

Consider the love of God

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[0 : 0 0] So the reading is from Psalm 107, which is on page 608 of the Bibles. O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures for ever.

Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble, and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south. Some wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to a city to dwell in.

Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He led them by a straight way, till they reached a city to dwell in.

Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of men. For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things.

Some sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, prisoners in affliction and in irons. For they had rebelled against the words of God, and spurned the counsel of the Most High.

[1 : 0 4] So he bowed their hearts down with hard labour. They fell down with none to help. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and burst their bonds apart.

Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of men. For he shatters the doors of bronze and cuts in two the bars of iron. Some were fools through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquity, suffered affliction.

They loathed any kind of food, and they drew near to the gates of death. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He sent out his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destruction.

Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of men. And let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, and tell of his deeds in songs of joy.

Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the great waters. They saw the deeds of the Lord, his wondrous works in the deep. For he commanded and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea.

[2 : 1 6] They mounted up to the heaven, they went down to the depths. Their courage melted away in their evil plight. They reeled and staggered like drunken men, and were at their wit's end.

Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. Then they were glad that the waters were quiet, and he brought them into their desired haven.

Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of men. Let them extol him in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders.

He turns rivers into a desert, springs of water into thirsty ground, a fruitful land into a salty waste because of the evil of its inhabitants. He turns a desert into pools of water, a parched land into springs of water.

And there he lets the hungry dwell, and they establish a city to live in. They sow fields and plant vineyards, and get a fruitful yield. By his blessing, they multiply greatly, and he does not let their livestock diminish.

[3 : 24] When they are diminished and brought low through oppression, evil, and sorrow, he pours contempt on princes and makes them wander in trackless wastes. But he raises up the needy out of affliction, and makes their families like flocks.

The upright see it and are glad, and all wickedness shuts its mouth. Whoever is wise, let him attend to these things. Let them consider the steadfast love of the Lord.

Before we begin, let's pray. Father God, we thank you for your precious word to us in Psalm 107, and we pray for your Spirit's help now as we consider your steadfast love.

Please help us to know you better. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. So let me start us off today by trying to get you all to feel the emotions that we often get from good stories.

We all love a good story where the weak overcomes the strong, right? We're often invited by the author of a story to get behind the main character who starts off weak, and then proceeds to overcome all sorts of obstacles to defeat the high and mighty villain.

[4 : 49] And that's the basis for many stories of our favorite novels or films. Think about Harry Potter, going from a young orphaned boy to the wizard who ultimately overcomes Voldemort.

When the finale comes, where we witness Harry Potter triumphing over Voldemort, we can all relish in that feeling of joy and gladness that comes with Voldemort being defeated.

We can all... Sorry. Harry Potter has won, okay? And the big bad has finally been defeated after seven books and eight films.

Or, if sports are more of your thing, we can feel that thrill of joy and gladness when we witness the people that you support making a comeback.

So, when Federer's supporters thought he was going to lose to Nadal in the 2017 Australian Open, trailing 3-1 in the final set, Federer wins five games in a row to win the title.

[5 : 54] What a comeback, right? In other words, we all love and get excited about a great reversal. But, do we realize that's actually how God loves to work too?

This isn't just how the narrative of our favorite fictional stories goes. Can we see that in this psalm? Can we see this in the story of the Bible?

Do we realize that God loves to work through great reversals? And so, let me invite us all to get excited. Let us all come and see how much God loves to work through great reversals.

So, we have spent the previous four weeks looking at Psalm 107's four different perspectives of God's steadfast love for his people. And today, we come to the final talk of this psalm, looking specifically at this final section, verses 33 to 43.

Now, a quick word about the context of Psalm 107 for those of us who might be joining us for the first time. This psalm's original audience was God's people, the Israelites.

[7 : 10] The Israelites were exiled to Babylon because they were a rebellious people who have again and again turned away from God in their sin and worship of idols.

But now, they've witnessed the rise and fall of their oppressors, the powerful Babylonian empire. God raised up the Persian empire to defeat the Babylonians, bringing them down.

