

## Psalm 107

“The French had collapsed. The Dutch had been overwhelmed. The Belgians had surrendered. The British Army, trapped, fought free and fell back toward the Channel ports, converging on a fishing town whose name was then spelled Dunkerque.”<sup>1</sup>

William Manchester, in this spell-binding account of a pivotal moment in World War II, tells us the miraculous story of how the British Army was rescued at Dunkirk. He continues:

“Now the 220,000 Tommies at Dunkirk, Britain’s only hope, seemed doomed. On the Flanders beaches they stood around in angular, existential attitudes, like dim purgatorial souls awaiting disposition. There appeared to be no way to bring more than a hand full of them home. The Royal Navy’s vessels were inadequate. King George VI has been told they would be lucky to save 17,000. The House of Commons was warned to prepare for “hard and heavy tidings.”

“Then, from the streams and estuaries of Kent and Dover, a strange fleet appeared: trawlers and tugs, scows and fishing sloops, lifeboats and pleasure craft, smacks and coasters; the island ferry *Gracie Fields*, Tom Sopwith’s America’s Cup challenger, *Endeavor*, even the London fire

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<sup>1</sup> *The Last Lion* by William Manchester (Preamble pg.1).

brigade's fire-float *Massie Shaw* – all of them manned by civilian volunteers: English fathers, sailing to rescue England's exhausted, bleeding sons.”

Manchester wonderfully recounts this miraculous rescue at Dunkirk in his novel *The Last Lion*.

All of us prior to conversion were much like the British Army on the beaches of Dunkirk: in desperate need of a miracle. All attempts at self-deliverance for the British Army, and likewise for us, were inadequate.

Today, Psalm 107 gives us the account of the divine rescue experienced by the Israelites while in exile and in recalling their divine rescue, leads them toward thanksgiving and praise.

This Psalm should help us to recall our own deliverance story and like the Israelites, should lead the believer toward gratitude and thanksgiving for what God has done for us in Christ.

If you have your Bible, please turn to Psalm 107. There are four parts to this exposition, and it will be beneficial to keep your Bible open to Psalm 107.

**Let the Redeemed of the LORD Say So**

**107** Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,  
for his steadfast love endures forever!

**<sup>2</sup>** Let the redeemed of the LORD say so,  
whom he has redeemed from trouble

<sup>3</sup> and gathered in from the lands,  
from the east and from the west,  
from the north and from the south.

<sup>4</sup> Some wandered in desert wastes,  
finding no way to a city to dwell in;  
<sup>5</sup> hungry and thirsty,  
their soul fainted within them.

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

<sup>7</sup> He led them by a straight way  
till they reached a city to dwell in.

<sup>8</sup> Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,  
for his wondrous works to the children of man!  
<sup>9</sup> For he satisfies the longing soul,  
and the hungry soul he fills with good things.

<sup>10</sup> Some sat in darkness and in the shadow of death,  
prisoners in affliction and in irons,  
<sup>11</sup> for they had rebelled against the words of God,  
and spurned the counsel of the Most High.

<sup>12</sup> So he bowed their hearts down with hard labor;  
they fell down, with none to help.

<sup>13</sup> Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,  
and he delivered them from their distress.

<sup>14</sup> He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death,  
and burst their bonds apart.

<sup>15</sup> Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,  
for his wondrous works to the children of man!  
<sup>16</sup> For he shatters the doors of bronze  
and cuts in two the bars of iron.

<sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup>

I have four points for us to consider from this Psalm.

Our first point:

## **1. The Redeemed and the Gathered (v. 1-3)**

The first three verses of our Psalm give us some context on who the redeemed and the gathered are: they are

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<sup>2</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 107:1–43.

those who have been “redeemed from trouble” and “gathered in from the lands.”

When we think of the word redeemed, it probably conjures up thoughts of redeeming credit card points or redeeming a coupon at a store.

When the Psalmist writes of “The Redeemed of the Lord” what he is referring to is the practice of the kinsmen redeemer as it is outlined in Leviticus 25.

