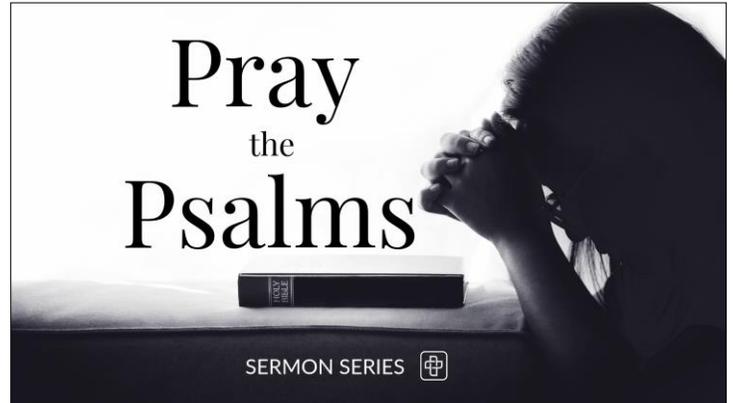




Let the Redeemed of the Lord Tell Their Story!

Psalm 107

David Sunday June 30, 2019



What a wonderful time today in baptism to reflect on the ways God loves us and all that He's done in our lives. Puritans spoke of "the Christian duty of improving your baptism." By that, they didn't mean you should get baptized over and over again, or—in the words of David Mathis—they didn't mean you could go back and improve the quality or quantity of the faith you had when you were baptized. Nor did it mean you should improve the character of the person who baptized you, or change who was in attendance, or how clean the water is, or any of that kind of stuff. That's not what "improving your baptism" meant to the Puritans.

You can read their answer to the question, "How do we improve our baptism?" in the Westminster Larger Catechism, Question 167. So you might want to google that. It's very rich and instructive. But let me summarize a few things they said we should be doing every time we witness a baptism.

- First, we should seriously and thankfully remember our own baptism and what it signifies—that we've been united with Christ in His death and resurrection—and all the benefits that flow to us from that.
- Second, they said whenever we see a baptism, we should be humbled by the sin that still defiles us and ask the Holy Spirit to search our hearts and show us how we've grown lax or cold or disobedient.
- Third, they said we should be strengthened in our assurance that all our sins have been forgiven and cleansed through the work of Christ. Just as we came forth from the waters of that baptism the first time, completely immersed in Christ's love and grace and forgiveness, when you see a baptism, you should ask the Holy Spirit to revive the joy of your salvation and strengthen your assurance that you are a forgiven, cleansed, redeemed child of God.
- Fourth, they said we should draw strength from Christ's death and resurrection to put sin to death. Baptism should remind us of that and encourage us to put sin to death.

- Finally, baptism helps us realize our identity in God, because of the work He's done in Christ.

Psalm 107 is a great Psalm to help us live out our baptismal identity as God's redeemed people. I'd like you to open your Bible to Psalm 107 and read the first three verses. This is a stirring call to praise and thank the Lord for all the ways He has loved us.

*Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his faithful love endures forever.*
² *Let the redeemed of the LORD proclaim
that he has redeemed them from the power of the foe*
³ *and has gathered them from the lands—
from the east and the west,
from the north and the south.*

Amen!

This Psalm cannot be limited to any particular time in Israel's history. There are echoes of all kinds of historical things in the Bible in this Psalm, but what it's talking about here is a worldwide gathering of all God's people from the four corners of the earth, and it's going to give us pictures of what all the redeemed people of God experience when God rescues us, when He gathers us into His family.

Four stories are going to be told in this Psalm. As we hear these different stories, don't think so much of four different groups of people who've been redeemed. Think more that here are four different angles, four vivid poetic descriptions, of what redemption looks like in our lives—in my life. There's a reason why God is showing us the story of our redemption from four different angles in this Psalm. It's because He wants us to tell this story, to share it with others. As it says here, "*Let the redeemed of the Lord proclaim...*" Or as the NIV puts it, "*Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story...*"

That's what we do when we come into the waters of baptism, but that's just the beginning. We're to tell that story again and again and again throughout our lives. I love what Jeff Vandersteldt said in the video, "Whatever God does to us, He also intends to do through us." God redeemed us and this Psalm is summoning us, as the redeemed, like a choir conductor who gathers the choir together and says, "In four-part harmony, now, sing the story! Proclaim the story of what God has done for you."

