

**Sermon preached by Rev. Helen Franssell at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, August 16, 2015**

SEE, SAY, AND CELEBRATE!

Psalm 107:1-9, 42-43

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.

² Let the redeemed of the LORD tell their story— those he redeemed from the hand of the foe,

³ those he gathered from the lands, from east and west, from north and south.

⁴ Some wandered in desert wastelands, finding no way to a city where they could settle.

⁵ They were hungry and thirsty, and their lives ebbed away.

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

⁷ He led them by a straight way to a city where they could settle.

⁸ Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind,

⁹ for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.

v. 42-43: The upright see and rejoice, but all the wicked shut their mouths.

Let the one who is wise heed these things and ponder the loving deeds of the LORD.

PSALMS AS A GENRE OF HEBREW LITERATURE

Psalms are a treasury of spiritual help for all believers. Their words speak to our hearts as surely as they have spoken to others since the days they were written. Whatever our mood, whatever our condition, the ancient voices call us to hear them. They, too, have experienced joy, sadness, mourning, sin, anger, confession, forgiveness, and other experiences that touch our lives so deeply. They call us to learn from them as the Holy Spirit uses their words to draw us closer to the Lord. The Psalms are an 'ancient songbook' of Israel, written by many writers, including David, Moses, Solomon, and a number of anonymous writers. They give an understanding of Israelite worship, and also information about all aspects of Hebrew life. It's not only *what* God says, but *how* He says it through the biblical writers; He reveals Himself in the beauty of the art of poetry. Intellect *and* emotion – head *and* heart - both sanctified for God's use.

One main word to describe Hebrew poetry – complexity! There are often elements of rhythm, and repetition, parallelism that echo a thought in a second line that is its partner. Each element gives dignity and space to make room for the meaning to soak in. *These*

elements are translatable into any language, unlike other elements that are lost to us if we don't read the original Hebrew - wordplay, rhyme, acrostics. There was also an elaborate system of markings/accents that make it distinct. Psalms were singable! There are 5 basic divisions of the book of Psalms (we're not quite sure how the divisions came to be), and Psalm 107 is the first of the final division.

The classifications of the Psalms varies, but there are 7 basic categories:

1. Hymns – individual or corporate praise to God and thanksgiving for Who He is and what He has done.
2. Penitential Psalms – confession and repentance of one person, or the whole community of worshipers, and appeal to God's grace for restoration.
3. Wisdom Psalms – general observations about life, presented as self-evident descriptions of life as God intended it.
4. Royal Psalms – focus on the king of Israel, who would rule Israel as God's representative and heir to God's covenant.
5. Messianic Psalms – describe the Messiah, the One Who would one day restore Israel and establish everlasting salvation.
6. Imprecatory Psalms – a call on God to judge enemies. They are often angry in content, and have generated much theological discussion.
7. Lament Psalms – a crying out to God, with some statement of hope in His gracious love

Psalm 107 is a song of lament (probably written after the Babylonian exile), and it is constructed with a pair of bookends at the beginning and the end, 4 scenes/stories, a summary of what God does, and the closing bookend.

- I. Opening bookend:
 - Provides an introduction: "Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; His love endures forever" - verses 1 & 43 begin and end with God's love, the basis of all of our stories - His steadfast love: God's covenant devotion, by which He binds Himself to His people – *forever!*
 - A call to recognize and tell our story: verse 2, "Let the redeemed of the LORD tell their story." We are told to open our eyes to the fact that God is working in His people *His* story! So open your eyes! See that we too are in the midst of God's story!
- II. There are 4 stories, and all 4 have the same elements that are introduced by 4 repeated phrases.

Let's let the writers tell their stories. Each begins with –
A **Bemoaning of the conditions:**

what God did: "he saved them from their distress"

- I. 4-5: **SOME** -Wandered in a desert; no place to settle. 7, 9: He led them by a *straight* way [no wandering!]

Hungry, thirsty, wasting away
[circumstance, because of sin]

What they did: "Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble"

II. 10-12: **SOME** -Dark prison because of rebellion, 14, 16 He brought them out of darkness - utter darkness, chains, even *despising* God's commands and broke down the gates, cut away their chains.

Stumbling in bitter labor [sin]

What they did: "Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble"

III. 17-18 **SOME** -Sickness of some sort here, healed them; he

"Loathed all food" [near death.