In Leviticus 25, the Lord provided specific instructions for those who found themselves enslaved or in debt. A brother, uncle, cousin, or any other relative could buy their kinsman out of slavery and debt, thus the term *kinsman redeemer*. The kinsman would pay the price incurred by their enslaved family member.

Through the pen of the Psalmist, the Lord is showing us that the redeemed are those who’ve been delivered from slavery and bought out of a spiritual debt.

Another theme that might be easy to miss in our passage but that is worth noting is that these redeemed by the Lord are those who have been “gathered in from the lands.”

We are given some details as the Psalmist indicates that the redeemed are those gathered in from the east, west, north, and south. We all know that if you are in one spot

and look to the east, west, north, and south, you are going to be looking all around you. These that were gathered in could be coming from anywhere!

Herein lies one interpretive challenge for our text: we don't know specifically where the redeemed are being gathered in from. Some biblical scholars believe the passage is referencing those who have been brought back to Jerusalem from their exile in Babylon.<sup>3</sup>

While we might not know the geographic specifics of where the redeemed are being gathered in *from*, what really matters is where they are being brought back *to*: the Promised Land.

The biblical evidence supports that this group of redeemed people being gathered in were previously in exile. To better understand how they became exiled, we will have to take a walk down bible memory lane.

From the beginning of creation, it was God's intention to dwell with man in the garden of Eden, and as man extended the garden throughout the earth, God would continue to dwell closely with man in this newly expanded Garden.

However, after the fall in Genesis 3, Adam and Eve are expelled from the garden and we no longer read of the

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<sup>3</sup> Tremper Longman in *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Psalms*

same kind of communion existing between God and man until later developments. For the time being, God would reside in the heavens and occasionally visit particular people in the bible such as Abraham and Jacob.

Then something interesting occurs in the book of Exodus when God appears to Moses at Mt. Sinai. God provides instructions on how the Israelites are to construct a tabernacle, which would be God's new dwelling place where he would meet regularly with man.

God also makes a promise with his people that he would give the Israelites a Promised land that is flowing with milk and honey. The Israelites would carry the tabernacle around with them until they were to reach this Promised Land.

Through military campaigns led by Joshua, the Israelites would eventually advance into the Promised Land, and they end up inhabiting Jerusalem.

Then, under the kingship of David, the people of God, who previously sojourned as 12 separate tribes, are now united under one kingdom, and they can now gather as one people to worship God in the central geographic location of Jerusalem.

It wasn't until the reign of David's son, Solomon, that we read about the Israelite's building a temple for the Lord in



Jerusalem. This temple would be Yahweh's new chosen dwelling place among his people.<sup>4</sup>

Yet, what occurs after the building of the temple is a failure in national leadership by Israel's kings and her prophets, which led to a splitting of the kingdom and spiritual apostasy that occurred among the people.

The prophets of Israel, one with whom we are familiar – Hosea – pronounce judgements of exile that would come upon Israel if she doesn't repent of her sins.

We all know the story; Israel does not repent, and she continues along her path of apostasy and is consequently exiled.

This theme of exile is significant in redemptive history, one that we must be aware of when reading the Old Testament and the Psalms.

It is significant because of the land promise and how God had marked the land to be the locale he would dwell with his people. As the people are exiled, we read in the scriptures of the people's heartache and their longing to be back home while they are dispersed to foreign lands.

For example, Lamentations 1:1 reads:

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<sup>4</sup> For more information on the biblical-theological development of God's dwelling place with man, see T. Desmond Alexander *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*.

How lonely sits the city  
that was full of people!  
How like a widow has she become,  
she who was great among the nations!  
She who was a princess among the provinces  
has become a slave.<sup>5</sup>

The Israelites were dispersed from their beloved city and land, the city and land they worshipped God in.

Now I intentionally skipped verse 1, but what we read in verse 1 is an exhortation, one that recurs throughout the Psalter, for the people to “give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!”