This story, the story of redemption we're going to read in this Psalm, is our story. When our hearts grow cold, we become lukewarm and lose the joy of our salvation, reading a Psalm like this that rehearses the story of our redemption can rekindle in us our sense of God's love and our

thankfulness for all He's done for us. I want you to look at the last verse of this Psalm too, before we look at these pictures. Psalm 107:43 says, "*Let whoever is wise pay attention to these things...*" Pay attention to these stories of redemption, "*and consider the Lord's acts of faithful love.*"

Do you want to be wise? Or do you want to be a fool? This is what it means to be wise. You consider your life, think about your circumstances and see that through it all, God has been faithful. He's been full of love toward you. And you thank Him for that. You thank Him for all the times you've cried to Him and He's heard you and has shown His faithful love to you. That's what it means to be wise—to remember his love.

On the other hand, this is what it means to be foolish. It means you go on living your life as if there's not a God in heaven Who deeply loves you. John Starke says, "The fool goes on with his life without attending to how deeply God has loved him." It's foolishness to go on with your life without paying careful attention to how deeply God has loved you. This Psalm shows us how we've been loved by God.

As we go through these pictures, children, you have a sheet where you can draw a picture of one of the stories of redemption we're going to hear this morning. We'll hear about people being lost and needing to find a home. We're going to hear about people being in prison with chains on them. We're going to hear about people who were foolish and got sick because of their sinful ways. And we're going to hear about people who were in a storm-tossed sea and needed someone to rescue them. And adults, if you want to draw a picture, you're welcome to do that as well.

What does it look like to be redeemed? Let's look at Psalm 107:4-9

We were lost, but now we're found (7-9).

Verse four, we were wandering in a desolate wilderness.

Verse 5, we were hungry and thirsty; our spirits were fainting. We were exhausted and isolated, because this world is a spiritual wasteland. Left to ourselves, we get lost, restless and unsettled. We can't find satisfaction, because we have spiritual hunger and appetites that gnaw away at our souls but cannot be fulfilled by anything in this world.

Verse 6 tells us what the lost need to do in their lostness. Pay close attention to verse six, because you're going to see it repeated four times in this Psalm. What do you do when you're lost, desolate, exhausted and isolated in this world? Verse six, "*Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble; he rescued them from their distress.*"

Right now, someone in this room, I am sure, is feeling very confused, very lost, lonely and exhausted, aching with hunger and thirst that nothing in this world can satisfy. Maybe you've lost purpose. You've lost direction. Maybe you can't fall asleep at night because you're so restless. And

then you have such a hard time getting out of bed in the morning because you've lost your will to live. This world is like that sometimes.

But there's a Shepherd Who can lead you out of the desert and can make you lie down in green pastures (Psalm 23). He can bring you beside still waters, where you can drink, being nourished and satisfied. That's what redemption looks like: lost people finding a home, God bringing an end to loneliness. God putting us into a family of forgiven people whose spiritual hunger is being satisfied by living bread and whose thirst is being quenched through living waters. God leading us to a city that cannot be shaken, where human life flourishes in the presence of God forever.

That's what Jesus came into the world to be. He came to be the way that brings lost people back home to God. That's what we see in verse seven. After they cried to the Lord in their trouble, He delivered them. Look at verse seven to see how He delivered them: "*He led them by a right path to go to a city where they could live.*" "You're lost? Let Me lead you to a place of safety."

Then in verse nine, "*He has satisfied the thirsty and filled the hungry with good things.*"

That's redemption. Is that your story? If it's not, it could be. That could be your story today. God is telling you this story today, because He's still writing new characters into the story. There's plenty of room in the city of God for more and more people to dwell. There's no risk of overpopulation in God's city. There's no risk of not enough resources. God is inviting everyone into this story today. He's saying, "If you're feeling like this, cry out to Me in your trouble and I will rescue you from your distress."

If He's done that for you, He's saying to you, "Don't ever forget it. Don't ever stop praising Me." Pay attention to verse eight, because you're going to see this over and over again in this Psalm: "*Let them give thanks to the Lord for his faithful love and his wondrous works for all humanity.*" That should be our response to His redemption in our lives.