And the Israelites were set free. They were redeemed. In other words, they have just witnessed a great reversal. But do these redeemed Israelites realize that that's exactly how God loves to show his steadfast love to his people?

They should. Look back with me at the first two verses of this psalm, where the redeemed of the Lord are called to give thanks to the Lord for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

And so, before we dive into this final section of Psalm 107 today, let us do it with the final verse in mind, verse 43, which says, whoever is wise, let him attend to these things.

[8 : 25] Let them consider the steadfast love of the Lord. And we are going to do exactly that now. Let us really spend time to consider the steadfast love of the Lord.

I want to help us to do this by thinking about two main ways that God shows his steadfast love through great reversals. So, for those making notes, here comes my first point.

The first way, looking at verses 33 to 38, is this. God shows his steadfast love by reversing his judgment on his people. God shows his steadfast love by reversing his judgment on his people.

So, you might be sitting there thinking, hang on, wait a minute. Reversing his judgment on his people? Yes, that's right. So, let me read verses 33 to 34 for us again.

He turns rivers into a desert, springs of water into thirsty ground, a fruitful land into a salty waste because of the evil of its inhabitants.

[9 : 36] Now, notice the imagery here. There should be no doubt that this is talking about judgment on a catastrophic level. Rivers turn into a desert, springs of water turns into thirsty ground, fruitful land turns into a salty waste.

We can try to imagine this in our heads. A blessed land becoming a cursed land. And how cursed is the land? Well, compared to life in a fruitful land, we certainly cannot have much life in a desert or a salty waste.

How can we grow crops? How can we survive in such a harsh environment? However, note that these verses aren't only describing a catastrophic level of judgment.

It is important not to gloss over two other things here in these verses. One, the person behind these catastrophes. And two, the reason for why this is happening.

It is clear that God himself is the person behind these catastrophes. And the reason he is doing this is, as verse 34 says, because of the evil of its inhabitants.

[10 : 50] Now, we cannot miss this. This is talking about God's judgment on his people, living in the fruitful lands that he had given them. God's people had rebelled against him, not trusting in him.

They turned away to worshipping idols, carrying out detestable acts that offended God. And therefore, God acted in judgment against his rebellious people.

And the effects of his judgment can be observed in all the lands. And we see this very clearly, especially from the books of Jeremiah and Isaiah, that we see God is the one who has pronounced judgment on his people for turning away from him.

He was the one who orchestrated his people's exile to Babylon and caused the whole country to therefore become a desolate wasteland. But here comes the great reversal.

Let's read verses 35 to 38 again. He turns the desert into pools of water, parched land into springs of water, and there he lets the hungry dwell, and they establish a city to live in.

[11 : 57] They sow fields and plant vineyards and get a fruitful yield. By his blessing, they multiply greatly, and he does not let their livestock diminish.

So what happened next? The great reversal demonstrating God's steadfast love. The land that had become a desert, the parched land, these have been reversed into places where they can be life again.

The state of these places has been reversed so that God's hungry can dwell in them, where they can establish a city to live in. There's a clear echo here of verses 4 to 7, where the Lord provided for his hungry and thirsty people who were wandering in desert wastes, finding no way to a city to dwell in.

The people cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. And that's what we have seen repeatedly over the last four weeks in this psalm.

This rescue, this great reversal, only came after the people had cried out to God for help. There is no doubt that these verses are speaking about the reversal of God's judgment on his people.

[13 : 14] We also see in verses 37 and 38 that God doesn't simply restore the land for them to live in. He also ensures that they multiply greatly, protects them, and he doesn't let their livestock diminish.

So by crying out to God to save them, they also return to the God who has all the power to sustain them and provide for them abundantly. And so, we see God's steadfast love shown through him reversing his judgment on his people.

God is the merciful God who has both the power to judge and to forgive. Despite all the wrong they had done in turning away from God, when they turned back and cried out to him for help, God rescued them from his judgment.

