

Cry Out, Give Thanks, Repeat

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Scriptures: [Job 38:1–18](#) ; [Psalm 107:1–32](#); [II Corinthians 5:14–21](#); [Mark 4:35–5:20](#)

We continue today in our series on the Psalms. We began with cultivating a sacred memory in Psalm 81. We then moved to Psalm 130, a Psalm of return and repenting praise. Last week we were in Psalm 92, where we explored true Sabbath rest. Today, we look at Psalm 107.

And as we've done already in this series, I want us to recognize where we are in the book of Psalms, 150 songs divided into 5 books. Psalm 107 marks the beginning of book 5, the last book and the same section of Psalms as our Psalm of the prodigal's return in the Psalms of Ascent, Psalm 130, two weeks ago. Psalm 107 is the opening chapter to this fifth and final book within the Psalms, and it starts off with a bang.

You may remember from two weeks ago that the fifth book of the Psalms has the theme of rising action out of the disaster of book three and the reorientation of book four. This final book is the crescendo of praise that is the final word.¹ Yes there is lament in the Psalms - thank God for it! But the final word is praise for God's deliverance from disaster and continued praise for his faithfulness to his people. Psalm 107 gets us started off on this theme from its very first word.

First words can be powerful things. My mind was always struck by the first word of another ancient text, Homer's *Iliad*.

"Rage.

¹ See Mangum, Douglas, ed. *Lexham Context Commentary: Old Testament*, 2020.

“Sing, Goddess, Achilles’ rage.

Black and murderous, that cost the Greeks
Incalculable pain, pitched countless souls
Of heroes into Hades’ dark...”²

For those of you who are familiar with Homer’s account of the battle of Troy, you will see how these opening words, even that opening word of “rage” sets the tone for the whole story, focusing on the disastrous effects of how unchecked anger can destroy life and goodness.

Book five of the Psalms begins slightly differently, but sets the tone just as powerfully:

“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.”

“Give thanks.” This will be the message of the final book of the Psalms. And what is it for which the people should give thanks to God? His steadfast love, the Hebrew word *hesed*, which is repeated throughout the psalm. God’s *hesed* is the love associated with his covenant and speaks of his faithfulness to his promises he has made to his people, to Israel (see Deuteronomy 7, et. al.), and to you and me in Christ. The theme of this psalm

² Homer, *Iliad*. Trans. By Stanley Lombardo. Hackett, 1997, p. 1.

and the whole book of Psalms it begins is summed up well by these first three verses: Give thanks to God for his covenantal faithfulness and love.

Notice also the global scale of this covenantal faithfulness and love. Those who are redeemed by the Lord in verse three come from every direction on the compass, which likely refers to the Exiles coming back to Jerusalem in the time of the psalm's composition, but also points forward to the Great Commission, where the Gospel welcomes all peoples of the world into the Kingdom of God.

And this all-encompassing nature of God's faithful, redemptive love is the theme of the rest of the psalm. Using four object lessons of those who are in need of God's help, the psalmist shows the height, breadth, and depth of how far God's love can go, which is to all people.

I didn't see this the first time reading through, but the four examples are laid out pretty plainly for us. After the introductory verses 1-3, each of the four object lessons is marked at their beginning by the word "some" (v. 4, 10, 17, 23) followed by a description of a group of people in distress. The sections end with two identical refrains. The first pair is verses 6 and 8. Here is verse 6:

"Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and he delivered them from their distress."

Between the two refrains is what God does to alleviate the situation, leading into the second refrain (verse 8):

"Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,

for his wondrous works to the children of man!”

The example then wraps up with a reiteration of what God has done.

This is the pattern for all four object lessons: Description of distress - refrain of crying out to God - God intervening - refrain that invites the people to give thanks - a repetition of the reason the people ought to give thanks.

And so I want us to look at the four object lessons a little more closely. My invitation for you is to see where you find yourself in this passage. You may relate to one specifically or to all four, but listen for the part of the Psalm that causes you to say, “That’s me.”

The first section begins with verse 4:

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

This draws our minds of course to the story of the people of God after their Exodus from Egypt, wandering in the wilderness. They had been given their freedom, but then what? The waiting for the Promised Land caused many to lose hope, but even in their doubting, God provided for their needs with water and food in the desert. And while there was disobedience in the wilderness in the Exodus story, that doesn’t seem to be the focus right here. The people are in need and so they cry out to God, not understanding fully how he can help, but trusting that he will.

Then there is that first refrain in verse 6, followed by God's intervention (verse 7):

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

And after the refrain of thanksgiving (verse 9):

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

God brings the wandering soul that cries out to him to a place of safety and security. He fills the needy with what they need. This has been all of us at some point. We are wandering not out of our own rebellion - the Psalm gets to that in a couple verses - but because of the situation in which we find ourselves. God does not abandon us there. His desire is for our good. If you are there this morning, make that first refrain the prayer of your heart. Cry out to God in your trouble.

