



"God's Steadfast Love despite Our Wayward Ways"
Psalm 107

The last verse of James emphasizes the value of restoring the fallen or winning the wayward or stabilizing the stumbling.

My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins. 5:19-20

He wants us to know that the effort to turn anyone back to a healthy walk with the Lord is worth it.

Last week we addressed how our Heavenly Father feels about the wayward by exploring three parables taught by Jesus. We know they reflect the Father's feeling because He applies them.

"In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." Restoring them is His priority. Restoring them is His passion. Restoring them demonstrates His loving patience.

Psalm 107 powerfully records God's steadfast love despite our wayward ways. The writer revisits some of Israel's history to show how God responded to repeated rebellion.

Introduction

We live in a troubled and broken world. That brokenness responds through all of humanity's history from the murder of Abel to the myriad of disturbing events all around the world. News flash! It will not change until Jesus come back to change it. No matter what trouble or distress we face in this fallen world, we serve a God whose steadfast love for us endures forever. This ancient song reminds of God's steadfast love; especially during difficult times. This Psalm has incredible symmetry. It first introduces the subject of the Lord's steadfast love in difficult times. It then illustrates the subject with four real-life scenarios.

Each scenario includes two repeated phrases.

They cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.

Let them thank the Lord for His steadfast love, for His wondrous works to the children of men.

Each scenario presents the predicament, records the petition for help, visualizes the pardon and urges the praise.

I don't know where you are today. I don't know what you face or will face. Today we reaffirm the steadfast love of the Lord. Today I encourage you to thank the Lord for His steadfast love, for His wondrous works to the children of men.

I. Principle Presented 107:1-3

Oh 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, from the north and from the south. Psalms 107:1-3

The Psalmist introduces His theme. The theme has to do with God essential character and His interaction with His creatures. God is good. God's steadfast or faithful love never runs out. The theme also includes a logical response to such a truth. Those delivered or redeemed from trouble should gratefully declare His goodness. A few repeating terms merit a closer look.

"Give thanks/recognize"

There are two terms which communicate the idea of praise or thanksgiving. We are familiar with the term “hallal” from which we get our English word Hallelujah. Basically that means to “Praise Ya or Yahweh”. It means to acclaim, boast or glory in an object. The word used here focuses more on recognition or declaration of a fact. We are called to declare the fact that God is good. It was used in relation to confessing or declaring sin (negative attribute). It was used in relation to confessing or declaring God’s attributes. It was also used in relation to conveying or declaring some truth about man.

The meaning of the Hebrew term translated “thanks” is much richer than our concept. It focused on showing admiration by the declaration or recognition of an attribute. In this case, we are to recognize or declare God’s goodness. God is good – all the time! All the time -- God is good!

“Yahweh”

This name for God focuses on His eternal attributes. He is the “I AM”; the eternal covenant making and keeping God. He is the one who eternally possesses all the resources for whatever we might need.

“Good”

The term “good” is a difficult term to nail down a definition.

This root refers to “good” or “goodness” in its broadest senses. Five general areas of meaning can be noted: 1) practical, economic, or material good, 2) abstract goodness such as desirability, pleasantness, and beauty, 3) quality or expense, 4) moral goodness, and 5) technical philosophical good.

Practical = good fruit, good for eating, good income

Abstract = good or desirable name, desirable, beauty

Quality = pure (good) gold, expensive (good) perfume

Moral = good vs. evil, the good way

Philosophical = no higher good, the good that man should seek

God’s goodness encompasses all these aspects. It is a core attribute. God’s goodness is like a diamond or prism. As the light shines it breaks into a myriad of color (other attributes) one of those being love. Grace, kindness, faithfulness, mercy.

“Steadfast love”

God deals with His children with unconditional unwavering love. If not, we would all be annihilated.

His loyal or faithful love is fully voluntary on His part. His actions toward His creatures flow out of His internal goodness not our actions.

God’s “love” is the providential exercise of His power on behalf of the needy people with whom He has established a special relationship. College Press NIV Commentary

Here, the song writer notes that this is a love that will never come to an end. Sometimes we feel like we run out of love at some point in relationships. God’s steadfast love NEVER ceases. It is never ending, perpetual, forever. This fact is asserted over and over in both the New Testament and Old Testament.