Consequences of foolish rebellion; sin] private *and* public

in the assembly & the council]

What they did: "Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble"

IV. 23-27 ["Acts of God", circumstances] - a tempest that lifted high the waves,

Lifting & plunging them;
Their courage melted away, they reeled and staggered like drunkards; [seasickness]

They were at their wits' end.

[Lost, disoriented, paralyzed with fear. Sea storms are far more terrible than on land!]

What they did: "Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble"

to a city where they could settle
[from 'no place' to a whole city!]
He satisfied their thirst, and *filled* them with good things!
Not just a snack of junk food!

what God did: "he saved them from their distress"

He busted 'em loose!

what God did: "he saved them from their distress"

20 He sent out his word and healed them; He rescued them from the grave [the ultimate consequence. Note in 22 & 32 – response of thanks and worship – sacrifices and telling their story,

what God did: "he saved them from their distress"

29-30 He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves and the sea were hushed. They were glad when it grew calm, & when it grew calm He guided them to their desired haven. [He still got them to their destination]

He guided them to their destination

Each story ends with their **response** to **God's response:** "Let them give thanks to the Lord for His unfailing love & His wonderful deeds for mankind."

Notice that in each scene, God's love is an *undoing* of the circumstances; a redemption; a restoration.

From: darkness	to: light
sickness and death	healing
chains	freedom
fear	gladness
tempest	calm – <i>thorough</i> and <i>complete</i> redemption!

III. Summary of what God does: reversal, then a reversal of the reversal . . . 😊

- He turned rivers into a desert/back to pools of water
- flowing springs into thirsty ground/parched ground back to flowing springs
- to the hungry He gave a fruitful harvest and their numbers increased/then calamity and sorrow decreased their numbers . . . and so on. Things are upside down, and back again.
- But in verse 41 it ends on a positive note: “But he lifted the needy out of their affliction and increased their families like flocks.”

IV. Conclusion:

⁴²The upright see and rejoice, but all the wicked – in contrast - shut their mouths.

⁴³Let the one who is wise heed these things and ponder the loving deeds of the LORD.

What do we do with all this?! Let us ‘see & rejoice’; let us be wise, and ‘heed these things and ponder’:

1. God is *ready*; the Psalm illustrates God's readiness to answer the prayers of His people. He is *waiting* for us to come to Him with our cries. His mercies are new every morning – before we've opened our eyes, He has ordained the day and the mercies needed to meet the day.
1. He chastises His people in order to draw their repentance, that He might deliver them. Guilt can be helpful! There's the artificial guilt of *regret* for the coulda/woulda's – that's not true guilt. True guilt is a recognition and repentance of wrong. Guilt can be especially beneficial to the foolish who rebel. Prisoners have time to pray, and see that they need God, when they used to think they could do without Him.
2. God's goodness, and faithfulness to bail us out, is not a license to sin. This does NOT mean I can make whatever mess I want out of my life because God will clean it all up, just so I'll have a dramatic story to tell. That would make me one of the foolish. No – we should not be complacent; we are part of a massive overhaul of all mankind. We're reading it here today, and we're living it every day; we're not just schlepping through the irritations of life.
3. And it's NOT instantaneous; we must *wait* on the Lord. And the scars that circumstances leave are signs of grace; we do *heal*. Jesus said “be clean; be whole” – and it was done. His spiritual cure is even greater; He heals souls – convincing, converting, sanctifying them.

4. Jesus promised the presence of the Holy Spirit throughout this process – John 14:16 –“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth . . . you know Him, for He lives with you and will be in you.”
5. 4 times: “Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and He delivered them from their distress.” Not “Naaw, it’s okay – I’ve got this one, Lord!” That repetition drives home the need of God’s people to CRY out to Him! We don’t just whine, or whisper a prayer, or complain, or abandon our faith. No! We CRY! With or without actual tears! With or without a loud voice! When I was a new Chaplain (I’ll always be new, because every patient is new) and someone said “Why is this happening! How can a good God allow this?” I took it as a theological question. I know better now; it is the people of God crying out to Him. It is not a question so much as an exclamation! Desperation will make us cry out, but *grace* will direct us to cry to The Lord, who alone can remove the affliction. We know Who we turn to . . . where else would we go?
6. Now, you may think you don’t have a ‘story’ to tell. Maybe you’ve never:

been homeless	wandered in a desert
been chained in a dark prison	been at the gates of death

But let me ask you this: have you ever -

Felt alone?

