

Give Thanks To The Lord!
Psalm 107:1-43
Thanksgiving Sunday — October 11, 2009
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Theme: **Thank God For His Steadfast Lovingkindness.**

Introduction

We are celebrating Thanksgiving. It usually is a nice holiday filled with good food, visiting and memories. But, like all holidays, it can get hectic. One lady tells of the Thanksgiving she knew she would be on a constant run. So, she made lists. On Friday morning she was getting a few things done and then it would be off to do some final grocery shopping. But a friend called her and reminded her of their plan to get together for lunch that day (which was one thing that had *not* made it to her list). So she quickly organized a few things and hopped into the car. She taped her list to the dashboard and headed out to pick up her friend. As her friend settled in the seat, her face dropped. She said, “Thanks a lot!” as she stared at the list. So the lady glanced at her list and saw the first item—“Take out the turkey.” She quickly explained that the turkey on her list was the bird in the freezer, and then they both enjoyed their lunch.

Question: What’s on your list for this Thanksgiving? Psalm 107 tells us one thing that should be on everyone’s list every Thanksgiving, “Give Thanks To The Lord!” It’s not too late to make sure it is on your list. Give thanks, but for what? The first verse calls out, “Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good, for His lovingkindness is everlasting.” Now drop down to the end, verse 43, “Who is wise? Let him give heed to these things, and *consider the lovingkindnesses of the LORD.*” Since we all are wise, that is what we will do! First, consider what God’s steadfast lovingkindness is.

Consider God’s Steadfast Lovingkindness.

The word lovingkindness is a beautiful and rich Old Testament term. But it is not easy to come up with a single word or two in English to adequately picture the meaning. So we see differences in the various English versions: lovingkindness, love, faithful love, steadfast love, mercy.

This term, which occurs six times in Psalm 107, refers to God’s love which is part of His nature. As the apostle John wrote, “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16). More specifically, it is a love that reaches out, reaches down to give to us, to help us, to do much more than we deserve; in fact to provide all that we need as His free gift. It also is both passionate and active—it is never just mechanical or theoretical. And, because it is part of God’s character, it is constant. It is, as the hymn sings, the “love that will not let me go.”

There are four features of God’s lovingkindness noted here. First, it goes hand in hand with God’s goodness. Go back up to verse 1, the opening phrase of this Thanksgiving hymn, “Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good, for His lovingkindness is everlasting.” God’s goodness and lovingkindness are linked both as reasons to thank Him and also to each

other. God's lovingkindness is never selfish or capricious. God loves us in spite of our sin with the goal of leading us to truly be holy and good. His love is always good—completely, perfectly, good. It goes hand in hand with His goodness.

This verse also tells us God's lovingkindness is everlasting. This point is made more than once in the Psalms. In fact, the opening verses of Psalm 118 state it repeatedly,

“Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; for *His lovingkindness is everlasting.*

“Oh let Israel say, ‘*His lovingkindness is everlasting.*’

“Oh let the house of Aaron say, ‘*His lovingkindness is everlasting.*’

“Oh let those who fear the LORD say, ‘*His lovingkindness is everlasting.*’” (1-4)

It is everlasting because it is part of God's character, and He is both eternal and unchanging. And so we sing, “O love of God, how rich and pure! How measureless and strong! It shall forevermore endure—the saints' and angels' song.”

Thirdly, God's lovingkindness redeems. Look at verse 2.

“Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom He has redeemed from the hand of the adversary and gathered from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.” (2-3)

In his lovingkindness God has redeemed, He has bought and brought us out of the clutches of adversaries, of all the kinds of troubles and disasters that exist. The largest section of this Psalm is a set of examples of God's loving redemption. He, and only He can rescue us from sin and all kinds of trouble to holiness and well being.

Finally, God's steadfast lovingkindness is part of His sovereignty over all. Verses 33-42 present a series of contrasting, applecart– upsetting sovereign works of God. In His lovingkindness and sovereignty,

- He changes dry wilderness into lush lands with springs and pools of water (35).
- Then He makes a city and fruitful fields there for those who are hungry (36-37).
- He also sets the needy in a secure place, high above and protected where they are fruitful (36-37).

