

Let the Redeemed Rejoice

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[0 : 01] Let me pray for us. Father, as we begin to look at the Psalms, this latter portion in Book 5, help us to be able to appreciate them, but also to use them for our own spiritual nourishment, to encourage others, and as well to grow in our faith and our knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Amen. Well, we're going to turn back to Psalms in a while, but I thought we'd start with that parable that you heard, that second reading, which would be quite familiar to many of you, I'm sure. In it, Jesus tells of two men, each with a different amount of debt forgiven. So, if you remember, one had 500 denarii, and the other had 50, and Jesus concludes by saying that the one who has been forgiven much, loved much.

Now, he taught that parable to draw a comparison between the woman and Simon, the Pharisees whose house Jesus was at. The woman had come to Simon's house, and washes Jesus' feet with her tears, wiping them with her hair, and then she pours the expensive perfume on his feet.

This woman, you see, was a sinner, and she recognized deeply her need for God. And in turn, when she turns to Christ, she finds favor with him.

[1 : 27] For Jesus says to her, your sins are forgiven, your faith has saved you. Go in peace. Now, she doesn't use words, but she acts out her thanksgiving, effusively, which is more than can be said of Simon, this seemingly righteous Pharisee, who neither washes Jesus' feet, nor anoints him with oil, even though he was the host of the house.

I tell this parable, or this story, because I want to draw that comparison with what's happened to Israel many years before this incident that Jesus tells us about.

For you see, Israel, the people of God, experienced something very similar to the woman. They too were forgiven much. Now, if you recall, they were in the depths of their trouble, and God rescued them and redeemed them.

Now, I'm talking about the exile, of course, when God scattered them from the promised land. Jerusalem, their capital, was ransacked in ruins, and many were taken to Babylon, far out in the east.

And there they lived as slaves for 70 years, humiliated, without king or country. And this psalm, if you turn back with me to page 603, Psalm 107, this psalm is set after their return.

[2 : 48] In it, they are urged to give thanks to the Lord for their return and to remember His great love for them. Now, I've got an outline there, and it's quite a simple outline, but hopefully, it will help you to follow tonight.

And the first thing I want to say is a little about the context of the psalm. It's actually the first psalm in Book 5 of the Psalter. In case people are unaware, this is the Book of Psalms, but it actually has five books, five volumes.

And most scholars agree that this last volume, Book 5, was compiled after the return from exile. Chronologically, that makes sense as well.

It's the last. And the psalms may have been written before then, right? But they were actually put together, brought together, after that comeback to the land from places like Babylon and places like Egypt.

By contrast, Book 4 was probably compiled during the exile. So if you read Book 4 closely, you will see that there's no references to human kingship.

[3 : 51] No talk of King David or Solomon. Instead, it's about Yahweh as king. And when you look at the very last psalm of Book 4, what you find there is a cry for help, a plea to be rescued from exile.

So look with me just one page, or it's still on the same page actually, page 603. Look with me at verse 47. It's the second last verse of Psalm 106. See what it says there?

It says, Save us, Lord our God, and gather us from the nations that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise. Save us, O Lord, and gather us from the nations.

And so when Psalm 107 begins, it begins with a response to that cry. It's as though Psalm 106 was the closing scene of Act 4. And what we have in Psalm 107 is the opening scene of Act 5.

And so we read in verse 1 to 3, O give thanks to the Lord for He is good for His love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story, those He redeemed from the hand of the foe, those He gathered from the lands, from the east and west, from north and south.

[5 : 03] Can you see, God has already gathered them. That word is in the past tense. So in Psalm 106, they prayed and asked God for deliverance. And in Psalm 107, they returned.

They have returned. This gathering is seen by them as a great redemption. It's been compared to the very first redemption, which is when they were first brought out of slavery in Egypt.

And so the psalmist encourages them in light of this great salvation, great deliverance from slavery, to remember to thank the Lord, to remember His goodness and His love for them.

And then with this general call to thanksgiving, what he then moves on to do is to give us four specific examples. So that's the second section we're going to look at. It's a rather lengthy section, verses 4 to 32, but as Marty helpfully helped us as we were reading through it, it neatly divides into four subsections.