“Redeemed”

This love manifests in the merciful rescue from the distresses of life in a rebellious world. To redeem means to buy back, deliver, rescue, ransom from a difficult situation. The Psalmist calls us to affirm God’s goodness because he has rescued us from the devastating difficulties associated with a life in a broken world and the consequences of our own rebellious behavior.

“Trouble”

The song writer uses different words for difficulty throughout his music. The first reference to trouble literally affirms that God rescues us from “the hand of the enemy”. The other occurrences of “trouble” that appear throughout the song literally means “to be boxed in, restricted, pent up.”

“Distress”

Another reoccurring term refers to a strong inner or external pressure. Now that we understand the key terms, let’s reflect on the lyrics of this song. The theme has to do with declaring or affirming the goodness of God because He delivers His people from the difficulties that box us in and cause inner distress or pressure. These pressures and difficulties may come from life, consequences for poor choices or the brutal attacks of a formidable foe.

II. Principle Illustrated 107:4-32

A. Situation 1 Distress of wandering from God’s community 4-9

1. The Predicament 4-5

Some wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to a city to dwell in; hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them.

The Hebrew word translated “wander” means to “err, wander, go astray, or stagger. How many times do we wander from God’s ways in a life time? How many times do we find ourselves in a desert place because of it? The desert or wilderness represents isolation, scarcity of resources, loneliness, dryness, lost, helpless, and lifeless. We sometimes find ourselves like the Israelites who forsook God’s fountain of life and tried to make life work on their own terms. The usual result of desert living is the same as we find here. Loneliness, isolation from community, strained relationship with God. That isolation results in emptiness and longing along with sense of weakness. The word translated “faint” means to be overwhelmed, frail, exhausted, fatigued. The soul became overwhelmed. The answer to every distress described in this song is the same throughout.

2. The Petition 6a

Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble

They cried out, called out to Yahweh. The action infers a cry of desperation. The root means to call out for help under great distress. It infers a realization of personal failure and weakness and a desire to reverse direction, return to the Lord and humbly seek His help.

3. The Pardon 6b-7

and He delivered them from their distress.

Because of His steadfast love, the Lord chooses to deliver them from their distress. Observe the specific elements of their deliverance.

He led them by a straight way till they reached a city to dwell in.

For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things.

They wandered aimless and isolated and He directed them back into community. He restored them and energized them. He satisfied their longing and filled their hungry soul with good things. He restores our soul. (Psalm 23)

4. The Praise 8

Let them thank the Lord for His steadfast love, for His wondrous works to the children of man!

The Psalmist urged them to acknowledge and respond to God’s deliverance with gratitude for His steadfast love evidenced by Yahweh’s blessing despite their wandering from Him. He blessed them in response to a cry of humble repentance.

B. Situation 2 – Distress from neglecting God’s truth 10-16

1. The Predicament 10-12

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. So He bowed their hearts down with hard labor; they fell down, with none to help.

Rebellion against and rejection of God's Words brought about their distress. Their deliberate rejection of God's ways resulted in spiritual darkness and feeling of impending doom and bondage. Sin always brings bondage and trouble and broken relationships.

2. The Petition 13a

Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble

The answer to their distress was the same as before. Humbly acknowledge our failure and acknowledge our great need of God's intervention. Have you ever found yourself distressed because you did things your own way? Have you ever found yourself in a stressful situation because you have neglected the word? Humbly cry out to Him.

3. The Pardon 13b-14

and He delivered them from their distress.

Again, Yahweh granted deliverance based on His never-ending steadfast love. The specific deliverance mirrored the distress.

He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and burst their bonds apart.

For He shatters the doors of bronze and cuts in two the bars of iron.

Instead of dark bondage He breaks apart the things that bound them. I love the action words, "burst bonds", "shatters doors", "cuts bars in two".

4. The Praise 15

Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man!

The response is the same as before. Acknowledge, declare God's steadfast love and blessing despite our waywardness. Publicly offer words of gratitude.

C. Situation 3 -- Distress of foolish decisions 17-22

1. The Predicament 17-18

Some were fools through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquities suffered affliction; they loathed any kind of food, and they drew near to the gates of death.

Again, others were in trouble for making unwise decisions. They chose to live foolishly or unwisely. They suffered affliction because of their foolish decisions. Their affliction affected their appetite. They felt like they were going to die. Ever felt like that. "I lost my appetite." "I don't feel like eating."

