

Thanksgiving Sunday

*“Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!”
(Psalm 107:1 ESV)*

*“Whoever is wise, let him attend to these things; let them consider the steadfast love of the LORD.”
(Psalm 107:43 ESV)*

Oh Give Thanks To The Lord!

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Psalm 107

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone! If you have your Bible with you, I would love for you to open it now to Psalm 107. We are going to take a 1 week break from our series in the Book of Acts in order to study this Psalm of thanksgiving.

We have an awful lot to be thankful for in this place, don't we?

And yet – truth be told – there often isn't a direct link between how much you've been blessed and how often you give thanks. Sometimes when we come out of a difficult season we can be so focused on rebuilding and so eager to forget the trauma that we've experienced that we actually RESIST the call to reflection and thanksgiving. We just want to move on. We just want to forget – but that's not WISE. And so here in Psalm 107 the Psalmist is calling on people TO STOP, to REMEMBER and to GIVE THANKS.

In terms of the immediate circumstances, Psalm 107 is generally understood as a counterpart to Psalm 106. In Psalm 106:47 the Psalmist prays:

“Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise.” (Psalm 106:47 ESV)

That prayer was offered up from INSIDE the experience of the Babylonian Exile. The people of God lifted up their voices and asked to be delivered from that calamity! And God heard them! He rescued them, he restored them and he returned them to the land that they had lost a lifetime ago. And now in Psalm 107, the Psalmist is encouraging the people to remember that and to give the thanks they had promised to give. That's why these Psalms are side by side in the Bible – though they may have been written a lifetime apart. In Psalm 106 you get the request – in the Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai and Zechariah you get the answer – and then here in Psalm 107 you get the response:

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. (Psalm 107:1–3 ESV)

It is good to do that – it is **good** to stop, look back, **think hard**, and give thanks.

And it is also WISE to do that. The Psalmist says that in the last verse of the Psalm. He says:

Whoever is wise, let him attend to these things; let them consider the steadfast love of the LORD. (Psalm 107:43 ESV)

So Psalm 107 is really a Thanksgiving sandwich – it makes use of the classic A-B-B-A structure that is so common in Hebrew poetry. You've got a CALL to thanksgiving at the top, you've got an encouragement to thanksgiving at the bottom and in the middle you've got the GROUNDS. The entire structure of the Psalm is intended to focus our attention on the WHY of thanksgiving, so that's what we want to do today. We'll read the Psalm and then we will reflect on the TWO REASONS WHY we ought to give thanks to God.

Hear now the Word of the Lord beginning at verse 1:

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.

⁴ Some wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to a city to dwell in;
⁵ hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them.
⁶ Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their
distress.
⁷ He led them by a straight way till they reached a city to dwell in.
⁸ Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the
children of man!
⁹ For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things.

¹⁰ Some sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, prisoners in affliction and in
irons,
¹¹ for they had rebelled against the words of God, and spurned the counsel of the
Most High.
¹² So he bowed their hearts down with hard labor; they fell down, with none to
help.
¹³ Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their
distress.
¹⁴ He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and burst their bonds
apart.
¹⁵ Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the
children of man!
¹⁶ For he shatters the doors of bronze and cuts in two the bars of iron.

¹⁷ Some were fools through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquities
suffered affliction;
¹⁸ they loathed any kind of food, and they drew near to the gates of death.
¹⁹ Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their
distress.
²⁰ He sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from their destruction.
²¹ Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the
children of man!
²² And let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, and tell of his deeds in songs of
joy!

²³ Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the great waters;
²⁴ they saw the deeds of the LORD, his wondrous works in the deep.
²⁵ For he commanded and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the
sea.

26 They mounted up to heaven; they went down to the depths; their courage melted away in their evil plight;

27 they reeled and staggered like drunken men and were at their wits' end.

28 Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.

29 He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed.

30 Then they were glad that the waters were quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven.

31 Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man!

32 Let them extol him in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders.

33 He turns rivers into a desert, springs of water into thirsty ground,

34 a fruitful land into a salty waste, because of the evil of its inhabitants.

