

Remember Your Baptism: Hope in Times of Exile

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[0 : 01] There we go. Thanks, Jeff. Well, good morning, Church of the Advent. It's a joy to worship with you this morning. As Jeff said, my name is Jacob, and I've had the privilege of being in the same pastoral residency cohort as Jeff. We started pretty much the same day on August 1st of last year. Jeff and I have met several times over this past year, the two of us and also with other friends, to pray for our churches, pray for God's work in and through us in our midst. And it's been a real joy to get to know Jeff and to celebrate the unity that we have in Christ across our churches. By being here today with you this morning, I think it's a way of embodying this pilgrimage that we're on together as God's people, journeying to our heavenly city, our true home. So would you start with me in our time going into God's word by praying. Heavenly Father, teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom. Show us who you are, seated on the throne of heaven. Show us who we are. Even in our sojourn here on earth and the frailty of our bodies, show us our future hope in Christ and his coming kingdom, in whose name we pray. Amen. Amen. Please turn in your Bibles to Psalm 106, the Psalm that we just read. It's pretty much right in the middle of your Bible. As you can open right up and turn to left or to the right, you'll find Psalm 106. As you turn there, let me tell you a little bit about myself, a little bit of my story. So a name like Jacob

Rodriguez, you can probably guess that there's some kind of Hispanic heritage in my story, and there certainly is. I'm Mexican-American. All of my grandparents were born in northern Mexico or southern Texas, and they started this sojourn, this pilgrimage in my family's story. They moved up to the Chicago area. My parents, the first generation to go to college, then moved to the Detroit area where I was born. I went to college back in the Chicago area and then sojourned all the way to Ethiopia where I met my British wife. And then we lived in England for three years and now have come to Washington, D.C. So when people ask me, Jacob, where are you from?

I usually say, I don't know. I have this experience of a sojourn, almost like a third culture kid, but for me, I'm reaching my fourth or fifth culture by now. And there's this question that I think many people who are in D.C. can relate to. Just talking to Tim this morning, asking, do you feel like you're from D.C.? You're from Kansas, but been in D.C. for, I think, over two decades or so. There's this search for the place called home. A search where we can say, not only where I've lived for several or many years, but a place where my fathers were from, or my father's fathers were from, a place where my people are from. As I search for this identity in my own story, it can be kind of humorous at times, depending on where I am. If I'm with my grandparents, I might start to be talking to me, and then all of a sudden, people think I'm speaking in tongues. Or if I'm with my

British wife and her family, I might start accidentally sounding like I'm in a BBC documentary or something like that. Or sometimes, even as I've been back here in the States, when I go down to the south, some people might think that I'm making fun of them because I accidentally start talking with a drawl, too. But in this search for identity, for a place called home, I have found myself resonating so deeply with the psalmist here in Psalm 106, looking for that experience of being brought from the place of dislocation back to the fullness of the promises of God, being placed in the land where God had called them and commissioned them to be fruitful and multiply. This feeling of dislocation is heard in the heartbeat of Israel in many of the psalms. Here we are in Psalm 106. It's placed intentionally at a particular location in the whole book of Psalms. Psalms is made up of 150 songs, and each of these songs is part of five blocks, five books of Psalms. 150 Psalms, five major sections in the Psalms. And these five sections of the Psalms kind of mirror the five books of Torah, Genesis,

Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. It's almost a new Torah that is sung by God's people to God, and also sung to God's people to rehearse the promises of God that were given to them in those first five books, the books of Moses. And as we get to our psalm, Psalm 106, if you

flip all the way down to the end of the chapter, verse 48, in your Bibles or study Bibles, you'll probably see that right beneath it is these, in big letters, book five, which means our psalm, Psalm 106, is at the end of book four. Book four within these five-part structure of Psalms is a book where Israel dives deep into the question of exile. They have the added dimension that they know that they have been sent into Babylon. They have been sent away from the land of promise because of their own sin. And so the only hope they have is to go back to the promises of God, the promises that said that even after you go into exile, I'm going to bring you back into the land that I promised to your forefathers because of my covenant and because of the love and the commitment I have to you through that covenant promise. It's a promise that we see implied right there in verse one. Praise the Lord. Oh, give thanks to the

