

Exposition on Psalm 67

by St. Augustine

The sermon emphasizes the importance of blessing God, knowing His way, and confessing our sins to experience His joy and exultation.

Scripture: Psalm 66:1, Matthew 6:10, Matthew 6:12, Luke 2:29, John 15:1, 1 Corinthians 3:6, Philippians 3:13

Topics: "Praise And Worship", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

St. Augustine preaches about the importance of confessing and praising God, emphasizing the blessings that come from both God blessing us and us blessing the Lord. He highlights the growth that occurs when God blesses us and when we bless the Lord, leading to mutual profit. St. Augustine also discusses the concept of God as the Husbandman who tills us for fruit, and the need for us to acknowledge God's work in our lives. He encourages believers to sing a new song in the way of Christ, confess to God with joy, and allow God to guide them on the straight path.

Transcript

1. Your Love remembers, that in two Psalms, which have been already treated of, we have stirred up our soul to bless the Lord, and with godly chant have said, Bless thou, O my soul, the Lord. If therefore we have stirred up our soul in those Psalms to bless the Lord, in this Psalm is well said, May God have pity on us, and bless us Psalm 66:1. Let our soul bless the Lord, and let God bless us. When God blesses us, we grow, and when we bless the Lord, we grow, to us both are profitable. He is not increased by our blessing, nor is He lessened by our cursing. He that curses the Lord, is himself lessened: he that blesses the Lord, is himself increased. First, there is in us the blessing of the Lord, and the consequence is that we also bless the Lord. That is the rain, this the fruit. Therefore there is rendered as it were fruit to God the Husbandman, raining upon and tilling us. Let us chant these words with no barren devotion, with no empty voice, but with true heart. For most evidently God the Father has been called a Husbandman. John 15:1 The Apostle says, God's husbandry you are, God's building you are. 1 Corinthians 3:9 In things visible of this world, the vine is not a building, and a building is not a vineyard: but we are the vineyard of the Lord, because He tills us for fruit; the building of God we are, since He who tills us, dwells in us. And what says the same Apostle? I have planted, Apollos has watered, but the increase God has given. Therefore neither he that plants is anything, nor he that waters, but He that gives the increase, even God. 1 Corinthians 3:6-7 He it is therefore that gives the increase. Are those perchance the husbandmen? For a husbandman he is called that plants, that waters: but the Apostle has said, I have planted, Apollos has watered. Do we enquire whence himself has done this? The Apostle makes answer, Yet not I, but the Grace of God with

me. 1 Corinthians 15:10 Therefore wherever thou turn you, whether through Angels, you will find God your Husbandman; whether through Prophets, the Same is your Husbandman; whether through Apostles, the very Same acknowledge to be your Husbandman. What then of us? Perchance we are the labourers of that Husbandman, and this too with powers imparted by Himself, and by Grace granted by Himself....

2. Lighten His countenance upon us. You were perchance going to enquire, what is bless us? In many ways men would have themselves to be blessed of God: one would have himself to be blessed, so that he may have a house full of the necessary things of this life; another desires himself to be blessed, so that he may obtain soundness of body without flaw; another would have himself to be blessed, if perchance he is sick, so that he may acquire soundness; another longing for sons, and perchance being sorrowful because none are born, would have himself to be blessed so that he may have posterity. And who could number the various wishes of men desiring themselves to be blessed of the Lord God? But which of us would say, that it was no blessing of God, if either husbandry should bring him fruit, or if any man's house should abound in plenty of things temporal, or if the very bodily health be either so maintained that it be not lost, or, if lost, be regained?...

3. Every soul that is blessed is simple, not cleaving to things earthly nor with glued wings grovelling, but beaming with the brightness of virtues, on the twin wings of twin love does spring into the free air; and sees how from her is withdrawn that whereon she was treading, not that whereon she was resting, and she says securely, The Lord has given, the Lord has taken away; as it has pleased the Lord, so has been done: be the name of the Lord blessed....But let not perchance any weak man say, when shall I be of so great virtue, as was holy Job?