Been disappointed or hurt by someone you love?

Felt disoriented and lost in life?

Wondered what’s going to become of your children?

Been scared because of a sickness?

Lost a job?

Sinned?

Realized that you have *nothing* to show you are good enough to be in Heaven???

Because we’re all sitting here breathing means that we’re still in our stories; and we mustn’t imply that all suffering is just so we’ll be able to provide a nice bedtime story. Christian suffering is a huge topic, with which we struggle every day. We remember the words of Paul in II Cor 1:23-28:

“I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I

have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.”

[Not such a nice bedtime story; that’s *living dangerously!* (Neil’s beautiful feet brought a whole series on that!)]

Christians DO suffer; so -

What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? No one! Nothing! No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. Nothing in all of creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:31+)

Now, it could be that someone here truly does not have a story of knowing God’s saving presence in your life, and if you don’t, then I would urge you to make *today* Page 1 of the story of God’s grace in *your* life.

The conclusion of the matter, verses 42-43: “The upright *see* and rejoice, but all the wicked shut their mouths. Let the one who is wise heed these things and ponder the loving deeds of the LORD.”

Open your eyes! SEE your story! Open your heart, open your mouth and SAY something! Tell it!

And CELEBRATE! Rejoice, because it isn’t really YOUR story, it’s God’s! And His story is one of victory – of restoration and wholeness and *peace*. And be patient – Jesus said “take heart – I *have* [past tense] overcome the world”; the story is still being written.

Reference

Introduction

¹ Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; His love endures forever. ² Let the redeemed of the LORD tell their story— those He redeemed from the hand of the foe,
³ those He gathered from the lands, from east and west, from north and south. [*everywhere*, that is]

I. Situation/circumstance:

⁴ Some wandered in desert wastelands, finding no way to a city where they could settle.
⁵ They were hungry and thirsty, and their lives ebbed away.

A. What they did; what God did

⁶ Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.
⁷ He led them by a straight way to a city where they could settle.

B. Their response

⁸ Let them give thanks to the LORD for His unfailing love and His wonderful deeds for mankind,
⁹ for He satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.

II. Situation:

¹⁰ Some sat in darkness, in utter darkness, prisoners suffering in iron chains,
¹¹ because they rebelled against God's commands and despised the plans of the Most High.
¹² So He subjected them to bitter labor; they stumbled, and there was no one to help.

A. What they did; what God did

¹³ Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and He saved them from their distress.
¹⁴ He brought them out of darkness, the utter darkness, and broke away their chains.

B. Their response

¹⁵ Let them give thanks to the LORD for His unfailing love and His wonderful deeds for mankind,
¹⁶ for He breaks down gates of bronze and cuts through bars of iron.

III. Situation:

¹⁷ Some became fools through their rebellious ways and suffered affliction because of their iniquities.
¹⁸ They loathed all food and drew near the gates of death.

A. What they did; what God did

¹⁹ Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and He saved them from their distress.
²⁰ He sent out His word and healed them; He rescued them from the grave.

B. Their response

²¹ Let them give thanks to the LORD for His unfailing love and His wonderful deeds for mankind.

²² Let them sacrifice thank offerings and tell of His works with songs of joy.

²³ Some went out on the sea in ships; they were merchants on the mighty waters.

²⁴ They saw the works of the LORD, His wonderful deeds in the deep.

²⁵ For He spoke and stirred up a tempest that lifted high the waves.

²⁶ They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths; in their peril their courage melted away.

²⁷ They reeled and staggered like drunkards; they were at their wits' end.

A. What they did; what God did

²⁸ Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress.

²⁹ He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed.

³⁰ They were glad when it grew calm, and he guided them to their desired haven.

B. Their response

³¹ Let them give thanks to the LORD for His unfailing love and His wonderful deeds for mankind.

³² Let them exalt Him in the assembly of the people and praise Him in the council of the elders.

Introduction 1-3

Situations/Circumstances – some external, some internal/sin

I. 4-5

II. 10-12

III. 17-18

IV. 23-27

Reaction: What they did (“they cried out to the Lord in their trouble), what God did (“He saved them from their distress/trouble”)

I. 6-7

II. 13-14

III. 19-20

IV. 28-30

Their response: “Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind.”

I. 8-9

II. 15-16

III. 21-22

IV. 31-32

Summary of what God did: 33-41

Conclusion of the matter: 42-43