It's a bit like our testimony time last Sunday, remember Thanksgiving, where people were coming up to share about God's goodness. Well, here we have four groups and one by one, as it were, they were coming up, taking center stage, and we get to hear their stories of redemption.

[6 : 20] Now some people have tried to connect each group with the four points of the compass so they think it ties in with verse 3. So, you know, the first group were coming from the east and the second from the west and so on. It sounds like a nice idea.

I'm not sure that it works actually. In fact, we're not even sure whether these groups are returning exiles. The Bible, the psalm, is not very specific, is it? It just talks about people who are in trouble generally.

They cry out and they are saved by God. Nevertheless, they all share a common pattern of redemption and I'm sure you would have picked it up when you were reading it.

So, whether it's the wondrous of the desert in verse 4 or the prisoners in darkness in verse 10 or the rebellious and afflicted in verse 17 or verse 23, the sailors in the danger on high seas, what happens is that whenever each of them find themselves in trouble, they cry out to the Lord.

That's the verse we read together. So, verse 6, verse 13, verse 19, and 20, they all say the same thing. In each case, as they cry out to the Lord, the Lord delivers them and saves them from their distress.

[7 : 23] God does that without fail. Whatever their trouble, we see in each of the subsection that the Lord reverses it. The language is one of reversal. So, in verse 4, if they have no city to settle in, God leads them by a straight way to a city they can settle in, verse 7.

If they are hungry or thirsty, in verse 5, God satisfies their thirst and hunger, verse 9. It's images quite reminiscent, isn't it, of the refugees we're seeing at the moment on TV as they make their way across the Middle East, from the Middle East into Europe.

Well, in this psalm, unlike some people right now in Europe, they actually find refuge because God provides a city for them to settle in. They can build houses or homes and they can plant crops and vineyards.

As we go on with the other groups, we see the pattern repeated again and again. So, verse 10, they're sitting in darkness in chains. Well, verse 14, the Lord brings them out of darkness and breaks their chains.

Again, verse 18, they're near the gates of death. And verse 20, God rescues them from the grave. As for being on the high seas, God stills the storm to a whisper, verse 29, and brings them to a safe haven.

[8 : 41] So, again and again, we see this constancy, this consistency in God's actions. Whenever people cry out to Him, He always saves. And in fact, that's how He responded with the exile.

So, again, we seem to be doing Psalm 106 and 7 together tonight, but go back with me to verse 41 of Psalm 106 because there, the psalmist talks about their rebellion and God giving them over into the hands of the nations.

But then in verse 44, when they cry out to the Lord, what happens? God takes note of their distress and He remembers His covenant and relents.

God saves them when they cry. Now, I want to ask the question, why does God always respond like that? Why does He always save when the people cry?

Well, verse 45 of Psalm 106 tells us, it's because of His great love that He relents. God does it because of His great love.

[9 : 49] And if we look back into Psalm 107 now, this is the exact same reason we find in the entire Psalm. So, six times, God's love is mentioned in the Psalm. Now, sometimes it's just love by itself, like in verse 1, but other times the word that's used is unfailing love or great love or loving deeds.

But in every case, the word in Hebrew is *chesed*. Right? It's the three sort of symbols I've got in the outline. It sounds like you're trying to cough up something but notwithstanding what it sounds, it actually refers to God's steadfast and unfailing love, His loyal love.

It's the love that prompted Him to enter into covenant with Israel in the first place. And then, even as Israel failed to keep faith with God, to keep on remembering that covenant, to honor that covenant in spite of what Israel does.

So, I think we're meant to realize as we read that God can be relied on to save, not because of Israel's goodness, not because of the circumstances, no, God can be relied on to save because of who He is, because of His *chesed*, His character.

And as each group finishes their story through Psalm 107, what they're urged to remember is to remember that character. So, verse 8, verse 15, verse 21, or verse 31, they all say the same thing.

[11 : 23] let them give thanks to the Lord for His *chesed* and His wonderful deeds for mankind. But in case you're then tempted to think that everyone receives God's *chesed*, the psalmist then cautions us to think again.

And that's the final and third section of the psalm, verses 33 to 43. Because here, what we see is that not everyone receives God's *chesed*, only the needy, the hungry, and the humble do.

