

# Thinking and Thanksgiving

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Preacher: Rev Gordon Mair

[ 0 : 0 0 ] I want to do something rather challenging. Would you come with me to a book of Psalms, Psalm 107? Psalm 107.

And the very last verse. And what I'm going to do is I'm going to read it in the English Standard Version because it seems to have a better resonance for what I want to do.

Follow it in whatever Bible is in your own hand. Psalm 107 verse 43 reads like this. Whoever is wise, let him attend to these things.

Let them consider the steadfast love of the Lord. So that verse seems to come at the very end of the psalm being the structuring principle that he's applying for the whole of this psalm.

What's his intention behind it? What's all those 42 verses before it? What's he wanting to do? He's going to be saying, listen, stop what you're doing and think on these things.

[ 1 : 1 0 ] That's what the psalmist is saying to us. Stop what you're doing and think of these. What things? Think of the steadfast love of the Lord.

Paul, when he wrote to the church in Philippi in chapter 4 verse 8, he says, think on these things exactly the same as we've got here. He wants to encourage the church in Philippi.

He tells them to do what the psalmist is telling us to do. We all know it. Yes, some people say that the island life is a laid-back life and it doesn't have the same pressures.

Oh, yes, it does. Every one of us, whatever we're doing, we have pressure. Different forms, different ways. Even in the home, looking after the croft, in the car, whatever it is.

There's a pressure, there's a timetable chasing every one of us. And we're sometimes swept along with it. And sometimes we've got to take exactly what the psalmist says, take time out to attend to these things.

[ 2 : 1 3 ] He sent the disciples out in Mark chapter 3, it was. No, chapter 5, rather. He sent them out two by two.

And they came back and they were buzzing. Buzzing with all the things that they achieved and accomplished. And the Lord says to them in Mark chapter 6, 31, He says, Come ye apart and rest a while.

They were so captivated by what they had done. The Lord wanted them now to be alone and apart with himself. The Lord says the same thing to us.

To look at ourselves and to take time out to think of the way the Lord has dealt with us. Our lives are decorated.

Time after time, day in, day out, with God's gracious blessings. And sometimes we take them almost for granted. Or at least we don't pick up on them as we ought.

[ 3 : 1 7 ] And the psalmist is aware of that. And he's telling us, Just stop, take a time out, and think of the steadfast love of the Lord.

This psalm then has got that one theme. Right back to the very beginning. Oh, give thanks to the Lord. Why?

For his goodness. And what else? For his steadfast love, which endures forever. That one theme.

And what the psalmist is going to do, and what we're going to do, is we're going to break that one theme down, and we're going to go, and we're going to look through four different windows.

And we're going to look through these windows, and see this same theme in different colors. We're going to see it portrayed and pictured and represented for us in different ways that we can identify with.

[ 4 : 24 ] Yeah, that's what I went through. Yes, that's where I am. And every one of them, there is this refrain that keeps on coming back, this conclusion that comes as you're walking along this corridor with these windows that you're looking into.

At the very end of each display, we think of the love of the Lord. And we give thanks to him for his steadfast love to us.

Four different pictures. Four different pictures that represent in different ways every one of us. And what the psalmist is doing is the old Celtic way, a fiery cross.

A clan chief sent a fiery cross through his clan grounds to summon all his people to himself. This is the fiery cross that has been sent through the people of God down through the years.

A great invitation given to stop, to think, to apply. All times, all ages, all types. The redeemed of the Lord, the assembly of God.

[ 5 : 35 ] Let them gather together with this one great song welling up from their company. The four quarters of the earl, all points of the compass, were united together in one song.

Give thanks to the Lord. So let's go and look in each of these windows. And that's what we're going to do. We're going to read each window as we come to it. So the first window we're going to go to is verses 4 through 9.

So we're going to Psalm 107, verses 4 through 9. They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way.

They found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distress. And he led them forth by the right way that they might go to a city of habitation.

Oh, that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, steadfast love, and his wonderful works to the children of men. For he satisfies the longing soul and fills the hungry soul with goodness.

[ 6 : 45 ] The first picture, the first window that we look at it, and above the heading on the window is Pilgrims Along the Path of Life. Pilgrims.

That's what he's saying. He gathers them out of the north and south, east and west. They wandered in the wilderness. They were, just let me throw the words at you, they were disorientated.

They wandered. Just like we did. We had neither purpose nor path which you simply wandered here and there many's a day, many's a year.

We had no safe place to go to. We were exposed to danger. Our days were full of activity. Oh, we packed so much into our days. But what did we achieve at the end of it all?

The end of it all, what did we have of any lasting worth or value? All our days wandering through life, but what have we got to show for it?

