A Call to Give Thanks

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Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22

1 O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever. 2 Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, those he redeemed from trouble 3 and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.

17 Some were sick through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquities endured affliction; 18 they loathed any kind of food, and they drew near to the gates of death. 19 Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress; 20 he sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from destruction. 21 Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind. 22 And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices, and tell of his deeds with songs of joy.

1. The Sign of Grace in Sickness

The pastors serving churches in Bourne meet once a month at Bourne UMC to pray for the community. Last week when we gathered, one of the pastors prayed for those who are in hospitals. He thanked God for the grace of Jesus Christ. Then he thanked God for the sign of grace even in sickness.

While praying, I asked myself, “Can sickness be a sign of God’s grace?” I never thought that sickness could be a sign of God’s grace. I was challenged by his prayer to develop a deeper understanding of what the grace of God means for us. If sickness can be a sign of God’s grace, we should give thanks to God for our sickness. But being grateful to God for sickness can be a hard thing to do.

About two weeks ago, one of our church families was in the hospital. She expected to move to rehab in the middle of the week. But her doctor kept her a few more days. When I saw her at the hospital, I felt sorry for her and was praying that she could go to a rehab facility soon. Last Wednesday, I saw her in rehab. I praised God for her recovery, but I’m not sure I would do the same if she was still in the hospital.

As Christians, we’ve probably been asked the question, “What is the biggest difference between believers and non-believers?” There are many things we could talk about. But for me, the biggest difference is that believers can give thanks and trust in God regardless of the situation around us. The Bible tells us that we are called to give thanks to the Lord always. That’s what Paul says to the Thessalonians, “***Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you***” (5:18).

2. Psalm 107

Psalm 107:1 says, "***O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever***." In the passage, the Israelites are called to give thanks to the Lord. Why do you think this was in the passage? It is because some of the people at the time were not grateful.

Some of the Israelites felt abandoned by God in the exile to Babylon. The author tells the people to give thanks to God because His love never fails. While we don't know the exact author, we believe that the psalm was written during the time of the exile and would have been at the forefront of people's minds for those who felt abandoned by God during the exile.

Psalm 105 and 106 also begin the psalm with the same phrase: "***O give thanks to the Lord***." We see there is a pattern between Psalms 105, 106, and 107. In psalm 105, we see the psalm reflect on the experience in the Exodus. In psalm 106, we see the psalm reflect back to the Babylonian exile. In psalm 107, the psalm talks about God's restoration.

In verses 2 & 3 in the Contemporary English Version, the author says, "***Everyone the Lord has rescued from trouble should praise him, everyone he had brought from the east and the west, the north and the south***." Then in verses 4 through 32, the psalmist cites four examples of God's deliverance of His people. God delivered them out of the wilderness, broke the bonds of prisoners, restored the sick, and showed His power to mariners in the sea. In each case the Israelites asked the Lord for help, and God answered them. And the psalmist urges them to thank God for His unfailing love and wonderful deeds. "***Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind***" (vv. 8, 15, 21, 31). Psalm 107 encourages us that no matter what circumstances we may find ourselves in, we are called to have the conviction that God will never abandon his people, and He will deliver them.

Psalm 107 is used as a liturgy during the annual festivals in Israel. Even today, if someone says "God is good," people will respond "all the time." Is God really good all the time? First, let's reflect on the meaning of the phrase "God is good." For some, "God is good" means that God helps prevent something bad from happening. This can be an accident or a near death experience. But we know that not everyone is so lucky. Bad things happen in life, and things that we didn't expect can derail us from the plans we set out. In this situation, can we still say that God is good?

Our instincts tell us that the answer might be no. But our passage today sheds light and gives us a deeper understanding of what the goodness of God really is.

3. God is Good

For us, God's goodness seems very dependent on what God does or doesn't do. But the Bible tells us that "God is good" has little to do with what

God actually does. In the case of Israel, we see that throughout history, the people of Israel suffer time and time again at the hands of other people. One of those examples would be this: at the end of World War II, there was a now famous graffiti on the wall of a gas chamber in the concentration camp in Germany that read, “God is good. God is love.” While they were dying in the gas chamber, they still believed that God is good and God is love.