The mightiness of the tree you wonder at, because but now you have been born: this great tree, whereat you wonder, under the branches and shade whereof you cool yourself, has been a switch. But do you fear lest there be taken away from you these things, when such you shall have become? Observe that they are taken away from evil men also. Why therefore do you delay conversion? That which you fear when good to lose, perchance if evil you will lose still. If being good you shall have lost them, there is by you the Comforter that has taken them away: the coffer is emptied of gold; the heart is full of faith: without, poor you are, but within, rich you are: your riches with you you carry, which you would not lose, even if naked from shipwreck you should escape.

Why does not the loss, that perchance, if evil, you will lose, find you good; forasmuch as you see evil men also suffer loss? But with greater loss they are stricken: empty is the house, more empty the conscience is. Whatsoever evil man shall have lost these things, has nothing to hold by without, has nothing within whereon he may rest. He flees when he has suffered loss from the place where before the eyes of men with the display of riches he used to vaunt himself; now in the eyes of men to vaunt himself he is not able: to himself within he returns not, because he has nothing.

He has not imitated the ant, he has not gathered to himself grains, while it was summer. What have I meant by, while it was summer? While he had quietude of life, while he had this world's prosperity, when he had leisure, when happy he was being called by all men, his summer it was. He should have imitated the ant, he should have heard the Word of God, he should have gathered together grains, and he should have stored them within. There had come the trial of tribulation, there had come upon him a winter of numbness, tempest of fear, the cold of sorrow, whether it were loss, or any danger to his safety, or any bereavement of his family; or any dishonour and humiliation; it was winter; the ant falls back upon that which in summer she has gathered together; and within in her secret store, where no man sees, she is

recruited by her summer toils.

When for herself she was gathering together these stores in summer, all men saw her: when on these she feeds in winter, no one sees. What is this? See the ant of God, he rises day by day, he hastens to the Church of God, he prays, he hears lection, he chants hymn, he digests that which he has heard, with himself he thinks thereon, he stores within grains gathered from the threshing-floor. They that providently hear those very things which even now are being spoken of, do thus, and by all men are seen to go forth to the Church, go back from Church, to hear sermon, to hear lection, to choose a book, open and read it: all these things are seen, when they are done.

That ant is treading his path, carrying and storing up in the sight of men seeing him. There comes winter sometime, for to whom comes it not? There chances loss, there chances bereavement: other men pity him perchance as being miserable, who know not what the ant has within to eat, and they say, miserable he whom this has befallen, or what spirits, do you think, has he whom this has befallen? How afflicted is he? He measures by himself, has compassion according to his own strength; and thus he is deceived: because the measure wherewith he measures himself, he would apply to him whom he knows not....O sluggard, gather in summer while you are able; winter will not suffer you to gather, but to eat that which you shall have gathered.

For how many men so suffer tribulation, that there is no opportunity either to read anything, or to hear anything, and they obtain no admittance, perchance, to those that would comfort them. The ant has remained in her nest, let her see if she has gathered anything in summer, whereby she may recruit herself in winter.

4. ...There is a double interpretation, both must be given: lighten, he says, Your face upon us, show to us Your countenance. For God does not ever light His countenance, as if ever it had been without light: but He lights it upon us, so that what was hidden from us, is opened to us, and that which was, but to us was hidden, is unveiled upon us, that is, is lightened. Or else surely it is, Your image lighten upon us: so that he said this, in lighten Your countenance upon us: You have imprinted Your countenance upon us; You have made us after Your image and Your likeness, Genesis 1:26 You have made us Your coin; but Your image ought not in darkness to remain: send a ray of Your wisdom, let it dispel our darkness, and let there shine in us Your image; let us know ourselves to be Your image, let us hear what has been said in the Song of Songs, If You shall not have known Yourself, O fair one among women. Song of Songs 1:8 For there is said to the Church, If You shall not have known Yourself. What is this? If You shall not have known Yourself to have been made after the image of God. O Soul of the Church, precious, redeemed with the blood of the Lamb immaculate, observe of how great value You are, think what has been given for You. Let us say, therefore, and let us long that He may lighten His face upon us. We wear His face: in like manner as the faces of emperors are spoken of, truly a kind of sacred face is that of God in His own image: but unrighteous men know not in themselves the image of God. In order that the countenance of God may be lightened upon them, they ought to say what? You shall light my candle, O Lord my God, You shall light my darkness. I am in the darkness of sins, but by the ray of Your wisdom dispelled be my darkness, may Your countenance appear; and if perchance through me it appears somewhat deformed, by You be there reformed that which by You has been formed.

