

SHINE ON US, GRACIOUS LORD!

Psalm 67: 1-7, John 1: 1-18 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

One special aspect of Christ's birth is the presence of lights and various kinds of lights at Jesus' birth. The fullness of the time had come when Jesus was born, Paul tells us in Galatians 4: 4. The world back in the days of Caesar Augustus was waiting for a Savior, and today, beloved, our world is still waiting for the Savior. The Hebrews, the Jews, known as Israelites, God's chosen people, had been ordained by God to keep His Law. The truth is, they gambled their future and sacrificed their future on the altar of the immediate. The Israelites veered so far off course that only a handful of them were still waiting for Messiah when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. The people walking in darkness needed to see God's great light in the face of Jesus. Yet, because the Israelites chose to mix their faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with the gods of the heathen all around them, God came into their world almost unnoticed. The Jews rejected their own Scripture about the Messiah being born of a virgin in Isaiah 7: 14. They rather created their own understanding of who the Messiah would be and what kind of Messiah He would be—a king to deliver them from bondage to the Romans. The Jews were living in bondage to the Romans as a nation possessed. The empire of Rome was so large, that it could be said, to some extent, that the whole world was in captivity to the Romans, and the whole world was lying captive to sin. From Adam to Malachi, the trail of man was a sad history of thousands of recorded acts of disobedience to God. The fullness of this disobedience had come to pass as the world and especially God's people hit rock bottom.

The nation of Israel was living in individual and national pain, feeling alone, abandoned, separated from God and detached from any divine hope. The cry of the nation of "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" was seldom heard as the nation was living apart from God. Yet, if King Hezekiah wrote Psalm 67 as most commentators believe, things were very similar 750 years before Christ was born. Even 1500 years before Messiah Jesus was born, the Lord spoke to Moses in Numbers 6: 22-26. We read, "The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, "Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them, "The Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace." When God spoke about His face shining on others, in Numbers, it was about God shining on the Israelites. In 517 BC, Daniel prayed to God in Daniel 9:17. Daniel prayed fervently for the nation of Judah living in captivity in Babylon. He prayed, " Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of Your servant and to his pleas for mercy, and for Your sake, O Lord, make Your face shine upon Your

sanctuary, which is desolate.” Babylon had since been defeated by Darius, the son of Ahasuerus, who was by descent, a Mede. Yet, Daniel was in Babylon, thinking of the defeated state of the temple in Jerusalem. Daniel was calling for Messiah to come then. The call for God’s face to shine on His people is a Messianic prayer. Five hundred years before Daniel, Asaph wrote Psalm 80: 1-3 crying out to God for deliverance then. Listen to the utter despair and desperation in the song of Asaph, one of King David’s three chief musicians who presided over the sacred choral worship services. Asaph cried out, “Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock; You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth. Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh, stir up Your might and come to save us! Restore us, O God; let Your face shine, that we may be saved!” Apparently, Asaph wrote Psalm 80 during a time when Israel was enslaved. How do you write a hymn of celebration and praise for God’s people to sing when they are enslaved in captivity, captivity to sin? The sin was so great that it had provoked God to cause Him to turn away from helping His people. Asaph’s cry for his nation’s predicament was asking God to once again shine His face on His repentant people. Asaph was crying in essence for Messiah to come for the Jews.

The words of Asaph were not new. For centuries, at the close of every worship service, the Levitical priests would utter the solemn benediction that called for God’s shining face—the words Moses uttered to Aaron. They would pray the prayer, “The Lord bless thee, and keep thee, The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.” Three times God’s people would repeat the name "Lord" or "Jehovah"—Yahweh—the Self-existent Eternal God. For centuries the Jews would make the same three requests of God... "bless and keep us"; be "gracious to us"; and "give us peace." They knew the only way these three requests could be answered was for God to let them see His shining face. God had made His face shine on them in the Exodus, when He sent manna from heaven, when He defeated their enemies from the Canaanites, the Amorites all the way down to defeating Sennacherib and the Assyrians in the days of Hezekiah. When God would shine down on His people, the people would respond in short-lived obedience, and then the cycle of sin would reoccur. Could the cycle of sin ever be broken? Not just the Jews, but the whole world needed a Savior, and the cycle of sin broken. Asaph knew that there would be no salvation apart from God’s favor; and no conversion apart from God’s grace. Thus Asaph led God’s people in a song of repentance, crying, “Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.” Yet, in Psalm 67, a remarkable occurrence happens. This tiny short psalm introduces the same plea for God to shine upon His people, but for hundreds of years, everyone has called Psalm 67 “The Missionary Psalm.” King Hezekiah, if he

is the writer is crying out not only for the face of God, of Messiah to shine on the Jews, but to shine on all the nations—on all us Gentiles. Listen afresh to the words of this mighty psalm for it is speaking of us, beloved. “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!” Beloved, I come to you with God’s Missionary Psalm.

