

Thankful That God Is Compassionate

By Jeff Darby

We are thankful because God knows our troubles and He cares

Psalm 107

Illustration

When the leaves start to turn and the cool breezes begin to blow, it brings to mind the wonder and majesty of the season. There are few sights that reveal the creative power of our God more clearly to me than the kaleidoscope of a hillside forest this time of year. When Facebook was in its infancy, I remember my first introduction to the idea of FB groups. I can even remember the first FB group I ever joined. It was a group, long since defunct, entitled picturesquely “I will go slightly out of my way to step on a particularly crunchy looking leaf”. and it was a group of Autumn enthusiasts that shared their reasons for loving this time of year.

Another reason I love this time of year is that I love its pinnacle holiday. Thanksgiving. What a wonderful reason to have a holiday. What a beautiful sentiment that the nation takes a day – really two because unless you are in retail you have Friday off also – for the purpose of being thankful.

Every year we celebrate this season by turning our attention to the subject of being thankful for all that God has done for us. This year is no different. And I am combining two favorites in a sermons series that I am very pumped about – one of my favorite holidays: Thanksgiving and one of my favorite books of the Bible: Psalms.

[click to slide with title and psalm 107](#)

There is good reason to look within this book for insights and inspiration, for example and precedence for being a thankful people. One could argue that this book has more to say on the subject than any other book in the canon. Just consider these facts – every time the word “thankful” is used in the Old Testament it is in this book, in fact, Psalms includes every use save two from the New Testament. Joy and Joyful – central aspects of gratitude – are used 75 times. The word “thanksgiving” found sparingly in Scripture appears 11 times. And the command “give thanks” is read 24 of the 44 times in these pages.

The Psalmists were people much acquainted with thanksgiving and their enduring work leaves us much to learn from.

Passage Background and Context Information

This Psalm is seen, by many scholars, as the third act of a three-act play in conjunction with Psalms 105 and 106. 105 speaks of God's care and providence for His Nation of Israel throughout its' history. Then 106 tells of their rebellion and rejection of His leadership. This Psalm ends with the people oppressed and beaten down until finally they relent and turn to God crying out to Him for deliverance which He lovingly gives.

Psalm 107 begins this way..

[.click to slide with first three verses](#)

This seems to be a Psalm that intentionally encompasses more than the select Nation of Israel. The third act in the play is to incorporate a full and complete picture of who God calls to be His own people. These people are Jews living abroad, Hebrew exiles, God-fearing Gentiles, and even pagans who have a notion that there is a supreme God over their lesser gods and they seek Him. As one commentator puts it, "these are the children of God that were scattered abroad, whom Christ died to gather together in one, out of all lands" (see Matthew 24:31 He will send out his angels with a loud trumpet, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. And John 11:52 and not for the nation only, but also to unite the scattered children of God.) In verse 3 He gathers them from all directions, and from the "lands" (plural). These who cried out to Him were heard by Him and attended to by Him. This broad inclusion of all people is cause alone for gratitude, but as we will see, there is much more to be grateful for in these lines. It begins...

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;

his faithful love endures forever.

2 Let the redeemed of the Lord proclaim

that he has redeemed them from the power of the foe

3 and has gathered them from the lands—

from the east and the west,

from the north and the south.

Therein lies the key reason for the gratitude and thankfulness expressed in this Psalm – that God has redeemed His people.

Specifically this Psalm tells four redemption stories; the story of 4 types of people whom God redeems and restores – (4-9) the self-reliant (independent), (10-16) the self-ruling (rebellious), (17-22) the self-indulgent (pleasure-seekers), (23-30) the self-serving (greedy).

What is also apparent is how each vignette reveals similar plotlines – they all moved away from God and toward themselves, this movement brought hardship (some naturally occurred by their choices, some God providentially provided), God used these hardships to masterfully bring about His will that they return to Him, they finally “came to themselves” and cried out, God saved them, and they rejoice with thanksgiving.

