

The Soul's Longing For Rest

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[0 : 00] Let's turn for a little to the chapter we read in the book of Psalms, Psalm 107. And reading from the beginning of the psalm, this first section, the psalm is divided into different sections, looking at different experiences.

There's in the first section, there's the wandering in the desert. The second section, it is where there is, as it were, captivity.

And then the third, where there's illness because of sin. And then the fourth is out in the storms. In each place there is a cry for deliverance and God hearing and saving.

But it's the first section, Psalm 107. I won't read it all. O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. 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 and from the north and from the south. Into verse 7, he led them by a straight way or by a right way, sometimes it's translated, till he reached a city to dwell in.

[1 : 07] So, verses 1 to 7, Psalm 107. Now, the Psalter is divided into five books. There are five books in the Psalter, and this is the last of these five books.

And some think that the same hand, but a lot of others don't think that, but a lot of people think that the same hand wrote Psalm 105, 106, and 107.

Because it's kind of like the history of God's people. So, Psalm 105 is looking at the promise of the land, like God's promise to his people and of the exodus from Egypt and such like.

And following that exodus and giving them the land. Like, for instance, in Psalm 105, verse 11, he says, To you I will give the land of Canaan as your portion for an inheritance.

And this was a great promise that the Lord gave to his people. And the Lord gives us so many promises. You know, it's one of the great ways of developing our faith, is by living upon the promises of God.

[2 : 25] And the Word of God is full of promises. From A to Z, from the start to the finish, full of promises. And there's nothing quite like where we're able to take hold upon what God's Word is saying, bringing His Word to him, and asking him to do what he has said.

We find that so often. That's the way that many of the great saints in the Bible, that's the way they acted. Remember David, he brings before the Lord God's promises to him, and he says, Lord, do as you've said.

And one of the wonderful things then, and this is a test of faith, is waiting for God to do what he has promised. That's where the faith comes in.

Because if, for instance, God did everything that he promised right away, then there wouldn't be the place for faith. Because faith, well, there's still the place of faith.

Whenever we go to the Lord, whatever it's about, whatever it is, whether it's an audible cry, or just even the movement of the soul Godward, it's an act of faith.

[3 : 32] That's what we're doing. But we're moving out from ourselves to God by faith. We're looking to Him. There is an acknowledgement of Him.

Where we're looking at Him as the one, the great provider. We're looking at the one who rules and overrules all things. And the Lord is looking for faith in our lives.

And sometimes, maybe today you say to yourself, I have very, very, very little faith, if I have any at all. Sometimes we think like that. But the thing is that there is often far more faith than we realize.

Because every time that even just a cry goes to the Lord, or says, Lord, help me here, I don't know what to do. That's faith. It's faith that has made you.

Because you're looking to Him. You're genuinely looking and asking for Him to help you. But if it was simply, and that is, we mustn't dismiss that part of faith, going to the Lord in the first place is faith.

[4 : 36] But our faith is developed and strengthened by waiting upon the Lord. Because if the Lord gave us everything that we wanted, the moment we asked, then our faith wouldn't grow, wouldn't develop.

We would just think, this is an automatic thing that would happen. And of course, as we know, the Lord doesn't always answer us in the way that we want. Sometimes He will answer us completely different. But He has promised to do what He believes is best for us.

And that is sometimes why we have to allow Him to do. But we come to the Lord and we learn to lean upon Him and wait upon Him. And the wonderful thing that the Bible teaches us is that all His promises are true.

It's something you find every so often. You find the book of Joshua different places. And it will say, every word of the Lord was fulfilled. It all came to pass.

And it will in your experience and in my experience as well. But it's here we have to learn to wait upon the Lord. So that's one of the great things. And again, if we will go back to that Psalm 105, it tells us here of how He has promised them, in verse 11, To you I will give the land of Canaan as your portion for an inheritance.

