

## Psalm 107:1-32 – Telling our story with thanksgiving

When I first saw the Scripture readings for this evening, I thought I would preach from the Gospel reading – Mark 6:45-52, Jesus walking over the storm-tossed waves of Lake Galilee to rescue his terrified disciples. I had even prepared an outline sermon on the passage. But then I realised that the same story, this time told by John, is the topic for next Sunday morning. So I decided to turn my attention – our attention this evening – to the psalm set for us, the wonderful Psalm 107.

### The opening verses of this Psalm

The psalm opens with a brief person testimony to what the psalmist has discovered of God through his own personal experience. Verse 1:

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

He has discovered that God is "good". The word used here carries the sense not so much of moral goodness – as if he were saying that God is righteous and holy – though that of course is true. The word has more of the flavour of how we might say that the peach we have just eaten or the jazz gig we have just been to was very good. It was good to our senses and felt good; it lifted our spirits and did us good; it gave us delight and pleased us, even filled us with joy. God is good in this sense, says the psalmist. The psalmist has tasted and seen / discovered that the Lord is good. God has been good to him and has filled him with joy. He has discovered that the very best thing in life is knowing God. Have you discovered that God is good?

The Lord's love, he says, endures for ever. The word he uses for "love" is a difficult word to translate adequately into English. The Hebrew word is *hesed* and it is variously translated as "love", "kindness", "lovingkindness", "mercy", "faithful love", "steadfast love", "gracious love", "loyal love" ... It's hard to express in English because human love so easily fails and breaks down. *Hesed*, God's love, is faithful, steadfast and true. It is his covenant love by which he binds himself to his people and says, "I am your God and you are my people". It is love that never fails even when his people rebel against him – remember the book of Hosea. It is love that remains faithful when we are faithless. It is love that will not let you go. It is love that is gracious, kind, forgiving and generous. It is the kind of love that we find described in 1 Corinthians 13. It is the love that is seen, even if imperfectly, in the very best of marriages.

This love of the Lord, says the psalmist, never ceases. He might have added that "his mercies are new every morning". This also is something he has discovered in his experience of God. In all the various circumstances of life, the Lord's love never failed. Through the variety of his own spiritual feelings – days when he was burning with passionate love for God and determined devotion to live wholly for him to days when his heart felt cold, maybe even resentful towards God – God never failed to love him and hold him tight. To quote William Shakespeare:

Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds...  
Love alters not with [time's] brief hours and weeks,  
But bears it out even to the edge of doom. (Sonnet 116)

But even more wonderful, this unending love of God goes beyond "the edge of doom" even into eternity. The love which the psalmist has known day-by-day throughout his life thus far, he is convinced will last through all that is yet to come, till death and even beyond death: "his love endures for ever". It is this same conviction that is expressed by the Apostle Paul at the end of Romans 8:

I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (8:38-39)

This is the psalmist's testimony. This is what he has discovered about the God of Israel. And it is more than just a personal testimony: it is what his people have discovered of their God down the long history of his dealings with them. So the psalmist turns from personal testimony to exhort all of God's people to tell of what they have discovered of God:

Let the redeemed of the LORD tell their story –  
those he redeemed from the hand of the foe (v. 2)

He calls upon others to bear testimony to what the Lord has done for them. And Psalm 107 then supplies us with some examples.

### **Psalm 107:4-9**

Verses 4-9 tells the story of people wandering in desert wastes in which they could find no safe place to settle. They were hungry and thirsty and facing death. But they called on the name of the Lord and he, "delivered them from their distress" (v.6).

The psalmist may well have been thinking of Israel's forty years of wandering in the wilderness. When they lacked food they cried out to the Lord, though it has to be acknowledged that their cry was one of complaint rather than humble petition. Nevertheless, the Lord fed them with bread from heaven and with quail. When they were thirsty they cried out to the Lord, though again it was in complaint, and he provided them with water from the rock. Eventually they were led into the land where they could settle in towns and cities, grow their own food and enjoy streams of water. Looking back on that experience the psalmist declares:

Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love  
and his wonderful deeds for mankind. (v. 8, cf. vv. 15, 21, 31)

This is a refrain found at the end of all of these sections of testimony. The Lord's people fail: they fail in their love for him and they fail in their obedience towards him. In many ways they are incorrigible failures. But the Lord's love never fails; his love is unfailing love. This is what his people have discovered. And his unfailing love for them calls for their heartfelt thanksgiving and praise.

