

The Thanks of the Redeemed  
Psalm 107  
Newton Bible Church – November 22, 2020

Martin Rinkart, was the son of a poor coppersmith. At the age of 31 he was called to be the pastor in his native town of Eilenberg. He arrived there just as the dreadful war between Catholics and Protestants broke out. Because Eilenberg was a walled city, it became an overcrowded refuge for political and military fugitives. Multiple waves of deadly pestilence and famine struck the city as the various armies marched through the town. The Rinkart home served as a refuge for afflicted victims, even though Rinkart often had difficulty providing food and clothing for his own family. The plague of 1637 was particularly severe. At its height Rinkart was the only remaining pastor in the city, conducting as many as forty to fifty funerals each day.

During the closing years of the war, Eilenberg was overrun by invading armies on three different occasions. During one of the Swedish occupations a demand for a large tribute was levied upon the impoverished people. Rinkart interceded with the leaders of the army. When the Swedish commander would not at first consider Rinkart's request, the pastor turned to his parishioners and said, "Come, children, we can find no mercy with man; let us take refuge with God." On his knees Rinkart led his parishioners in prayer and singing a familiar hymn. This demonstration of trust so moved the Swedish commander that he finally reconsidered.

Out of these severe hardships, Rinkart wrote a hymn which reveals that he fully understood the message of Psalm 107. We know that hymn as "Now Thank We All Our God." It declares "Now thank we all our God with heart and hands and voices. Who wondrous things hath done, in whom His world rejoices; Who from our mother's arms hath blessed us on our way with countless gifts of love, and still is ours today."

Today we consider that psalm whose message Rinkart clearly embraced. Even though it stands at the head of a new section of psalms, it has clear linkage to the previous two psalms. Psalm 105 stated that God would send His people into exile should they prove unfaithful to the covenant He graciously provided. This happened and Psalm 106 follows with the prayer that God would gather those scattered peoples and return them to their land. Psalm 107 is a response to God answering the prayer of Psalm 106, particularly in returning Judah from the Babylonian exile.

The structure of the psalm begins and ends with a summons and contains multiple portraits between those summonses meant to convince the worshipers that they could and ought to obey both of the summons. We begin with the opening summons:

**Psalm 107:1-3** (English Standard Version)

**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.

The thrust of this opening summons is the reason we are considering this psalm on the Sunday before our national holiday of Thanksgiving – the summons is to give thanks to the Lord. The reason given for this summons is that He is good and His steadfast love (mercy and grace) endures forever. The target

audience is identified – it is the redeemed of the Lord that are to obey this summons. These redeemed are further identified as those who have been gathered from every direction. This had immediate application to the Jewish people who had just returned from exile in Babylon. Lest we think it applied only to them, we need to remember that our Savior also declared that He would redeem peoples from every nation – think the compass points in our text. We will see that each of the portraits applies as equally to us as it did those returned exiles. Five portraits are given; the first four following an identical pattern; a predicament followed by petition followed by pardon followed by praise. Let's consider the first portrait:

**Psalm 107:4-9** (English Standard Version)

<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.

Portrait 1: wanderers rescued (4-9)

Predicament: a lost caravan is wandering aimlessly in the wilderness. One of the most compelling episodes in the mini-series Centennial involved a cattle drive from Texas to Colorado. In an effort to evade the Comanches in Oklahoma and the desperados in Kansas, the drive swung far to the west to cross a brutal section of desert called the staked plains. For more than 100 miles there was not a single drop of water. While crossing this section, the cattle rebelled and took off in every direction in search of water. The camera followed as one steer after another wandered aimlessly until it collapsed and died. This was the danger faced by those described in this portrait.

It is very possible that as the returned exiles gathered to worship in the temple rebuilt by Zerubbabel and this psalm was being sung that one of the priests stood up and pointed to a group of returnees whose caravan had been lost in the desert and had run out of water and food far from the safety of any city. But this picture applies equally to Israel wandering aimlessly in the wilderness for forty years after the Exodus from Egypt. The imagery could also apply to Judah's time in Babylon, which was a spiritual desert of paganism, threatening the very survival of the nation.

But more than anything else, in this portrait we encounter the sinner's restless soul. Restless, aimless, lost sinners wandering hopelessly in a desert trying to find a city they never locate. They are lost and have no hope. This is their predicament!

Petition: having come to the end of themselves and knowing that they have no hope, they cry out to the Lord in their trouble. Israel cried out to the Lord in Egypt and He delivered them. Israel also cried out to the Lord in Babylon and He delivered them again. This illustrates sinners of every age who recognize their aimlessness and hopelessness and cry out to God in desperation and total dependence.