We read this and rejoice! “God is good! God is great!”

In this section we also see that

- God dries up rivers and springs, makes what once was a fruitful land into a wasteland because the people there were wicked (33-34).
- He also pours misery and contempt on the wicked high and mighty, and makes all their efforts lead only in circles of waste and emptiness (39-40).

We read this and ... wonder ... even are troubled. “How can, why would God who is love do this?” This is the other side of the coin—God is the loving Redeemer; He also is the holy and righteous judge. Through what we may call natural law or God’s moral law and also through His direct action, He lives out His full character in His sovereign, personal rule.

Now all of this is helpful, but is far from being all we should consider about God’s lovingkindness. The biggest part of the Psalm, again, gives us examples of God’s lovingkindness to consider, to convince us to give thanks to God for it.

Consider Examples Of God’s Lovingkindness.

There is a series of four pictures in verses 4-32 of God’s lovingkindness in action redeeming people in all kinds of distressing and threatening situations. There are no limits! There is no place, there is no situation where God’s lovingkindness cannot rescue, cannot redeem us! First, God in His lovingkindness guides those wandering in the wilderness. Let’s pick it up at verse 4.

“They wandered in the wilderness in a desert region; they did not find a way to an inhabited city. They were hungry and thirsty; their soul fainted within them. Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble; He delivered them out of their distresses. He led them also by a straight way, to go to an inhabited city. Let them give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness, and for His wonders to the sons of men! For He has satisfied the thirsty soul, and the hungry soul He has filled with what is good.” (4-9)

This, and the following three examples, are both real and typical situations. We don’t have enough background to nail down the examples specifically, but that is part of the design. Our thoughts may go back to Israel in the wilderness. God provided food and water for them for forty years as He led them to the land He promised them.

Then think of how Jesus fulfills this. He is the good shepherd for people who are “distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd” (cp. John 10:11, 14; Matthew 9:36). He is the bread of life and the living water to those who are spiritually hungry and thirsty (John 4:10-14; 6:32-35). He is the One who gives rest to those who are weary and overburdened (Matthew 11:28-30).

Think of how God has redeemed you from dry, dead-end wandering, from inner hunger and thirst that nothing else could really satisfy. And then, as one of the redeemed, say, sing, shout, “I give thanks to the LORD because He has rescued and guided me, because His lovingkindness to me is everlasting!”

The next example of God’s lovingkindness is His releasing those suffering in prison. We continue at verse 10.

“There were those who dwelt in darkness and in the shadow of death, prisoners in misery and chains, because they had rebelled against the words of God and spurned the counsel of the Most High. Therefore He humbled their heart with labor; they stumbled and there was none to help. Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble; He saved them out of their distresses. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death and broke their bands apart. Let them give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness, and for His wonders to the sons of men! For He has shattered gates of bronze and cut bars of iron asunder.” (10-16)

Many of us remember first hearing the story of Joseph when we were little children. He was wrongly accused and imprisoned, but God freed Him and raised Him to be second most powerful person in the world at that time. The Psalmist takes it a step farther here. He reminds us that even those who are prisoners because they rebelled against God and spurned His truth are rescued and redeemed by God when they call out to Him and place their faith in Him.

As I think of the spiritual application of this I'm drawn to two of Charles Wesley's hymns. The first opens with the exclamation, “O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise.” Why? Part of his answer is that Jesus “breaks the power of canceled sin, He sets the prisoner free.” In the second hymn he describes his experiencing Christ's salvation this way, “I woke—the dungeon flamed with light! My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth and followed Thee.” Whatever your initial encounter with Christ was like, the truth behind these lines is true of you and everyone Christ has redeemed.

But there also is a sense of this in our ongoing walk with God, in our struggle with sin, and how God rescues us and enables us to grow in Christ and holiness. Do you remember how the apostle Paul described his experience of this?

“For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? *Thanks* be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:19-25a)

Why was he thankful? Because, as he wrote in another place, “thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ...” (2 Corinthians 2:14a).

