

Psalm 107 – November 21, 2021
“He Satisfies the Longing Soul”
6:00pm Evening Service
Faith Presbyterian Church, Tacoma, WA
Pastor Nathaniel H. Gutiérrez

It is Thanksgiving week. The aroma of the thanksgiving meal will soon be in the air: turkey, mashed potatoes and gravy, stuffing, and pumpkin pie. And if you are part of a family like the one I grew up in, you will soon be sitting around the thanksgiving table sharing why you are thankful.

And it is important to be thankful. Thankfulness is part of the Christian’s character. It is who we are called to be. Throughout Scripture, we observe that God’s people take the time to be grateful and to give thanks to their God.

Tonight, as we read through this Psalm, I want to encourage you to focus in on mental images being sketched out for us in this Psalm. What is going on in this Psalm? Why are the people thankful?

After all, they all seemed to be enduring significant suffering and or near-death experiences. We will see that they were parched and starving. They were wandering through deserts and living on the verge of death itself.

When we experience suffering, it rarely causes us to stop and be thankful. Instead, we get upset with the things interrupt our lives. So why are the people of God in this psalm so thankful?

I believe that the answer is that in each scenario of suffering, they were able to see something supernatural. They saw God’s redeeming hand in a way they hadn’t before. In the midst of distress and suffering, they saw that God’s love was real, and that his love wasn’t just real, but that it was enough. More than enough. V. 8 reads, “Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love.”

The people of God were thankful, because in the midst of their suffering, they are able to perceive God’s steadfast love. Only he himself is able to satisfy all their needs.

He satisfies their longing soul, in a way that nothing else in this world possibly could.

So, with that in mind, let’s turn to Psalm 107. We will read and focus our attention on v. 1-22.

Psalm 107:1

Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever!

2 Let the redeemed of the LORD say so,
whom he has redeemed from trouble
3 and gathered in from the lands,
from the east and from the west,
from the north and from the south.

Psa. 107:4 Some wandered in desert wastes,
finding no way to a city to dwell in;
5 hungry and thirsty,
their soul fainted within them.
6 **Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and he delivered them from their distress.**
7 He led them by a straight way
till they reached a city to dwell in.
8 **Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,**
for his wondrous works to the children of man!
9 **For he satisfies the longing soul,**
and the hungry soul he fills with good things.

Psa. 107:10 Some sat in darkness and in the shadow of death,
prisoners in affliction and in irons,
11 for they had rebelled against the words of God,
and spurned the counsel of the Most High.
12 So he bowed their hearts down with hard labor;
they fell down, with none to help.
13 Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and he delivered them from their distress.
14 He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death,
and burst their bonds apart.
15 Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,
for his wondrous works to the children of man!
16 For he shatters the doors of bronze
and cuts in two the bars of iron.

Psa. 107:17 Some were fools through their sinful ways,
and because of their iniquities suffered 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 delivered them from their distress.
20 He sent out his word and healed them,
and delivered them from their destruction.
21 Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,
for his wondrous works to the children of man!
22 And let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving,
and tell of his deeds in songs of joy!

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Let's pray together.

Finish lines, life goals and our purpose in life

There is nothing quite so emotional like scoring a last-minute winning goal in a 90-minute soccer match or scoring the final basket on the buzzer to win a basketball game. In a close game of competition, fans are on the edge of their seats and emotions are high. A last-minute victory over another team can cause such high eruptions of emotion that people will literally jump up and down screaming. Others will cry, while others will high-five and hug complete strangers! Why is that? Why do we get so excited about these things? Is the joy and emotion we feel enduring?

What makes people celebrate and hug strangers? It is the fun of competition, and doing better than others, right? Breaking a world record. It is the sense of accomplishment.

The other day I went running on an empty track near our house. I ran hard and when I crossed that finish line, nothing happened. No one jumped out and celebrated me for crossing that finish line! I didn't jump up and down celebrating myself for crossing the line either. Because that would have been ridiculous! Why is there meaning when there are other people there competing, but not when I am by myself?

