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October 17, 2021

Give Thanks for Deliverance

Psalm 107:1-9, 39-43

- ¹ O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever.
- ² Let the redeemed of the LORD say so,
those he 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 an inhabited town;
- 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,
until they reached an inhabited town.
- ⁸ Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,
for his wonderful works to humankind.
- ⁹ For he satisfies the thirsty,
and the hungry he fills with good things. . . .
- ³⁹ When they are diminished and brought low
through oppression, trouble, and sorrow,
- ⁴⁰ he pours contempt on princes
and makes them wander in trackless wastes;

- ⁴¹ but he raises up the needy out of distress,
and makes their families like flocks.
- ⁴² The upright see it and are glad;
and all wickedness stops its mouth.
- ⁴³ Let those who are wise give heed to these things,
and consider the steadfast love of the LORD.

Theme Statement

The Lord's steadfast love calls for praise and thanksgiving, especially as we remember the many ways God has delivered God's people. As we come together in worship and thanksgiving, the truth of God's presence and love is made new.

Exploring the Word

Although the writer of Psalm 107 is unknown, there are clues to the situation in which it was written. The mention of gathering (v. 3), wandering (v. 4), and imprisonment and hard labor (vv. 10-12) could place this psalm in the time after the Babylonian exile. This is when Israel was allowed to return to their homeland. When the dispersed Israelites returned, they found a ruined Jerusalem and experienced opposition from their Canaanite neighbors. It is a humbled Israel that reassembles in their homeland. The consequences of their sin weigh heavily on them. They had rebelled against God and had chosen to rely on world powers for their security. Although the prophets warned them about this and their neglect of the poor, they did not listen. So, in 597 and 587 BCE Babylon marched in and destroyed Jerusalem, took the Israelites captive, and made them a displaced people.

Psalm 107 speaks of deliverance from exile with praise and joy, born out of great suffering and humiliation. The description of concrete suffering in this psalm is very

important. We cannot trivialize this suffering; it was world shattering. Israel's world was turned upside down, and they were left disoriented and helpless. It was the Lord, through the Persian king Cyrus, who brought them home in 538 BCE. Now, with fresh eyes and repentant hearts, all assembled Israelites give thanks to the Lord for such steadfast love and deliverance.

Psalm 107:1-3 The *hesed* of the Lord

The Hebrew word *hesed* is translated as loyal love or steadfast love (NRSV). It is a covenant-based love that is powerful, forgiving, and forever. God keeps God's promises to Israel and to the world. These verses of praise and thanks recognize this and celebrate it as a singing assembly of God's people. This may be a special festival where Israelites from all over the known world came together in Jerusalem to offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving (v. 32). The important point is that they recognize that it is the Lord who has gathered and rescued them from the disaster of the exile in Babylon. They are the redeemed (v. 2) and delivered (v. 6), which means they are those who have been snatched away from whatever has oppressed them. Redemption comes because of the Lord and not because the people are innocent or guiltless. They are not.

Psalm 107:4-9 Deliverance in detail

These verses provide a concrete description of the dangers faced by God's people. The entire assembled congregation takes on these sufferings. The point is that as any have suffered, all have suffered. Now all these are joined together in thanksgiving for God's saving, steadfast love. All of Israel, those in Jerusalem and those who come as pilgrims from the far reaches of the earth, share in God's presence and salvation in this time of worship and singing. And not just Israel. The Lord's steadfast love is meant for the entire creation ("humankind," v. 8).

Psalm 107:39-43 The great reversal

Verses 33-38 (not printed above) provide important context for the conclusion of this psalm. The Lord is praised for the gift of the land and prosperity—a reversal of their situation. Concrete examples of fruitful land, food for all, and herds of cattle are listed. After this, verses 39-41 summarize this blessing by pointing to the Lord as the one who will never neglect the needy. The Lord "raises up" and blesses those who are "brought low." The opposite reality is also true: the Lord holds the wicked accountable (v. 40). The writer of Deuteronomy 32:35, as well as the apostle Paul (Romans 12:19), recognizes the Lord as the one who will absolutely deal with the wicked and oppressive forces in this world.