[5 : 51] And then you go to verse 44, and it tells us this, And He gave them the lands of the nations, and they took possession of the fruit of the people's toils. And God had promised them that.

He said, You know this, When you go into that land, you will get houses you didn't build, you will get crops you didn't sow, because the provision is going to be there for you.

And so, Psalm 105 is a summary of God's dealing with His people, of His promises, and of taking them out and giving them what He has promised.

So when you come to Psalm 106, you would say to yourself, Oh, well, this will be even better. This will be the fulfillment of, now we'll see God's people living in the land and enjoying the land, as they live to the Lord by faith.

But unfortunately, Psalm 106, although it starts well, by giving praise and thanks to the Lord, that's what it says, Praise the Lord, who give thanks to the Lord, for He is good for His steadfast love endures forever.

[6 : 58] And it's just as well as steadfast love endures forever. But we find that the people's sin and their idolatry and their abandonment of the Lord led to God scattering them amongst the nations.

God had said, this is going back to what we said about His word being faithful. He said to His people, I'm giving, this is what I'm giving you. This is your inheritance.

But I am setting you apart as my own people because it's through you I'm going to bless all the nations of the world. And so it was important that they would retain the true worship of God and that they would be a light in a dark world.

But as we know, when we read through biblical history, so often the darkness that was in many of the surrounding nations, Israel began to take that on board.

And they began to initially to mix the worship of God with the idolatrous practices next door. But it wasn't long until sometimes it was just the idolatrous practices.

[8 : 12] And God had said to them, if you do that, I will scatter you amongst the nations. And again, God was faithful and true to His word because that's exactly what happened.

Israel at the north, remember how the kingdom divided up in the reign of Rehoboam, Solomon's son. Part remained faithful to the line of David, the southern kingdoms, but the northern kingdoms followed a man, Jeroboam.

Israel, which was the northern part, it went into captivity earlier. The southern part, there was still a token, or very often a very good worship of the Lord, but it was dependent on who the king was.

But eventually, the southern was taking captivity into Babylon. Then we come to Psalm 107. And this psalm, really, is a psalm of crying for help.

So first, there's the promise of the land, the receiving of the land, living in the land, abandoning God, God scattering amongst the nations, and now as they're in the nations, scattered, in all the different trials and situations they find themselves in, they're crying to the Lord, and the Lord hears and delivers.

[9 : 36] And that probably is, if you're going to look for, there's different themes that run through the Bible, but one theme that runs all the way through the Bible is the cry to the Lord and the deliverance that the Lord brings.

You'll find that all the way through from Genesis right through to Revelation. It's this cry, the consistency of our needs and the consistency of God in meeting these needs.

And so, we find that this psalm shows God bringing us back, bringing back from the lands. It's like God is saying, it's time to come home. That's really what it was like when they went into captivity, God said, it's for a limited time. I want to bring you back. And it's like, right, here's the time to come back.

And you know, sometimes it's the same for ourselves as well. Because you know, as Christians, we can wander. We can be going through the motions, but our heart is, our heart, God knows our heart exactly as it is.

[10 : 37] We can be in church, we can be going through all the motions, we can be involved in Christian work and our hearts are far off. And there comes times when the Lord will say, you know, time to come home.

You've got a straying heart. Sometimes that straying heart will lead our feet to wander, our hands to wander, our eyes to wander, every part of us to wander, so that we're straying.

But the Lord always goes after His people and He says, it's time to come home. Stop your wanderings, stop your straying, stop your running away. Time to come back.

And in many ways, this is what this particular psalm is about. And as we know, there is no true rest until we find rest in the Lord.

Now, at the beginning of the psalm, we find that the psalmist is giving thanks to the Lord and says, for He is good for His steadfast love endures forever. And that steadfast love, of course, is the same as what we have often translated as mercy.

[11 : 41] And we give thanks to the Lord for that, that His steadfast love, His mercy, endures forever. Every single day, the Bible tells us that His mercies are new every morning.