Last time I preached, I mentioned how the phrase *steadfast love* is translated from the Hebrew word *hesed*. This word means covenant faithfulness and loyal love.

These exiled Israelites suffered the consequence of Israel’s previous sin. Now what we read about in this Psalm is how their deliverance from exile is yet another reminder that God’s love is truly steadfast, and that his covenant-faithfulness does endure forever. God kept his promise to them.

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<sup>5</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), La 1:1.

They were back home where God's presence resided, and they could now sing out with gusto that "God is good."

Believers under the New Covenant no longer look to a specific geographic location to worship God in, because the Lord has chosen a new tabernacle in which to dwell with man – He dwells in his people by His Spirit. (Eph. 2:22).

What verses 4-32 tell of are the Israelite's experiences while in exile and how God is faithful to deliver his covenant people when they call upon him.

## **2. Wanderers, Prisoners, Fools and the Distressed (v. 4-32)**

The Psalmist breaks up these 28 verses into four groupings, or experiences of the Israelites while in exile, and there is a reason he includes these stories for his audience.

The Psalmist wanted to remind God's people after their exile that they were a people who were exiled from their home. Why does the Psalmist want to do this? Because it is easy to forget what God has done for us.

These verses can help us to recall our own deliverance stories.

Let's look at the first grouping in verses 4-9. The Psalmist mentions those who wandered through desert wastes, without a city to call home. These wanderers were also hungry and thirsty and needed to be fed.

Prior to conversion, how many here searched for your identity and nourishment in all the wrong things, only to be left spiritually starving? I'm certain I am not the only one.

Perhaps, your wandering wasn't marked by hunger and thirst, but by having plenty. It could be that the Lord had to show you how meaningless life can be while you searched for meaning in the accumulation of material things such as wealth or finding your identity in relationships.

These wanderers, we are told, had souls that fainted within them. Regardless of whether your wandering was filled with hunger and thirst – with little or plenty – all of us experienced a fainted, tired soul before meeting Jesus. We each needed to find rest.

This reminds me of Augustine's famous line from his *Confessions* when he writes "You (that is God) have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." What Augustine understood is that the human condition prior to Christ is one of restlessness.

Being made in the image of God, every man, woman, and child is created for communion with their Creator.

If it were not for Jesus saving us, we would all be on a dead-end search, looking for meaning in all that is meaningless.

The hungry and thirsty wanderer in our text can cry out to the Lord and find rest and be filled because of the covenant faithfulness and loyal love of the Lord.

The second experience we read of in our text is of the prisoner, in verses 10-16. They endured affliction and were “in irons” because they had “rebelled against the words of God.” This experience depicts how those who hear God’s word and fail to obey it will be punished and suffer harm.

But even the prisoner is not without hope. The prisoner can call upon the Lord of covenant faithfulness and be rescued from their captivity caused by their sin.

Again, I’m certain there are some here who can find their own story of redemption in this passage. We were each imprisoned at one time by the passions of our flesh and sinful desires. If it were not for the tender mercy of God, we would still be bound and imprisoned by those passions.

Verse 16 tells us that God “shatters the doors of bronze and cuts in two the bars of iron.” Only God could release those in shackles, and it is only the power of God that can set captives free. Praise God for the freedom we experience in Christ!

The next grouping in verses 17-22 is like that of the prisoner, because the Psalmist tells us these Israelites “were fools through their sinful ways.” Like the prisoner, the fool is held captive by their sin and suffers harm because of their sins.

An appropriate understanding of sin is that its wages always lead to death, which we find in Romans 6:23. But if we continue in that verse, we also read that the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The prisoner and fool, the captive and insolent, each one can call upon the Lord for deliverance and be rescued from the wages of their sin.

Finally, the last grouping of those who called upon the Lord and were delivered are the distressed. Verses 23-32 tell us of the merchant who is at sea and how these merchants were caught in stormy waters. They then cry out to the Lord for their deliverance and were saved.