5. That we may know on earth Your way Psalm 66:2. On earth, here, in this life, we may know Your way. What is, Your way? That which leads to You. May we acknowledge whither we are going, acknowledge where we are as we go; neither in darkness we can do. Afar You are from men sojourning, a way to us

You have presented, through which we must return to You. Let us acknowledge on earth Your way. What is His way wherein we have desired, That we may know on earth Your way? We are going to enquire this ourselves, not of ourselves to learn it. We can learn of it from the Gospel: I am the Way, John 14:6 the Lord says: Christ has said, I am the Way. But do you fear lest you stray? He has added, And the Truth. Who strays in the Truth? He strays that has departed from the Truth. The Truth is Christ, the Way is Christ: walk therein. Do you fear lest you die before thou attain unto Him? I am the Life: I am, He says, the Way and the Truth and the Life. As if He were saying, What do you fear? Through Me you walk, to Me you walk, in Me you rest. What therefore means, We may know on earth Your Way, but we may know on earth Your Christ? But let the Psalm itself reply: lest ye think that out of other Scriptures there must be adduced testimony, which perchance is here wanting: by repetition he has shown what signified, That we may know on earth Your Way: and as if you were inquiring, In what earth, what way? In all nations Your Salvation. In what earth, you are inquiring? Hear: In all nations. What way are you seeking? Hear: Your Salvation. Is not perchance Christ his Salvation? And what is that which the old Symeon has said, that old man, I say, in the Gospel, preserved full of years even unto the infancy of the Word? Luke 2:30 For that old man took in his hands the Infant Word of God. Would He that in the womb deigned to be, disdain to be in the hands of an old man? The Same was in the womb of the virgin, as was in the hands of the old man, a weak infant both within the bowels, and in the old man's hand, to give us strength, by whom were made all things; and if all things, even His very mother. He came humble, He came weak, but clothed with a weakness to be changed into strength, because though He was crucified of weakness, yet He lives of the virtue of God, 2 Corinthians 13:4 the Apostle says. He was then in the hands of an old man. And what says that old man? Rejoicing that now he must be loosed from this world, seeing how in his own hand was held He by whom and in whom his Salvation was upheld; he says what? Now You let go, he says, O Lord, Your servant in peace, for my eyes have seen Your Salvation. Luke 2:29-30 Therefore, May God bless us, and have pity on us; may He lighten His countenance upon us, that we may know on earth Your Way! In what earth? In all nations. What Way? Your Salvation.

6. What follows because the Salvation of God is known in all nations? Let the peoples confess to You, O God Psalm 66:3; confess to You, he says, all peoples. There stands forth a heretic, and he says, In Africa I have peoples: and another from another quarter, And I in Galatia have peoples. You in Africa, he in Galatia: therefore I require one that has them everywhere. You have indeed dared to exult at that voice, when you heard, Let the peoples confess to You, O God. Hear the following verse, how he speaks not of a part: Let there confess to You all peoples. Walk ye in the Way together with all nations; walk ye in the Way together with all peoples, O sons of peace, sons of the One Catholic Church, walk ye in the Way, seeing as you walk. Wayfarers do this to beguile their toil. Sing ye in this Way; I implore you by that Same Way, sing ye in this Way: a new song sing ye, let no one there sing old ones: sing ye the love-songs of your fatherland, let no one sing old ones. New Way, new wayfarer, new song. Hear thou the Apostle exhorting you to a new song: Whatever therefore is in Christ is a new creature; old things have passed away, behold they have been made new. A new song sing ye in the way, which you have learned on the earth. In what earth? In all nations. Therefore even the new song does not belong to a part. He that in a part sings, sings an old song: whatever he please to sing, he sings an old song, the old man sings: divided he is, carnal he is. Truly in so far as carnal he is, so far he is old; and in so far as he is spiritual, so far new. See what says the Apostle: I could not speak to you as if to spiritual, but as if to carnal. 1 Corinthians 3:1 Whence proves he them carnal? For while one says, I am of Paul; but another, I of Apollos: are you not, he says, carnal? 1 Corinthians 3:4 Therefore in the Spirit a new song sing thou in the safe way. Just as wayfarers sing, and oftentimes in the night sing. Awful round about all things do sound, or rather they sound not around, but are still around; and the more still the more awful; nevertheless, even they that fear robbers do sing. How