Finish lines are an interesting concept. We draw a line on a field, or on a track and we determine that crossing that line is something to celebrate and be happy over. That is kind of funny to me. How is it that we have decided that crossing a line, only when it is faster than others is something to celebrate? How have we decided to make that an accomplishment or something valuable? Is there *real* value there?

We all have set up these sorts of "finish lines" in our lives. And these finish lines become deeply important to us. We set them up and we think of them as goals in our lives, as things to aspire to, and then we build our lives around these perceived values and goals.

If we are able to perform in such a way...to meet some self-imposed goal, or an externally imposed goal, then we imagine that we will have somehow proven that we are good at things. That we are valuable and that our lives matter. So, we are thankful.

We all do this in so many ways. We assign a value to our lives based on some goal that we have decided is of ultimate importance to us.

The athlete is a straightforward example. He or she is valuable and revered by others, so long as his or her performance has been superior to that of the others who have competed.

But we also assign value to academic success – to grades, diplomas, and intellect. We believe ourselves to be accomplished in these areas if we are better off than those around

us. But when we are surrounded by people more intellectual and accomplished than us, suddenly we consider ourselves small and worthless.

Then we give tremendous significance to the achievements, obedience, or character of our children. Though we may be thankful for them most of the time, when compared with other “better behaved” children, or more accomplished or kind children, suddenly we feel they and we have fallen short.

Or sometimes we put our value and worth in our accomplishments. In our particular careers or roles in life. Then when we reach those goals, we focus in on being the best at our career or role. And we may be content and happy with where we are for a while, but then when we compare ourselves to others who are better off than we are, we may realize we aren’t all that special. After all, they have crossed the finish line *before* or *better* than we have.

The list of goals and finish lines go on and on. We value ourselves in relation to our accomplishments. The state of our finances, the happiness of our marriage or our relationship status. We value ourselves based on our age or our health, how well we do our jobs, or the legacy we leave behind.

We all do it. We all are running toward a line or a goal that we believe will achieve for us some sort of special value. But all these goals fail to provide us with value. In fact, they can make us feel worthless when we compare ourselves with others.

I highlight this, because often as Christians, we can often lose our way and get stuck chasing after these false hopes. We start to search for joy and happiness in earthly accomplishments and goals, or ideals, but just as soon as we start to achieve them, we realize that they are empty. That there is no joy in them - there is no lasting satisfaction. They are all meaningless, just like crossing a finish line. That is not our purpose in this world. That is not our satisfaction in this world.

God’s purpose for our lives

Our Shorter Catechism Q & A #1 summarizes the Bible’s teaching on this subject in the following way: “The chief end of man is to glorify God *and to enjoy him forever.*” That is our end. That is our purpose. That is our end goal, and reason for living. To satisfy our longing souls in God.

For we can only find true satisfaction and joy in Him.

It is for that reason, that as a loving Father, God does not allow his children to pursue false gods. He teaches his children the error of their ways by allowing those wrong ideals in life to fail us. That means he often has to shake our confidence in the things that we place our hope in, so that we can see how misguided we truly are and how much we need *HIM*.

Charles Spurgeon explains that some of us will never understand this until we go through suffering. He writes,

“Some men will never pray till they are half-starved, and for their best interests it is far better for them to be empty and faint than to be full.... If hunger brings us to our knees, it is more useful to us than feasting; if thirst drives us to the fountain it is better than the deepest draughts of worldly joy; and if fainting leads to crying it is better than the strength of the mighty.” [Spurgeon, 400]

In other words, most of us only learn the hard way.

While things are going well and we are prospering in this world, it can be easy for us to forget our true purpose in this world. We forget that God is the only one who can satisfy our deepest longings.

But when we are faced with hardship and are feeling the deepest dread of our lives...it is then that we are often *far more inclined* to see our need for God. It is *then* that we realize that our deepest longings are met in the God whose love endures forever and ever.

And throughout Psalm 107, God is showing us that his hand is at work in bringing about this purifying result in the lives of all his children – even in the lives of his people Israel.

And we see this, because throughout this Psalm we are faced with this pattern:

Suffering – Outcry– Salvation – Thanksgiving

We see God’s people face hardship and suffering, then we see them abandon their hope in themselves, or in their source of trust, and they cry out to God for help. And the amazing thing is that he answers and rescues them, and they respond with thanksgiving in their hearts and voices.