35 He turns a desert into pools of water, a parched land into springs of water.

36 And there he lets the hungry dwell, and they establish a city to live in;

37 they sow fields and plant vineyards and get a fruitful yield.

38 By his blessing they multiply greatly, and he does not let their livestock diminish.

39 When they are diminished and brought low through oppression, evil, and sorrow,

40 he pours contempt on princes and makes them wander in trackless wastes;

41 but he raises up the needy out of affliction and makes their families like flocks.

42 The upright see it and are glad, and all wickedness shuts its mouth.

43 Whoever is wise, let him attend to these things; let them consider the steadfast love of the LORD. (Psalm 107:1–43 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

As I mentioned a moment ago, the structure of this Psalm is directing us to consider the WHY of thanksgiving, so let's do that now.

The Why Of Thanksgiving

There are two main GROUNDS; two REASONS WHY we should give thanks to the Lord. The first reason the Psalmist gives is this: We should give thanks to the Lord:

1. Because the Lord redeems us from all our troubles

The Psalmist tells 4 stories that collectively represent and express the sorts of troubles from which God's people have been rescued. Alexander Kirkpatrick says here:

“The scenes are at once fact and figure; scenes from life, yet intended to represent Israel's experience.”¹

So this is like a collage – one big picture made up of several smaller pictures. You can spot each of the smaller pictures because each of the depictions begins with the word “SOME”. You can see that at the beginning of verse 4, verse 10, verse 17 and verse 23. These are the various SORTS of troubles that God has proven himself faithful in rescuing his people from. Let's take a look at them, and as we do, perhaps you can be thinking about which of these depictions best describes the sort of trouble from which the Lord rescued you. The first depiction begins in verse 4:

⁴ Some wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to a city to dwell in;

⁵ hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them.

⁶ Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.

⁷ He led them by a straight way till they reached a city to dwell in. (Psalm 107:4–7 ESV)

The Tyndale Old Testament Commentary has really good titles for each of these little snapshots; they give this one the title: Wanderers Retrieved. I like that!

God knows how to rescue the wanderer. He knows that some people get lost. They go looking for something and they end up in trouble. They end up in the dark, away from God and dying of thirst – but if those people come to their senses and cry out for rescue, then God hears them! He comes and delivers them and he leads them by a straight path until they reach a good city to live in.

Isn't that good news!

¹ Alexander Kirkpatrick as cited in Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 16 of Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 418.

Moms and dads – any of you have a child that has wandered off into the world looking for something only to get lost and to grow weary and to fall into darkness and shadow? Any of you feel like they are too far gone for you to reach them?

Well the Good News is that God knows how to find people like that. If they will just fire up one prayer – then out of the dark, they will see a light coming and he will find them and lead them home. So as long as there is breath enough for one prayer in their lungs, there is hope.

Thanks be to God!

The Lord knows how to rescue the wanderer, and thanks be to God – he knows how to set the prisoner free as well. Look at verse 10:

¹⁰ Some sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, prisoners in affliction and in irons,
¹¹ for they had rebelled against the words of God, and spurned the counsel of the Most High. (Psalm 107:10–11 ESV)

Some people aren't just lost – they have become imprisoned. They rebelled against the words of God, they spurned the counsel of the Most High, they did it their way and now they are STUCK. They are sitting in the dark, in the shadow of death, prisoners in a dungeon of their own making.

I'm not capable of reading this paragraph without thinking of a particular story from Pilgrim's Progress – which I'm sure is a big shock to many of you! But if you know the book, then you can probably guess which scene I am referring to. Christian was told on several different occasions not to leave the path – but the problem was that the path was HARD and it frequently led uphill and Christian was tired and he saw what he thought was a shortcut – so he made an executive decision and he decided to take the road that led through by-pass meadow. But as you can probably imagine, the shortcut turned out not to be a shortcut at all. It was a trap and by the time he realized what had happened it was dark and Christian could not find his way back to the road.

He fell asleep and a villain came and captured him and locked him in the Dungeon of Giant Despair.