2. The Petition 19a

Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble

Out of their "trouble, boxed in feeling" this group also humbly cried out to the Lord for help.

3. The Pardon 19b

and He delivered them from their distress

Again, He delivered because of His steadfast love. He delivered them by giving them truth and wisdom. The truth of God healed and set free and restored life from certain destruction.

He sent out His word and healed them, and delivered them from their destruction.

He spoke truth into their life intended to return them to the path of life. His word resulted in their healing. to cure, (cause to) heal, repair, make whole.

4. The Praise 21

Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man!

The response is the same as before; a grateful acknowledgement of Yahweh's steadfast love and wondrous works.

D. Situation 4 -- Distress of everyday life 23-32

1. The Predicament 23-27

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. They mounted up to 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 wits' end.

This is the only situation that does not refer to some personal neglect or failure to acknowledge God although sometimes the business of life can distract us from our relationship with God. The affairs of everyday living can cause great distress. Sometimes life throws stressful situations totally unrelated to any personal failure.

And as for what seed fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. Luke 8:14

In this case, they encountered turbulence doing life's business. It can sometimes disorient us. It can melt away our courage and confidence. It can cause us to stagger around without sure footing. It can cause us to feel helpless and at times hopeless at our wit's end.

2. The Petition 28a

Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble

The answer for this situation is the same as all the others. Cry out to the God of the storm. Cry out for His loving intervention.

3. The Pardon 28b

and He delivered them from their distress.

God granted deliverance from the storm.

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 to their desired haven.

Not only did God still the storm but lead them to a place of peace and rest. He removed the obstacle and provided guidance to a place of rest, a haven.

4. The Praise 31-32

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

This last one repeats the grateful acknowledgement of Yahweh's steadfast love and adds a public declaration of His attributes.

Where are you today? Can you identify with any of these scenarios? Have you wandered out into a desert place; hungry, thirsty faint? Cry out to Him. God wants to bring you back into community with Him and others and satisfy your hunger with Himself so that you too can acknowledge the steadfast love of the Lord for His wondrous works to the children of man.

Do you feel like you are imprisoned in a dark place in your life because you have neglected or even rejected His truth? Cry out to Him. God wants to break your prison bars and bring you out of darkness into His glorious light so that you can acknowledge the steadfast love of the Lord for His wondrous works to the children of man.

Do you feel like you have made some foolish decisions and done some stupid stuff that eat at you and rob you of even the simplest pleasures of life? Cry out to Him. He wants to send His word of healing and deliverance and restore life so that you can acknowledge the steadfast love of the Lord for His wondrous works to the children of man.

Do you feel like life's circumstances are tossing your emotions like the waves of the sea? Do you feel like the daily grind has robbed your courage and affected your stability? Cry out to God. He wants to still the storm on your behalf and direct you to a place of rest on Him so that you can acknowledge the steadfast love of the Lord for His wondrous works to the children of man.

Because of His steadfast love that never ceases, God wants personal connection in your life. Deliverance may not come in the way we expect but in the way we need. God ultimately expressed His steadfast love by sending Jesus.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly... God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:6-8

This song ends with a kind of summary regarding God's involvement in the affairs of men. He can make things dry up for those who reject Him. He can turn a desert into a fruitful garden for those who cry out to Him.

III. The Principle Reviewed 107:33-43

The theme is God's essential character and His interaction with His creatures. God's steadfast love never ceases. Sometimes the only way God can get our attention is to dry up the things we depend on besides Him.

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.

We may depend on our own abilities rather than Him. We may depend on a bank account or retirement "nest egg" instead of Him. We may depend on other people to satisfy our hunger besides Him. He can also go the other direction. Notice the connection to the previously mentioned distresses.

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.

God is the God of deliverance. God is a God of blessing and fruitfulness. God's steadfast love never ceases.

His love protects us when oppressed.

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.

God's wonderful works of loving kindness are a cause for great rejoicing.

The upright see it and are glad, and all wickedness shuts its mouth.

The final phrase of this powerful song of praise invites us to further contemplate the steadfast love of the Lord.

Whoever is wise, let him attend to these things; let them consider the steadfast love of the Lord. Psalms 107:33-43

Attend = protect, guard, observe

Consider = distinguish, understand.

*Oh 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... Psalms 107:1-3*