

Give Thanks

Psalm 107:1-43

November 19, 2017

Our LORD has a history of enduring love. (vv. 1-3) Psalm 107:1 says, “Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.” This is a call for us to worship God by giving Him thanks out loud to Him. Psalm 107:2 goes on to say, “Let the redeemed of the LORD tell their story.” Psalm 107 is a salvation-history psalm, which means that it celebrates that God “hears the prayers of those in need and saves them.”¹ This idea alone is really good news this morning: **God hears the prayers of those in need and He saves them!** All of us have been in need at some time in our lives. Some of us are probably in need today. We serve a God who saves, not only saves us from our sin, but also saves us from our daily situations and the problems around us. v. 2 goes on to declare how God “redeemed from the hand of the foe.”² God has an enduring track record of faithfulness. His love endures forever. In the past, present, and future, He is in control. Whatever enemy we might face, we need not fear nor despair, because we can trace the history of the enduring love of the God who saves.

God’s enduring love is laid out in the poetic structure of Psalm 107. It begins with the intro in verses 1-3, then lays out 6 different stanzas, and ends with a simple but profound conclusion in verse 43. In your Bible you probably have some kind of clue as to how this psalm breaks down. In my personal NIV Study Bible, it leaves a white space between each section. For example, between the introduction of verses 1-3 and the first stanza of verses 4-9, there’s a small gap. Other Bibles may indicate this in some other way. Let’s trace through this poetic structure and discover some reasons why we can “Give thanks to the LORD” this morning.

We should Give Thanks to the LORD...

1. ...because He leads us and meets our daily needs. (vv. 4-9) Stanza 1 of this poem consists of verses 4-9. It lays out an account of how “Some wandered in desert wastelands.” These people were simply lost. There were hungry and thirsty and their lives were ebbing away. It makes no mention of any particular sin or wrong behavior, they just couldn’t seem to find their way. They simply needed God to lead them by a straight way, to a place where they could settle down. And God did that! Psalm 107:8-9 ends this stanza by saying, “Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind, for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.” The refrain of verse 8 will be echoed 3 more times before the Psalm is over.

Another reason that we should Give Thanks to the LORD is...

2. ...because He draws rebels back to Himself. (vv. 10-22) Stanzas 2 & 3 both talk about this in verses 10-22. Verse 11 mentions that they were suffering “because they rebelled against God’s commands and despised the plans of the Most High.”³ Verse 17 says something similar, “Some became fools through their rebellious ways and suffered affliction because of their iniquities.”⁴ The beauty of these two stanzas is that they demonstrate God’s amazing mercy and patience. God even delivers us when we cry out to him because of the distress caused by our own sins.⁵ Sometimes our suffering is due to the discipline caused by our own rebellion.

Psalm 107:12 really caught my attention, “SO he subjected them to bitter labor; they stumbled, and there was no one to help.” What this verse is getting at, is that God broke their willful spirit with burdensome labor.⁶ The ESV catches the flavor here a little better, “So he bowed their hearts down

¹ NIV Study Bible, Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 2011, p. 981 footnote.

² “Redeemed” can be a synonym for “delivered.” (See the NIV Study Bible note on p. 981.) This salvation history goes back to being delivered from captivity in Assyria and Babylon, and even as far as being delivered from captivity in Egypt. See Exodus 6:6.

³ When I typed verse 11, “Most High,” my spell check tried to correct it by “fixing” the capital M and H. But, they are supposed to be capitals! This is one of God’s titles. Our God is above all things, He is MOST HIGH, there is nothing or no one higher than Him!

⁴ Not every sickness and disease is a punishment from God. It’s important that we understand that.

⁵ NIV Study Bible, p. 981.

