

Part 1: Jesus Finds the Lost

Tyler Velin | Psalm 107:1-9

December 8, 2024

Today we begin a four week break from our sermon series in the book of Acts--a book of the Bible which outlines for us the birth of the church—in order to reflect on the birth of our Savior this Advent season.

That's why we are going to spend the next four weeks in the 107th Psalm of the Bible. The book of Psalms is a book of songs for the people of God. Songs of hope and songs of comfort. You'll notice that the name of Jesus is never mentioned in this reading—that's because it was written before the Christmas events. Kids, did you know that? Did you know that there was a time before Jesus was born as the son of Mary? He existed forever and ever as the Son of God in heaven, but it wasn't until that first Christmas Eve that Jesus was born into this world as fully God and yet fully man.

And even though this song was written before that moment—it is leading us to consider Jesus. It's a song of God's salvation and it calls us to look back on where we've come from—but also calls us to look forward to where we are going.

That's what's unique about Christians! We look back at that one event, the cross of Jesus and we do so with great fondness and thanksgiving. But we also know that our best days are yet to come—heaven awaits us. But when we hold the past events of the gospel and the future events of the gospel in tension we avoid the ache of nostalgia and the sting of consumerism. We find instead—contentment, thanksgiving and love.

If we lose sight of the gospel story which holds together our past and our future—we lose the possibility of contentment. I think we see that a bit with our culture today don't we? The more we move away from the Christian observance of Christmas—the more our quest to finding meaning in Christmas becomes difficult.

For some people Christmas is a time of sweet nostalgia—looking back at good times gone by, recovering family traditions, and replaying the same old songs. But, as life goes on those times past seem to get further and further away. Getting together with family and friends becomes harder and harder—and each year Christmas is more of a reminder of what we've lost than it is of what we've had.

For others, Christmas is a time of excited optimism. We get things for Christmas. We get bonuses at work, breaks from school, gifts from parents, and the potential of a new you in the New Year. And yet, our New Year's goals often fail before the batteries on our toys. Before long our gifts are broken and forgotten, and the grind of school and work picks back up. We got a lot—but it didn't satisfy.

If we aren't careful—this can drift even into the way Christians think of Jesus. We appreciate that silent night—and if only our world were as calm as that. Maybe Christmas is nothing more than a reminder that you should have some warm fuzzies for Jesus. Or maybe, Christmas is the time of the year where we show up to church, read our Bibles and try to be generous so that we might purchase another year of God's good graces.

But neither of those are the gospel, neither of those will satisfy. So how then will we look back at what

was important, and forward to what is optimistic while not despairing for either? By seeing the steadfast love of God.

That's what this Psalm wants us to see, and it will help us see that by showing us the beauty of Jesus in four specific ways—four stories which celebrate God's salvation of his people. Today we will look at the introduction and the first story and our main point is simple: **Jesus came to rescue the lost.**

We will examine this in three ways. First we will look at the introduction to the whole song and see: **The Responsibility of the Redeemed**, then we will examine a case study of redemption in two parts, **The Experience of Losing our Way**, and **The Experience of Finding the Way**.

Let's begin by looking again at the first three verses: **Psalm 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 from the lands, from the east and from the west, and from the north and from the south."

So here is our first point this morning: **The Responsibility of the Redeemed.**

So now that we have looked at this, let's return to our main point. I told you that our main point this morning is: Jesus came to rescue the lost. That is certainly the main truth of this text—but it's not the main purpose of the text.

The Bible doesn't come simply to inform us of truths—it comes to change us with its truths. We just learned a few truths about God which would allow most of you to pass a simple theology exam. I wonder if you recognized some of those truths? What do we learn about God in these few verses: he is the LORD—the covenant God of the Bible, he is good, he has steadfast love which endures forever, he has redeemed a specific certain people and gathered them from far off places.

All of these statements are true—all of them are found right there in the text. But behind all of our communication is a goal isn't there? There's always something behind our words. For instance, if my wife says, "I'm thirsty and my cup is by the fridge," she's not just giving me a bulletin update. Her desire is that I would respond to that truth accordingly.

Sometimes we have to do some work to unearth that purpose—but we don't need to in this text. It's clear. What ought we to do on account of these truths? Give thanks! The first and only command given in our passage this morning. Give thanks to the Lord of the Bible—why? Because he is good, and because his steadfast love endures forever.

Why should we praise God? Because he is good and eternally, steadfastly, enduringly loving. The world loves to talk about God's goodness and God's love. They will reject everything about God—except his goodness and his love.

