

Let the Redeemed Say So

Psalm 107:1-43

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Count Your Blessings

A few weeks ago, our family started watching *Diff'rent Strokes* in the evenings. If you're too young to remember *Diff'rent Strokes*, it's a sitcom from the late 70s and early 80s about Willis and Arnold Jackson, two African American brothers from Harlem who were adopted by Mr. Drummond, a wealthy white businessman from Manhattan.

There are a lot of hilarious lines from the show, mainly out of the mouth of Arnold. You're probably familiar with his most famous line: "What'chu talkin' 'bout Willis?" One of my favorite lines is from the episode called "The Social Worker." A social worker comes to check on the boys and see how they're adjusting. Everyone's nervous. So, they plan to lay it on thick for the social worker, so she'll know they're thriving. My favorite scene begins with Mr. Drummond talking to the social worker while the boys are in their room. Then they make their way down the stairs, skipping arm in arm. Willis politely says, "Sorry to keep you waiting Mr. Drummond." Then Arnold adds, "Yeah, we would've been here sooner, but we were upstairs counting our blessings!" The studio audience erupts in laughter.

It's hilarious because everybody knows young children aren't really in the habit of counting their blessings. Actually, none of us do it very well. It's easier to count our troubles than our blessings, especially in 2020. It's easier to count the number of COVID cases or days in quarantine. It's easier to count the people who've lost income or even their lives. It's easier to follow all the drama with counting votes.

I'm not saying we shouldn't count these things. They're real, important, and affect our lives. But counting our blessings is more important. In fact, it may be the best thing we can do when there are so many challenges in our lives. Counting our blessings gives perspective to the trouble we face. And the week of Thanksgiving is as good a time as any to do it.

So, let me encourage you to take time this week, maybe as you sit around the table together on Thursday, to count your earthly blessings and give thanks for all you have. But especially, take time to count your spiritual blessings. To help you do that, we're going to look at Psalm 107 this morning. Please turn in your Bibles to Psalm 107.

Earlier this year, we studied a number of psalms in Book IV of the Psalter. If you'll recall, Book IV is all about life in exile (troubled times). Look at the final plea of Book IV:

Psalm 106:47¹

*⁴⁷Save 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.*

¹ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

The first words of Book V in Psalm 107 are an answer to that prayer:

Psalm 107:1-3

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.*

The Lord has answered the prayers of his people in exile! He has gathered them from exile, back to Jerusalem to worship him. And so, they should give him thanks.

And yet, as we learned from Daniel, the return from Babylon wasn't the end of the hard times for Israel. God had not yet established his everlasting kingdom. Israel still faced oppression and occupation of other nations. The Davidic king was not on the throne. And so, they were still looking to a future and final deliverance. But even though they were struggling, they could still give thanks to the Lord for what he had done. The Lord's deliverance in the past gave them hope as they looked to the future.

The same is true for us today. We're living in exile. We feel it. That's been our theme for 2020. But even as we're waiting for the consummation of God's eternal kingdom, we have hope. We have hope because God has promised that Christ will return to take us home, as Jordan said last week. But we also have hope because of God's proven track record of keeping his promises to his people throughout history.

As we read this psalm together, I want you to listen to all the ways God has worked to deliver his people. Even in our exile, there are so many reasons to give thanks to the Lord.

Psalm 107:1-43

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!*

- ⁹For he satisfies the longing soul,
and the hungry soul he fills with good things.
- ¹⁰Some sat in darkness and in the shadow of death,
prisoners in affliction and in irons,
¹¹for they had rebelled against the words of God,
and spurned the counsel of the Most High.
¹²So he bowed their hearts down with hard labor;
they fell down, with none to help.
¹³Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and he delivered them from their distress.
¹⁴He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death,
and burst their bonds apart.
¹⁵Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,
for his wondrous works to the children of man!
¹⁶For he shatters the doors of bronze
and cuts in two the bars of iron.
- ¹⁷Some were fools through their sinful ways,
and because of their iniquities suffered affliction;
¹⁸they loathed any kind of food,
and they drew near to the gates of death.
¹⁹Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and he delivered them from their distress.
²⁰He sent out his word and healed them,
and delivered them from their destruction.
²¹Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,
for his wondrous works to the children of man!
²²And let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving,
and tell of his deeds in songs of joy!
- ²³Some went down to the sea in ships,
doing business on the great waters;
²⁴they saw the deeds of the LORD,
his wondrous works in the deep.
²⁵For he commanded and raised the stormy wind,
which lifted up the waves of the sea.
²⁶They mounted up to heaven; they went down to the depths;
their courage melted away in their evil plight;
²⁷they reeled and staggered like drunken men
and were at their wits' end.
²⁸Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and he delivered them from their distress.
²⁹He made the storm be still,
and the waves of the sea were hushed.
³⁰Then they were glad that the waters were quiet,
and he brought them to their desired haven.