much more safely you sing in Christ! That way has no robber, unless thou by forsaking the way fallest in the hands of a robber....Why fear ye to confess, and in your confession to sing a new song together with all the earth; in all the earth, in Catholic peace, do you fear to confess to God, lest He condemn you that hast confessed? If having not confessed you lie concealed, having confessed you will be condemned. You fear to confess, that by not confessing can not be concealed: you will be condemned if you have held your peace, that might have been delivered, by having confessed. O God, confess to You all peoples.

7. And because this confession leads not to punishment, he continues and says, Let the nations rejoice and exult Psalm 66:4. If robbers after confession made do wail before man, let the faithful after confessing before God rejoice. If a man be judge, the torturer and his fear exact from a robber a confession: yea sometimes fear wrings out confession, pain extorts it: and he that wails in tortures, but fears to be killed if he confess, supports tortures as far as he is able: and if he shall have been overcome by pain, he gives his voice for death. Nowise therefore is he joyful; nowise exulting: before he confesses the claw tears him; when he has confessed, the executioner leads him along a condemned felon: wretched in every case. But let the nations rejoice and exult. Whence? Through that same confession. Why? Because good He is to whom they confess: He exacts confession, to the end that He may deliver the humble; He condemns one not confessing, to the end that He may punish the proud. Therefore be thou sorrowful before you confess, after having confessed exult, now you will be made whole. Your conscience had gathered up evil humours, with boil it had swollen, it was torturing you, it suffered you not to rest: the Physician applies the fomentations of words, and sometimes He lances it, He applies the surgeon's knife by the chastisement of tribulation: do thou acknowledge the Physician's hand, confess thou, let every evil humour go forth and flow away in confession: now exult, now rejoice, that which remains will be easy to be made whole....Let the nations rejoice and exult, for You judge the peoples in equity. And that unrighteous men may not fear, he has added, and the nations on the earth You direct. Depraved were the nations and crooked were the nations, perverse were the nations; for the ill desert of their depravity, and crookedness and perverseness, the Judge's coming they feared: there comes the hand of the same, it is stretched out mercifully to the peoples, they are guided in order that they may walk the straight way; why should they fear the Judge to come, that have first acknowledged Him for a Corrector? To His hand let them give up themselves, Himself guides the nations on the earth. But guided nations are walking in the Truth, are exulting in Him, are doing good works; and if perchance there comes in any water (for on sea they are sailing) through the very small holes, through the crevices into the hold, pumping it out by good works, lest by more and more coming it accumulate, and sink the ship, pumping it out daily, fasting, praying, doing almsdeeds, saying with pure heart, Forgive us our debts, as also we forgive our debtors Matthew 6:12 -- saying such words walk thou secure, and exult in the way, sing in the way. Do not fear the Judge: before you were a believer, you found a Saviour. You ungodly He sought out that He might redeem, you redeemed will He forsake so as to destroy? And the nations on earth You direct.

8. He exults, rejoices, exhorts, he repeats those same verses in exhortation. The earth has given her fruit Psalm 66:6. What fruit? Let all peoples confess to You. Earth it was, of thorns it was full; there came the hand of One rooting them up, there came a calling by His majesty and mercy, the earth began to confess; now the earth gives her fruit. Would she give her fruit unless first she were rained on? Would she give her fruit, unless first the mercy of God had come from above? Let them read to me, you say, how the earth being rained upon gave her fruit. Hear of the Lord raining upon her: Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Matthew 3:2 He rains, and that same rain is thunder; it terrifies: fear thou Him thundering, and receive Him raining. Behold, after that voice of a thundering and raining God, after that voice let us see something out of the Gospel itself. Behold that harlot of ill fame in the city burst into a strange house into

which she had not been invited by the host, but by One invited she had been called; Luke 7:37 called not with tongue, but by Grace. The sick woman knew that she had there a place, where she was aware that her Physician was sitting at meat. She has gone in, that was a sinner; she dares not draw near save to the feet: she weeps at His feet, she washes with tears, she wipes with hair, she anoints with ointment. Why do you wonder? The earth has given her fruit. This thing, I say, came to pass by the Lord raining there through His own mouth; there came to pass the things whereof we read in the Gospel; and by His raining through His clouds, by the sending of the Apostles and by their preaching the truth, the earth more abundantly has given her fruit, and that crop now has filled the round world.

