

His Gathering Covenant Love

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The Love of God / Love of God; Covenant; Christ / Psalm 107; Psalm 107:1–3

Call to Attention

We can be certain about a few things regarding everyone in this room.

First, we can be certain that each of us resides in a corrupted, earthly body whose desires are sinful and contrary to God.

Second, we know that, for those who are in Christ, life on this side of eternity is spent in constant conflict with this body—warring against it through faith and by the Spirit.

Third, we know that our brothers and sisters are pitched in the very same battle, wrestling against the world, flesh, and the devil.

Fourth, all of us know some amount of unbelieving people. Whether it's our neighbors, coworkers, or family members, there are some people in our lives with whom we interact that are spiritually dead.

For both groups of people, believers struggling with their flesh, and unbelievers perishing in their sin, I want to start my talk by asking the question: “What really *moves* a person?”

What force is sufficiently powerful to change the minds and hearts of human beings?

What ministry methods, Gospel calls, or preaching strategies will *really grip and move a person* in the core of the being?

We're probably all thinking, “God.” This is correct.

But even demons understand that God has all power.

Even Satan knows that his time is short, and the end draws near.

But for a nation so abundantly blessed with knowledge and light, how is it that we have managed to become so cold and dark?

Forget about the nation. How has it become so easy for us to leave our first love? To put Christ away and prop up an idol in his place?

We have forgotten something; something that has faded from view. Like a garden left untended, weeds invade and threaten to choke out the plants of our faith.

What power is sovereign enough to change the heart of an unbeliever?

What force is faithful enough to draw the Christian onward to heaven, not stepping to the left or to the right of the narrow path? What is it the world has never known, and the church is starting to forget?

It is the eternal, steadfast, and breathtaking love of God, manifest in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Introduce the Text, Series, and Theses

Today, we are beginning a 7-part series on the 107th psalm, which begins the fifth and final book of the Psalms. The fifth book begins with Psalm 107 and concludes with the final psalm, 150, whose final verse so wonderfully reads, “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!” Nothing else could’ve ended the Book of Psalms than that command—that shout.

If praising God were a symphony, then the love of God is every stick, mallet, reed, and bow of the orchestra.

When magnified in the heart of his son or daughter, God's love invariably gives way to praise.

It is by remembering this steadfast love of God that we are reoriented back to him and to his face.

Psalm 107 is a command to do this very thing; to remember the steadfast love of God. And, assuming that we have forgotten, the psalm’s author provides four ‘remembrances’ of God’s love—of his wondrous works to the children of man

We will be focusing on the psalm’s opening verses today (vv. 1-3), which will set the table for this series.

Before we move forward, I want to outline the main point of the series and explain how we'll approach this psalm.

The Short Main Point: "The love of God moves a person."

I'll be referring to this regularly, as it's shorter and more useful in passing.

The Long Main Point: "The covenant love of God, in Christ, which gathers sinners, satisfies their souls, breaks their chains, heals their sickness, delivers them from danger, and executes justice is what will move someone's heart."

This captures the essence of how, Lord willing, God will speak to us through this magnificent psalm.

Read the Text

Psalm 107:1-3 ESV

¹ Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever! ² Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble ³ and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.

Prayer

Father God, we give thanks to you this morning, for your steadfast love endures forever. You have redeemed us from trouble, and have gathered us in from the lands, from those distant far countries in all directions. We pray and ask that you would deal completely with us, this morning, according to your goodness, filling our hearts and minds with the love of Christ, so that it overflows out into the world. In your Son's strong name we pray, Amen.

Exposition

Verse 1

Thankfulness and Gratitude

The verses we will zoom in on today are the first three, which open

the psalm. Verse 1:

Psalm 107:1 “1 Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!”

The first line of this psalm contains the first order of business for any child of God: thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving is more than a day to stuff ourselves; it’s the bread and butter of every season in the Christian life.

When skies are clear and weather warm, we are to give thanks to God who has given us his sun.

When skies are stormy and weather freezing, we are to give thanks to God who has given us a storm *for our benefit*.

And this is the great challenge we all face: to believe that the storms God call us into are truly *for our benefit*.

Whatever it is you are facing, it is hand-made and custom-tailored for you. Even if it is a storm.

But because we are creature and not Creator, who is outside of time and holds all that has been and will be in his hands, we look at the trouble we face in life and stumble. We react with unbelief. We stop believing crucial things because of what trouble does to us.

We stop believing that “God is good.”

The Goodness of God

The irony is that goodness is one of God’s attributes that we *can* understand.

We *can’t* wrap our head around his eternal or unchanging nature.

They are incommunicable—they can’t be truly communicated to us, as creatures.

But his goodness *is* communicable—we can wrap our heads around that. We’ve all brushed up with goodness before.

Sometimes, I feel that I haven’t even begun to understand his goodness. When I say understand, I mean to grasp something in a way that moves. In a way that does something. More than just an

intellectual understanding.

I ask you: are you ever struck by your existing at all? Do you ever look back on the unsearchable complexity of human history behind you, and wonder what it was in God that resulted in your creation? It was his goodness.