- ³¹Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,
for his wondrous works to the children of man!
- ³²Let them extol him in the congregation of the people,
and praise him in the assembly of the elders.
- ³³He turns rivers into a desert,
springs of water into thirsty ground,
- ³⁴a fruitful land into a salty waste,
because of the evil of its inhabitants.
- ³⁵He turns a desert into pools of water,
a parched land into springs of water.
- ³⁶And there he lets the hungry dwell,
and they establish a city to live in;
- ³⁷they sow fields and plant vineyards
and get a fruitful yield.
- ³⁸By his blessing they multiply greatly,
and he does not let their livestock diminish.
- ³⁹When they are diminished and brought low
through oppression, evil, and sorrow,
- ⁴⁰he pours contempt on princes
and makes them wander in trackless wastes;
- ⁴¹but he raises up the needy out of affliction
and makes their families like flocks.
- ⁴²The upright see it and are glad,
and all wickedness shuts its mouth.
- ⁴³Whoever is wise, let him attend to these things;
let them consider the steadfast love of the LORD.

This is the Word of the Lord.

This psalm is divided into three parts. The first is a call to worship God for his steadfast love (1-3). The second calls forth four witnesses to testify to God's steadfast love (4-32). And the third is a call to wisdom; to consider the Lord's steadfast love (33-43).

CALL TO WORSHIP (1-3)

The call to worship is found at the beginning of the passage. We're called to give thanks to the Lord for his steadfast love. The main theme of the passage is God's steadfast love. And the main aim is for his people to give thanks for his steadfast love. This is not only in the call to worship. It's repeated and emphatic throughout the psalm.

God's love is praiseworthy. It's unlike the love of man. It's not simply a feeling or an emotion. His love is proven in action. God's steadfast love is his covenant love toward his covenant people. It's his commitment to be faithful to his people forever. And God's love never fails, unlike human love.

In fact, even when we are faithless, God remains faithful. He redeems his people when they sin. That's love. And he protects his people from their enemies. And provides for them in every circumstance in life.

CALL FOR WITNESSES (4-32)

And that leads us to the second part of the psalm. The first part of the psalm is a call to worship. The second part calls forth four witnesses to testify to God's faithful love. Verses 4-32 give four examples of how God's love is experienced.

These four examples form a sandwich. The first and last examples deal with two general troubles we face. Troubles on land and troubles at sea. The middle two examples deal specifically with spiritual troubles. The trouble with sin.

And even though this psalm is situated at the beginning of Book V to draw out Israel's deliverance from exile, the examples in this psalm aren't restricted to the exile. They are more general than that. They teach us that we can cry out to God and experience his love in every circumstance.

Troubles by Land and Sea

Let's begin by looking at the first and last examples of God's steadfast love.

Verses 4-9 describe God's people wandering in the wilderness. Maybe this is a reference to Abraham's sojourns, or Israel's wilderness wanderings, or to the exile. But it really describes *any* situation where God's people feel lost in the wide world and longing for home. They feel vulnerable and exposed, "with no city to dwell in;" longing for protection.² They experience hunger and thirst, longing for God's provision. They're at the end of their rope and can't take it anymore. Their longing soul wants to be satisfied with God's good love.

In verses 23-32, we see someone struggling at sea. They're doing their business on the great waters, when all of the sudden, they fall victim to what insurance companies call an "act of God" (v. 24). God brings a storm that strips them of their courage (v. 26). They're at their wits end (v. 27), at the end of human wisdom.³

As one commentary says, "They're getting on with their life and going about their business, when out of the blue comes a storm that upsets all calculations, destroys all cherished comforts, and leaves them helpless."⁴ I love this line because it describes so well what we're going through in 2020.

We were going along just fine. I'd say, before 2020, I was doing as well as I can remember in every area of life. I was thriving physically, relationally, and spiritually. But now my boat is taking on water and weighed down. I suspect many of you feel the same. So, what can we do? Where do we turn?

In the middle of each crisis, the psalmist tells us, the people of God "cried to the Lord in their trouble and he delivered them from their distress." God doesn't always give us immediate relief from our troubles in life. But this psalm teaches us that God has a proven track record of bringing the homeless home and calming the storms in life. But above all, it teaches us that every storm in life is an opportunity to cry out to the Lord and trust him.⁵

² Willem VanGemeren, *Psalms*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary

³ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries

⁴ J. Alec Motyer, "The Psalms," in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*

⁵ Motyer

How are you responding to the storm we're in now? Are you like Jonah, in the belly of the ship in utter despair? Or are you like the men on deck, crying out to the Lord? Is COVID strengthening your faith and reliance on God? Or has it exposed just how thin your faith is?