And you know, sometimes we can trot out phrases like that without really appreciating just what it is. Imagine, imagine if God was a God who delighted in judgment.

But we find that judgment is a strange work. Mercy is what He delights in. He loves to display mercy. And how thankful we ought to be for that.

How we should praise the Lord every single morning. Because He says, My mercies are new. They're new to you every morning. I'm dealing with you in mercy and in grace.

And how wonderful that is. And we should give the Lord thanks. Because we've got to remember that every good, the Bible tells us every good and perfect gift is from above. And so often as we go through life, have you stopped sometimes and you say to yourself, you know, there's so much.

[12 : 46] I think it must be partly the way that we're made. Because so often we focus on what's wrong rather than what's right. And you know, you can have ten different things happening in your life.

Say, even in the morning. And most of them, they're okay. Some of them are good. But there's one thing that's not good. What do we focus on? We focus on the thing that's not good.

We focus on what's gone wrong. We focus on, and it's, you can have, supposing you do something and people say, oh, that's good. This person says, oh, that's very good. That was very helpful.

Then one after another says, that's very good. And one person says, I thought that was rubbish.

What will you focus on? Will you focus on what people said was good? No. You'll focus on the one who said it was rubbish.

Because that's part of, I don't know what it is, there's something about the way we are. And that's often the way before God. God is giving us so much, doing so much that it's good.

[13 : 45] So often we take it for granted, and yet, when something goes wrong, that's all we're able to see. So, this is kind of what the psalmist is saying. Sometimes you need to get our perspective corrected, our vision readjusted, and to look at the Lord and to see what he's doing.

That is, God, he's a liberal giver, and he is giving us so much, and his steadfast love endures forever, and his mercy is new every morning. And so, the psalmist is saying, Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

And he now focuses on who should be saying this, let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble. Now, as we know, redemption is one of the great themes that runs

through the Bible.

And the Lord has redeemed, you know, we all know, to redeem is basically to buy back what was once used, what once belonged to you.

And that's what God has done. Because God, initially, at the very beginning, he made us, in his image, he made us, like himself, for himself, reflecting himself.

[15:00] But we know what happened in the fall. Bang! Crash! And we lost that. Lost. Everything was crashed and bashed. And instead of walking with God, in the cool of the day, we find Adam is running away from God.

That's what's happened. And that's how we're, that's how we're naturally born into this world. Instead of walking walking and delighting to walk with the Lord, we're going in the opposite direction.

Don't want you, Lord. Sometimes we don't have the courage to say that, but basically, that's what it is. When we run away from God, we're kind of saying, don't want you. I want myself, I want to be king of my own life.

I want to map out my own path. Lord, I don't want you. Unless I, unless I need you, otherwise, leave me alone. And of course, for many people, there's no thought of God at all.

But God has made us for himself. And so he redeems us. He buys us back. And as we know from the Bible, the way he bought us back, when you're going to redeem, when you're going to buy back, there's a cost.

[16:07] And the cost was his son. He sent his son into this world to do for us what we couldn't do. His son came into this world to live according to the law, the law of God, you and I can't keep.

We're breaking it all the time. We're told that in our thoughts, in our words, in our actions. We're breaking God's law. But every single day in this world, Jesus fulfilled the law.

And if he hadn't, there would be no salvation for us. But he kept everything. That's part of the extraordinary thing. So there was, he lived in active obedience to God's law, fulfilling it.

But then he died the sacrificial death where he paid the sacrifice for sin. Because sin, God, demands his justice, his holiness, demands that sin is dealt with, that it is punished.

And sin is either punished on the sinner or on somebody in the sinner's place. That's what Jesus came to do. And of course, this was highlighted, the great picture for God's people way back in Egypt.

[17:24] The great picture of redemption was the blood on the door, and the doorposts and on the lintel. And this was a great night of redemption. And remember what happened.

It was an awful night. God said, the firstborn, God said, unless I see the blood when I pass through this land, unless I see the blood on the door, the firstborn in every house will die.