Whether they realize it or not, their restless spirits are looking just as Abraham did for a city whose builder and maker is God. In their desperation they finally recognize that He is Who they need; only He can provide that refuge. They are among those who are desperate enough and hungry enough and thirsty enough and lost enough to finally come to the place where they cry out to God. And when they cry out His response is incredible!

Pardon: Here is proof positive that the opening assertions of our text are true – the Lord is good, and His steadfast love endures forever! When the sinner reaches the end of himself and cries out to God, God provides deliverance. This is nothing less than pardon – what the sinner deserves is to be left endlessly circling in the desert. Instead, God lovingly leads them to the very place their heart craves – His own city! We are told that God leads them out on a straight way – it is not circuitous and hard to travel. It is as our Savior promised – those who come to Him find rest for their souls.

We must recognize that all the sinner brings is his need. He offers nothing; he just admits, “I’m dying.” He cries out to God and God responds with grace beyond any expectation. When the sinner comes and cries out to God, God pardons the sinner.

Praise: This kind of mercy, this kind of grace, this kind of goodness carries the obligation of gratitude. The instruction is simple – those who have been redeemed should thank the Lord for His steadfast love and wondrous works of redemption. Not only does He redeem; He satisfies the longing soul and fills the hungry soul with good things. In essence, the soul that is hungry for Him will be filled by Him with Himself! Who could deserve more thanks? Those who have been redeemed realize that we would be ungrateful not to immediately give Him thanks and praise.

**Psalm 107:10-16** (English Standard Version)

- <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.

Portrait 2: prisoners set free (10-16)

Predicament: a prisoner is locked in prison awaiting execution. If restlessness marked those in the first portrait, misery marks those in this second portrait. They are in the dark and under the threat of immanent death; completely unable to help themselves. The prisons of that day were often pitch-black dark and unimaginably filthy. The affliction mentioned here would have included the chafing of chains and the restriction of movement by irons.

The predicament is deepened because it is their own fault. It is their rebellion against the Word of the Lord that has resulted in this imprisonment. They spurned His counsel; consequently, He set them upon hard labor, labor so hard that they fell and had no one to pick them up. This predicament could

describe Israel in Egypt – it was certainly hard labor under the shadow of immanent death. More recently it could describe their Babylonian captivity. Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel had all warned them that their rebellion would result in this captivity. Judah’s last king exemplified Judah’s imprisonment:

**2 Kings 25:1-7** (English Standard Version)

**25** And in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came with all his army against Jerusalem and laid siege to it. And they built siegeworks all around it. <sup>2</sup>So the city was besieged till the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. <sup>3</sup>On the ninth day of the fourth month the famine was so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land. <sup>4</sup>Then a breach was made in the city, and all the men of war fled by night by the way of the gate between the two walls, by the king’s garden, and the Chaldeans were around the city. And they went in the direction of the Arabah. <sup>5</sup>But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king and overtook him in the plains of Jericho, and all his army was scattered from him. <sup>6</sup>Then they captured the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah, and they passed sentence on him. <sup>7</sup>They slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes and put out the eyes of Zedekiah and bound him in chains and took him to Babylon.

This king was a microcosm of the Babylonian captivity – he exemplified their disobedience – they had all chosen to disobey God and were hauled off to the dungeon of Babylon. But beyond that, this is an illustration of any sinner in the dungeon of his own making: having rebelled against God, disregarding and disobeying His Word, stumbling and falling and chained to his own sin. Spiritual blindness encompasses him with darkness and misery is unabated.

Petition: in the midst of their trouble, they cried out to the Lord. The enemy tries to hold us in the darkness, claiming that we have no right to cry out to God. He insists that as a rebel against God we have no such right and that it is useless to do so. As always, the enemy lies! In the confines of that dark dungeon, the prisoner cries out to the only One who is able to help. His ears are not deaf to the cry of the prisoner!

Pardon: Israel cried out to God for deliverance and He delivered them! They were delivered from their distress, brought out of the darkness and the shadow of death, and the bonds that held them were shattered! This is nothing less than pure grace! They had nothing to offer but the wreckage of their lives. This is grace in its most potent form – the sinner’s chains fall off at the word of the Redeemer and he is brought into the light. Charles Wesley wrote; “He breaks the power of cancelled sin and sets the prisoner free.”

Speaking of His Son, God declared:

**Isaiah 42:6-7** (English Standard Version)

<sup>6</sup>“I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, <sup>7</sup>to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

God loves to shatter the doors of bronze and cut in two the bars of iron. He loves to set prisoners free from their prisons, and He does it instantaneously when they ask. Jesus declared, “Him that comes to Me I’ll in no wise cast out.” Such marvelous redemption brings an obligation.