As we look at each of these, let’s keep that idea in mind – we can be thankful that God is compassionate of the trouble we find ourselves in – even when, and maybe especially when the trouble is of our own making.

1

The Self-Reliant (4-9)

Explain the Text

click to slide with “the self-reliant”

In verse 4 we read of people looking for a city. Often in scripture this idea of looking for or living in a city spoke of a person’s self-reliant spirit – an “I can do it myself” push back against the notion that we need God or each other. City living was self-reliant living. Jesus’ brother James wrote in James 4, “

13 Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will travel to such and such a city and

spend a year there and do business and make a profit.” 14 Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring—what your life will be! For you are like vapor that appears for a little while, then vanishes. 15 Instead, you should say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” 16 But as it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

In the middle of a chapter devoted to warning people against being self-reliant these are warned about the foolishness of thinking they needed nothing from God.

These had set off to a city and found themselves lost in the wilderness. They had launched out in arrogant self-reliance and found themselves hopeless.

Vs. 5 – They were hungry and thirsty – not only did they not succeed in becoming wildly wealthy, they could not even meet their most basic needs and it says their spirits failed. This is their “come to themselves moment”. They realized they had been wrong. They realized they could not do it on their own. They realized that they did need God.

So, they cried out to God and He supplied a city in which they could be provided what they needed. When they struggled arrogantly to do it themselves they failed. When they turned to God acknowledging their need He immediately and graciously provided for them.

Notice – there is no chastisement or shaming. God doesn’t beat them up. After all, they have learned the lesson. He acts like we expect God to act – compassionate to the trouble even though they brought it on themselves.

What is the result of God’s gracious fixing of man’s foolish mistake? read on...

Let them give thanks to the Lord
for his faithful love
and his wondrous works for all humanity.
For he has satisfied the thirsty
and filled the hungry with good things.

God’s compassion for us in the trouble of our own making is reason for thanksgiving.

The Self-Ruling (10-16)

Explain the Text

click to slide with “self-ruling”

We move from the self-reliant to the self-ruling. The first group says, “I can do it myself”, the second group says, “I am on the throne”. This group wants to be answerable to no one but themselves. They shook their fist at God’s instructions and resolutely turned against His will. The result of it, “darkness and gloom, prisoners in cruel chains”.

This is the result of rebellion – all rebellion, from teenage angst that pushes back on parental rules to the angel Lucifer – that most beautiful creature whom God loved – that commanded the most audacious rebellion in history... all rebellion ends in darkness and gloom and cruel chains.

Listen to 2 Peter 2 on this very topic... For if God didn’t spare the angels who sinned but cast them into hell[a] and delivered them in chains[b] of utter darkness to be kept for judgment.

The same punishment for rebellion is meted out whether angel or man – darkness and chains.

Verse 12 tells us that God’s hand was heavy on them. God disciplines harshly, but for good reason. Consider what the Hebrew writer says in chapter 12...

My son, do not take the Lord’s discipline lightly
or lose heart when you are reproved by him,
6 for the Lord disciplines the one he loves
and punishes every son he receives.[d]

7 Endure suffering as discipline: God is dealing with you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline? 8 But if you are without discipline—which all receive[e]—then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we had human fathers discipline us, and we respected them. Shouldn't we submit even more to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time based on what seemed good to them, but he does it for our benefit, so that we can share his holiness. 11 No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

In the next verses, God's discipline has its desired effect as they "come to themselves" and cry out to God. In true God fashion, He swoops in, saves them from the prisons of their own making, breaks the chains of their own self-rule delusion and restores them to His fellowship.

Then comes the predictable result – the people erupt in thanksgiving.

Once again, God's compassion for us in the trouble of our own making is reason for thanksgiving.

3

The Self-Indulgent (17-22)

Explain the Text

click to slide with "self-indulgent"

The next section introduces us to the fool that suffers affliction for his folly. The Bible says a lot about a fool. While there are many uses and definitions, the most general understanding is a fool is a person who does not employ wisdom. Without wisdom, we typically do what seems easiest, what seems to bring us the most joy, what seems to be good for the moment. In other words, childishness. This is the sentiment of the passage that says foolishness is bound up in the heart of childhood. To be foolish is to act like a little child. No thought for the long-view, a fool, like a kid, only asks what is fun in this moment, what brings me pleasure right now, what is easy and requires the least effort.