[ 7 : 55 ] Disorientated pilgrims. Not only that, disoriented, yes, but also dissatisfied. We're told here they were hungry and they were thirsty.

Always looking for something to fill our life, to give us satisfaction. That's the way we once were, to make us comfortable and satisfied. And again, look at what's on offer today round about us in society.

Every taste is met. Every taste is taken account of. And so often there's a multitude of menus prescribed to meet that every taste.

And yet, even as we stoop to drink, Jeremiah tells us, the cistern is cracked. We don't find satisfaction.

We don't find satisfaction. Whatever is on offer and whatever's held out for us, hunger and thirst within us. The flashes of conscience, the weight of guilt, we find no relief for our souls.

[ 9 : 04 ]     disorientated, dissatisfied, desperate. We're told they fainted.

Their soul fainted in them. Nothing to support, nothing to strengthen, nothing to sustain them. Alone in the desert.

What a fearful thing it is to be alone without anything substantial round about you. When to be in a tight corner and nothing to lean on or get you out of it.

that's the way they were. There's a solemn text comes to us in Elijah's confrontation on Mount Carmel.

Remember the situation. He told them, you get on with it. You set out your sacrifices. You do everything. And he told them to get on with it and they did it. And they cried and they cried and they even cut themselves.

[ 10 : 16 ]     But there are two verses which bring a fearful thing home to us. In all of what they did, there was nobody who heard and there was no answer coming to them.

That's the kind of situation to be in where these people had no God to whom they could return and were devoted entirely to idols. In a tight corner and nothing and no one to lean on.

So yes, that's what we once were perhaps. I don't know what your background is but that's what the Bible tells me. Pilgrims in life.

Brought to a corner. Brought to a situation where we cry out verse 6. They cry to the Lord in their trouble.

The Lord has brought our circumstances to such a situation where all that we can do is cry out Lord have mercy upon my soul. We feel our need. No one can take it out of us.

[ 11 : 29 ]     And we should simply turn to the Lord for mercy. And what do we find these pilgrims receiving? Oh yes, disorientated.

Dissatisfied. Desperation. They look for deliverance and the Lord what does He do? The Lord gives them directions. Verse 7 He led them forth by the right way that they might go to a city of habitation.

Their days and your days our days our wandering days are over. We're now following the directions which the Lord gives us and they are directions which lead us from across to a celestial city.

And we're going along that road yes there are times when we find it is hard going it's a narrow way and we find it's hard going but we're never ever ever alone on it.

And there is always that prospect before us of the celestial city. A city which has foundations and whose builder is God. A city where the Lord has prepared a place for His people.

[ 12 : 49 ]     Pilgrims but this time so different in that pilgrimage. they've got a taste of the blessings of the Lord Jesus Christ and they want more and they're drawn out more and more and the closer they're getting the glory of Emmanuel's land fills their perspective more and more.

They're going to a city to be with the Lord. A city Revelation tells us where there is no sin to spoil or mar.

Peter tells us where there's no thief to steal where there's no rust to spoil. These are the things that we know of in this world that spoil anything we've got but in this place this place provided and prepared by the Lord there is nothing going to spoil that prospect of being in the company of the Lord.

Lord, when we've been there 10,000 days like Newton tells us, 10,000 years, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we first began. And notice what he says, to sing God's praise because that's what this psalm is about, is it not?

To give thanks to the Lord. Pilgrims we were on the path, these are the descriptions that are given about where we were and what we were doing until the Lord intervened and gave us direction pointed us to a destination and brought before us that delight.

[ 14 : 21 ] The delight, remember, spoken of by the disciples. Lord, to whom else can we go? For thou alone was the words of everlasting life.

Thanks be to God for what he's done for pilgrims in life like you and me. So that's the first picture with the heading on the top, pilgrims in life.

Let's move on to the second window. Let's read verses 10 onwards. Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron, because they rebelled against the word of God and contemned the counsel of the Most High.

Therefore he brought down their heart with labor. They fell down and there was none to help. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble and he saved them out of their distress. The first image, what was the heading?

Pilgrims in life. Move on to the second window. What's above this second window? Prisoners in sin. Prisoners in sin.

[ 15 : 36 ] That's the problem that there is with every one of us and that's the problem that is there generation after generation from the time of the fall in the Garden of Eden.

And we'll only have a right remedy for our society today when we have a right assessment of what's wrong with people now. This is the description of people today.

Right now, here it is for us. But the Lord, the Lord in his grace never leaves his people where sin has brought them.

Sin does not have the last word with a Christian. But to appreciate the good news, to appreciate the good news of the gospel, we first must listen to the bad news.

And that's where we need to start and that's what this window gives us. It gives us an image of prisoners in sin. Three simple words again or descriptions to give.