God, in all of his invisible power and infinite wisdom, is so orchestrating our lives so that we can see him face-to-face.

And God shows us this. Here in Psalm 107, he shows us that this is his pattern.

Because time and time again, Israel put their trust in princes, or in the might of their armies, or in the wealth of their kingdoms. They gloried in their lands or in their leaders, and time after time, God used his power to show them how mistaken they were. Their false sense of security would be shaken, and they would see it for what it truly was. Then Israel would cry out to God, *and he would come to their rescue. He would save them, and they would give him their thanks.*

How often do we see ourselves doing the same thing? We are swayed by strength or beauty, and we are tempted to fall captive by the values of this world. So, God allows us to pursue these things we long for, and through his Holy Spirit, he shows us their true nature, and we realize how empty it was.

In verses 4-6 we see, *"Some wandered in desert wastes ... hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress."*

Now, even though it was not until they were in such an extreme situation that they chose to pray, Spurgeon notes, *"...**but the mercy is that they prayed then, and prayed in the right manner, with a cry, and to the right person, even to the Lord.**"*

He goes on to explain that prayers that are forced out of us by severe necessity are still acceptable to God, and in fact, they are often more sincere! [Spurgeon, 399]

In God's deep mercy, knowing the condition which we find ourselves in, and even fully aware of what caused us to be in said situation, he still hears our cry, and he rescues us from our distress.

And God does this because he wants to move us away from our false and hollow securities in this life and helping us to trust and find satisfaction in Him alone.

Why the hard way?

Now, if you have seen any good western, you know that for some reason, the town Sherriff is always obligated to ask the scoundrel who he is pursuing which way his arrest is going to go down. He has two options, 1) he can do it "the hard way" or 2) "the easy way". And strangely none of the scoundrels want to do it the easy way. They always chose the hard way.

Well, I don't know about you, but when it comes to learning that my true purpose and joy in life can only be found in God, I want to learn it the easy way! I don't want to go through the hardship of suffering first. I just want to jump straight to the good part, where I am rejoicing in God, and finding my ultimate joy in him.

But it doesn't work that way. And if we're honest, we might be a little bothered by this if it did. Some of us might think to ourselves, if God knows the past and the future, since he is all-powerful and infinitely good, why doesn't he just skip all the suffering parts? Why doesn't he just prevent us from sinning in the first place and set up barriers so that we don't go down the path of sin and temptation? Why doesn't he stop us?

First of all, I think most of us actually would be bothered by that to some degree as well. We don't like the idea of God controlling our every movement and we don't like the idea that we couldn't make our own decisions for ourselves.

But second, he *has* set up barriers. He has set up commands that point us to life, and as if that were not enough, he gives us his Holy Spirit to resist temptation, and he also always gives us a way out of temptation. **Every single time.** He always gives us a choice to trust in him and not to sin or to turn toward false hopes.

Listen to what Paul writes in 1 Cor. 10:13:

“No temptation has come upon you, except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”

God has given us barriers! He does offer us ways to get out of it. He does not allow for temptation to be so overwhelming that we cannot get out of it, he has given us ways out every single temptation, and he convicts us in our souls by the power of the Holy Spirit so that we will be able to overcome temptation. And even so, with all of that, we will choose other hopes and securities in this world!

What more can we ask for? What more do we want? How do we still find ways to be upset with God for our sins, our sufferings, and our hardship? God not only gives us a way out, but he also gives us repeated warnings and convictions in our soul! Other people in our lives rebuke us, sermons convict us, the Bible teaches us, devotionals, podcasts, verses hanging in your homes, and even music on the radio. All these warning signs and barriers face us, and what do we chose to do? We keep on returning to our old ways.

In some ways there are parallels to the character Forky in the Pixar movie Toy Story 4. Forky is a plastic spork created out of different parts *from a trash bin*. He has different sized googly eyes, broken popsicle stick pieces for feet, red pipe cleaner arms and hands, a blue clay forced smile, and a red unibrow.

