

**Stafford Carson**

**60<sup>th</sup> Briarwood Global Missions Conference**

**Let All the People Praise Him**

**Psalm 67**

It's an absolute joy and delight for me to be here. Especially on the 60th anniversary of your Nations conference. I count it a great honor to be the Frank Barker Chair of Evangelism and Missions at Westminster Seminary, and it's in memory of his leadership and his vision that I believe this conference was established. Frank had a great vision for the role of the local church in terms of global missions and your presence here today and the 60 years of consistent witness and work through this conference is testimony to that original vision that Frank had. And we rejoice in all that has been accomplished and in all that will still yet be accomplished as we walk together and serve the Lord together.

Let me turn your attention now to the scriptures in the Book of Psalms. And we're reading in the 67th Psalm. The psalmist writes,

*May God be gracious to us and bless us, and make his face to shine upon us, 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. 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. Amen.*

May the Holy Spirit, who inspired these words, be pleased to bless them to our hearts today.

Alexander Duff was the first overseas missionary of the Church of Scotland. He went to India with his new bride, and in 1829, and after 25 years of missionary service, Duff came back to Scotland and then subsequently visited America. In 1854 and preached a sermon on this passage Psalm 67. Hughes Oliphant Auld called it one of the most significant sermons ever preached. It was entitled: Missions - The Chief End of the Christian Church, and it was an exposition of the opening two verses of Psalm 67.

*May God be gracious to us and bless us. Make his face to shine upon us, that your way may be known on earth, and your saving power among all nations.*

Duff preached that sermon in the Broadway Tabernacle of New York City to over 200 clergymen and many others. The sermon lasted two hours, so you'll be relieved that I'm not going to repeat it all here today. And the message was so powerful that James Alexander, son of Archibald Alexander, pastor of Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, was heard to say whenever Duff concluded, Shut up. Not in this tabernacle. Let no man dare to speak to us here. After that, he thought it was such a complete and perfect word that nothing more needed to be said. And

the effect of that sermon was really wonderful and marvelous, and especially at Princeton Theological Seminary. The effect was immense. The entering class of students in 1855 was unusually large, and there were indications that the Holy Spirit was at work during that academic year. There was greater attendance at prayer meetings and a greater seriousness among the students. And the next year, 95 students entered the seminary, the largest number of students at Princeton in the 19th century, and from Princeton there was a great stream of graduates ready to serve the church all around the world.

Calhoun says one out of every three students leaving the seminary during its first 50 years went out to preach the gospel on missionary ground. Almost 600 served for at least some time in what was described as destitute places in America. 37 went to American Indians, 17 became missionaries. To the slaves, 127 men went to Fordham mission fields from Turkey to the Sandwich Islands, from Brazil to Afghanistan, from West Africa to northern China.

And the opening sentence of Duff sermon was really a summary statement of the whole psalm. He described Psalm 67 as a sublime prayer for the inward prosperity of the church and its outward universal extension. As we reflect today, friends, for a few minutes on this Psalm. That's our prayer. God blessed that Psalm to those who heard it all those years ago, that in several similar measure as we listen to God's Word today, we pray that God will speak to our hearts. And as a result of this conference, people will hear God's call and will go out into the world with the good news of Jesus Christ. May it be not just for the inward prosperity of the church as we think of this Psalm, but may it be for its outward universal extension. It's a prayer and supplication for God's blessing on God's people. It's a prayer that we can pray in the 21st century because more than anything else, we need God's blessing on his church, not only for our inward prosperity, as I've called it, but also for this ministry and work and calling. We have, in terms of the universal extension of the mission of the church. And make his face to shine upon us. Reminiscent of that great covenantal blessing pronounced by Aaron on his sons at number six. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. And each phrase of this Psalm is full of meaning and significance. God, be gracious to us. Praise the psalmist. God, forgive us and pardon us all our sins.

Lord, please show us grace and mercy and bless us. Convey every gift and every grace that is really needful. Unnecessary not only for time, but for the eternity. Make your face to shine upon us. Cheer us with this smile of your love and your approval. Cause the sun of righteousness to rise on our darkened souls. With healing in his beams. And what he is praying is clear and clean. Lord, we need you. Lord, we crave your blessing, your grace, your presence, the warmth of your smile and the light of your countenance. And that's our prayer.