And of course that is a metaphor for what can so easily happen in life! The author, John Bunyan, is telling us about a particular danger. The danger of thinking that we are wiser than the Word of God. God's Word sets out a path for us – a path that leads to abundant and eternal life – but we think that we see a short cut! We think there is an easier way! And so we take that way – we leave the path and inevitably we get lost, we are captured and we end up in the Dungeon of Giant Despair!

Yes – that happens, the Psalmist says, but the Good News is, that God knows how to BUST PEOPLE OUT. He is really good at prison breaks! He bakes keys into cakes, he digs holes through the walls, he hides people in baskets of laundry – he knows how to set the captives free.

Thanks be to God!

And he knows how to heal the sick; that's the third picture. Look at verses 17-20. The Psalmist says:

17 Some were fools through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquities suffered affliction;
18 they loathed any kind of food, and they drew near to the gates of death.
19 Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.
20 He sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from their destruction.
(Psalm 107:17–20 ESV)

This is a really interesting one. The Bible is clear that not ALL sickness can be directly related to sin. God rebukes Job's three friends for making that mistake – and Jesus rebukes the disciples in John 9 for making that mistake. So not all sickness can be directly linked to sin.

But some can.

Now we're not capable of making that link – but Jesus is and he does that very thing in Matthew 9:

“Some people brought to him a paralytic, lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.”
(Matthew 9:2 ESV)

The scribes get mad at Jesus here because he is doing something that only God can do – he is making a connection between sin and sickness. Some sickness IS due to sin. Sometimes we do things that have consequences that we experience in our own bodies – and that's the situation here. In this picture we've got someone who has done something foolish – to themselves – and now they are suffering affliction.

Derek Kidner in his commentary says here:

“In such a context, verse 18 could well call to mind in modern times the drug-addict, but only as one example of man's perennial determination to get hurt.”²

For whatever reason – sometimes people hurt themselves. They do FOOLISH, sinful, harmful things that result in physical suffering and affliction. But the good news is, even when it is your own fault – even when you are the author of your own calamity – if you just humble yourself and call upon the name of the Lord he will lift you out!

He knows how to solve the problems we make for ourselves – he knows how to heal the sicknesses that we bring on to ourselves. He's the Great Physician – and like with any good doctor, it doesn't matter what stupid thing you did to get yourself into the ER – what matters is that you have come to him.

²Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 16 of Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 420.

God doesn't just heal people who deserve it – news flash – nobody deserves it – God heals all those who call out to him in faith. Have you noticed that? That's the only common element in all these stories. We've got various troubles, various problems, various afflictions – but here is the common element:

“Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.” (Psalm 107:19 ESV)

Thanks be to God!

That takes us to the last of these 4 pictures. Look at verse 23:

23 Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the great waters;
24 they saw the deeds of the LORD, his wondrous works in the deep.
25 For he commanded and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea.
26 They mounted up to heaven; they went down to the depths; their courage melted away in their evil plight;
27 they reeled and staggered like drunken men and were at their wits' end.
28 Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.
29 He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. (Psalm 107:23–29 ESV)

This last picture is different than all the others. The first three pictures were about people who made their own trouble, in one way or the other. They wandered away from that which was safe, they took a shortcut, they did something stupid – but here we have a guy who was minding his own business and who was just trying to make a living for himself and for his family – and all of the sudden, a storm broke upon him and he is reeling and staggering like a drunken man!

Which is actually a really interesting comparison – because the last story, the third story, was ABOUT an actually drunken man. He was staggering about because HE WAS A DRUNK – he was the maker of his own storm - but here in this story we've got a storm that seemingly came out of nowhere and it puts this guy in exactly the same position.

What's the Bible saying?

It's saying that it doesn't matter how you got there, it doesn't matter where the storm came from – what matters is whether or not you call out to God from within it.

If you call out to God, he will come for you – that's the Good News!

And of course, it is this LAST PICTURE – more even than all the others – that clues us in to the Holy Spirit's mysterious design. This Psalm originally, functioned primarily as a call to God's people to consider the many and various ways in which God had been merciful to them in the past and to summon them to thanksgiving – but of course, it became also a series of clues pointing the disciples to the identity and mission of Jesus.