And you see, Forky was made by a little girl named Bonnie who loves him, but the only problem is, that when he comes alive, he cannot get his head around the fact that he is a toy. He believes he is trash. As soon as he wakes up, his one drive and purpose is to immediately throw himself into the nearest trash bin. It is only there that he feels cozy and at home. And throughout the whole movie the other toys' main objective is to try to rescue him and convince him that he is not trash. Forky, however, repeatedly throws himself into the trash bin.

And though it is a ridiculous illustration, in many ways we do the same thing. And it is just as ridiculous.

We are not made to be cozy and satisfied in this world. We were made to be holy and righteous, to long for the eternal things, that are not the things of this world.

We were made in God's image, because we are to live as he lived. But instead, we keep on pursuing sin, and sometimes with an intense and insatiable drive. We keep returning to the “trash” of this world, rather than enjoying the true joy and satisfaction that we can only find in God himself.

His Mercy is More

And even so, our merciful Father rescues us from our suffering over and over again and he sets us on solid ground, to walk in his ways. And even though we stray over and over again, God, in his everlasting mercy, hears our cry and brings us back to himself.

Spurgeon helps us to see God's love for us in the midst of our suffering in a beautiful way:

He notes that we have such a glorious Shepherd, for he gathers the sheep that he has purchased with his blood from the most remote regions, and he guides them through countless dangers so that at last he can make them lie down in the green pastures of Paradise.

He goes on to say, "Some wandered one way and some another, they have all left Immanuel's land and strayed as far as they could..." and yet God's grace and power is so great, that he collects all of these sheep back into one flock by the Lord Jesus. [Spurgeon, 399. Paraphrased]

We struggle with the idea of suffering. We can only see the here and now. We don't understand the greater purposes of God.

We don't see that he is working, as a glorious Shepherd, to gather us from all the most remote regions, through countless dangers, just so that he can make us lie down in the green pastures of Paradise.

We hear some of Spurgeon's heart here in this description. He is a man who is profoundly aware of his own sin – of all man's sins – and even more than that, a man who knows God. He knows that God will never abandon his children. He will gather them from all the corners of the earth, and he will bring them to himself, for their good and for his glory. What a wonderful savior.

We do have a wonderful savior because he hears us as we cry out to him. He hears our pain and suffering.

So, what do we do with all of this?

A friend told me about an experience he had at a funeral a long time ago. He went to give his condolences to his co-worker, and after expressing his sorrow for her, she said, "Why? Why are you sorry? My husband is in heaven!" She knew he was with Jesus, and that was more than enough for her. This made such a deep impression on my friend that it made him jealous of her faith.

Her faith surpassed her earthly situation. Though she no longer had her beloved husband, but she had Jesus.

And as Christians, we find our greatest satisfaction not in abundant life here on earth, or in wealth, or in success, but in Jesus.

When we face hunger, we are reminded that Jesus did not just go around handing out bread and water. He said, ***I am the bread of life who has come down from heaven.***

When we are thirsty, he reminds us that ***I am the living water.*** That whoever drinks from him will never be thirsty again.

When we face darkness in this world, Jesus reminds us that ***I am the Light of the World that has overcome the darkness.***

When we feel weak or afraid, we are reminded that Jesus said, ***I am the Good Shepherd who lay down his life for the sheep.***

When we feel lost in this world, Jesus reminds us that ***HE is the WAY the truth and the life.***

When we face death, Jesus reminds us that ***HE is the RESURRECTION and the LIFE.***

In these and so many more ways, Jesus is showing us that he is enough. That he is our everything. That he satisfies our longing souls.

So, we have much to be thankful for. For even though we face hardships and discouragements in this world, when we cry out, God hears us, he saves us and satisfies our deepest longings in Christ Jesus our Lord.

May we, the redeemed of the Lord, 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. For he satisfies the longing soul.

Amen.

This sermon series draws on material from:

Kidner, Derek. *Psalms 73-150: A Commentary*. Downers Grove, Illinois. Inter-Varsity Press, 1975.

Spurgeon, Charles H. *The Treasury of David: Classic Reflections on the Wisdom of the Psalms Vol 2*. Peabody, Massachusetts. Hendrickson Publishers, 2014.