⁶ Literally ‘brought down their heart with labor,’ i.e., a labor so burdensome it broke their spirit.” (NIV Study Bible, p. 981.)

with hard labor.” In other words, sometimes (not all the time but sometimes) the LORD uses hard things in our lives to get our attention and bring us back to Him. Even this is a sign of his patient mercy and enduring love. He doesn’t give up on us or just leave us alone to languish in our rebellion. Psalm 107 verses 13 and 19 repeat the same word for word response, “THEN they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress.” So, their rebellion leads to bitter labor leads to crying out leads to the LORD saved. Our God draws rebels back to Himself. That’s good news if we ourselves are currently in rebellion but also if we are praying for some loved one who is currently living in rebellion.

A 3rd reason that we should Give Thanks to the LORD is...

3. ...because He guides us when we’re at our wits’ end. (vv. 23-32) Stanza 4 is a little longer section stretching from verses 23-32. It lays out an account of how God brought a group of merchants through dangerous seas to a safe haven. Psalm 107:23 explains, “Some went out on the sea in ships; they were merchants on the mighty waters.” So these were not pirates out causing trouble nor were they on pleasure yachts, these were workers going out to make a living. And as they went about their daily work, there were dangers on the job. Psalm 107:26b-27 tells us that the seas got pretty rough and, “...in their peril their courage melted away. They reeled and staggered like drunkards; they were at their wits’ end.” Not many of us probably make our living at sea. But, in our own particular work, we’ve probably come to points when we feel at our wits’ end.

For the 4th time in a row, Psalm 107 demonstrates, the right way for humans to respond to situations like this. Psalm 107:28 says this about the merchants at work, “Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress.”⁷ When we’re at our wits’ end, we can cry out to the LORD and He’ll take care of us.

Also, for the 4th time in a row, Psalm 107:31 urges, “Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind.”⁸ These wonderful deeds happen in God’s timing and according to His plan because He is our sovereign LORD. Some of us are currently crying out to the LORD and trying to patiently wait for Him to bring us through our distress. Others of us have reached a point where we can now look back and report God’s deliverance, His enduring love came through for us again! For some of us, “giving thanks” today comes more readily. We are on the “wonderful deeds” side of God’s work in our lives. But for others, “giving thanks” takes a little more effort. Despite our confidence in our LORD’s “unfailing love,” we are still waiting for His “wonderful deeds” to come our way. Sometimes as Christ-followers, we have to look back at our own personal history and remember what God has brought us through in the past. This helps put our current struggles in perspective. This was a huge personal encouragement for me this week. That’s what Psalm 107 is trying to do for all of us today.

We should Give Thanks to the LORD...

1. ...because He leads us and meets our daily needs.
2. ...because He draws rebels back to Himself.
3. ...because He guides us when we’re at our wits’ end.

A 4th reason that we should Give Thanks to the LORD is...

4. ...because He can sovereignly reverse any circumstance. (vv. 33-42) Our poem in Psalm 107 wraps up with Stanzas 5 & 6 in verses 33-42. Both of these stanzas show how tentative and changeable life’s circumstances can be. We see this in the contrast of verses 33 & 35. Verse 33 tells us, “He turned rivers into a desert, flowing springs into thirsty ground.” But, on the other hand, verse 35 says, “He turned the desert into pools of water and the parched ground into flowing springs.”

⁷ See verses 6, 13, 19, 28.

⁸ See verses 8, 15, 21, and 31.

So God can make the wet dry and the dry wet. Therefore, a reversal for good or for bad could be right around the corner. This is why Psalm 107 ends with verse 43, “Let the one who is wise heed these things and ponder the loving deeds of the LORD.”

The wise will heed this advice and take time to ponder our LORD’s loving deeds. (v. 43) Whatever your current situation might be, heed the advice of Psalm 107, and take some time this week to ponder it.⁹

PRAYER “LORD, please teach us to cry out to You when we’re in trouble. Please save us from our distress today. Lead us and meet our daily needs. Teach us to turn from any rebellion in our lives. Guide us when we’re at our wits’ end and help us to trust Your sovereign timing and plan. Teach us to give You thanks in all things as we trust in Your unfailing love. Today, we praise You for your wonderful deeds in our lives.
In Jesus’ Name, Amen.”

This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji
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⁹ See also Deuteronomy 32:29 and Hosea 14:9