[ 16 : 47 ] First of all, we're told they sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. We're told that they were brought down their hearts with labor.

They were shackled in a dark dungeon. shackled in a dark dungeon. Oh yes, people will try to cut an image and they'll tell us, life is just fine for me.

Leave me alone. Don't come to me with your gospel message. I'm just fine. Go below the surface and what do we find? That they are indeed shackled in a dark dungeon.

Life is not attractive. Life is not enjoyable for the sinner. Whatever they might say to us, it's not enjoyable. They haven't listened to the gospel message. They have rebelled, we're told in verse 11, they have rebelled against the word of God.

They won't hold on to it and they won't follow it. Even when it's made plain to them the consequences of what is in store for them.

[ 17 : 51 ] That's the kind of message that we need to hear that we have heard. Again, think of the parable of the five wise and the five foolish and silence until you hear a door slamming shut and you can't get in.

Again, that's a fearfully frightening prospect so often used to awaken people to their need that indeed we are shackled in a dark dungeon.

lost and life has lost its meaning. Life has lost its pleasures. Shackled in a dark dungeon. Not only that but sentenced to hard labor.

They were being bound in affliction and iron. Life has a demanding schedule. We know it before we came to know the Lord.

Life has a demanding schedule. Do this, do that and the next thing if you want to get anything out of life. And we pursue it and we chase it but we never get what's been held out in promises. So many promises held out.

[ 19 : 06 ] So many schedules to fulfill. Do this and you're okay. The book is marked and the Lord will accept you. And you have peace and it doesn't work out. We all know the kind of prescriptions that have been set before us and we might even have closed in with some of them.

To do deals with God. Sentenced to hard labour and doesn't work out. Shackled.

Sentenced. The third thing in this window as you look through sprawled at death's door. Sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death.

this regime that we were in it took its toll upon us. Day after day we were getting weaker and frail. Strength went so did hope and all that was left within us was a bitterness.

Despondency came upon us. We can even now perhaps tonight look down the path we've journeyed and we can see it described in these very colours for us.

[ 20 : 18 ] Where was I? Yes I was shackled in that dark dungeon. I can see the place in the corner where I sat. Oh yes I can remember the days of hard labour when I tried and I tried and I tried to get peace and acceptance with God and it didn't work.

Oh yes and there were these times when sickness or something came upon me and I was brought down to death door. Looking back that's where I was.

We had an old lady with us in Fort William and she said something to me which has stuck with me to this day. She said there are no pockets in a death shroud.

there are no pockets in a death shroud. When you're wrapped up there's no pockets to take anything with you.

That's the way it was. That's the way it is. Prisoners of sin sprawling a death store.

[ 21 : 36 ] until the Lord again we're told they cried to the Lord and he saved them out of their distress. Where do you find, where do these people who are prisoners of sin, where do they find that peace?

They find it only where the Lord points and brings them. The Lord gives simply the themes set out for you.

The Lord gives us light. Yes, he gave light on what I was and who I was as he did to you. He gave light upon the familiar passages of the scriptures which we've learned set down in our memories.

Things that we've gone over and read and read and read until that one moment, that one day when the Lord met us and the Lord gave light. That's what it means. He gives us light and he gives us understanding and he gives us liberty and he gives us life.

Peace to our soul and to our conscience that we've never ever had before. Peace to our conscience that we so desperately look for and long for.

[ 22 : 58 ] Peace to our soul, the gift of Jesus Christ whose death on the cross bought for us and his people what we could never achieve and obtain with all of our application, with all of our hard labor.

We could never ever reach it. But as we obey what the Lord gives us, only then do we find peace life.

For quite a few months, and you'll appreciate why I'm saying that, for quite a few months, just before I left for William, we will be going through the whole of the book of Deuteronomy. fascinating, rich, rich study that I was really thrilled to go through before I finished.

And there's a text, and it's very easy to remember it. Deuteronomy 4, 5, 6. Deuteronomy 4, verses 5 and 6. Let me read them to you. I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should go into the land whither you go to possess it.

And then verse 6. Keep, therefore, and do them. For this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, who shall hear of all these statutes, and what they say about you.

[ 24 : 24 ] Surely this nation is a wise and an understanding people. Surely this nation is a wise and understanding people.

You'll remember it, won't you? Deuteronomy 4, 5, 6. So there's the first window. Pilgrims and light. Second window, prisoners of sin. What's the third window?

We move down the corridor and we come to another one. Verses 17 to 22. Let me just read a few verses. Fools because of their transgression, because of their iniquities are afflicted.

Their soul abhors all manner of meat, and they draw near unto the gates of death. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saves them out of their distress.

We've said most of it. Let me just simply give this one image again. These people have rejected, like we did ourselves, we've rejected so much of what God was telling us and teaching us at one time in our life.