We were bound in chains, but now we're free (10-16).

Let's go the second scenario where we're pictured as people who were bound in chains, but who have been set free. Look at verse ten. Some sat in darkness, in the shadow of death, prisoners in affliction, in irons and cruel chains. Why is this? Look in verse 11: "*...because they rebelled against God's commands and despised the counsel of the Most High.*" They wouldn't listen to His Word and now they were trapped. Notice in verse 12, their bondage is the result of God's discipline. "*He broke their spirits with hard labor...*"

Friends, when we choose to serve sin, God may choose to give us up to the power of our sin, handing us over to the hardness of our hearts. Jesus says in John 8:34, *“Truly I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin.”* The Apostle Peter says in 2 Peter 2:19 that people are enslaved to whatever defeats them. Our consciences and souls get weighed down with shame and condemnation, and we cannot break free. This is the thing about sin. First it entices you, then it enslaves you. You can’t get free from it.

But Jesus also said this in John 8:35-36: *“A slave does not remain in the household forever, but a son does remain forever. So if the Son sets you free, you really will be free.”* That’s what He came into the world to do. He came into the world so that through His perfect life, His atoning death and His glorious resurrection, He would now have the power to set our hearts free from guilt and shame and condemnation.

If you find yourself today bound by chains that you cannot break—you’re trapped in something like jealousy or lust or some type of sin and you can’t get free from it—look at what you need to do in Psalm 107:13: *“Then they cried out to the Lord...”* Cried—I like that. It’s not just a little whimper—it’s a cry. “Lord, I need You! I’m in trouble!” *“...And he saved them from their distress.”* Verse 14, *“He brought them out of darkness and gloom and broke their chains apart.”* Is that your story? Can you sing this this morning?

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

[From *And Can It Be That I Should Gain?* by Charles Wesley]

That’s the story of all who are redeemed. Our chains are gone and we’ve been set free. Sin will no longer have dominion over us, because we are not under the law but under grace. If that’s your story, you’re invited, called and summoned in this Psalm to respond. Verses 15-16: *“Let them give thanks to the Lord for his faithful love and his wondrous works for all humanity. For he has broken down the bronze gates and cut through the iron bars,”* setting us free. Glory to God! Thank Him! Praise Him for this great redemption.

We were addicted to self-harm, but now we’ve been healed (17-22).

Then we see another picture in verses 17-22. The first word in verse 17 is the word “fools.” *“Fools suffered affliction because of their rebellious ways and their iniquities. They loathed all food and came near the gates of death.”* Friends, to be a fool in the Bible is more than just ignorance. Tim and Kathy Keller describe it like this: “Fools in the Bible are not just regular sinners, but those who become destructively self-absorbed and self-deceived.”

Has that ever been you—destructively self-absorbed and self-deceived? The Kellers go on to say, “The picture is of those who have badly damaged their spiritual and physical health through foolish, self-indulgent lifestyles and addictions.” Examples abound, such as drug addictions and all kinds of self-harm. What happens is you badly damage your spiritual and physical health. You don’t even want to eat anymore, it gets so bad, according to verse 18. Friends, we have the power to ruin ourselves, but we don’t have the power to rescue ourselves. We can bring destruction, but we can’t bring deliverance, but there is One Who can.

Look at the refrain which is repeated in verse 19. This is what all the redeemed have in common. *“Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble...”* They cried out, “Lord! Save me!” *“...And he saved them from their distress.”* I love that this section points out how God saved them in verse 20: *“He sent his word and healed them; he rescued them from the Pit.”*

Friends, the Bible—the Word of God—has the power to heal all the harm we have done to ourselves through our foolish ways. We have done all we can to ruin our lives through our self-harm, but the Bible has the power to heal us. God’s Word not only corrects us, God’s Word not only shows us the path we need to take, God’s Word actually has healing properties. It restores us. It makes us whole again. It lifts us out of the pit that we dug ourselves into.

If you find yourself enslaved to some kind of addiction, trapped in self-destructive, harmful behavior—maybe alcohol, drugs, pornography—there is power in the Word of God to set you free from that and to heal you from all the damage you’ve caused yourself.