Were you beginning to pick up on that?

When the disciples went out to do business on the great waters of the Sea of Galilee and a storm fell suddenly and violently upon them – do you remember what they did? They went and cried out to Jesus saying:

“Save us, Lord; we are perishing.” (Matthew 8:25 ESV)

That was very wise, because Matthew tells us:

Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.²⁷ And the men marveled, saying, “What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?” (Matthew 8:26–27 ESV)

That's a very good question.

And of course, the answer is, he is The One who is able to save and rescue his people out of ANY and EVERY CALAMITY – he knows how to save the wanderer, the depressed, the addict and the overwhelmed, thanks be to God!

Now, as you can probably see for yourself just by word count and number of verses, that is the meat and marrow of this Psalm – but there is one more reason given for thanksgiving that I want to draw your attention to. We should thank the Lord because he rescues us from all our troubles and tribulations and ALSO because he is able to rebuild, renew and restore.

2. Because the Lord knows how to rebuild, renew and restore

The Psalmist talks about that in verses 33-42. God knows how to BUILD UP what for reasons of his own Providence he may have once BROKEN DOWN. Look at verses 33-38:

³³ He turns rivers into a desert, springs of water into thirsty ground,
³⁴ a fruitful land into a salty waste, because of the evil of its inhabitants.

So, stop there. The Psalmist is saying: God MADE THE DESERT that trapped the wanderer in his wanderings. God made the exile that punished us for our idolatry. He made the hard times!

Are you seeing that?

But the Good News is – when you turn to him – he knows how to BRING YOU BACK and he knows how to BUILD YOU UP; that’s the second reason to give thanks to God. Check out verses 35-38:

³⁵ He turns a desert into pools of water, a parched land into springs of water.
³⁶ And there he lets the hungry dwell, and they establish a city to live in;
³⁷ they sow fields and plant vineyards and get a fruitful yield.
³⁸ By his blessing they multiply greatly, and he does not let their livestock diminish.
(Psalm 107:35–38 ESV)

Are you seeing that brothers and sisters?

Do you know why you should thank God?

Because he has a plan for you on the other side of the calamity. After the desert. After the dungeon. After the sickness. After the storm. Whatever your trouble, he knows how to rescue you and he knows how to build you back.

That's what the Psalmist is saying to this weary group of refugees who have survived and escaped the Babylonian Exile. You prayed, God heard, he came – and now here you are. And I know that all you can see is the ruin, all you can feel is the loss – but remember who God is. Remember all that he has already done. And believe in the promise of what is coming.

He didn't rescue you from Babylon so that you could live like a nomad in the desert. He brought you back so that he could build you up. He's got a plan for you. And it may be difficult for you to see it now, so instead of looking forward, for just a minute, I want you to look back. Think of where you were and now consider where you are.

God did that.

And you need to stop.

You need to stop what you are doing and think about that.

“Whoever is wise, let him attend to these things; let them consider the steadfast love of the LORD.” (Psalm 107:43 ESV)

An awful lot of wisdom comes down to this, my friends: Remembering who God is. Remembering who you are. And remembering how God has saved you – in the New Testament we would add - through the person and work of Christ.

Think about those things. Whoever is wise – let him or her attend to these things. Let them consider the steadfast love of the Lord. And let them open their mouths and SPEAK!

“Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble”
(Psalm 107:2 ESV)

W.S. Plumer says here:

“If all the world would honestly tell of what God has done for them as travellers and exiles, the earth would resound with his praise.”³

So let’s do that church. Let’s tell honestly and boldly tell what God has done for us as travellers and exiles in this world. Remembering these things – speaking these things aloud - will give us faith for the future, resolve in the present and peace with the past and it may also be used to bring our friends and neighbours into a relationship with their Creator through the person and work of Christ – thanks be to God! Let’s pray together.

³ W.S. Plumer, *Psalms* (Edinburgh: The Banner Of Truth Trust, 2016), 960.