Praise: the redeemed are called to give thanks for His steadfast love expressed in redemption. The only proper response to grace is thanks. Thanks may be expressed in praise, whether in song or simply in prayer, but thanks must be expressed. Those who recognize the grace they have received are compelled to praise!

**Psalm 107:17-22** (English Standard Version)

<sup>17</sup> Some were fools through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquities suffered affliction;

<sup>18</sup> they loathed any kind of food, and they drew near to the gates of death.

<sup>19</sup> Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.

<sup>20</sup> He sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from their destruction.

<sup>21</sup> Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man!

<sup>22</sup> And let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, and tell of his deeds in songs of joy!

Portrait 3: sin-sick healed (17-22)

Predicament: a sinner is languishing in a sickness. If portrait one is characterized by restlessness and portrait 2 by misery, portrait 3 is characterized by sickness and depression. The beginning of the section assigns culpability – the victim acted in folly motivated by his sinful ways. The product of this sinful rebellion against God is the suffering of affliction; affliction including loss of appetite. Anyone who has observed the final days and hours of a terminal illness recognizes that as illness takes over the body, appetite disappears and there becomes almost a loathing for food. This is the severity of the illness – severe near-death illness resulting in loss of appetite.

Israel in Babylon reflected these characteristics. They were like a sick person with a fatal disease. They had lost appetite for the Word of God that would give them life and sustain them. They were languishing in sickness, near extinction, with no appetite for that which could have rescued them. This imagery also has application beyond Israel. Sinners are sick with a deadly incurable ailment, and most of them have lost all interest in what would sustain their life. They are hopeless and on the brink of death. There is a loss of appetite for life or anything else. This is why depression is rampant and so many commit suicide.

So, sinners are like lost wanderers, restless and aimless. They’re like chained prisoners held in dungeons awaiting death. They are like depressed neurotics. In each case, death is imminent. But some sinners, in the throes of this sickness do something remarkable.

Petition: in their trouble, they cry out to God. Please note that these are rebellious fools that are now crying out to God. Many would declare “That’s not fair!” And they would be right – that’s not fair. But it is grace – it is God moving in their heart to do the unthinkable – to ask for help from the very One they have most offended. The enemy screams “It’s no use!” The Spirit pleads, “Cry out to Him; He longs to hear your cry!” And some do cry out to Him.

Pardon: once again we see that He delivered them from their distresses. No qualifications are listed, no prerequisites are required. He saved them because they asked. That's pure grace. The good news gets even better – we are told that He healed them through the agency of His Word and delivered them from destruction. Helpless sinners who have lost all appetite for life are miraculously healed and vitality of life restored!

When sinners realize they're lost and starving, in a dungeon and doomed to execution, and have a fatal disease from which there is no cure, and in desperation cry out to the Heavenly Physician, the Redeemer comes to them and intervenes with healing. All the sinners in these portraits were delivered by grace. And once again, that leads to an obligation.

Praise: once again the redeemed are called to give thanks for His steadfast love expressed in redemption. They are to offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving, telling of His marvelous works in joyful song! Do you realize that this is what we do when we gather for worship? The church is simply a group of redeemed people that gather together to thank God for their redemption. That's what we are and that's what we are to do. If our worship loses its zest it is because we have forgotten the marvel of His grace. When we realize that we were lost in a wilderness, locked in prison, and languishing in fatal illness, and that He redeemed us when we called out to Him, we cannot help but give thanks!

**Psalm 107:23-32** (English Standard Version)

<sup>23</sup> Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the great waters;

<sup>24</sup> they saw the deeds of the Lord, his wondrous works in the deep.

<sup>25</sup> For he commanded and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea.

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

<sup>27</sup> they reeled and staggered like drunken men and were at their wits' end.

<sup>28</sup> Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.

<sup>29</sup> He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed.

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

<sup>31</sup> Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man!

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

Portrait 4: life-threatened delivered (23-32)

Predicament: a sea farer is caught up in a life-threatening storm. To fully appreciate the predicament here, you have to try to put yourself in the place of a sea farer in that day. The ships were far smaller and fragile, while the tempests at sea and the resultant waves were just as frightening as they are today. People say that there is nothing more frightening than being on a ship that is sinking in a raging sea. That is the lot of those described here.

This predicament is so severe that courage completely failed, and reason disappeared. This describes the complete exhaustion of human resources. No human wisdom was left. They were in shock and convinced that they were about to die. Terror completely overwhelmed their hearts. No harbor, no

hope, just a relentless overpowering storm. This certainly described the Babylonian captivity that felt like a storm sweeping over the nation and threatening to drown it completely.