And of course, that's why the blood was put on the doorposts. But where there was no blood, the firstborn died. And what did God do with his firstborn, with his only begotten son?

Well, he made him. To be the one who died. God's firstborn, or God's only born. God's only begotten, I should say.

He was the one who died. And he became this. He was the sacrifice. He was everything. It doesn't matter which aspect of the whole way of salvation you look.

[18:27] Jesus was pivotal and central. So we've always got to remember when we think of the giving of Jesus. Because last weekend, that's what we were doing.

We were remembering the Lord's death until he comes at the sacrament. Yes, we remember what Jesus did and he did everything for us. We've also got to remember the Father's giving.

The Father gave. You who are parents, can you imagine giving your son as a sacrifice or your daughter as a sacrifice? And yet, God did not withhold.

He gave. And this is why God's love is so great. So this is the redemption. And so he redeemed his people. So, as we give thanks to the Lord for his redemption, we've got to remember what we've been taken from, what we've been brought to, and the cost involved.

And then we see in verse 3 that he gathered in from the lands from east and from the west and from the north and from the south. And of course, again, as we know, the Lord is the great shepherd.

[19:36] This is one of the wonderful things he does. He gathers. That's what a shepherd does, whether it's a crofter or whether it's a full-time shepherd or a farmer, whatever. They gather.

It's one of the things that they do. They gather the sheep. And you and I know there's no animal more prone to wandering than a sheep. It's amazing. If you ever had sheep and you'll find one of

the things that sheep will turn out in gatherings and thanks in different communities, different areas because sheep wander.

That's what they do. All we like sheep have gone astray, Isaiah said. We have turned every one to his own way. It's natural for us. And in the very first place before we came to salvation, that's why Jesus came into this world as a good shepherd.

And he came to gather his sheep. And he went out after them. And there's that beautiful picture where there's a hundred sheep and ninety-nine were there but there was one missing.

And did the shepherds say, I've got ninety-nine and that'll do me. I know there's one missing but I'm happy with the ninety-nine. No. No, he says he left the ninety-nine safe and he went off searching until he found that one sheep that was missing.

[20 : 55] And you know that's what Jesus is doing with us as well. He is going out until he has brought every single one in. And you know sometimes it's quite difficult.

There are some sheep that are really stubborn. Some are hard to find. And it's the same with our shells. Some of us were really, really stubborn. And the shepherd he may have sent the dog out and whistled and sometimes you get really, really stubborn sheep and you know sometimes we ourselves can be really, really stubborn.

But thank the Lord that the good shepherd didn't give up. Imagine if he had said, oh well that's it. I'm done with it. Imagine if in our disobedience and rebellion and just saying, no, because there were times in our life when we said, I will not have this man rule over us.

We wanted to go our own way and imagine if the Lord had said, oh well, on your own. I give up. I've tried. I've gone after you. I've called you.

How often I've called you through. Remember the incidents and experiences in your life that shook you to the core. Remember the brush with death that you had. Remember the sermons you heard.

[22 : 09] Remember the strivings in your soul. And yet, all the time you just turned a deaf ear to me. On your own.

But that's not what he's saying. He's still, he is a good shepherd who has come to save his sheep. That's what he's doing. He's doing today. But, he then, he breaks down and he woos and he wins you.

But, as you and I know that even when we come to faith there is still within us a potential to stray.

We go off. And that's the great thing about the Lord Jesus Christ.

The good shepherd who gave down, who laid down his life for his sheep. That he continues to shepherd you all the time. Yes, you might wonder a wee bit.

But you know, you know, the, the, the, the, the Douglas Macmillan, we've told the story before, he has had, lovely, when, when he does a, his wee book, well it was a series of lectures on Psalm 23.

[23 : 11] And he put all his shepherd, he was a shepherd for about 14 years or something. And he puts all his shepherding experience into the shepherd's Psalm, Psalm 23.

