

GOD'S HEART FOR THE WORLD

(Sermon Summary)

Reading: Psalm 67:1-7

The Psalms are full of variety. They are there to suit different aspects of the believer's pilgrimage through life. Having just reflected upon Harvest, we can see that Psalm 67:6 contains that theme with the Lord providing material blessings for the people.

1. God's heart to bless the world in the Old Testament.

Israel, as a nation enjoying special privileges and responsibilities, was only to enjoy that role for a season. Its place in the plan of God, in this special sense, was always destined to be temporary and not permanent. Though they were the recipients of the law, promises, including that of the Messiah being born to them, and covenants, the Lord's heart was always to bless all the nations of the earth and to do them good. These are referred to as the nations (v2, v4), the peoples (v3, v4) and the ends of the earth (v7). This is something we saw recently in Psalm 65: 5, 8.

It was a sad fact to relate that Israel largely failed in her mission, as a specially favoured nation, to show that favour to the rest of the nations. She did not yield to God that which God deserved and eventually the nation was destined to lose some of her privileges through exile. The Lord suffered His name to be ridiculed by the nations, though there were some memorable defeats that He inflicted upon the nations, such as the defeat of the King of Assyria, Sennacherib, as he attempted to conquer Jerusalem.

But throughout this period, when the Lord especially revealed Himself to Israel rather than any other nation, the Scripture in the Old Testament was full of promises that, one day, the Lord would reveal Himself to all the nations. Examples can be found in Psalm 22: 27-28; Isaiah 42:6; and Isaiah 49:5-6. When the Lord Jesus entered the Temple, shortly before His passion, He declared that it was meant to be a house of prayer for all nations. Also, there were lots of indications of the kinds of people that, one day, would receive the gospel through the calling of Gentile people, like Rahab and Ruth. We can also see His kindness to Gentiles, such as the widow of Zarephath, and the healing of Naaman. The ends of the earth were already, in Old Testament times, learning to fear the Lord, and the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ proved through, for example, the mercy shown to the Gentile Syro-Phoenician woman, that His grace was to touch the world. The Day of Pentecost gave further proof of this, as did the calling of Cornelius.

2. Large-hearted prayer.

The same large-heartedness, shown by the Lord, is to be shown by us too. We also should pray that the nations of the world would be blessed. This is found in lots of places in the Psalms, such as Psalm 96: 1-9; 97:1; 98:4; 99:1-3; and 100:1. In the Old Testament, Israel, functioning at her best, was to desire blessing for herself that she might show forth that blessing to the world. She was to desire grace, provision, deliverance, mercy and joy, that she could then convey those things to the world and testify to the reality and power of the Lord.

We might ask ourselves whether we have large hearts, as the Lord teaches us to have here? Do we desire that others should prosper? Or do we just think of ourselves? We should not want to have a self-centred Christianity that is only interested in what the Lord would do for us, rather than how we might reflect His character in kindness shown to others. Sometimes we might be guilty of a kind of closet racism, looking on other people as less worthy or downgrading them. We have to ask ourselves whether we value conversions of people in other nations or devalue them. Similarly, do we pray for other nations and their needs, including the missionaries and churches in those nations?

3. Do people see God's blessing in us?

But this Psalm also asks of us whether we have actually received enough from Him so as to have something to pass on to others. This culture is very hard-hearted. It has, although it would not want to admit this, been Christianised through the centuries. Non-Christians recognize the importance of good works, of caring for the weak, of having an interest in other nations. Christians do not have the monopoly on these things and it, therefore, can be quite unremarkable when Christians do 'good works.'

So perhaps we need to look particularly at the people that we are. Does the world around us see joy in us? Does it see us positive and comforted during this continuing pandemic and economic crisis? Does it see us forward-looking and self-controlled over our fears and concerns? When we speak to people about the good news that we have, are we credible as witnesses? When we talk about what the Lord has done for us, do people see that we really mean it? Does it sound like and look like good news?

We should pray for more of the Lord's grace and blessing that we have presently received. We should share the confidence of vv 9-10 because of our past experience of the Lord's goodness. The more we see answered prayer, the more confidence we have as we go forward. Perhaps years of spiritual neglect of our own walk with the Lord needs urgent repair. We need the Lord to do something in us, as individuals, and as a church. We pray that the church will have a future and a hope. This could be part of the answer to this prayer.