Things turn a bit in the second and third sections. It is in these object lessons that those who are in trouble are in that state of their own making.³ Of the two examples the first is most directly relatable to Israel's captivity in Babylon, a captivity brought on by their own disobedience (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,

³ For more on this contrast and how it relates to the form of the Psalm, see: Wilcock, Michael. *The Message of the Psalms*, Psalm 107.

and spurned the counsel of the Most High.
So he bowed their hearts down with hard labor;
they fell down, with none to help.”

But even disobedience and its fruit is not a place from which God can't redeem his people. The Exile came to an end! Interestingly, the words used in verse 16 of the shattered doors of bronze and the cut bars of iron reflect Isaiah's prophecy of the return from Babylon in Isaiah 45.⁴ The Psalmist seems to certainly have the return from Babylon in mind, along with the disobedience that led to captivity there.

The third object lesson doesn't have as neat a connection to Israel's history. This one feels more personal. Those in distress aren't suffering under some sort of institutional punishment. There is no prison sentence, but the suffering is just as real and just as self-inflicted (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.”

We have all seen the ways that our own foolish choices have led to destruction in our own lives and in the lives of others. Sometimes things are on as grand a scale as the people in exile in Babylon, sometimes the scope is just our personal lives, but the suffering is just as severe. There are many Babylons from which we need to be set free, many Babylons of our own making.

⁴ Ibid.

But the beauty of these two object lessons in the psalm is that the same sort of rescue that is available to us when we are not at fault is there when we are. The refrain remains the same:

“Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and he delivered them from their distress.

Just as those who are welcomed in the kingdom and are invited to give thanks come from all the directions of the compass in the opening verses, God’s redemptive, covenant love is available to those who suffer innocently and those whose suffering is the fruit of their own actions. We will of course experience both in our lives, but we ought to remember that God is no less far off when we are at fault. Prodigals and poster children have this in common: they need the delivering love of God.

Our last object lesson goes back to those who suffer innocently, this time not in the dry expanse of the desert, where water is scarce, but in the chaotic expanse of the sea where it is all too plentiful. Hear how the psalm describes these sea-faring sufferers (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.”

The desolation of wandering in the desert is a problem of absence: no water, no food, no shelter. It is a negative threat to well-being. The problems at sea described here in this section are the opposite. There is an active threat of disorienting waves. You hear them in that rhythm of mounting up to heaven and cascading back down into the depths. The text says of the seafarers that they are like those who are drunk; they can't stand up straight. Anyone who has been on a rocking boat can tell you how quickly rough water can knock you off balance. These experienced boatmen are brought to the very limits of their skill and wisdom. That is when they cry out for help to the one who can calm the waters.

Some of our struggles come from want, too little of what we need. Some, like the waves, are far too much of something we don't need. These are live threats that seek to knock us off our balance, and the sheer force is often overwhelming. But the one who provides in the desert will also calm the raging storm.

It may strike us as a bit odd that this last example is the longest, at least, it does to me at first. And that is because you don't have a lot of seafaring in the Bible, particularly in the Old Testament. Israel was not known for its powerful navy. The patriarchs stayed far away from the water when they could help it, or it at least seems to be that way. So why then does this example get the final billing? Why does it get the most verses?

There is a larger theme in Scripture of the triumph of God over the chaotic power of the waters, and further the great serpent who makes the waters his home ([check out the Bible Project podcast series on this topic](#)). Not always, but you will see these images of serpents and the sea paired together in Scripture. This is a theme in the Psalms, but goes right back to the story of creation, where the Spirit of God hovers over the waters and brings out the

good order of creation from the primordial sea. We have God holding back the death-dealing waters of the Red Sea so his people could escape the death-dealing Egyptian army, and him releasing that power of death on those who were seeking to deal it out. There is the story of Noah and the Ark and God's response to Job in our reading for today. At the end of the story, in the book of Revelation, John sees a vision of the great dragon, Satan, who is chained for a thousand years and then cast into a lake, not of water, but of fire, ending the reign of chaos and danger that is unleashed on the world. The water is a terrifying thing.

So when the disciples saw that the water from the rough Galilean Sea was filling the boat, I don't know if Psalm 107 was in their minds, but in waking Jesus up and begging for his help they indeed cried to the Lord in their trouble. And he indeed delivered them from their distress when he said to the waves, "Peace, be still." Perhaps the psalm did come to mind as they wondered with one another at who this could be who was with them as they completed their crossing to the other side on calm waters. Perhaps the psalm was on their hearts as they exited the boat only to be confronted with a man possessed by demons or when they saw this man delivered from the raging seas of his own demonic oppression. Perhaps they gave thanks, not only for their own safe passing across the sea, but this poor man's passing through his spiritual darkness.

Wherever you may see yourself today: searching for water in the desert, captive by some foreign power or by your own actions, tossed about on a sea you can't control - remember this refrain:

"Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,
and he delivered them from their distress."

And do not forget the second refrain:

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

Cry out. Give thanks. Repeat. This is the cycle of the people of God. It is the better story we get to tell about our suffering, what it means, and where we are headed. God is near. You may find that he is in the boat with you.