The Psalmist doesn't tell us that this was a result of their sin. What we find here in this last group are those who are confronted with their mere humanity. In the face of the

violence of nature, we are all confronted with just how small and powerless we truly are.

Have you ever been in a storm with thunder so violent that it shook your house (Thursday)? Or have you been in a plane that was being rocked by winds that cause extreme turbulence? It is in moments like these where we are confronted with just how little control we have over our circumstances.

The sailors in these verses recognized that they had no control over the waves of the sea, only the Lord did, and they cried out to the Lord for deliverance and were saved.

Four different circumstances but all end with the same result – deliverance. Notice how each circumstance or grouping ends with a similar call to respond (verses 8, 15, 21, 31): Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man!

Each deliverance carries with it a call to respond to the Lord in thanksgiving, to thank him for his *steadfast love*. We, too, should read this Psalm, recall our own circumstances which led to our deliverance, and sing out in thanksgiving for all that God has done.

Our God who is steadfast in love is also sovereign in his care. This leads us to the next point.

### **3. The Sovereign Care of God (33-42)**

The same God who provides deliverance to his covenant people is the same God who controls all things. Verses 33-42 demonstrate his absolute sovereignty over the created order.

Notice how in vv.33-35 the Psalmist tells of the Lord's sovereign control over water in dry places. This would have massive implications for the Israelites, considering how dependent they would be for water in the arid region of the Middle East they lived in. Having access to water was essential to satisfy thirst, raise livestock and grow crops.

Verse 38 provides us with the result of God's sovereign care: blessing and abundance for his people.

God's desire for his covenant people is that they would prosper. The Psalmist recognizes this, and we must also. The Lord doesn't leave his people lacking what they need. Are you in need this morning? Ask the Lord for provision and he will provide for you.

Now, as a disclaimer, we are not proponents of the health & wealth gospel here at Center Church; the idea that God will shower material riches on every Christian.

But the testimony of Scripture is that God's people are provided for: both in what they need to survive *physically*



AND in what they need to thrive *spiritually*. Our God is a God of provision.

The Psalmist reiterates this for us in verse 41 when he writes that the needy would be raised up out of affliction, and that God would make their “families like flocks” (simile that conveys God’s desire for his people to be fruitful/multiply).

This should show us that our God is not just a sovereign God who does whatever He pleases (which he is), but it demonstrates that our God cares for us.

Christian, let this portion of Psalm 107 remind you that this same God who provided for the Israelites is the same God who provides for us: he doesn’t spare any good thing from his children.

Our fourth and final point:

#### **4. A Final Consideration (v. 43)**

In verse 43, we read:

**Whoever is wise, let him attend to these things;  
let them consider the steadfast love of the LORD.<sup>6</sup>**

Up until this point we have considered who the redeemed of the Lord are (God’s covenant people bought out of

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<sup>6</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 107:43.

slavery and redeemed from their spiritual debt), we've also considered where they've been gathered to (God's promised land for his covenant people), we have also considered the circumstances surrounding their redemption.

In the last line of our Psalm, the Psalmist appeals to God's people to be wise. Here, wisdom for the Psalmist equates to considering the steadfast love of the Lord.

This call to consideration for the Israelite would require them to recollect how God has shown himself faithful to his promises.

These redeemed Israelites were able to experience first-hand the covenant-faithfulness and sovereign care of the Lord through their deliverance from the various circumstances we read of in Psalm 107.

What we should consider is that the experience of the four groupings of Israelites who were delivered in our Psalm parallels the experience of another Israelite.

The first group's experience we discussed – the Wanderer – parallels the experience of Jesus as he was led into the wilderness to wander for 40 days and 40 nights.

This group in Psalm 107, we are told, were hungry and thirsty. Imagine how hungry and thirsty Jesus would have been during his wilderness wandering.