The entire assembly sees this great reversal and rejoices in it. This saving good news has been made new and present to them in their worship (v. 42). Verse 43 counsels all to pay attention to this gracious, saving God, who is the source of all goodness and whose steadfast love endures forever.

The Word Today

Has something like this ever happened to you? My husband, our two little girls, and I were walking from the parking lot into a very busy local mall. I went to cross the mall drive when my husband suddenly snatched me backward and I felt the rush of air from the speeding city bus that zoomed by within inches of me. I was delivered from death in that moment. This experience helps me grasp the depth of the meaning of deliverance in Psalm 107. Loving, watchful deliverance saved me, saved my family incredible trauma, and gave me a new appreciation for my own vulnerability (and, of course, a new appreciation for my husband).

That is a very personal example. It is important to state that there are examples of even more traumatic and communal distress: world hunger and drought, unfairly incarcerated populations, victims of a virus pandemic, and whole states and regions suffering natural disasters. Psalm 107 speaks comforting words in these situations. The Lord is a rescuer and deliverer for all humankind in any kind of trouble or sorrow. The Lord is also a protector, at work to hold accountable those who practice wickedness and oppression.

Psalm 107 reminds us of the good news of the lasting steadfast love of the Lord. Unfortunately, this good news is often drowned out by the bad news of human sin and natural disaster. Oppression of the weak by the strong, racism and discrimination, sickness and disease are part of our broken world. We need good news! Psalm 107 teaches us that the truth of God's steadfast love needs to be a part of our daily lives, privately and in congregational worship. We sing as Israel sang so long ago. But it needs to be truthful singing that recognizes the troubles, injustices, and pain of life. It also needs to recognize those times and situations when God snatches us from danger and even death.

God never meant for us to go through this life alone. To stay strong in our trust and hope in God, we need the community of faith. But we need honest songs and worship, recognizing all that is suffered by people in our world and all the ways that God is at work today delivering us and others. Make time to do as Psalm 107 advises: consider the steadfast love of the Lord, given first to Israel and then through Jesus Christ to the whole world.

Questions for Discussion

Beginnings

1. How would you define the word *deliver*? How do we often use it in everyday conversation? What are some synonyms for this word?

Exploring the Word

1. What does it mean to say that Psalm 107 speaks out of praise and joy born of suffering and humility?
2. In one or two sentences define the Hebrew term *hesed*.
3. What kinds of distress have God's people experienced in Psalm 107:4-5, 10-11, 17-18, and 25-26?
4. What is the "great reversal" in Psalm 107:39-42?
5. Read and compare Psalm 107 and Luke 1:46-55. What are the similarities in these songs of deliverance?

The Word Today

1. When have you and/or your congregation experienced suffering and vulnerability? Was there deliverance? How?
2. Who are the vulnerable, suffering, and needy in your community and world today? Check below all that apply.
 - ___ terminally ill persons
 - ___ refugees
 - ___ essential pandemic workers
 - ___ persons with disabilities
 - ___ other: _____

3. Complete this sentence: Three important things I have learned from Psalm 107 are . . .

Closing Prayer

Thanks be to you, Lord, for your steadfast love. Gather us together in worship so we may remember your gifts of mercy and deliverance. Make us mindful of all who suffer and need deliverance today. Empower us through your Spirit to advocate for them. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Further Study

Isaiah 1:16-20; Luke 16:19-31

Daily Readings

M. Psalm 107:1-9

F. Ephesians 2:1-10

T. Psalm 107:10-22

S. Ephesians 2:11-22

W. Psalm 107:23-32

S. Psalm 107:33-43

T. Ephesians 1:3-14

Memorization

Psalm 107:6

They cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and he delivered them from their distress.