In here, in this final section, we see God again as the God of reversals. So, in verse 33, God turns rivers into deserts and springs into thirsty ground.

So, things that are full, He empties. But then also the reverse is true in verse 35. He turns deserts, things which are empty or desolate, into pools of water.

He turns parched grounds into flowing springs. And what He does in nature actually serves to achieve the same purpose with people. For it says in verse 34, for the abundant lands are turned into wastelands.

[12 : 36] Why? Because of the wickedness of the people who live there. So, it's as if nature is reflecting the people that live in it. Conversely, for the hungry, the dispossessed, God blesses them with a city and a fruitful harvest, it says in verse 37.

And God greatly increases their number. Verse 41, those who are needy are lifted out of their affliction. But those who are proud, that is high and mighty, and who think that they have no need of Him, like the nobles of verse 40, God pours contempt upon them and makes them wander in trackless ways.

And so, this final section says that God in His actions is showing us where His heart is directed towards. It's directed towards those who are humble and lowly.

And so, we see at the end in verse 42, who are the ones that actually welcome God's intervention? It's the upright, isn't it? The upright see and rejoice.

They're those who are humble before God. But on the other hand, all the wicked shut their mouths. And I take that to mean that the wicked see and they have to stop their boasting.

[13 : 57] They have nothing else to be proud of. And so, with that, the psalmist closes with the following advice. Verse 43, if you think you're wise, if you're wise, then take heed of these things.

Consider the actions of God and consider the loving deeds or literally the *chesed* of the Lord.

Understand who God shows His loving, steadfast love to and align yourself with that reality.

And so, if you want to experience God's love, God has said, then I take it that you need to number yourself among the needy, among those who humble themselves before God. The apostle Peter says the very same thing in verse 6 of chapter 5 in his first letter.

I think I've got that verse up on the screen. He says, humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you in due time. So, humbling yourself is a good thing because it leads God to exalt you, to bless you, to show His *chesed*, His love towards you.

Well, that is what I wanted to say for the content of the psalm. But what I want to do now then is to try and apply it. So, over these next few weeks as we look at the psalms, I want to actually ask the question, how can we use this psalm?

[15:22] How can we use this psalm to encourage ourselves at home when we meet together? How can we use the psalms actually as songs and poetry to glorify God?

Now, I wonder if this psalm actually resonates with you as you heard it read. I'm sure for many of you, it would. Life is complicated, isn't it?

It's messy. We're often met with numerous uncertainties and difficulties. We want life to be good, but we have no control over a lot of things in our lives.

So, we make careful plans in our lives, we study hard, we work hard, but unexpected things happen, don't they? They come along and they stuff up our well-laid plans.

Accidents happen, we fall sick, people we rely on let us down. If we look at the four stories, we see the variety of troubles that people get into.

[16:32] Sometimes, with the first two stories where it's the prison or the affliction with sickness, we can see that it is a result of our rebellious ways. It's as if God puts us in the midst of trouble, hopefully to bring us to our senses, to help us to rely on him.

But at other times, when we look at the second two examples, the troubles are not really of our own doing. They just happen to us. But whenever trouble hits, we often ask why we often ask why is it happening to us.

But even as we ask those questions, sometimes God gives us an insight as to why and sometimes he doesn't. But I think the psalm is saying whether he does or not and whether we're at fault or not, what we are to do is to cry out to God for help.

We are to recognize we are in need of him, that we cannot save ourselves. And instead, actually, as we look at these troubles, we are to look at them as opportunities for God to show his headset to us.

For we know that because God is good, then he will save us when we cry to him. And when the Lord does deliver us, however long it takes, then we are encouraged to respond with thanksgiving.

[17:58] Let us give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love. God's love. That's the encouragement. And in fact, as we look down the psalm, we're not just to do it in our hearts, but in verse 32 and 33, we are to do it in and among God's people.

We are to exalt him in the assembly of the people, it says, and to praise him in the council of the elders. We're to share it in and amongst God's people.

So I want to encourage us tonight to actually cultivate a habit of dependence on him. Make it a daily habit to seek the Lord's help. Do it not just without big troubles, but without day-to-day demands, whatever they may be, physical ones, spiritual ones, relational ones.