In verse 21, the Word of God reveals the unfailing love of God to people who don’t deserve it. In His Word, God keeps saying to people who will come to Him and who will cry out to Him, “Even though you’ve done everything in your power to destroy yourself, I still love you. I still set My love on you and will not let you go.” For that, we should be filled with thanks and praise, just as verses 21-22 command us: *“Let them give thanks to the Lord for his faithful love.”*

Are we getting this message, friends? Is it sinking in? The psalmist keeps telling us, “Thank the Lord for His faithful love. Consider how He’s loved you and don’t forget to thank Him.” That’s wisdom. Thank Him *“...for his wondrous works for all humanity. Let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving and announce his works with shouts of joy.”*

I like that. Worship sometimes needs to be solemn, but sometimes it needs to get a little raucous, a little loud, a little excited, because God has done great things for us. There's a place for shouting with joy in praise to God and I think a baptism Sunday is a good day to do that. We've been redeemed!

We were helplessly battered by the storms of life, but God became our Haven (22-32).

Here's a picture of people out at sea here. They're doing business on the great waters. These are skilled mariners. They know how to conduct trade out there on those vast waters. Then a storm comes. They think they have this thing down. They think they know how to get across that sea just fine. But a storm comes and it's from the hand of God, as we see in verses 25-27: *"He spoke and raised a stormy wind that stirred up the waves of the sea. Rising up to the sky, sinking down to the depths, their courage melting away in anguish, they reeled and staggered like a drunkard."* Some versions say they were at their wits' end. What it's actually saying is that all their skill became useless. All their ability to navigate that sea was no help now.

Friends, that's a picture of life. Sometimes you think you're sailing along, sometimes you think, "I've got this. I've got the right connections, the right education, the right resources. I can handle this fine. I can go anywhere. I can do anything. I'm on top of the world." Then suddenly a storm you never imagined would come and it's beyond your control. You can't manage. Your own skills and wisdom are useless, so you realize, "I'm going to sink if God leaves me here on my own."

What do you do when you're at your wits' end? What do you do when all your skill becomes useless? You do verse 28: *"Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress."* So God actually sends storms into the lives of people so that they will cry out to Him and experience His redemption. Because if it was always smooth sailing, we might think we did it our way, that we managed life just fine and we didn't need a Savior; we didn't need a Redeemer. So He sends things into our lives that make us realize, "I can't do this," then we cry out.

Then look at how He responds in Mark 35-41: *"He stilled the storm to a whisper, and the waves of the sea were hushed."* "Master, don't You care that we're perishing?" the disciples said to Jesus in the boat as He slept in the middle of the storm. "Don't You care?" "O you of little faith," He says. He looks out at the sea and says, "Peace. Be still." And the wind and the waves grow calm. The disciples say, "Who is this? Even the wind and waves obey Him." *"He stilled the storm to a whisper, and the waves of the sea were hushed. They rejoiced when the waves grew quiet."*

Another way God can do this is to keep the storm going, then He can come walking on the water toward you and say, “Get out of that boat.” He can enable you, like Peter, to walk through the storm, as long as you keep your eyes on Him (Matthew 14:22-33). Sometimes He stills the storm and sometimes He says, “Walk through this with Me and I will be with you.” Either way, you will be guided to the harbor you long for. Either way, you will not sink in the storms of life, if you’re looking to Christ as your Redeemer. Jesus is the One Who stills the storms.

As I was reading this, I was thinking there’s a real word for us here who are so prosperous and who have so many ways to keep our lives under control. Have you learned yet that you’re not in control of anything in life? Has that sunk in yet? Have you come to the point where you realize that everything you think is stable could shift in a moment? Do you find yourself thinking, “My world could be turned upside down and I’m not in control of anything”? I hope you realize that, because that’s true. We’re not in control.

I read a prayer of confession by the Kellers that went like this. I hope you’ve started praying like this.

Lord, I confess my overconfidence about my ability to manage life through planning, knowing the right people, reading the right books. But then ‘out of the blue’ comes a storm and I am lost. Teach me how to depend on You and lean on You moment by moment. Without You I can do nothing. Amen.

Have you come to that point in your life? Maybe right now that’s where you are. You thought you were in control, you thought you had it made, but the bottom has dropped out. God can redeem you out of that. God can redeem the mess made by the storms of your life. He can guide you into a place of safety and peace, a safe haven. Cry out to God.