Maybe you're asking, "Does the Father really love us?" Let me be clear. He does. He's proven it over and over. So, we can trust him and give thanks to him. He is worthy of all blessing and honor and glory.

Troubles with Rebellion and Folly

The first and last examples teach us that some of our troubles are just a result of living in a fallen world. But some of our troubles are a result of sin in our life. That's what the middle two examples teach us.

In verses 10-16, we see people living in a dark dungeon. They're prisoners, in bondage. And what's the cause of their slavery? It's rebellion against God's word.

From the beginning, Satan has tempted God's people to reject God by rebelling against his rule and his word. In the moment, rebelling against God's word seems like a path to fewer restrictions and greater freedom. We *think* we want a life without rules. But the repeated testimony of Scripture shows us the irony of rebellion. Rejecting God's word doesn't lead us to greater freedom; it leads to greater bondage.⁶ Greed promises freedom to have more, but often leads to bondage in debt. Lust promises freedom of pleasure, but how many have found their addiction to pornography a dark dungeon right next to the doors of death.

In verses 17-22, we see sin as folly. The fool knows what's right, but chooses to do wrong. The fool thinks he knows better than God. But following our own way won't lead to a better life. It will only leave us sick, ashamed, and sad.

So, when sin has left you in chains or in affliction, what should you do? We should turn to God. We should cry out to God. But what many people do when they're suffering for their sin is run away from God. Their shame is so thick, they don't think God could ever forgive them.

This exposes our thin faith in God. The love of God is higher and deeper than your sin. And it's a love that's proven in action. In each example in this psalm, God delivers his people from sin. In Jesus we have an even greater proof of God's love. "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). The Son of God shed his blood to pay for our sins, but also to break the chains of sin. As the hymn says:

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night.
Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray:
I woke— the dungeon flamed with light!
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.*

*Amazing love, how can it be,
That thou, my God, should'st die for me?*

⁶ Motyer

The only way to be forgiven of your rebellion against God's word is to receive the healing that's found in the word of the gospel (v. 20).⁷ The only way to be free from your sins is to cry out to God and believe the gospel. To repent and trust Christ. If you're here today and have never received the forgiveness of God, I want to encourage you today to turn to God, not to run from him. But the same is true for those of you who have been a Christian for years. When you find yourself trapped in sin, don't run from God, run to him.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from unrighteousness. That's what the steadfast love of the Lord does.

We need to count all our blessings, friends. All that we have is a gift from God. But the greatest blessing of all is the blessing of God's grace through Christ. "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:7). Let us count the ways God has blessed us in Christ. Let us count our blessings one by one! And then give thanks to the Lord for what he has done.

CALL TO WISDOM (33-43)

We've seen the call to worship God. We've seen four witnesses called forth to testify to God's steadfast love. Now let's turn to the final section of this psalm, the call to wisdom.

The call is clear in verse 43: "Whoever is wise, let him attend to these things; let them consider the steadfast love of the Lord." If we're going to give thanks to the Lord for his steadfast love, we have to consider the steadfast love of the Lord. We have to concentrate on the steadfast love of God.

Specifically, verses 33-42 call us to consider the ways God reverses the fortunes of his people and his enemies. Or to use the language of Hannah's prayer or of Mary's prayer, we have to consider the way God brings down the wicked who prosper and the way he raises up the humble who depend on God.⁸ God will bring down the wicked. "He turns rivers into a desert, springs of water into thirsty ground, a fruitful land into a salty waste, because of the evil of its inhabitants" (vv. 33-34). And God will raise up the needy. "He turns a desert into pools of water, a parched land into springs of water" (v. 35).

The Lord is sovereign over history. Even when things seem to be spinning out of control, God is in control. He causes the storms, but he's also able to calm the storms.

We live in what some have called unprecedented times. But there's really nothing new under the sun. God will put the world to its rights and he will bring justice upon the wicked. And he'll raise up the needy out of affliction. He's promised it. And he's done it throughout history.

The most supreme example is found in Jesus Christ. In God's wisdom, the Son of God became a man. And he was humbled to the point of death on a cross. But then God raised him from the dead and exalted him to the highest place.

Those who are in Christ will experience difficulties in this life. Difficulties because of the fall, difficulties because of our own sin. But if we're in Christ we will be lifted from our affliction. We will go the way that Christ went.

⁷ Motyer

⁸ Kidner

We have to consider the steadfast love of God. We need to consider the way God turns deserts into pools of water. We need to count our blessings. Counting our blessings in Christ helps us to make sense of our lives as we count the troubles in this world. This is what gives us perspective in our exile.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!