I know for you good folks here in Briarwood, but it's a prayer for the whole global church of Jesus Christ, that God would be pleased to smile upon us and to bless us. But notice that the psalmist doesn't stop there. He doesn't intend that he and his fellow worshipers, as representatives of the visible church, should absorb all the mercy, all the blessing, all the light of

Jehovah's countenance. He doesn't pray suddenly for their own blessing and their own prosperity and their own happiness, because having fervently prayed for God's blessing to descend upon himself and every member of that church, he immediately adds, and here's the true evangelistic and missionary spirit, that thy way may be known on earth. You're serving among all nations. Folks, there is a glorious purpose to us receiving God's blessing and grace.

Obviously, if we haven't received his grace and mercy, we have nothing to share with others. If we have received no light, no truth, no wisdom, we're in no position to communicate life, our truth or wisdom to anyone else. But the psalmist establishes this important connection here between us attending and receiving God's blessing on the one hand, and sharing and distributing that message and that blessing to others.

And there's a grand and a glorious end in view in this prayer. The linking preposition is very important. That or so that your way may be. No one on earth. Your saving power among all nations. And the emphasis on the so that or in this way or by this instrumentality that our being blessed, and by the light of your countenance shining upon us, therefore your way may be northerners. What's the reason we seek God's blessing? What's the purpose that underpins God's blessing of his people? It is primarily that he might be known. God will not rest until he, the true and the living God is known among all the peoples of this world. And for the past 200 years, there's been great progress in taking the good news of God to the nations. And the result has been, as many of you know personally, there's been a stunning and remarkable shift in the center of gravity of world Christianity. It has moved from the north and west of the planet, to the south and east of the planet. Beginning of the 20th century, European Europeans dominated the World church, with 70% of the world's Christian population being European or of European descent.

By the end of the 20th century, the European percentage of world Christianity had shrunk from 70% to 28% of the total. Latin America and Africa combined. Without even considering Asia, made up 43% of the world's Christians. That is astonishing. That is testimony to God's blessing upon his missions and his missionary people who have gone out into the world.

In 1900, Africa had 10 million Christians, about 10% of its population. 100 years later, that figure had grown to 360 million, representing almost half of the continent's population. Did you know that today the number of practicing Christians in China may be approaching the same number of practicing Christians in the United States? It's estimated that more Christian believers attended church in China last Sunday than in all of so-called Christian Europe.

The number of people in church in Kenya each Sunday is greater than the number attending in Canada. More Christian workers from Brazil are active in cross-cultural ministry outside their homeland than those from Britain and Canada, put together God's great purpose in advancing his kingdom across the world so that his name might be known is moving ahead. And there are folks here today who, in a significant and wonderful way, have contributed to that advance, and the many who have gone out from this conference over the past 60 years have contributed to

the great advance of the gospel all across the world. Not just that God may be known, but that he may be praised and worshiped. That all the peoples praise you, says verse three. Verse five repeats it that the peoples praise you, God. Let all the peoples praise you. And here's the great end in view in terms of redemptive history, that God is gathering together the people to himself, who will be his worshiping people, who will bring glory and honor and praise to the name of the only one who is worthy. And in doing that, God's people are to enjoy his presence and his worship. Let the nations be glad, says verse four, and sing for joy. God will not be content until all the nations are glad and delighting in him. Not just praising God, not just knowing God, but rejoicing in the Lord, and that he might be feared and revered and honored. Verse seven says, let all the ends of the earth feared them. Let them give him respect and honor and reverence that he deserves.

So the purpose of God is clear. And at the heart of Psalm 67 is the revelation that God is good. That his goodness is known and experienced in Jesus Christ. And its ignorance of that truth that lies behind so much of the world's sadness and so much of the world's unbelief. The tragedy of our community is the tragedy of our world at large, is that Jesus Christ is not receiving the glory and praise that is due to him. The problem of our world is that other gods, gods of our own creation, are receiving the worship and the devotion of our hearts. And it seems as though in many places and the other God. But the Lord is reckoned to be worthy of worship. We worship the gods of our sport, our hobby, our pleasures, even our families and our entertainments. Before we worship God, we put our tribal loyalties before the kingdom of Christ. And that not only results in emptiness and frustration and sadness in our own lives, but that means supremely that God is denied his rightful place. Quite simply, we worship the wrong gods, and the task of mission and evangelism is to redirect the hearts of men and women and boys and girls to men who alone is worthy of our worship and our devotion. Remember how the apostle put it in Romans one, describing how we turn away from God to worship idols? That's the key feature of life in our broken, fallen world.