Is Psalm 67: 1-7 obscure, with this missionary aspect of Messiah’s coming anywhere else? No! Way back nearly 2000 years before Jesus was born, the Lord appeared to Abraham and said, in Genesis 12: 1-3, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” God had given His people the word of God in writing, but now, in the fullness of time, God was going to shine upon not only the Jews, but upon all flesh and give them His Word made flesh, in His incarnate Son, born of a woman. Today I want to link The Missionary Psalm—psalm 67 with the Christmas text of John 1: 1-18, because John adds the picture that includes us, saying, “Jesus came unto His own, the Jews, but they received Him not, but as many as received Him, to them God gave the power to become the sons of God, even to those that believe in His Name.” Today, I want us to look at the Missionary Psalm and explore why, as yet, the nation of Israel, as a nation has refused to allow the Messianic Light of Jesus’ face to shine upon them. The lessons we learn from the unbelieving Jewish nation are huge lessons for us all—Christmas lessons that we need to remember as we sing of Christ’s Light and read of Christ’s Light in His Word. The question I want us to explore is “What keeps us from allowing the fullness of Christ’s face to shine upon us? The response of the nation of Israel gives us three huge lessons to remember:

GOD’S GRACIOUS FACE CANNOT SHINE ON US IF WE REFUSE TO KNOW JESUS.

(I.) Notice Psalm 67: 1-2 “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.” This Hebrew word “known” in Psalm 67: 2 is **yada**. Yada means to intimately know or to be joined to God or to a spouse. We read in Genesis 4: 1, “And Adam knew Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain.” God’s shining face is not available to those who know of Him, even

those who speak and sing of Him or those who do great miracles in His name. In Matthew 7: 23, we read that Jesus someday will say to many—to multitudes, “Depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness or iniquity, I never knew you.” In our New Testament text today, in John 1: 9, 10 states, “The true Light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not **know** Him. The Greek word for “know” in John 1: 10 is **ginosko**. Ginosko means to perceive, to understand, to come to know personally, or to understand completely. Now we know that there were exceptions to the truth that the world as a whole did not know Jesus. But the exceptions proved the rule, and the rule was that people chose the darkness over the Light. Herod got to know that Messiah was born, but when he said to the wise men, “Go and search for the young Child, come again and tell me where you find Him, so I can come and worship Him also.” Was Herod interested in worshipping or knowing Jesus? Never! His word “worship” really meant, so I can kill Him.

Beloved, whatever knowing is, it is not the same as knowing something about, or knowing someone’s name, or reading all the Wikipedia articles on that person. The knowing that lets God’s face in Jesus shine on us is an intimate personal knowing that only comes to us when we repent, believe, and receive Jesus. Simeon was an exception to the rule as he was an old man, a believer in the Messiah coming, and it had been revealed to him that he would not see death until he had seen the Lord’s Christ, His Messiah. Thus, when the Holy Spirit prompted him, Simeon went to the temple on the exact day when Joseph and Mary brought the baby Jesus to do for Him according to the custom of the Law. When the parents brought in the child Jesus, Simeon didn’t have to introduced to Jesus. Luke 2: 28-32 is explicit. What happened? Simeon took the baby Jesus up in his arms and blessed God and said, “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to Your people Israel.”

How did Simeon know which baby in the temple that day being presented was Jesus? Was baby Jesus the only baby? We don’t know. What we do know is that Simeon never asked Joseph, Jesus’ step-dad or Mary, His mother, who Jesus was. Simeon just reached out and took baby Jesus up in his arms. When you really know God, you know His Son. Do you remember the words of Philip to Jesus. I am so glad this disciple asked his question. John 14: 8,9 is clear. “Philip said to Jesus, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know Me, Philip? Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” Psalm 67: 1,2 makes it clear that when God is gracious to us and blesses us and makes His face

shine on us, Selah, think of that, it is so “that His way may be known on earth, His saving power among all nations.” Beloved, those who have seen the face of God, who have had God’s light of Lights, Jesus to shine on them—those people, God’s bride, they know His way and His saving power. That’s this first huge lesson: “God’s gracious face cannot shine on us if we refuse to know Jesus. Secondly,

GOD’S GRACIOUS FACE CANNOT SHINE ON US IF WE REJECT HIM AND REFUSE TO RECEIVE JESUS. (II.)