[6 : 28] Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. God's steadfast love, his covenant promise that he will never break, that he will always go back to, that endures forever, that he will always love his people. Now, this steadfast love was established firmly through the major event of God's salvation that he brought about for his people, the event of the Exodus that we read a few moments ago from Exodus chapter 14. This amazing action of God to bring his people out of slavery in Egypt through the waters of the Red Sea. It was that archetypal event that will shape the story of God's people all the way through and into being into the fulfillment that Jesus brings later on in the New Testament. Now, this story of Israel going through the

Red Sea can almost, in fact, it is described as a baptism. Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 10 talks about how the forefathers were baptized into Moses' forefathers were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

This image of going into the waters symbolizing death and coming out of the water symbolizing life, new life that God had bought for his people when he redeemed them out of Egypt and was bringing them into the desert toward the promised land. And when we look at the structure of this psalm, the heartbeat of the psalmist and the direction in which he's taking us as the readers or the singers of this psalm, we can see one major theme that he's encouraging us to do. To paraphrase Martin Luther, it is to remember your baptism. He's telling Israel here by singing about their baptism through the Red Sea, he's telling Israel to remember their baptism in the waters of the Red Sea. And to remember this baptism for three reasons that we'll go through quickly here. Because your baptism shows you, first of all, to whom you belong. Secondly, it shows you what God has done to save you.

And thirdly, it places your individual story into the larger story of God's redemption for his people. Let's look at the first of these.

[9 : 13] Your baptism shows you to whom you belong. Back in verse one, the psalmist talks about this great God, the Lord who is good, whose steadfast love endures forever, who can utter the mighty deeds of the Lord.

This is a God who creates, a God who saves. That word, mighty deeds of God in the Old Testament, refers to the miraculous act of God to create in the first place, and the miraculous act of God to save, and almost have a new creation in founding his people by saving them from Egypt. This is the God who is being praised in this psalm. Look at what the psalmist says in verse three. Verse four, rather. Remember me, O Lord, when you show favor to your people.

He's speaking of his own people here, the people of the Lord. They're called, in verse five, God's chosen ones. They are called God's nation.

And finally, they are called God's inheritance, his treasured possession. This is something that I think we should meditate on regularly.

[10 : 30] If you're like me and you've ever struggled with negative self-talk, sometimes it's helpful for me to take a, like a three-by-five card, put it in my pocket, and if I have constant negative self-talk, try to keep track of how many times am I saying these things to myself, and as many times as I say those things to myself, I say a truth about God to counter the negative self-talk and remind myself, I belong to God.

Meditate on that for a bit. You belong to God. You are his inheritance, the thing that he is looking forward to, to enjoy for all eternity, his treasured possession.

You are valuable to God. Now, even though we belong to God, even though this is a truth about all those who are the people of God, the psalmist has a realistic depiction of those who follow God and those who are prone to forget his goodness.

Look at verse seven. Our fathers, when they were in Egypt, they did not consider your wondrous works. They did not remember the abundance of your steadfast love, but they rebelled by the sea, at the Red Sea.

So this brings us to the next point of what remembering our baptism does for us. It shows us what God has done to save us. I think it's quite profound that the psalmist here, even though he is one who clearly acknowledges the faithfulness of God, and he is one who, out of anybody in Israel, he is one who has his heart in the right place looking toward God, even he has this honest, real declaration to God of identifying himself with those who have sinned and committed iniquity.

[12:30] Verse six. We and our fathers both have sinned. We've committed iniquity. We have done wickedness, and we have forgotten. We have not considered the wondrous works or remembered the abundance of your steadfast love.