For all they knew, God, they did not honor them as God nor give thanks to him. But they became futile in their thinking. Their foolish hearts were darkened, claiming to be wise. What happened? They became fools. They exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. So our task and mission and evangelism is to call people back from the worship of idols to the worship of the one, true and living God. In the ancient world of pagan deities and in our modern world, which is no less religious and no less idol worship in the call of Psalm 67 is to worship the only true God. Let the peoples praise you, O God. And what is it specifically that God wants to be known about him? What kind of a God are we declaring and calling people to worship and praise?

Well, he is supremely a God of justice. He does what is right. And just look at verse four, that the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you. Judge the peoples with equity, and to judge with equity means that when the final judgment of the nations comes, God will not be partial. No one will be condemned because of the color of his skin.

No one will be condemned because of their lack of intellect or their lack of education, or the place of their birth. No bribes will be taken or considered. There will be no sophisticated plea bargaining or backroom deals. The final judgment will proceed on the basis of the impeccable righteousness and the perfect justice of God. And folks, the people of this world.

Need to know and hear that truth, because they will all stand on equal footing with every other nation before God. They'll all be judged by one standard of justice. God until stress. Because God is a God of equity and justice, and he wants to be known among the nations that that's the kind of God he is. He's a God of sovereign power.

Verse four says, let the nations be glad and sing for joy. For you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth. Many nations in our world call themselves sovereign states. Many leaders of the nations believe that they are in total control and that they have the final word. But while they may choose to publish and promote that kind of narrative, we know that the reality is much different.

They are not in complete control of everything. The fact of the matter is, the Lord alone is sovereign, and God wants to be known as the one who guides the nations on earth. God sets the destiny for every nation. He wants the nations and the leaders of the nations to know that he rules over all and supremely. He wants to be known as a God of grace.

This is the very heart of the gospel. Verses one and two are clear. May God be gracious to us and bless us. Make his face to shine upon us, that your way may be known on earth. Your saving power among all nations. God is a gracious and a loving Savior. He desires that all nations hear about his salvation and his rescue of sinners in the person and work of Jesus Christ, His Son, and from our New Testament perspective.

We understand the full and the majestic and the global implications of these words. God's grace, his saving power, have been fully and finally revealed in Jesus, our Redeemer and Deliverer. We declare with the apostles that their salvation and no one else. There is no other name under heaven given among men, by which we must be saved. And it's these great truths about God that has driven and energized missionary endeavor and the missionary enterprise from the earliest days of the church.

The fact that there's one true and living God that is infinitely just and holy, that he's sovereign over all the nations, and that he is gracious to all who will believe. He wants that to be known. And whilst we rejoice in the great success of global missions in recent years, we still acknowledge that there's work to be done.

There are many who still need to hear about our great God, who need to be drawn into the praise and worship of our Almighty, gracious, sovereign Savior. For the past three years, Westminster Seminary has been offering biblical training to a group of Christian leaders from Yemen. 40 million people in Yemen. The number of Christians is minimal. Less than one half of 1%.

29 different people groups in Yemen, and 20 of them have yet to be reached with the gospel. One of our students runs a Yemeni Christian radio ministry. It's now delivered over the internet. He was telling us about a phone call he had from a man in a remote area of northern Yemen who was asking for a Bible. He works in a farm, and at lunchtime, he and a few Christian friends would gather in a secret location on the farm to listen to the broadcast.

And at the beginning of each program, the presenter would read a chapter from the Bible. And these farm workers have no Bibles, and they would write down urgently and eagerly what was being read so that they could read it again. So hungry, so eager to hear more from the Bible. More about the Christian faith. I'm talking to my dear friends here who are the college students.

Could it be that God would place some of this burden on your heart today, so that you would feel the call of God to give your life to this enormous task of taking the gospel to people he has not yet heard? The Joshua Project you can check it out on the website tracks the unreached people groups in the world.

Estimates that there are 17,000 different people groups in the world, and 7000 of those people groups remain unreached with the gospel representing 42% of the world's population. So over 40% of the world has not yet been evangelized. And many of our missionaries are sent to people who already have access to the gospel. Only a small percentage carry this burden of going to unreached people groups.