Certainly, every sinner living apart from God is in a storm-tossed sea of terror without hope. Heaven is the only safe harbor, but it cannot be reached by sinner's efforts. The storms of life produce a level of fear in the sinner that we may well have forgotten. That terror paralyzes many but not all. There are those who recognize their helplessness and cry out for help.

Petition: when these sinners reached the end of their wits and all their wisdom was exhausted and they had nowhere else to turn, they cried out to the Lord in the midst of the storm. They remind us of the disciples who cried out to Jesus in the midst of the storm on the Sea of Galilee.

Here we see the common thread: there is no human rescue possible, and something inside them leads them to call out to the Lord. They have no hope in anything else. They have come to the complete end of their own effort. In desperation they cry out for that which they do not deserve nor have any leverage to accomplish. And the answer is marvelous!

Pardon: He brought them out of their distress, making the storm to be still and the waves of the seas hushed. Not only did He quiet the storm, He brought them to the desired haven. This pictures the rescue. The people in the caravan found the city. The people in prison were set free. The ones who were sick were made whole. The people in the storm were safely led to a haven.

We too have experienced this grace. When we called on Him, He rescued us, restored us, redeemed us. He is leading us to a heavenly city, He has released us out of prison into freedom, He has taken us from deadly illness to eternal health, and from terror to safety in the harbor of His making. Such grace produces obligation.

Praise: once again the redeemed are called to give thanks for His steadfast love expressed in redemption. This time there is a corporate element – the redeemed are to engage in worship together, praising Him as they assemble together. We come together and we sing “Now thank we all our God with heart and soul and voices.” This is the heart of worship – incessant gratitude for the grace of our salvation.

We know that this grace came at a cost we could never pay. We know that this grace is nothing we can earn. We know that this grace is a gift from Him that flows from His steadfast love. We answer the call to the redeemed to give thanks. The psalm is not quite finished, and we must hurry on.

**Psalm 107:33-42** (English Standard Version)

<sup>33</sup> He turns rivers into a desert, springs of water into thirsty ground,

<sup>34</sup> a fruitful land into a salty waste, because of the evil of its inhabitants.

<sup>35</sup> He turns a desert into pools of water, a parched land into springs of water.

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

<sup>37</sup> they sow fields and plant vineyards and get a fruitful yield.

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

<sup>39</sup> When they are diminished and brought low through oppression, evil, and sorrow,  
<sup>40</sup> he pours contempt on princes and makes them wander in trackless wastes;  
<sup>41</sup> but he raises up the needy out of affliction and makes their families like flocks.  
<sup>42</sup> The upright see it and are glad, and all wickedness shuts its mouth.

#### Portrait 5: lives transformed (33-42)

In a series of opposites, the psalmist declares that God not only has the ability to transform but is actively involved in transformation of lives. In short, He possesses the ability to accomplish that which portraits 1-4 claim that He does.

- He transforms the land according to His purposes, punishing the evil and rewarding the faithful.
- He establishes His impoverished people and blesses them with abundance.
- He brings down the haughty and raises up the afflicted.
- His transforming power is so undeniable that all wickedness shuts its mouth.

Having painted these glorious portraits, the psalmist concludes with a final summons:

#### **Psalm 107:43** (English Standard Version)

<sup>43</sup> Whoever is wise, let him attend to these things; let them consider the steadfast love of the Lord.

The final summons is a summons to meditate upon the steadfast love of the Lord and serves as a reiteration of the opening summons. As the redeemed meditate upon the steadfast love of the Lord, they will give thanks to Him. Those who are overwhelmed by His grace cannot help but give thanks! Everyone of us today is on one side of these portraits – we are either in the throes of wandering in the wilderness, being held captive by our sin, sick unto death because of our sin, and fearful of imminent death, or we are among those who have been delivered and know that this deliverance was pure grace.

- If you know that you have not yet experienced this grace, I urge you to cry out to God today. Admit your need and your total inability to do anything other than cry out to Him. Trust Him when He says that salvation comes through trusting Christ alone. Stop looking within and look up to Him. He delights in answering this cry!
- If you have experienced this grace, meditate upon His steadfast love expressed in grace and thanks will flow. Make sure you get together with God’s people so that the thanks are amplified. Worship will be pure joy as you thank Him for His grace!

With the song writer we ask: “How can I say thanks for the things You have done for me – Things so undeserved, yet You give to prove Your love for me? The voices of a million angels could not express my gratitude – All that I am and ever hope to be, I owe it all to Thee. To God be the glory for the things He has done. With His blood He has saved me, with His power he has raised me – To God be the glory for the things He has done!” Let this be the unending song of thanks of the redeemed!