All that he creates, he creates out of an abundant goodness. He doesn't need us, because he doesn't *need* anything. All that he creates, is created from an overflow of goodness, and to the praise of his glorious grace.

1 Timothy 4:4 “4 For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving,”

There's that thanksgiving, again. Why does our text say to give thanks? “For he is good...”

The goodness of God is why we exist in the first place. It's the first thing we should give thanks for, apart from our salvation.

The goodness of God is also what the human heart longs for.

1 John 4:16 “16 ... God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.”

You've heard the phrase, “Searching for love in all the wrong places.” This is the bumper sticker for human history.

We're searching for true love everywhere it isn't.

1 John 4:10 “10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

Here is this goodness of God that seeks us out, and not the other way around.

God's goodness is abundant and it's tied up with his love. Both concepts are in our first verse.

The Heseed of God

But there is a third element, here, as well. This is the element of God's covenantal love.

The term, here, for “steadfast love” is one word, *heseed*, and it is used

249 times in the Old Testament.

- It's used to describe a loyal, promise-keeping love between human beings, such as in 2 Samuel 9:1, where David seeks to show *hesed* to a descendent of Saul because of his promise to, and love for, Jonathan.

- It's used to describe an action to be taken on the part of the people of God, such as in Hosea 6:6 "6 For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings."

- The vast majority of its usage describes the loyal love of God that is wrapped up in his promises.

Loyal love, steadfast love, and lovingkindness—all are different ways that English translations have handled this word.

Specifically, it is God's promise-keeping love for his people.

And God's promises are contained in his covenants.

The Covenants of God

Whereas God's love in a general sense is seen the creation of all things, his specific, personal love is seen in covenants.

God's people have always been defined by a covenant. It made things official.

- Adam
- Noah
- Abraham
- Moses
- David
- Christ

And with each covenant, there were regular elements.

- Parties
- Terms
- Mediator
- Signs
- Ratification

- Conditions

In our bones, we understand that we are covenant breakers.

Verse 2

Psalm 107:2 “2 Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble”

Covenant Keeping vs. Breaking

The reason the steadfast love of the Lord is so highly exalted in this psalm is precisely because we are covenant breakers.

Though we have time-and-time-again broken our promise, God will never break his promise.

All throughout the psalms, God’s hesed is what is most precious and desired. It’s God’s hesed that David pleads with for his forgiveness is Psalm 51. (We sang this, his “unfailing love.”) He knew he was a sinner; but more importantly, he knew that God was a Savior.

As God redeemed David from his trouble, so God has redeemed his people from their trouble throughout history. And God’s business in redemption reached its glorious heights in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Christ the Covenant Fulfillment

Having already discussed the covenants, we are ready to remember steadfast love of God in history. All of God’s promises to humanity are fulfilled in the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

- God covenanted with David that a descendent of his would occupy his throne, and his kingdom would be eternal. Christ is that descendant, the Son of Man, who is seated at the right hand of God.
- God covenanted with Israel, through Moses, and laid out the blessings and curses. Christ said, "I have not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it."
- God covenanted with Abraham, when he was old and without an heir, that his offspring would outnumber the stars, and that, through

him, all the nations would be blessed. Christ is the fulfillment of that promise.

- When Noah exited the ark onto dry land, God covenanted with him never to "destroy all flesh" by water again. Christ, who is both the ark of our souls and the fountain of living water, came not to judge the world, but that through him it might be saved.
- When God created our first parents, he placed them in the garden and gave them dominion over everything. One rule he gave, not to eat of the tree, or they "would surely die."
- Though they broke the terms of the covenant, they kept breathing. They weren't vaporized instantly; they kept breathing.
- Instantly, we see a sobering demonstration of God's grace, in that he seeks out his rebellious creatures and clothes them.
- He confronts them and delivers his judgment; cursed is the serpent, forever to be at war with the descendants of Eve. Though the serpent will strike his heel, he will strike the serpent's head.
- Christ is the promised offspring of Eve, who fulfills all the promises of God for the redemption of humanity..

The New Covenant in Christ's Blood

It is through the New Covenant of Christ's blood that God's blood is poured out for many.

- God, again, covenants with man
- Through a faithful High Priest, Christ the mediator
- The guarantee of this covenant is eternal life, sworn by God's own name for all who believe
- The duration of this covenant is forever and ever, a kingdom without end
- The sign of this covenant is baptism, where we demonstrate our union to Christ
- This covenant was ratified with the blood of the Lamb

The redeemed of the LORD are God's covenant people, who have

been delivered from Hell and the power of the devil

Verse 3

So we should ask, “How did this come to be?”

Psalm 107:3 “3 and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.”

We see the answer in verse, that God “gathers” us “in from the lands.”

His Gathering Covenant Love

God’s covenant love is a “gathering” love.