There is a reason that the Bible teaches us as parents to drive foolishness far from our children. It is a sad and serious thing when we see an adult think and act like a child.

There is a price to pay for foolishness – verse 17 calls it affliction. That same verse also places equal emphasis on both "their" and "rebellion" to help the reader understand that the issue is them doing what is pleasing to them regardless of what God wants. Their iniquities are the result of their self-indulgence. That self-indulgence is explained in the next expression: they loathed all food. They ate with such greed and gluttony that the very thought of food was repulsive. They were like the Israelites we studied in the series "Wanderers" who ate so much quail that they made themselves sick.

The result of self-indulgence is the same as the result of self-rule and self-reliance; they ended up far from God and deep in trouble. Verses 19, 20 and 21 now repeat our by now well-known pattern, 19 – they cry out to God, 20 – God saves them from the pit of their own making, 21 – They lift up thanksgiving to so kind a God.

For a third time, God's compassion to us, in the trouble of our own making, is reason for thanksgiving.

The Self-Seeking (23-30)

Explain the text

click to slide with “self-seeking”

The last group we read about today are the self-seeking, the greedy, those whose concern is for their own gain. We read that these conducted trade in ships – now, let me be clear that I’m not suggesting anyone in business is necessarily greedy. But, we would all agree that it can become a point of obsession.

Ezekiel 27 is a magnificent piece of poetry and it is about the demise of the ancient city of Tyre – a city destroyed by its greed. Ezekiel describes Tyre, not as a city, but as a ship – a merchant ship of such grandeur and beauty that the world had never seen anything like it. But, her greed brought upon her a storm and she was lost.

This picture of ships and sailors as symbolic of man’s greed is also seen in Revelation 18 and other places.

That, I think, is the point of the Psalmist here. Some people create for themselves worlds of trouble because of greed. In this case, the “storm” is of God’s creation for the purpose of bringing them back to themselves, helping them to see the truth – basically to knock some sense into their greedy little heads.

The storm is poetically described as the Psalmist says,

Rising up to the sky, sinking down to the depths, their courage melting away in anguish, they reeled and staggered like a drunkard, and all their skill was useless.

This is an accurate depiction of a ship at sea in a terrible storm. Up and down on the

waves. Fear. All the sailors can do is simply try to hang on.

But, this is a description of the kinds of trouble we can get into when we fall victim to self-serving mindsets and let our love of stuff run our lives.

By now you know exactly how it ends – let's just read it together...

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,
and the waves of the sea[g] were hushed.

30 They rejoiced when the waves[h] grew quiet.

Then he guided them to the harbor they longed for.

31 Let them give thanks to the Lord
for his faithful love

and his wondrous works for all humanity.

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

One last time, our phrase to remember for this lesson:

God's compassion to us, in the trouble of our own making, is reason for thanksgiving.

5

Conclusion (33-43)

Custom

click to slide with "conclusion"

Up to this point, the Psalmist has kept himself contained to his structure – stayed close to the storyline and plot development technique. But it is like a dam that has held back a mountain of water, straining, groaning, creaking until finally it bursts and a torrent gushes forward. This is how the Psalmist finishes, with a gushing torrent of reasons to praise God and be thankful to Him.

We can see that this Psalmist is grateful to God and aware of so many reasons why he should be.

What about you and me?

This God that we read about here is so gracious, so loving, so kind that when He sees His children in hardship He is motivated to help. He is even motivated to help when the trouble we find ourselves in is trouble of our own making.

That is an amazing God. That is an awesome God. That is a God you should know. If you don't, we'd love to talk to you about how you could. Our leaders meet in the back of this room during this last song for that very reason.

Praise and thanksgiving to a gracious and compassionate God.

Let's sing