The second group and third group – the Prisoner & Fool – received their prison sentence and affliction because of *their* sin. These prisoners suffered affliction and were at the brink of death by their own doing.

Jesus was also imprisoned before his crucifixion, although he never sinned, and he suffered undue affliction at the cross for the sins of others.

The final group – the Distressed – were tossed around like a ragdoll at sea. They cried out to the Lord for deliverance and were saved from the crashing waves.

We find in the gospels an account of the disciples being at sea with Jesus, and how they suffered under a mighty tempest that threatened to wreck their boat.

But where these 4 experiences share some similarities with Jesus, there are also some major differences for us to consider.

Only Jesus could feed the hungry and quench the thirst of the thirsty. He did this by turning a few loaves of bread and fishes into enough food for thousands. And he tells the Samaritan woman at the well that he Himself is living water.

Only Jesus could heal the afflicted, raise the dead, and cast out demons from the possessed, thus setting spiritual captives free.

And in the face of tempestuous waters, only Jesus could calm the raging seas.

The Christian can consider the same covenant faithfulness of the Lord as the Israelites did because *Jesus is the expressed embodiment of the covenant faithfulness of our God.*

Jesus represents the power of God in every miracle he ever performed. Jesus fed the hungry, healed the sick, raised the dead to life, and stilled the seas.<sup>7</sup> Only Jesus can rescue the wanderer, free the prisoner, and save the distressed.

To close, if you are a Christian here this morning, what this Psalm teaches us is that we can have a deep, abiding attitude of thanksgiving because Jesus has done the same miraculous work for each of us.

We were all at one time wanderers, prisoners, fools, and distressed but at just the right time Christ rescued us.

Every believer has a rescue story. Each of us were bought out of slavery to sin and our spiritual debt was settled by

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<sup>7</sup> See R. Belcher Jr. *The Messiah and the Psalms: Preaching Christ from all the Psalms* for additional background on this reference.

the blood of Jesus, and we must never forget this price he paid for us.

The beginning of Psalm 107 tells of those “gathered in from the lands.” Church, God is still gathering a people from all over the earth unto himself. We know this because the Bible says in Colossians 1:6 that the gospel is **indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing**<sup>8</sup>

God will use the story of the redeemed to continue bringing newly redeemed people into his family. Of course, it is only the gospel that rescues the lost and saves the sinner, but the Lord can use our testimonies to draw people in to hear the gospel.

Were you a wanderer? Remember your wandering and how Christ satisfied your deep hunger and thirst. Tell others your testimony and watch how God uses your story to bring himself glory!

Maybe you were a prisoner and a fool: remember the day that Christ saved you from your sin and transformed your callous heart. Tell others of how Jesus rescued you from your sin and delivered you!

Or maybe the Lord calmed the stormy waters of a recent trial in your life: praise God for his sovereign power and

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<sup>8</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Col 1:6.

care for you! Tell others of how the Lord intervened for you and see how God works in others as they hear about his sovereign power and care.

Church, let this Psalm be a reminder that our God is still in the business of delivering the wanderer, saving sinners, and rescuing the distressed.

Pray: Father, Your Word is glorious! It speaks directly to us, and we thank You that this morning you have graciously addressed us through the preaching of your word.

I pray that we would be a people who would remember how You have delivered us and that in this remembrance, we would be overflowing with gratitude and thanksgiving.

Lord may our gratitude and thanksgiving cause us to be witnesses – sharing our testimony of deliverance with family and friends, loved ones and neighbors. Most of all, Lord, help us to testify to your goodness and power in how you have given us everything we need in Christ.

Spirit, we pray you would bring Psalm 107 to mind when we are stuck in seasons of apathy or indifference, and that you would use Your word to bring us true and lasting delight in Christ our Redeemer.

Father, thank you for your gracious, sovereign care over your people in providing us with your word. In Jesus name, Amen.

(If you are not a believer...)

Benediction from 1 Th. 5:23-24

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
<sup>24</sup> He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it. <sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Th 5:23–24.