So he's situating the great salvation of God that he wrought by bringing Israel through the waters. Within the context of Israel's own sin, their undeserved nature, the place where they were, where not one ounce of the grace or glory or love of God that was poured over them did they deserve. Even to the point after God showed them all ten signs of the plagues, and they were delivered out of Egypt, they get to the Red Sea, and what do they do? They question God and say, let us go back and serve Egypt.

And what that actually means, it's really a shorthand for saying, we're better off serving the gods of Egypt. Yahweh did all of this work to show that he was greater and stronger than the gods of Egypt ten times over, and now we still don't have the faith to trust him.

Yet God doesn't treat them as their sins deserve when they reject him at the shores of the Red Sea. Rather, in verse 8, he saved them for his name's sake, that he might make known his mighty power.

[13:58] You see, he had made a covenant with them that he would not break. Knowing that Israel would break that covenant again and again, Yahweh, the Lord, would be faithful to his promise to them.

As it says in verse 1, and again at the end of our chapter here, his steadfast love endures forever. He acts on behalf of his name, the name that he connected to Israel through the covenant that he made with them to say that he will never break it.

He will save his people. His love abounds for them, even to the worst, quote unquote, of sinners. And look at how he saves them. Verse 9, What God is doing here, as described by the psalmist, it's using language that brings the reader back to the imagery of creation.

When the depths were there, the Spirit of God was hovering over the depths, and God speaks into these depths and creates out of nothing through the waters that were there.

Now Yahweh here at the Red Sea, by the word of his power, he's bringing Israel through the depths, and he is creating a new people and calling them his own.

[15:41] This gives the imagery of the new creation that we'll see developed further into the New Testament in the ministry of Jesus and his followers. He redeemed them from the power of the enemy.

He purchased them in exchange for them. What he did was showing the image of the Lamb being slaughtered so that his people could be bought, and he called them his own.

Now this great act of salvation, this exodus as the people were being brought out of Egypt through the Red Sea, it was a great event that Israel needed to recall, to rehearse in their acts of worship, but it was pointing toward a greater salvation.

Israel in exile was looking back towards the original exodus, but they were also looking forward in hope toward a new exodus, a new baptism that would be irreversible.

We as Christians who see the fruits of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection can see that this baptism to which the exodus was pointing forward was the death and resurrection of Jesus because Jesus reenacted this very story of Israel by passing through the Jordan River.

[17:05] In Matthew 3, he says that it was necessary for him to come and be baptized by John to fulfill all righteousness. In other words, to pave the way for God's people, that they might have perfect relationship with God, that his perfect life might represent them to open the gateway for all of us to have fellowship with the holy God.

And the literal waters of baptism practiced in the church to this very day seal those same promises for God's people. Now, for those who are struggling with their own sense of identity or dislocation, or for those who, like the psalmist here, are recalling the ways that they have failed or that our

people, God's people, have failed and need reassurance that God is truly for us, he has not forsaken us, that we belong to him, we are encouraged to remember our baptism, sealed by water, representing God's act of saving us and calling us his own.

Now, this brings us to the final point here. When we see, when we look back, and we remember what God has done to save us, it situates our own story, whatever you might be going through at the moment, it situates that story within the larger story of God's redemption.

Look at what the psalmist says back in verse four. Remember me, O Lord, when you show favor to your people. Help me when you save them.

There is a kind of hope here. There is a forward looking. He knows there's gonna be a time when God saves his people.

[19 : 04] In verse five, he says, that I may rejoice in the gladness of your nation, that I may glory with your inheritance. The inheritance is that which you know certainly you will receive and that you will rejoice and enjoy in perpetuity.

Like, it will never go away. And our human inheritances might go away if the stock market crashes, if inflation continues. Any inheritance that we might think we might have, it's kind of fragile.

But God's own inheritance will never perish, spoil, or faint. God's own inheritance is sure and certain.

And so God knows that he will not lose his own. They are firmly established in relationship with him. The larger story to which this points is God gathering his people from all of the places where they have been scattered and bringing them together as one flock, as one people, forever to enjoy fellowship with him.