And he tells of the time when they were being troubled by foxes. And he was out on the hill and he spent the night on the hill and he was, it was early in the morning.

And he saw a fox away in the distance and it was working the sheep and he was taking them, he was moving them towards a swamp.

And Douglas was saying he was working, this fox was working as well as any dog worked them.

And the sheep were alarmed but there was nothing they could do.

But Douglas was sitting there and he had his gun and he decided he just watched and then when he saw that the fox was going to go, all he did was he didn't shoot, he just put his fingers in his mouth and he gave this almighty whistle.

[24 : 12] The fox stopped and realized and as foxes are so sharp obviously saw in the distance and moved away. And Douglas was likening that to the way the Lord is with us.

That so often we feel as a flock and sometimes we wander and we stray and we're in trouble and we think we're on our own but all the time the Lord is watching.

And sometimes he leaves us for a while but you know he knows the right time to come in to do for us to help us sometimes to rebuke us but always the shepherd's staff the rod and the staff are in his hand.

The rod sometimes sometimes we need a wee sometimes when you're driving the sheep on you need to give them a prod. Other times you're using it to draw them closely into yourself.

But always the shepherd is at work for our good. And you'll notice how they've wandered. It's from east, west, north, south, everywhere. Everywhere.

[25 : 16] And that's what we're like. We go all over the place wandering all over the place. And then we see in verse 5 Some wandered before in desert wastes finding no city to dwell in.

Hungry and thirsty their soul fainted within them. And this is again a picture of what we're like and it's very interesting that the hunger, the thirst, the lostness are the things that Jesus came into this world to do, to deal with.

What does Jesus say? I am the bread of life. What does Jesus say? He says, whoever drinks of the water that I will give will never thirst again.

What does Jesus say? I am the way, the truth, and the life. So for those who are lost and wondering, I'm the way. For those who are hungry, Jesus says, I'm the bread.

For those who are thirsty, Jesus says, I am the water, I am the water of life. Whoever drinks will never thirst again. So Jesus is the one who provides for us all these things.

[26 : 23] He has become these things for us, or he is these things for us. And not only initially when we come to find him, but throughout our life as we journey through this world.

Because there are times in this world when, as a Christian, you can become so weary and so thirsty and so despondent.

because there are times the world stifles you. Have you ever come across, there are times it doesn't. And sometimes when we're not living in the right way, we can become cozy in the world.

But the Lord, there are times we become really weary and we really need the Lord's feeding and the water. And then finally, it says, he led them by a straight way or the right way till they reached a city where to dwell in.

And of course, the city was very important because a city meant a place of protection, meant a place of company.

[27 : 27] The loneliness of the wilderness is no more. That's the beauty of it and there's this sense of protection. Now, you know, the wonderful thing is that the Lord is leading us by the right way.

And when you look back over your life, he has led you all the way. Isn't it, this is why we should be praising and thanking the Lord. Think first of all where the Lord set you in life.

You could have been set somewhere else, but he set you here where the gospel is, where the Christian, where you had a Christian upbringing, the Christian values that were ingrained into your thinking.

It could have been otherwise. But this is where the Lord put you and there's nothing random in it. The Lord has a purpose for you. And since you've been converted, you've had many wonderful experiences along the way.

Now, we've said this before. When Israel were taken out of Egypt, remember, they went through difficult times and there was one occasion when they were brought to the wells, to the waters, to the wells of Elam.

[28 : 40] It was like an oasis. And they were so thankful and it was wonderful. They were able to refresh themselves. And along the way, our journey, we have our moments where we come to our wells, to our oasis, to our waters of Elam.

And we thank the Lord for them. But that's not why you were saved. That's not why you were converted, to be brought to the waters of Elam. Whatever experience you've enjoyed along your Christian journey, that's not why the Lord saved you.

It's part of your journey. The Lord has saved you in order to bring you to this city. One day, the wandering is all going to be over. One day, you're going to be at rest.