- He gathers up the lost.
- Ezekiel 34:11 “11 “For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out.”
- Ezekiel 34:16 “16 I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed...”
- Luke 19:10 “10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.””
- He continually draws us to himself, despite our wandering.
- Not only does he come to us and rescue our souls, but he goes after us when we wander. This is partly what Psalm 107 is about, remembering how God was faithful to the faithless.
- He gathers his people together in fellowship, into communion with one another.
- The people of God are gathered in a **saving** sense, **sanctifying** sense, and also a **social** sense.
- This is something we see so frequently throughout the Bible, we almost take it for granted. The people of God are always sticking around, near each other.
- The Lord Jesus deals with individuals church bodies in the opening chapters of Revelation. The Laodicea church was not the Pergamum church, neither was the Roman church the same as the Ephesian

church.

This is where the remembrance of God’s steadfast love is to be most apparent and loudest—in the house of the Lord, among the corporate worship of his people (v. 32).

(It also just makes logical sense)

Love That Reaches To The Far Country

This love gathers us from all directions and distances.

Psalm 107:3 “3 and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.”

- "From the lands," (NET, "foreign lands"); these are places other than *home*. We were in exile in the far country.
- This gathering love is the hope of the Gentiles: that God, from whom most of humanity was separated by what Paul calls “a wall of hostility” (Eph 2:14), would reach out and gather these lost peoples back to himself.
- If we examine the laws of the Mosaic Covenant, we will see a strict and aggressive separation between Jews and Gentiles. Such that the Israelites were forbidden from even mixing fabrics in their clothing, as the Gentiles did.
- It seems to me that there is more going on there than meets the eye, but even at face value the text is clear that these people were full-on enemies of God.
- It should take our breath away that God was plotting and arranging the redemption of the descendents of these people while they were in rebellion against him.
- To put it another way: God was bringing about the salvation of Gentile pagans, even while they were still bowing down to idols.
- Romans 5:8 “8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”
- Ephesians 3:6 “6 This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and **partakers of the promise** in Christ

Jesus through the gospel.”

His Love, Our Only Hope

This is the only hope for those who have yet to be brought in.

- It is only in the love of God through the Gospel of Christ where humanity can find redemption.
- And if a person somehow were to doubt God’s promise-keeping ability, they should see how Christ is the fulfillment of all God's promises.
- 2 Corinthians 1:20 “20 For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.”
- Christ is the gift promised by God to man since the Fall. He is the King, Mediator, High Priest, and Deliverer, Sacrifice—and more—that is shouted about throughout the entire Old Testament. God has *already* kept his promises, we can trust him.

This is the only hope for those yet to be brought in, but also for those who have already been gathered, yet have wandered.

“Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love.”

This is hope for lost sheep, that the God who is their shepherd loves them with a steadfast, immovable, gathering love.

Have you looked this truth in face, yet?

Are you trusting in your ability to gather up some goodness in you, or are you trusting in him?

Psalm 107 does not walk a person through redemptive history to draw their attention to man’s steadfast disobedience, but to the steadfast love of God.

Conclusion

What Truly Moves A Person

This sermon series is about the love of God, because it's what truly moves a person.

"For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised." 2 Cor 5:14-15

"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Gal 2:20

It's by seeing how much God loves us that we will be moved to do anything truly good in this life.

It was the goodness and loving kindness of God that saved us (Titus 3:4) in the first place,

Titus 3:3–7 “3 For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient... slaves... 4 But... the goodness and loving kindness of God ... saved us, not because of works done by us... but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ...”

The love of God moves in that sinner's life, such that they long for God, now, and for his righteousness—not their own. They are ***moved*** towards to him, to be more *like* him, that is, to be more like Christ.

Knowing Christ Is To Know God's Love

"Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— ***that I may know him*** and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death..." Php 3:8-10

We sing sometimes, “We stand forgiven at the cross.” What’s the line before it? “What a *love*, what a *cost*”

Reflecting on these things is what grips our heart and moves us to worshipful obedience.

Do you ever think about that day?

- When a country boy from Galilee heard the scroll of Isaiah read in the temple...
- When Jesus was in the garden.. were the olives trembling on the vine as the Savior was?
- When the men being crucified started to talking to one another
- Where Jesus is now, seated on his throne of majesty, in his great and terrifying beauty, waiting to return to this earth

Dwelling on these things, seeking to know Christ and the love of God, is the Christian practice drawing near to him.

Are you struggling in your walk with the Lord? Does he feel distant?

Are you frustrated with his providence in your life?

Go back to these things to reset your perspective. Dwell on Christ, that we would not develop an inflated view of ourselves. Consider the love of God, and your's will never grow cold.

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The Blood That Shouts The Father's Love

Mark wrote this line in a newsletter a few months ago, "God shouts his love for us through the blood of his Son."

There's something so intensely personal about that sentence.

God is not giving a speech to us in a market square, he is in our face, in our bedroom, and he is shouting.

"Look at the blood of my beloved son, and see how much I love you."

It's so personal. To unredeemed humanity, this is spoken to their judgment. But to the redeemed of the Lord, it is the most moving thing.

God does not shout at us like an abusive husband, who is angry and bitter about our failures.

God shouts his love to us like “a mighty one who will save; he rejoices over us with gladness. He will quiet us by his love, and rejoice over us with loud singing.”
This is the love of God that moves a person.