[ 25 : 26 ] We thought we knew better and we could go and do it our own way. We put so much hope in what we were doing, all our eggs in one basket, but then when we needed help, it wasn't there for us as we needed it.

Even when it came to face the last enemy, especially the last enemy, when death's shadow maybe came across our life, when the prospect came close and we were aware of it, the very prospect of death itself, it's a fearful thing.

It's a fearful thing. And that was used perhaps by the Lord with some of us set out for us here, that they cry out unto the Lord in that very extreme circumstance, where no man can help you, no matter how advanced our medicine might be or our facilities are, no man can help us, but the Savior can because he and he alone is the one who has overcome and defeated death and taken the sting from it.

He and he alone is the one who gives peace at the prospect of the grave because he has dealt with the problem that we have in our soul, the problem of sin and he and he alone is able to console us.

Let me take an illustration. In the book of Isaiah there are four images given to us of the suffering servant. The first of these is in Isaiah 42 and it says about he will not quench the smoking flax.

[ 27 : 08 ] And it's a beautiful image. If you think of a saucer with a wee dimple out the side of it, that's where the wick was draped and the saucer was filled with oil. And the wick was lit and it burnt drawing the oil up the wick.

But if you didn't fill it regularly, it would draw all the oil up the wick and it would begin to burn itself. And when it did, it burnt with a smoky flame.

And it was, perhaps you came into the room and you said, oh, I need a bit of oil in it. And you would grab the bottle of oil and you'd pour it in quickly. If you did that, you would create a bow wave in the saucer and the bow wave would just simply flood the saucer and push the wick out and you'd smother it.

What you need is that gentle touch to pour the oil into the saucer so that it begins to draw up the wick and burn again.

Smoking flax he will not quench. That's the gentleness of the Lord dealing with somebody who is in dire straits, somebody who's on rock bottom, somebody who's in the shadow and with the prospect of death.

[ 28 : 25 ] move on. Our time is going. The pilgrims in life, prisoners of sin, prospect of death. One last window that the psalmist gives us.

The passage through the seas. With the weather outside, we can understand what this is about. Come down to verse 23. They that go down to the sea and ships that do business in great waters, these see the work of the Lord and his wonders from the deep.

He commands the mount up to heaven, down to the depths. They reel to and fro and stagger like a drunken man, verse 27, and are at their wits end.

A beautiful word. They're at their wits end. Israel wasn't known as a seafaring nation. But here we're given a picture of a very dramatic and traumatic situation to be in.

A storm comes. It's here described in terms of a storm at sea, but it can take any form to you and to me. A storm comes.

[ 29 : 30 ] The size, the scale, the strength of it. Enormous. Boats thrown about by the sea. Green water coming over the front. Its effect.

We as they are at a wits end. We don't know what to do. We're in a situation and we don't know what to do. We cannot cope. And even in that kind of situation, fit in the details yourself, wherever you've been in life.

Perhaps trawling through your memory with this word tonight. I can pick out something. Open a cupboard of your memory and take something off the shelf of life. Open the jar and show it.

the Lord is doing that perhaps to us. Some traumatic situation you were in, I was in. Where we were like this in an intense situation, at our wits end.

And what happened? Despite without wisdom, despite without control, despite not knowing which way to turn or what path to take, what happened? the Lord broke in and he brought us to the place of a rest and a haven.

[ 30 : 47 ] He brought us into the harbor. Brought us into peace. The master's touch. When we were wet and weary and weak.

The master's touch to bring us to safety. Remember what we said? This one theme with four variations.

Every picture that's given at the end of each, when you move from one window to the next, what's the phrase? What's the theme? Oh, give thanks to the Lord for what you've seen.

What you've seen. What you've seen. Give thanks to the Lord for what he's done. What he's done for your life and mine. Whenever, I'm not a musician, but in a great orchestra, when they're dealing with an overture, there's always a theme that the composer has put into the music.

[ 32 : 06 ] And holding them, it moves on to the percussion and the drums. And all of that is just building up one upon the other. One theme with different expressions and different variations.

There is, happens from time to time, and you can maybe look at it yourselves, it's what's called a flash mob. A flash mob is in Macy's in a town square where you've got a choir, but they're all dressed up like ordinary people.

And as they go on, somebody else in another corner starts. And two people here will get up in their seat and they'll start. And it develops and it grows in momentum and strength until eventually you've got the choir singing and everybody's trying to join in.

Calum there starts singing. Ian Duncan starts in another corner. George starts, Chorus in another one.

It begins with a faint whisper. It grows in intensity. We look through the windows and we look into our memory and we get it all.

[ 34 : 35 ] Let us pray. Thank you for your patience. Bring your love to the Lord.

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