It is not God’s will that any should perish. We read, “He is not willing, or wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance or reach repentance. (II Peter 3: 9) Psalm 67: 3-5 reads, “Let the peoples praise you, O God; (Couldn’t that be just a few?) That’s not all the missionary psalm says. “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!” Let Psalm 67: 3-5 establish God’s wish and desire, that no one should reject Him or choose not to receive Him. Turn to our Christmas text in John 1: 11, 12. He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.” The Greek word for “receive” is **paralambano**. What a word! Paralambano means to receive near, to associate with, in any familiar or intimate act or relationship, to take unto oneself, to receive from another, and to take to oneself after being offered. None of us become Christians by osmosis. We must, by an act of our will, in faith, by God’s gift of grace, take the Lord Jesus into our heart and life. That’s the heart of conversion, regeneration, and being born again.

John tells us in John 1: 11, that “His own,” the Jews” received Him not. The nation did reject and fail to receive Jesus, but don’t forget there were exceptions of those Jews who believed—Joseph, Mary, Zechariah, Elizabeth, John the Baptist, Simeon, Anna the prophetess, the disciples of our Lord, a number of women like Mary Magdalene, Mary and Martha, Lazarus, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, Saul/Paul on the Damascus Road, Stephen who was stoned, and 120 in the upper room and 3,000 on the Day of Pentecost, under the preaching of Peter, and 5,000 a few days later under the preaching of Peter and John. Have you rejected or received Jesus? If you have received Him, then join the psalmist who cries to us, -- v. 3-5. We can’t help but praise Him if God has shown the gracious, glorious Light of the face of Jesus on us. John adds in I John 1: 7, “But if we walk in the Light, as He is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.” Thirdly and lastly, there’s another really huge lesson.

GOD’S GRACIOUS FACE CANNOT SHINE ON US IF WE SEE ONLY THE LETTER OF THE LAW AND REFUSE TO SEE THE GRACE AND

TRUTH JESUS HAS MADE KNOWN. (III.) Notice first of all, Psalm 67: 6, 7. “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!” The Hebrew word for “bless” is **barak.**

Twice I read “shall bless us.” The literal meaning is to kneel, or as in this Psalm, “to make to kneel to receive His blessing.” Now read the verse. “The earth has yielded its increase, God, our God, shall make us to kneel to receive His blessing. God shall make us to kneel to receive His blessing.” Not everyone wants God’s light to shine on them. Even very religious men and women sometimes, would rather argue about the Bible as the Pharisees did, trying to prove a small fine point, than to join God’s people in unity on our knees together to receive His blessing. Notice what John tells us in our Christmas text. John 1: 16-18 and notice that the Light won’t shine on you if you are bound to the letter of the law, and deny the spirit of the law with the grace and truth that comes through Jesus. John wrote, “For from His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, He has made Him known.”

Beloved, we who know Jesus can become legalists, like the Pharisees. Is the end of all things, the letter of the law given by Moses? O is the end of all things, the grace and truth brought to us in Jesus Christ? The nation of Israel, for the most part, rejected Jesus’ coming the first time, as the prophet Isaiah spoke of Messiah Jesus as born of a virgin, and coming as a despised, humble servant, to die on the cross, to make an offering for the guilt of our souls, to be crushed for our iniquities. The Jews wanted control, they refused to accept Jesus and His messiah-ship. They tried rather, to defeat Jesus, by holding Him to technical fine points of their own making, in their commentaries in the Talmud and in their rabbinical writings.

The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. What is the main thing? It begins with the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, His sinless life, His sacrificial death in our place, His burial, His glorious resurrection, and His imminent return. When we do what Jesus said the Pharisees did, when we strain out a gnat and swallow a camel, we miss the fullness of God’s gracious face shining on us—the main thing. We isolate ourselves to our position, and we fail to kneel with all God’s people before God for Him to bless us. Perhaps for me, that’s why our statement of faith is so vital. Our 12 point statement of faith is the main thing. When we take other minor differences in the Word and camp on them, by Jesus’ testimony to the Pharisees in Mt. 23, Jesus is saying to us, “You make the minor things the main thing. He told the Pharisees, “You emphasize tithing of mint and anise and dill and cumin, while neglecting the weightier matters of the law.” “You focus on cleaning the outside of the cup, while inside you are full of greed and self-

indulgence.” “You fault me for picking corn on the Sabaoth, not recognizing Me, Jesus as the Lord of the Sabaoth.” “You say what you would have done if you lived back in the days of the prophets, but you turn against My prophets. You seek to kill them and you persecute My prophets.” “You put heavy burdens on others, but you yourself will not help others and carry their burdens or lift one of them.” Beloved, may the Christ of Christmas help us to kneel before His shining face with our brothers and sisters in unity until His gracious face shines down on us and we to the ends of the earth, Psalm 67: 7 reverence the Lord. Oh, may (1) we know Him, (2) receive Him, and (3) kneel before the Lord with others who make the main thing the main thing for His glory. Amen.