to confess”. God wants us to praise Him – to confess before the world His wonderful salvation so that the world, in turn, can confess the goodness of God – and His goodness is personified in Christ.

Everything God does, He does to glorify His Son. He wants the people of this earth to be glad in Christ and confess Him as their loving king – who works in all things for the good of those who love him. Salvation was never meant to be reserved for one race of people. No, it has always been meant for everyone – and this is why we ask God to help us praise His Son in the world.

⁵ *May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you.* ⁶ *Then the land will yield its harvest, and God, our God, will bless us.*

At first glance we might think that this verse means if we praise God, then we will be physically blest with a good harvest of food, money and material wealth. But this is probably not the meaning of this verse. Rather, God is speaking of a different kind of harvest – the harvest of souls for His kingdom. Remember how I mentioned that the word “praise” also carries the meaning “to confess”? As we confess him to others, they will believe and start confessing Jesus to others, who will also start confessing Jesus to others, and so on. . .

Do you remember Jesus' parable of the sower, and the seed that fell on the path, rocks, thorns and field? The seed that fell on good soil produced a harvest of 30, 60 or 100 times that which was sown. That portion of the parable speaks of the same harvest our Psalm does.

In just a couple weeks we will be celebrating Pentecost. Did you know that Pentecost was originally a harvest festival God instituted for the Jews? But this festival was not only meant to celebrate the harvest of grain. It was also meant to foreshadow the harvest of believers through the proclamation of the Gospel. Think of what happened on the Pentecost immediately following Jesus' resurrection and ascension: The Lord sent his Spirit on His disciples. Peter preached a sermon and the LORD harvested 3000 souls from around the ancient world for his kingdom. And so the Church was blessed.

God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth will fear him.

When we praise the LORD, when we boldly confess his name as the apostles of old did, our confession will have an effect. The LORD promised through Isaiah: ¹⁰ *As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,* ¹¹ *so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.* (Isaiah 55:10-11)

Now, let's be clear. This promise do not mean that if we praise the LORD publicly that people will immediately be happy with our message and our Church will grow. No – remember the apostles! Their confession met was also met with rejection, ridicule and even persecution. The apostles also labored in cities where only a few – if any – believed. But, in God's good time, their confession did cause a harvest. So it is with us. Our labor with the Gospel will probably not bring immediate results. Our praise of God might be met with rejection and ridicule. But the seed will have been planted. And in God's good time it will sprout, grow and produce fruit.

And so we pray: Help us praise you, O God. Remove all apathy and complacency from our hearts. How? By reminding us of your many blessings; by reminding us of your great salvation. Bless us with your Gospel, dear LORD, so that we might be moved to confess you and your salvation to our community, and with our offerings and prayers to all people in the world. Then your salvation will be known, and all the ends of the earth will fear you. Amen.