How are the people of Israel able to trust in God’s goodness in these situations? It is because they believed in God’s faithfulness to keep His promise made to Abraham. Genesis 12:3 says, “***I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed***.” When the Bible talks about God’s steadfast love, it talks about God’s covenantal love and His faithfulness to fulfill His promise. God’s goodness is about His faithfulness to His promise.

Our life journeys may be full of ups and downs. How then do we keep our peace and our thankfulness to God in the ups and downs of life? As Christians, we know that there are times when we feel ill, sad, disappointed, and maybe even depressed at the state of things in our lives or those around us. As long as we remember God’s covenantal love that God will be faithful and our Lord Jesus is with us in every situation, we can keep our peace and calm even in the biggest storms in life. When we remember that we are under His care, we can be grateful to the Lord always.

4. Now Thank We All Our God

Many of us might know the famous hymn, Hymn 107, “Now Thank We All Our God.” The backstory of the hymn goes back to the 17th century. During that time, a Lutheran pastor named Martin Rinkart had just arrived at a church in Eilenburg, Germany right before the Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648).

Many of the people fleeing the fighting suffered from sickness and famine, and the area became overcrowded with refugees from the surrounding areas. At the beginning of 1637, there were four ministers in Eilenburg. One left his post for a better area, and two later died and had funerals officiated by Pastor Rinkart.

Rinkart was the only pastor left. During that time, he would often officiate as many as 40 to 50 funerals a day, totaling 4,480 in all. In May of that year, his wife died. By the end of the year, the refugees had to be buried in trenches without services. The world around Rinkart was full of death, and yet during this time, he wrote a timeless prayer of thanksgiving for his children. “Now thank we all our God With hearts and hands and voices; Who wondrous things hath done, In whom this world rejoices. Who, from our mother’s arms, Hath led us on our way, With countless gifts of love, And still is ours today.” Even after Rinkart lost his wife and his people, he did not complain but gave thanks to the Lord because he trusted God’s unfailing love and faithfulness.

5. Conclusion

We genuinely wish everyone good health and hope that everyone can live long and healthy lives, even to 100. But for many, we know that not everyone will be able to live that long. We know of friends and loved ones that might suffer in life for many different reasons. In these situations, giving thanks to God sounds impossible.

But the author of Psalm 107 urges us to give thanks to God. Despite the situation around us, we are reminded that God is good and that His steadfast love endures forever. Even when we might feel like there is nothing to give God thanks for, we are reminded that God's steadfastness will surpass anything that happens in life. We are called to give thanks in the face of challenges and difficulties because we believe that God's goodness will take care of us in any situation.

6. Application

Now the question is, how can we express our thanks to God? I am sure you have many ways to give thanks to God. Let me share with you what I find in psalm 107. First, say to God and others about what God has done. Verse 2 says, "***Let the redeemed of the LORD say so***." Psalm 105:1 says, "***Make known among the nations what he has done***." Psalm 106:2 says, "***Who can proclaim the mighty acts of the Lord***?" Whenever we pray, we tend to ask for what we need first. But if we give thanks to God first for His goodness and covenantal steadfast love, God will be so pleased with our prayers.

Second, sing praise to him. That is what Psalm 107:22 says, "***Tell of his deeds with songs of joy***." Psalm 105:2 also says, "***Sing to him, sing praise to him***." When you get up in the morning, if you sing a song first giving thanks to God for a new day, God will be so happy to hear our praise. "Morning has broken like the first morning. Blackbird has spoken like the first bird. Praise for the singing, praise for the morning, praise for them springing fresh from the world."

Third, give thank offerings. Psalm 107:22 says, "***And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices***." The Israelites gave thanks to God by bringing thanksgiving sacrifices. Leviticus 7:12 says, "***If you offer it for thanksgiving, you shall offer with the thank-offering unleavened cakes mixed with oil, unleavened wafers spread with oil, and cakes of choice flour well soaked in oil***." And Lev. 22:29 says, "***When you sacrifice a thanksgiving-offering to the LORD, you shall sacrifice it so that it may be acceptable in your behalf***." Our thank offerings will be opportunities for us to give thanks to God.

Psalm 105, 106, and 107, 118, 136, and many passages of the Bible urge us to give thanks to God. For God is good and his steadfast love endures forever. What a wonderful Lord He is! Praise the Lord, hallelujah! Amen.