And so you and I can join the chorus of all the redeemed saying, singing, shouting, “I give thanks to the LORD because He has freed me from bondage, because His lovingkindness to me is everlasting!”

The third example is God in His lovingkindness healing those aching with illness. It begins at verse 17.

“Fools, because of their rebellious way, and because of their iniquities, were afflicted. Their soul abhorred all kinds of food, and they drew near to the gates of death. Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble; He saved them out of their distresses. He sent His word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions. Let them give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness, and for His wonders to the sons of men! Let them also offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, and tell of His works with joyful singing.” (17-22)

When we get to the subject of illness and God’s healing, there are many questions and misconceptions. Consider just two. First, while some illness can be the result of personal sin as we see here and in other places such as 1 Corinthians chapter 11, not all illness is the result of personal sin, as Jesus made clear in John chapter 9. Secondly, it is not God’s will to heal every physical illness. Scripture makes that clear. Jesus did not heal Lazarus, nor did He heal Paul from his thorn in the flesh.

What we see here is the reality that God in His lovingkindness heals people of any and all kinds of illness, even people whose illness was the result of their own sin. Yes, God heals directly, miraculously and also through skilled medical workers and the vast range of treatments. But the view here is God healing directly, miraculously.

We have seen that. There are people in this church and others we know whom God in His lovingkindness has reached down to and touched, healed in response to their prayers and the prayers of others. Yes, we wonder why God has not healed us or others we know and love. We have questions about why some suffer over long periods of time, even over a lifetime. But as we wrestle with those deep, hard questions, we should never lose sight of the reality that God in His lovingkindness heals those aching with illness. And so we can give thanks to Him.

The last example the Psalmist gives us is God rescuing those reeling on stormy seas. Verse 23.

“Those who go down to the sea in ships, who do business on great waters; they have seen the works of the LORD, and His wonders in the deep. For He spoke and raised up a stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea. They rose up to the heavens, they went down to the depths; their soul melted away in their misery. They reeled and staggered like a drunken man,

and were at their wits' end. Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and He brought them out of their distresses. He caused the storm to be still, so that the waves of the sea were hushed. Then they were glad because they were quiet, so He guided them to their desired haven. Let them give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness, and for His wonders to the sons of men! Let them extol Him also in the congregation of the people, and praise Him at the seat of the elders.” (23-32)

The picture is vivid and speaks of typical but real events—of real sailors on real ships in real storms. When I read this my mind goes to how Jesus did this when He was here on earth. After a busy day of ministry Jesus and His disciples got into a boat and set out. Jesus slept. A ferocious storm blew in and the boat was being swamped. The disciples thought they were going to drown, and so woke up Jesus. He told the winds and waves to be quiet, and they became perfectly calm (Matthew 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25).

We don't make our living on the water, but some of us may have had a harrowing time on a lake or the sea. God in His lovingkindness still rescues people reeling on stormy seas. All of us can identify with applications of this truth in our emotions, relationships, work and other aspects of life. We have experienced stormy situations we thought would do us in. We know what it is to be terrified, to reel, to stagger and be at our wits' end in those storms. We also know that God in His lovingkindness, in ways we cannot explain, has reached down, reached into our innermost being and rescued us as He calmed the storm. And so we can give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness in rescuing us, we can thank and praise Him in the presence of the congregation.

These are some of the truths, some of the examples of God's steadfast lovingkindness and why we should thank Him for it. We have considered the Lord's lovingkindness. Now it is time to ...

Consider Your Response To God's Lovingkindness.

The best response is what we saw and the beginning of the Psalm,

Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good

For His lovingkindness is everlasting.

Let the redeemed of the LORD say so,

Whom He has redeemed from the hand of the adversary.

Yes, *Thank God for His steadfast lovingkindness.* Today and tomorrow may be very busy for you, even hectic. Your to-do list may be mission impossible. Even so, these two days are basically like any other day. Both of them have 1,440 minutes, or 86,400 seconds. Look at your list, whether its scribbled on paper or scrawled in your mind, and decide to take some of those seconds, some of those minutes to truly, deeply thank God for His steadfast lovingkindness to you and to all of His children. Let's start right now, in these next quiet

moments.

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