9. The fruit of the earth was first in Jerusalem. For from thence began the Church: there came there the Holy Spirit, and filled full the holy men gathered together in one place; miracles were done, with the tongues of all men they spoke. They were filled full of the Spirit of God, the people were converted that were in that place, fearing and receiving the divine shower, by confession they brought forth so much fruit, that all their goods they brought together into a common stock, making distribution to the poor, in order that no one might call anything his own, but all things might be to them in common, and they might have one soul and one heart unto God. Acts 4:32 For there had been forgiven them the blood which they had shed, it had been forgiven them by the Lord pardoning, in order that now they might even learn to drink that which they had shed. Great in that place is the fruit: the earth has given her fruit, both great fruit, and most excellent fruit. Ought by any means that earth alone to give her fruit? May there bless us God, our God, may there bless us God Psalm 66:7. Still may He bless us: for blessing in multiplication is wont most chiefly and properly to be perceived. Let us prove this in Genesis; see the works of God: God made light, Genesis 1:3 and God made a division between light and darkness: the light He called day, and the darkness He called night. It is not said, He blessed the light. For the same light returns and changes by days and nights. He calls the sky the firmament between waters and waters: it is not said, He blessed the sky: He severed the sea from the dry land, and named both, the dry land earth, and the gathering together of the waters sea: neither here is it said, God blessed....

10. How should we will that to us He come? By living well, by doing well. Let not things past please us; things present not hold us; let us not close the ear as it were with tail, let us not press down the ear on the ground; lest by things past we be kept back from hearing, lest by things present we be entangled and prevented from meditating on things future; let us reach forth unto those things which are before, let us forget things past. Philippians 3:13 And that for which now we toil, for which now we groan, for which now we sigh, of which now we speak, which in part, however small soever, we perceive, and to receive are not able, we shall receive, we shall thoroughly enjoy in the resurrection of the just.

Our youth shall be renewed as an eagle's, if only our old man we break against the Rock of Christ. Whether those things be true, brethren, which are said of the serpent, or those which are said of the eagle, or whether it be rather a tale of men than truth, truth is nevertheless in the Scriptures, and not without reason the Scriptures have spoken of this: let us do whatever it signifies, and not toil to discover how far that is true. Be thou such an one, as that your youth may be able to be renewed as an eagle's.

And know thou that it cannot be renewed, except your old man on the Rock shall have been broken off: that is, except by the aid of the Rock, except by the aid of Christ, you will not be able to be renewed. Do not thou because of the pleasantness of the past life be deaf to the word of God: do not by things present be so held and entangled, as to say, I have no leisure to read, I have no leisure to hear. This is to press down the ear upon the ground. Do thou therefore not be such an one: but be such an one as on the other side you find, that is, so that thou forget things past, unto things before reach yourself out, in order that

your old man on the Rock you may break off.

And if any comparisons shall have been made for you, if you have found them in the Scriptures, believe: if you shall not have found them spoken of except by report, do not very much believe them. The thing itself perchance is so, perchance is not so. Do thou profit by it, let that comparison avail for your salvation. You are unwilling to profit by this comparison, by some other profit, it matters not provided thou do it: and, being secure, wait for the Kingdom of God, lest your prayer quarrel with you.

For, O Christian man, when you say, Your Kingdom come, how do you say, Your kingdom come? Matthew 6:10 Examine your heart: see, behold, Your kingdom come: He cries out to you, I come: do you not fear? Often we have told Your Love: both to preach the truth is nothing, if heart from tongue dissent: and to hear the truth is nothing, if fruit follow not hearing. From this place exalted as it were we are speaking to you: but how much we are beneath your feet in fear, God knows, who is gracious to the humble; for the voices of men praising do not give us so much pleasure as the devotion of men confessing, and the deeds of men now righteous.

And how we have no pleasure but in your advances, but by those praises how much we are endangered, He knows, whom we pray to deliver us from all dangers, and to deign to know and crown us together with you, saved from every trial, in His Kingdom.

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