And this repeated testimony is then concluded with a summary of the testimony of the previous verses and a reason for their thanksgiving. In this instance:

for he satisfies the thirsty  
and fills the hungry with good things. (vv. 8-9)

I love that word "satisfies". It expresses the need and longing for nothing else; God, in all his goodness and love, satisfies his people.

And this sense of thanksgiving and praise is echoed by us as we meet this evening to break bread and drink wine together. We remember that the Lord Jesus spoke of himself as the bread of life and of himself as living water; the one who gives rest to the weary and who restores the soul of those thirsting for the living God. He is the one in whom we have found the fulfilment of this psalm in our own experience. He is the one in whom we have discovered that the Lord is good and that his love endures for ever.

Are you satisfied with Christ this evening?

### **Psalm 107:10-16**

In verses 10-16, the psalmist speaks of prisoners, chained in darkness and forced into back-breaking labour as a result of their rebellion against God. Note that they had got themselves into this predicament; they deserved their fate. Nevertheless, when they cried for the Lord to help them and he broke their chains and brought them out of darkness into light.

As I was preparing this message, I was moved by words I read in *Word in Action*, the magazine of Bible Society. In it, Paul Williams, the Chief Executive of Bible Society writes:

I was powerfully impacted by my experience of visiting prisoners in Guatemala in a maximum security prison for ex-gang members. These were prisoners who had been involved in drug-connected violent crime who had very little freedom and yet, because of the work of Bible Society, there was an inner freedom that they had discovered in encountering God through the Scriptures.

I think our prison work, abroad and in this country, is remarkable in that the Gospel is an incredibly liberating message, even for those who are in prison. Psalm 107 is a wonderful

Psalm about those who were cast in gloom and imprisoned, and how God's presence and word brings liberation. We want to see people whose lives have led them to suffer external restriction on their freedom being in a position to encounter an enormous inner freedom through the Scriptures, which will then work its way out into every aspect of their lives.

Amen to that. But we too can identify with the words of this psalm. We cannot but help read these verses in the light of the Lord Jesus – think of Charles Wesley's great hymn, *And can it be that I should gain*:

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.

Jesus has broken down gates of bronze and cut bars of iron (v.16) to set *us* free from our cruel imprisonment to sin and death. We cannot but praise him for his unfailing love and for the wonderful things that he has done for us.

### **Psalm 107:17-32**

**Verses 17-22** speak of those who suffered a deadly sickness and called on the Lord for help. "He sent out his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave" (v.20).

The Lord Jesus is the one who healed the sick and saved many from death. He even raised some from death before breaking the power of death by his own glorious resurrection. He is our hope of resurrection and life in the face of death.

**Verses 23-32** recount the experience of those in peril on the sea. They cried to the Lord in their distress and the Lord rescued them:

He stilled the storm to a whisper;  
the waves of the sea were hushed.  
They were glad when it grew calm,  
and he guided them to their desired haven. (vv. 29-30)

This brings us back to our Gospel reading. This is what Jesus did for his distressed disciples, terrified by the storm on Lake Galilee. This is what he continues to do for terrified disciples today. His love never fails: he is the same yesterday and today and for ever.

### **Over to us**

We have been redeemed by the Lord from sin, death, darkness and despair. We also have a story to tell to others. "Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story" says the psalmist in verse 2. We should rejoice to be able to tell the wonderful story of our salvation in the Lord Jesus and of his unfailing goodness and love. We should delight to tell others of the hope we have in him in all the varied circumstances of our lives and in the prospect of death. If we were often to tell our story, might it not lead many others to come and trust in the Lord Jesus and have their own stories to tell?

Time does not permit me to tell the details of my story here, but I can bear testimony to the way in which God's goodness and unfailing love, shown particularly in the Lord Jesus, have impacted my life. I know that I am forgiven and need not be defeated by guilt and shame. I have learnt to be able to face failure – failure in myself and in others – knowing that this is the human condition but that this also will not have the last word. Christ has succeeded where I have failed and will one day transform the whole of this poor broken world and make it new and filled with the glory of God. I know that I am loved with a love that will never let me go. Death no longer holds any terror for me.

How will you tell your story?

**Peter Misselbrook, Christ Church Downend – 4/8/2019**