Now, one of the top phrases that appear on people's CVs and resumes nowadays is, proven track record.

Well, if God has a CV, then it will definitely say that God has a proven track record of reversing his judgment on people who turn back from their sinful ways and cries out to him for help.

[14 : 30] So for the Israelites who were brought back from exile in Babylon, meditating on God's proven track record of reversing his judgment on his people, this means that they can continue to trust in a gracious and merciful God.

They've witnessed it firsthand, God's deliverance and his mercy when they cried out to him. their hearts should be filled with joy and gladness.

And for us here today, we have the benefit of an even clearer view of this aspect of God's proven track record. In our sin and rebellion against God, we are all under his wrath and righteous judgment.

But in sending his only son, Jesus, to die for us on the cross, God has given us all an invitation to turn back to him. So that we too can experience for ourselves his steadfast love.

In Jesus, we can truly experience God's steadfast love. It is the ultimate display of God reversing his judgment on us.

[15 : 44] Now, for those of us here who have already accepted that invitation and are Christians here today, let us take the time to really consider this. let God's steadfast love for us sinners really sink in.

He's done the great reversal on us. We were wandering in the desert, headed towards eternal destruction. But through Jesus Christ, he turned us around and saved us and promised us eternal life with him in heaven.

We can always be glad and filled with joy, knowing that he is the kind of God who will reverse his judgment on us when we call out to him for help.

So praise him. Now, for those of us who wouldn't consider themselves Christians here today, as verse 43 says, whoever is wise, whoever is wise, if you consider yourselves to be wise, attend to these things.

Consider how great it is that with God, it is possible for him to reverse his righteous judgment on those who stop rebelling against him, who cry out to him for help, who realize they need to be saved.

- [16 : 57] If God reversed his judgment on his people during the Babylonian exile, as well as everyone else in history who have turned back to God from their sinful ways, then you also can be 100% confident in God's proven track record that he will save you if you would turn to him and cry out to him for help.

Now, moving on to verses 39 to 42, we come to the second way through which God shows his steadfast love. And so, my second point is this.

God shows his steadfast love by reversing the state of the wicked and needy. God shows his steadfast love by reversing the state of the wicked and needy.

And let me read verses 39 and 40 again. Again, we see God is the one who acts.

When his people are diminished and brought low, he punishes the culprits, the ones responsible for oppressing his people, the ones responsible for causing them sorrow.

- [18 : 26] It is these evildoers who now face the judgment of God as he makes them wander in trackless wastes. Now, before the Babylonians had taken the Israelites away to exile, the Assyrian army was another huge threat, huge enemy of God's people.

Now, think about how God had poured contempt on the Assyrians. Just when they thought they were going to enter Jerusalem and destroy God's people, God answered the king of Judah's prayer and sent an angel to the camp of the Assyrians and killed 185,000 of the Assyrian army, sending the Assyrian king crawling back to where he came from.

The high and mighty are brought low by God, suffering his righteous judgment. Now, as for God's people, we read on in verses 41 and 42.

But he raises up the needy out of affliction and makes their families like flocks. The upright see it and are glad, and all wickedness shuts its mouth.

Now, this is a beautiful image of God's rescue that should make God's people glad and comforted. In their sufferings and afflictions caused by the high and mighty, God's people are cast down and defeated.

- [19 : 54] They are in a state where they need help. And God swoops in, he comes and lifts up, he raises up the needy who need help, those who are unable to help themselves.

Now, we can all imagine that movie scene where Superman swoops in to save someone from that falling rubble, and then he offers a kind hand to help that person up off the floor.

You can see that the joy and gladness that fills the faces of the one being lifted up, being rescued. But this is so much more than that.

This is the real deal, God Almighty himself, who personally comes and raises the needy out of affliction. He even makes their families like flocks.

God multiplies his people like flocks of sheep with him as their loving and caring shepherd. The redeemed Israelites have been brought back together in great numbers in the land that God had given them.