It's not wrong to pray for God to be gracious to us and bless us. It's not wrong for us to seek God's blessing and provision in our lives, but we ask for what purpose? In Alexander Duff's words, it's not just for the inward prosperity of the church. It's for the outward universal extension of the church. And the simple fact is, God has blessed us so that we might be a blessing.

God has blessed you in this world and in your community in which you live, so that you may be a blessing to those around you. Your goal and mine should be to work so that God's way may be known on earth and his saving power among all nations. So when you pull out your debit card or your credit card to buy food or clothes, or when you buy a house or a car, pause to think again. Why has God blessed me like this? Why have I been given these resources? The answer is it's an order that you may be a blessing to the peoples of this world. As an outsider and a Brit, can I say God has blessed this nation of the United States enormously. You have so many resources, not just material, but in terms of pastors and professors and seminaries, well trained pastors who can preach God's word.

God has blessed you, and you have lived up to the calling of God in so many ways. But I'll call on you again today in this age. God has blessed you so that you may be a blessing. And so that from this great nation, people make light and the name of Christ to share the good news of the gospel.

Early in 1885, on a wet winter's night in London, a crowd of about 3000 people gathered in the Exeter Hall on the strand. Exeter Hall was one of the venues where Spurgeon preached, and on the platform of the hall sat 40 Cambridge undergraduates above their heads occasionally hung a large map of China, stretching from side to side, across the platform and on the table was a small pile of Chinese New Testaments. At the stroke of the hour, the chairman of the meeting entered, followed by seven young men slightly older than the undergraduates, but all by their drafts and their burning man of education and position. After a prayer and to him and some introductory remarks, this group of young men, already dubbed the Cambridge Seven. Those in turn to tell the crowd at Hall Wilder why they were leaving England the next day to serve as missionaries in inland China. One by one, they told how in the past 18 months, God had called them to renounce their careers and to give themselves to Christian service overseas. Among them was a stud, the Eton, Cambridge and England cricketer acknowledged to be the most brilliant cricketer of his day, and one of those who spoke that evening was a young man called Stanley Smith. Stanley Smith had been struck in the Cambridge University, ruined it, and he told the audience, we do not go to that far distant field to speak of doctrine or theory, but of a living, bright, present and rejoicing Savior. The apostles and their converts of old did not like to propagate the milk and water of religion, but the cream of the gospel, and to tell what a blessed thing it was to have the love of the Lord Jesus ringing in their hearts. This, dear friends, he said, is the gospel. We want to recommend it and then he began to speak of the many thousands and millions of people who had not heard of Jesus. And he described the story of Jesus feeding the 5000 as if it was taking place in the hall that evening in which they met. And he pictured the disciples distributing the food. But he said, what if, at the end of the it thrill, they stop and turn back to the first row and feed those it rules again, pouring bread and fish into their laps and piloted about them. What do you suppose our Lord would say? He would say, what are you doing? Andrew! Peter! John, what are you doing? Don't you see the starving maidens behind?

Stanley Smith concluded his remarks by saying this. How can one leave an audience such as this? It seems to me as if Christ has come right into your midst and has looked into the face of you men and women, young, old and middle aged. And he would take hold with loving hands of each one. And looking into your eyes would point to the wounds in his pierced side and ask, do you love me? And you would say, yes, Lord, you know that I love thee. And what is the test of that love that you love me? If you love me, keep my commandments. And what master do you command? Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.

If you have a sense today that Christ is speaking to you, then in this book there are lots of opportunities for you to move forward on that sense of God at work in your life. Join in the Global Missions team, joining in concerted prayer for the cause of world mission. Going on a short term mission trip. Could it be that God is calling you to a special ministry to take the gospel to the nations?

Samuel Miller was professor at Princeton Seminary in the 19th century. He too preached on Psalm 67, and he ended his sermon with these moving words. What more worthy object can we

seek than contributing to fill the earth with the glory of the Lord? Let us pray that we may not be found wanting in the payment of that mighty debt that we owe to our Divine Master, and to a perishing world.

Let us all more and more aspire to the honor of being workers together with God in his name. The triumphs of Emmanuel's universal reign. Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Let the whole earth be filled with your glory. Amen and amen.

Father, we give you thanks today for the clarity and the call of your word. And we pray that by your Spirit you would speak to all our hearts today, that in understanding the immense ways in which we have been blessed, we may determine that we will be a blessing to others.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen.