

St. Stephen Lutheran Church - Pastor Mark Gullerud - January 1, 2025 - New Year's Day

**Sermon Text Psalm 67** *God be merciful to us and bless us, And cause His face to shine upon us. Selah <sup>2</sup> That Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations. <sup>3</sup> Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You. <sup>4</sup> Oh, let the nations be glad and sing for joy! For You shall judge the people righteously, And govern the nations on earth. Selah <sup>5</sup> Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You. <sup>6</sup> Then the earth shall yield her increase; God, our own God, shall bless us. <sup>7</sup> God shall bless us, And all the ends of the earth shall fear Him. (NKJV)*

**Sermon Theme: A Timely Prayer for Us and All Others**

1. That God bless us with His saving favor in our time of grace.
2. And as the saving message of the Gospel goes out that all the nations of the world be blessed in their time of grace and join us in praising God.

In the name of our eternal Lord and Savior God, who desires everyone to be blessed with everlasting salvation, dear fellow redeemed;

Time is one of those important measurements we consider in this earthly life as this temporal world makes its way from eternity to eternity, that is, from the creation of the world when time began to the end of this world when the timelessness of eternity will commence once again.

With the aid of the Bible record we are able to calculate from the beginning of time that the Lord has been overseeing and governing the world with His providential care accordingly His gracious purpose for some 6,000 years or so. In all His governance of this world which He carries out in righteousness, it has been and ever shall be His ultimate purpose to rule in such a way that people the world over may come to have a share in His eternal kingdom. Contrary to the faulty beliefs of the evolutionist, we are not living in an ancient world measuring in the millions or billions of years nor are we residing in a realm that is merely subject to blind luck and chance happenings.

When we come to this juncture in time, we add another year from the time Jesus made His way into this world born of the virgin Mary. We will refer to the new year as 2025 A.D. The letters A.D. are an abbreviation for the Latin words of anno Domini which means, in the year of our Lord since Christ was born.

Another measurement of time we keep track of is the number of years each of us has lived in this world. In the responsive reading taken from Psalm 90, which we used earlier in the service, we were reminded that we might ordinarily expect to live for some 70 or 80 years or so before we come to the end of our earthly pilgrimage. Here too, the length of our lives is not left up to chance, for as the Word of God reveals our times are in God's hands. The Lord is the one who determines how long we will live before we enter that timeless realm of eternity that lies beyond this temporal world.

This brings us to an eternally critical measurement of time which is referred to as the time of grace. The teachings from Holy Scripture explain this as being the length of time the Lord in His rich grace and mercy grants each and every person the opportunity to come to a saving knowledge and faith in the Savior of the world Jesus Christ. And once we learn of Him and put our trust in Him for forgiveness and salvation the chief most

concern of God in the remainder of our time of grace is to preserve us in the Christian faith to the very end and to use us as His ambassadors to bring others to a knowledge of their Savior.

No one knows except God Himself how long that time of grace will be for each person. It can be anywhere from a short while after birth to the upper years of senior citizenship. Not knowing how long that time of grace will be impresses upon us the importance of making the most of the time here on earth to attain and retain a saving faith and to be instrumental in others reaching that eternally critical goal in life.

In this very important matter, Psalm 67 supplies us with a very timely prayer to use for ourselves and all others. It is a prayer that God bless us with His saving favor in our time of grace and as the saving message goes out in the world that all the nations of the world may also be blessed in this manner and join us in praising God in our remaining time of grace.

That part of the prayer which we offer for ourselves as children of God is found in the opening verse - "God be merciful to us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us." This petition to God has a familiar sound to it, for it contains the very same elements of blessing God instructed the High Priest Aaron to confer upon the people of God. Those words of blessing have been the same used at the close of our worship services week after week through out the year, namely, "The LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace."

We have come to know and appreciate the fact that the benediction spoken by the pastor are not words of wishful thinking or high sounding platitudes which have no affect upon our lives. No, these are words of blessing spoken in God's behalf which express His intent to pour out upon us the bountiful blessings of His infinite mercy, His unbounded grace, and His divine favor. This threefold blessing is assuring us that the Triune God is faithful in graciously helping us in every need of body and soul -

- that the heavenly Father, our Creator and Preserver, cares for all our earthly needs and keeps us safe from all harm and danger;
- that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is ever favorable to us in causing God to graciously smile upon us by forgiving all our sins each day without fail, on account of His atoning sacrifice on the cross;
- and that the Holy Spirit leads us to repent of our sins every day
- and bless us with the spirit of peace by giving us faith to trust in and lay hold of God's pardon in Christ Jesus,
- and with the spirit of love so that we treat others with kindness and consideration,
- and also bless us with the spirit of hope by imparting to us the confident knowledge that because of Jesus' work of salvation we will most certainly be entering heaven upon our departure from this world.

So then, in the petition we offer up in the first verse of Psalm 67, we are telling the LORD that our request of Him are the very same blessings He has promised us in His

benediction. It is in a sense saying to the LORD, yea and amen to His promised blessings and telling Him this also is our prayerful desire of Him.

As we look back over the year just past, all of us can say in all truthfulness that God has been faithful in blessing us in all these many ways just as He promised. He has fed, clothed, and housed us. When we were sick or injured, He was there by our side to help us and in many cases healed us. In times of trials and tribulations, He sustained us and kept us safe with His protective care. Through His Word and Sacrament He nourished, comforted, refreshed, and preserved our souls in His saving grace. And when the time of grace was brought to an end for those dear loved ones who died in the Lord, we have the wonderful comfort of knowing that they entered the eternal bliss of heaven. Thanks and praise be to God for His gracious and bountiful blessings.

The second part of the prayer found in Psalm 67 is for the sake of all other peoples and nations in the world. In verse 2, we join the psalmist in petitioning the LORD, saying to Him “that Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations.” This is basically a mission prayer. We are saying to the LORD that we greatly desire to see the fulfillment of the promise that God made to the Old Testament patriarch Abraham when He said, “in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Gen. 28:14) We have come to rejoice in the fact that the promised seed of Abraham through whom all the families of the earth shall be blessed is Jesus Christ.

In order for all the families of the earth to be blessed in this way and to join us in praising God with glad and joyful hearts, the saving message of the gospel needs to continue to go out both near and far by Christians like you and me.

When this takes place, there is a wonderful harvest that occurs which the psalmist speaks of in verse 6 where he says, “Then the earth shall yield her increase; God, our own God, shall bless us.” This harvest or increase that the earth yields is most likely a harvest of souls and not of grain or fruit. It is the glorious ingathering of precious souls into the kingdom of God for whom Jesus shed His precious blood. In this way, God, our God, shall bless us and all other peoples.

Having come to the end of another year in the long history of this world, there are Christians who wonder why the Lord Jesus didn't come during this past year to bring an end to this world which is referred to as a vale of tears and usher in eternity. All of us who cling to Jesus in faith for eternal salvation are eagerly awaiting His return to usher in the new eternal world, that new world of heaven where we will be living on a new perfected earth with none of the problems we experience in this present world and living there with a glorified and perfected body and soul never again to face death. Looking forward to that day, we have been praying for the Lord Jesus to come, and to come quickly. But that final end time did not come this past year.

There have also been Christians who have wondered why the Lord hasn't as yet brought their time of grace to an end by taking them out of this world through death so that they can finally join the heavenly host and dwell with God in eternity.

Why is it that God hasn't brought an end to this world yet? It is because there are still precious souls in the world that God would have us reach out to with the gospel so

that they can be brought into His kingdom of grace and finally into His kingdom of glory. And why is it that God hasn't taken this or that fellow Christian out of this world to join Him in heaven? It is because we still have a divine purpose to serve, and that purpose has much to do with us letting our Christian light shine in the world about us so that the light of God's saving grace in Christ Jesus might shine in the hearts of other sinners.

Whenever we come to this juncture in time where the old year is drawing to a close and the new year is starting up, many have had the custom of making new year's resolutions. As a Christian there is no greater resolution to make than this twofold one - first of all, to have the resolve of looking to the Lord each day to preserve us in the Christian faith through our use of His Word and Sacrament so that when our time of grace comes to an end we will enter the eternal life in heaven, and secondly, that God grant us the grace to do all we can to carry out our primary purpose in life as His dear children, namely to share and to spread abroad the gospel of Christ so that all the nations of the world may also know the joy of their salvation and praise our Savior God in time and through out all eternity.

To that end, we pray together with the psalmist, "God be merciful to us and bless us, And cause His face to shine upon us. That Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations. Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You. Oh, let the nations be glad and sing for joy! For You shall judge the people righteously, And govern the nations on earth. Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You. Then the earth shall yield her increase; God, our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us, And all the ends of the earth shall fear Him." Amen.