One day, you will arrive in this heavenly city. So, he led them, that's what it says, till they reached a city to dwell in.

And I love that word, dwell. It's the same as, let's like the word, abiding. The Lord uses this word so often. When we come to dwell, that's it.

[29 : 47] We put down our roots, we're grounded there. Never again to depart. That's part of the wonder of heaven. That will be there forever. There's nothing temporary in any shape or form about heaven.

And that's part of, you see, there's so much we know. Faith lays hold upon it. Faith believes it. But we cannot properly understand it because we live in a world where everything is so temporary.

Even the most foundational things that we have. You get a new car and you think, wow, that's great. Not too long, you say, oh look, there's the first bits of rust coming on it. New clothes, and you say, oh that'll last me a long time.

It doesn't take too long until it begins to wear. You can have the most beautiful house and it doesn't take too long until it begins, the pristine condition begins, it begins to not just look lived in, but need a wee bit of repair here and there.

Everything we have, our own bodies, everything, there's nothing lasting in this world. So it's quite difficult for us to grasp what it's going to be like to be where everything is enduring forever.

[31 : 03] Our experiences will be enduring forever. Our joy, nothing will interrupt it. In this world we're always being interrupted. You know, there's something, ah this is really good, something going on, and then that's it, it's interrupted.

There's always interruption in this world. Sometimes we're glad of an interruption if it's not a good thing that's happening. But often we say, ah look at that. But there'll be none of that in glory, it'll be perpetual enduring.

And that's part of the wonder of it. And many of the positives of glory are highlighted to us here in this world by ways of negatives.

Like for instance, there'll be no, there'll be no more weariness. The rest of heaven is a perpetual rest. That doesn't mean that we will just sit there or lie there forever and ever and ever.

not at all. But all the things that cause the unrest of this world will be gone. There'll be no more sin, no more temptation.

[32 : 11] There'll be no more hurt. There'll be no more pain. There'll be no more death. It's not extraordinary. We get pain in our mind, pain in our body, painful experiences.

there's so many hurts. Some people are, we're all different in inner sensitivity. Some people are hypersensitive and they're so easily hurt.

Wouldn't that be wonderful? And glory, never hurt again. Some people physically, the pain threshold is such that their life is almost always pain.

There'll be no more pain. There's always pain in our heart because of the loss of loved ones, because of the crushing disappointments in life. That'll be gone forever.

It will be a world of positivity and a world of joy, a world of fulfillment, a world of excitement, a world of service, and God will wipe away all tears from their eyes.

[33 : 21] It's a wonderful prospect. prospect. And that's a question today. You say to yourself, am I being led along the right way? Am I on the right road? That's a question you have to ask yourself.

Am I going in the right direction? You know, there's nothing worse than it's happened, I suppose, today with your sat navs and such like, but there was often in days, you found when you were away in the mainland, going somewhere, and you found you going, I'm going in the wrong direction.

And sometimes you didn't even know how to get back on to the right direction. And you know, it would be awful to go through your whole life and realize, you know what, I'm going in the wrong direction.

And the Lord says, you don't need to go in the wrong direction. Because Jesus came to say, I am the way, I am the right direction, you come with me, and we're going to glory.

And that's what we've to do, is to walk, put our hand in the hand of the Lord, and go with him. I am the way, the truth, and the life. So you make sure today, and if you haven't asked the Lord, Lord, lead me on the right way, lead me on the straight path, and take me home to be with yourself.

[34 : 38] Let us pray. Lord, we pray to bless us. We give thanks for your goodness and mercy. We give thanks, oh Lord, that you do lead us on a straight path, on the right way, that you cannot lead us in any other way.

When we go other ways, it's because we've gone other ways ourselves. And so we ask, Lord, that you will bless us, that you will part us with your blessing, and that you will take us to our home safely.

Bless all our families, all whom we love this day. Cleanse us from our sin, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.