And when He does lead you into the safe haven, respond like Psalm 107:31 commands us to. Here it is again. God just keeps telling us this, because we need to hear it. *“Let them give thanks to the LORD for his faithful love and his wondrous works for all humanity.”* Because you know what, friends? Even if you don’t know Who God is, He’s been doing things like this for you. He’s been keeping you alive. He’s been protecting you. He’s been caring for you.

God is good to all people some of the time, but He is good to some people all of the time—those who trust in Him. Everything we experience in life is His goodness, even the storms. If you’ve learned to trust Him, if you’ve seen His redemption like this, thank Him. Verse 32, *“Let them exalt him in the assembly of the people and praise him in the council of the elders.”*

This is redemption. What does redemption look like? It’s the lost being found. It’s the hungry soul being fed. It’s the thirsty being satisfied. It’s the prisoner being set free from his

chains. It's the self-destructive fool being healed through the Word of God that speaks of the faithful love of God for people who don't deserve it. It's being brought through a violent storm into a haven of rest.

This is redemption and all of this is possible only because there is a Redeemer Who went into the desolate wilderness and Who endured the agonies of hunger and thirst while He was being tempted 40 days and nights by the devil (Matthew 4:1-11). There is a Redeemer Who, for the joy set before Him (Hebrews 12:2), willingly said, "Let My hands and feet be bound by iron nails to a cruel cross, where I will hang in darkness and desolation for My people." There is a Redeemer Who, Isaiah 53 says, was despised and rejected by men, a Man of suffering Who knew what sickness was.

There is a Redeemer Who was submerged under the violent waves of God's wrath against our sin. A Redeemer Who emerged triumphant from the grave, conquering sin and death so that through Him forgiveness of sins is being proclaimed to you today. There is a Redeemer and if you've experienced His redemption, then consider what Psalm 107:43 says: Pay attention to the Lord's acts of faithful love.

Consider the Lord's acts of faithful love (33-43).

I'm not going to read verses 33-42, but if you look at them, you'll see how living under God's love can sometimes feel like a seesaw. This is how God's steadfast love operates. If you think you're high, He brings you low. If you know you're low, He lifts you high. If you think you're strong, He shows you your weakness. If you know you're weak, then you'll be strong in Him. That's how you experience God's faithful love. And you can experience that because Jesus embraced the weakness, the pain, the condemnation of the cross so that God can now lavish His love on all who cry out to Him.

All you have to do to experience this is to humble yourself. Get low. Admit, "I'm lost. I'm wandering in a wasteland. Left to myself, I'm in bondage. I can't set myself free. Left to myself, I will foolishly destroy myself. Left to myself, I cannot manage life in this storm-tossed world. I'll crash against the rocks. I'll sink under the waves." Humble yourself, because that's you, friend. Cry out to the Lord again and again.

When you do, notice again and again, He hears you. Again and again, He saves you from your distress. Again and again, He's giving you exactly what you need—a home in His family, forgiveness, freedom from the dungeon of sin, healing and a safe haven. You can't earn this love, you don't deserve this love, but He lavishes this love on all who trust in His Son, the Redeemer.

Philip Yancey told the story about a British conference on comparative religions. The delegates were fervently discussing, “Is there anything unique about Christianity, anything that sets it apart from all the religions of the world?” C.S. Lewis wandered into the room. “What’s the rumpus about?” he asked. He heard in reply that his colleagues were discussing Christianity’s unique contribution among the religions of the world. Lewis responded, “Oh, that’s easy. It’s grace.”

Grace. That’s the unique contribution of the gospel to this world of lost sinners. What is grace? I think Bono personified it splendidly when he said, “Grace makes beauty out of ugly things.” Hmm. That’s what this Psalm is about. God’s grace makes beauty out of ugly things. There are lots of ugly things in our lives.

As the worship team comes forward, I want you to know that Jesus is here to do that for you today. He’s here to make beauty out of the ugly things of your life. Don’t wait until you clean up your act. Cry out to Him now in your trouble, in your distress. He hears you. Friends, Jesus the Redeemer loves you. Will you believe that? Will you believe today, “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so”? Will you consider the Lord’s acts of faithful love in your life? Will you thank Him for bringing beauty out of the ugliness and trust Him to do that for you? If he has, never stop praising Him.

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