- [20 : 56] And so naturally, the upright are glad because they saw that God indeed is faithful to taking care of his people. He is faithful to rescue.

He won't let evil go unpunished, and he won't let injustice to his people go on forever. This is God's steadfast love for his people on display.

So for this, they can be glad and confident in the God who is steadfast and faithful to his people. Now on the other hand, we have the complete defeat of wickedness as all wickedness shuts its mouth.

There were no more Assyrians mocking God. There were no more Babylonians oppressing the Israelites. God indeed reverses the state of the wicked, bringing them from on high to low, and he reverses the state of his needy people, raising them from low to on high.

Now again, what does this mean for us? Just like the Israelites who had witnessed the high and mighty Babylonian empire being brought low and God's needy people being raised up, we too can be glad.

[22 : 13] Be glad that this is not unusual for God. In other words, this is God's MO, his predictive mode of operation. Everyone has an MO.

For instance, the youth among us. Your MO might be doing your best at school to get the best grades. To the healthy inclined people among us, your MO might be to go to the gym regularly to stay healthy.

Now for Kim Jong-un and Vladimir Putin, their MO is abusing their power as dictators. But God's MO, God's MO is showing his steadfast love by making sure that evil people do not get the last laugh.

His MO is reversing the state of the wicked and his needy people. We have a God who is perfectly consistent 100% of the time.

And so as we wait for Jesus' future return, know and trust in God's MO. He has been working like this across the narrative of the Bible.

[23 : 25] Remember the rescue of the Israelites from Egypt in the Exodus? How the Pharaoh was brought low and the Israelites were raised up from being oppressed and enslaved? Remember in the battle between David and Goliath, God chose David, the weak-looking shepherd, and used him to literally bring low the giant Goliath as David shot a rock at Goliath with a sling and David was raised up to be king.

But most importantly, let us remember that the greatest reversal happened at the cross. Jesus, the infinitely mighty one, descended from on high to be brought low to pay the price of death that we deserve for our sins so that we who are lowly in our sins can be lifted up and be glad at our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The wickedness of death has been silenced as we who are in Christ can be glad and no longer need to fear death. And so, while we wait for Jesus' future return, we may find that wickedness around us is discouragingly loud.

People may mock Jesus and all those who follow him and even persecute them. They may be laughing now, but we can look forward to the deafening silence when Jesus returns, when evil is finally defeated.

There will be no more snickering, no more evil laughs or oppressors boasting about their evil deeds. We can have utter confidence that on the day Jesus returns, all wickedness, all of it, will shut its mouth when they see the Lord return to vindicate his people.

[25 : 19] God's people will be glad because God has consistently done it in the past and one day we will all experience that ultimate thrill of joy and gladness when we all leap up and exclaim, for the final time, yes, he's done it again.

Amen. And so, drawing to a close, we have spent some time considering the steadfast love of the Lord, which is what the end of this psalm calls us to do.

Now, I pray that we would leave today feeling that joy and gladness that comes from seeing how much God loves to show his steadfast love through great reversals.

We can trust him. We can trust in his proven track record and his MO of how he shows his steadfast love. We've seen God reversing his judgment on people who cry out to him for help, and we have seen God reversing the state of the wicked and his needy people.

So let us continue to consider this in discussion groups in a minute, as well as in the coming days and weeks, to help one another not to lose sight of God's steadfast love for us.

[26 : 38] And here are a couple ideas of discussion questions that might help us as we go into our groups. One, where else has God shown reversals in the Bible?

Where else has God shown through, where else has God shown reversals in the Bible? And two, how does considering God's steadfast love help you to trust God more?

How does considering God's steadfast love help you to trust God more? But before we do that, let us pray. Father God, we thank you for the greatest reversal that you've shown us at the cross.

You have made the ultimate display of your steadfast love to us there, sending your son down from heaven to die in our place for our sins, so that we can be raised up and be glad.

Thank you that you are the God who loves to show your steadfast love through reversals. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. aman. Amen.