Whatever it is, we are to seek the Lord's help in all things. And then hand-in-hand with that, let us develop a habit of thanksgiving. Let us name specific things that we can thank God for each day.

I know many of you are already doing that in the midst of your trouble. And it's amazing how when we put what seem to be like small habits in place, what a big difference it does make in our lives.

[19:12] That all of a sudden, we go from thinking that, oh, life's so unfair, God's not treating me well, to realizing how much we are loved by God, despite the troubles that life throws up, that God is good, and his unfailing love endures forever.

Well, I think some of you might be thinking, that's all well and good, Mark, but there's actually a fly in the ointment, because good as this psalm may sound, it doesn't ring true all the time.

Just on Wednesday, I was actually leading devotions down at Domain, the retirement village, and we were looking at this very same psalm. They were helping me to prepare the sermon, actually.

And one person raised this very issue with the psalm.

She commented that this psalm doesn't describe her experience often. Yes, it's all well to cry to the Lord and thank him for his deliverance, but what if God does not deliver us?

For her and for others in the group, they've seen that sometimes when they cry out for help with their loved ones, praying for them to be healed, prayers don't get answered.

[20:21] One gentleman had a daughter who's been suffering from anorexia for a long time, seemingly no answer to prayer. And for many of them, they're getting more and more frail, and they realize that there will come a time when with age taking its toll, no amount of crying out would deliver them from the aches and the pains, the fractured hips, or whatever.

Now, I know, looking out, many of you are still young and fit, but that will be our reality one day, wouldn't it? Sooner or later, there will come a day when the body will just not heal itself. That when we cry out for, even if we cry out for physical deliverance, it will not come. Death catches up with all of us eventually, doesn't it? And if that's the reality, then what are we to make of this psalm?

Does it mean that we cannot trust God's unfailing love? Well, I shared two things, I shared two points with the residents, and these are the same two points that I want to share with you tonight. First, I think we need to realize that when the psalm talks about being redeemed, it is a much bigger redemption than physical redemption. So Paul says in Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 7, the verses on the screen, that in him, that is in Christ, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sin in accordance with the riches of God's grace which he lavished on us.

[21 : 53] That is, God's ultimate plan of redemption is not just about bringing his people back into a physical place of security, rather it is about gathering us into God's spiritual presence, a place of eternal security.

And what is stopping us from doing that is our sin, our alienation from God, our relationship of rebellion against him. But because of what Jesus has done on the cross, we now have redemption, this big redemption where we have entered into a right relationship with God, not just for now, but forever.

And it's one that will endure forever. This was exactly what the woman received when Jesus forgave her. You would notice that Jesus actually didn't, you know, I don't know, make her rich or give her, you know, lots of physical sort of comforts.

No, all he did was forgive her. But that was enough for her because God had saved her from her distress. And so, friends, for us, what we need more than anything else is deliverance of this nature. Yes, physical healing might be good, but that's not what we need. We need spiritual healing. So when we cry out to the Lord, this is the distress that we are being saved from.

[23 : 13] this is the salvation that God is giving to us. So this time is true. God has answered our prayer. When we cry out to him, we are saved, not just from physical troubles, but from eternal troubles.

But what then does it say about our present troubles, the ones that we do feel in this life, our sickness, our afflictions? Does it mean God doesn't care? Well, again, I say no, because in Christ, because we have a hope of salvation, then the second thing we realize is that we have a hope of one day being delivered from our present troubles.

When Jesus comes back again, we will be brought into a new heaven and a new earth, and there we will be delivered from all our physical distress as well as from the spiritual ones.

God is good, and that God is so it's okay to keep crying to the Lord. But we do need to wait for that day. We do need to realize that God is good, and that his hesed, his unfailing love endures forever. Well, friends, I wonder how you might be able to apply this psalm to yourself. what circumstances are there in your life that you think this psalm is particularly helpful at the moment?

[24 : 42] How do you think as a congregation we could do this? Could we use this psalm to encourage one another? So what we're going to do right now is just to break up for a minute or so, talk to the person next to you, and just share a bit about how this psalm has spoken to you tonight, and how you may be able to use it to encourage one another.

Why don't you do that, and then Adam will answer lead the next segment.