[20 : 20] And on behalf of that promise, based on that promise, the psalmist cries out, I'm going to skip all the way ahead to verse 47. Kind of give us a little foreshadowing of what's going to happen here.

He says, Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the nations that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory. And this is something that God is doing.

God has done, initiated to the death of the resurrection of his son, and something that will be completed on the final day when Jesus' return is accomplished. And all of God's people are drawn together and become one.

Now, this larger story, when Israel remembers it, remembers her baptism, remembers the God of faithfulness, of covenant love, to whom she belongs, what God has done to save her when she remembers that, and when she remembers the larger story of the promise that God made to her. It moves her to songs of praise. In verse 12, Then they believed his words, and they sang his praise.

[21 : 36] Now, there's two different levels of singing in this passage. It's the psalmist remembering when Israel was singing at the other side of the Red Sea, but he's also singing about Israel singing, and he's writing from a place probably of exile.

He's able to sing of this great salvation of God even when the promises are not fulfilled before his eyes. He's singing in faith.

This is a call to remember our baptism, even though it's hard work, even though sometimes our doubts and our anxieties in our hearts might feel insurmountable.

Perhaps you're like me, and the feelings of dislocation after all of my long sojourning brings me to a place of hunger pangs, longing for a place on this earth that I can call my home.

Sometimes I feel like my heart is pulled in so many directions. At any given day, there's a blessing that I can receive. I look at my WhatsApp, and I get encouragements from brothers who are still serving in Ethiopia.

[22 : 50] Even just yesterday, I heard an amazing testimony of an imam in the Horn of Africa, so a leader of a powerful mosque, who came to Christ and shared about his dream that he saw of Jesus, dressed in white, calling him my son and bringing him towards himself.

And the story is quite amazing, and this particular Muslim leader, who's just now come to Christ, is still in a place of secrecy because he knows the persecution that he will face if it's revealed what he has done.

encouraging, powerful story that I hear checking my WhatsApp. But there's also messages that I get from dear friends who have had serious accidents, one who is still in the hospital that I've been praying for, longing for him to be healed, and they still don't know if he can have his life-saving

surgery.

And so my heart is torn in several directions in the continent of Europe, here in the States, and in the Horn of Africa. And my own experience longs for this to be put back together in a place that I can call home.

Perhaps you're like me and have those similar experiences. Dear brothers and sisters, if that's your story, remember the words of God who says to you that he will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land, sprinkling you with clean water and making you clean.

[24 : 21] That's a quote from Ezekiel 36. Or perhaps you are afflicted by that nagging feeling in the back of your mind that surely God can't love you.

Surely God can't love me. I can say that he loves his people in this kind of vague, you know, sense of he loves the people of God in general, but maybe he's actually thinking about the person sitting to my left or the person sitting to my right.

But if he actually saw me and everything that I've done and thought, would he really love me? Now, in this time in which we live when Roe versus Wade has recently been overturned, there are probably many in the churches here in America who, with abortion being part of their story, part of their past and the trauma and the shame that has lied buried in their hearts, perhaps is resurfacing. Perhaps, if that's your story, you're wondering, can God really love me? My friend, believe God's word. He says to you this morning, my steadfast love endures forever.

You belong to me. I have rescued you, redeemed you, and made you my own. You belong. Maybe you've had a clear trajectory, though.

[25 : 51] Maybe your story's different, and you've had a clear trajectory from Sunday school to full-time ministry or to Christian charity work. You're doing everything that you know you need to do for God, but you have this nagging feeling that no matter all the things that you do, you're never doing enough, and God isn't fully pleased with your work at the end of each day.

I've been there. And I have to remind myself to believe God's word to me. His steadfast love endures forever. I belong to him. He's rescued me, redeemed me, and made me his own.

In your experience of exile, remember your baptism. Remember that you belong to Christ.

Remember that he saved you by those waters through his death and resurrection.

and united to him. You can have the confidence that your sins are forgiven. God really does love you, and he has prepared a home for you in glory.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[27 : 02] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.