But notice how the Psalmist tells us who is able to respond this way. Who is able to see and praise God for his goodness and his love?

Verse 2 tells us, "the redeemed."

God is good, his is loving always. That's true everywhere at all times. That would have been true if he never created us. He is good within himself in his purity, his love between the Father, Son and Spirit was eternal and steadfast. Even if God created us, and even if we sinned and fell away with no hope of salvation--God's goodness and his general love would have been seen to us in the way in which he continues to sustain the world. To send rain on our crops, to give us food to eat, to make football to watch--all of that comes from God's good hands even to sinful people. All of that is representative of his general love towards even a fallen world.

Paul tells in Romans 1 that, "what can be known about God is plain" to the whole world. His invisible attributes and his divine power have been perceived since the creation of the world in creation itself. Yet Paul tells us that even though we ought to know God (**Romans 1:21**)—we do not "honor him as God or give thanks to him."

We ought to see God and praise him if we have life at all! But not everyone praises God, not everyone sees how good and loving this God is. And here we see why—because our sin has blinded our eyes—if we really want to see how good and how loving God is—if we want thanksgiving and praise to flow out of us—we must be redeemed by the Lord.

What are we to be redeemed out of? Look again at **Psalms 107:2-3**. Those whom the Lord has redeemed from two threats, trouble (literally the hand of the enemy) and from faraway lands. In the Old Testament God entered into a covenant with a physical people, Israel, in order to set up and illustrate the spiritual realities of God's love and our problems. Their problem was always two fold—their own hearts often lead them into trouble—and that trouble often lead them into faraway lands away from their home.

The Bible is really clear about what our problem is. Here, the Psalmist speaks of it as both a person and a place—there is trouble and a moral agent behind it, and it's the place where we are. We are not where we ought to be. The world our sin has wrought is not our home.

Now, this Psalm is meant to remind and rehearse God's saving acts for those who are in those dire straits. Which means there are potentially two kinds of people who need to hear this Psalm.

First, there are those who are blissfully unaware of their problem. Maybe, that's you. You don't really see the need of God, or certainly you don't see the need to be that thankful for him, because you've managed life pretty well. But this Psalm on the whole will show you the invisible problem for the purpose of showing you God's steadfast love to people like you.

Second, perhaps there are those in here who know full well that they are imprisoned and lost. Maybe, you've tried time and time again to get out of this mess and to find your way back to God. But it feels like the more you try to move towards God, the further he gets. Maybe, the more you try to work your way back, the more stuck you feel. Maybe you know full well that God is good and he is loving—but the question in your mind is: "Is he good and loving to me?" Well, this Psalm is for you to see for certain how God loves those who he redeems.

Over these four weeks we will examine four stories of salvation and each of them include the repetition of these two refrains: **Psalm 107:6**, Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. Refrain two: **Psalm 107:8**, Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man.

So how might we as the redeemed thank God and enjoy his goodness and love? Well, this Psalm shows us that when we find the true reality of our troubles—we find our voice. That's how we are redeemed, God shows us our need, we cry to him—and he shows us his abundant provision.

The first story of redemption focuses on those who have lost their way: This is our second point this morning: **The Experience of Losing Our Way.**

Who does God redeem? Those who **Psalm 107:4-5**, "wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to a city to dwell in; hungry and thirsty their soul fainted within them."

In our modern world we actually like the idea of being a wanderer. It means that you're a free soul. It's the spirit of adventure that takes us to wild places. But this is a first world view of wandering. Notice how the text shows the falling away of hope: wandering in the desert, finding no way to a city to dwell in, hungry and thirsty their soul fainted within them."

When I was in the Middle East, our hosts offered to take us out on the sand dunes. After driving as far away of civilization as we could, we turned off the road and headed out deep into the desert. It was fun until it wasn't. One of the vehicles had the wheel come off completely, and the sand was so deep the other trucks couldn't tow it out. It was a thousand degrees, not a car or road in sight, and the reality of the situation slowly began to set in on us.

If you've ever been lost before—you know that fear. Few people knew this fear better than the Jews. God kept his promise to Abraham to bring his children Israel out of Egypt. He redeemed them out of slavery and told them that he would lead them to the Promised Land where he was going to establish them forever. Kings would come from them, nations would inquire of their beauty.

But even though God took Israel out of slavery in Egypt—the slavery of sin remained in their hearts. As quickly as God brought them out into the desert—they began to wonder if God was as bad as leading them as my guide was as driving. They rebelled, they longed for Egypt, and were made to wander for 40 years in the desert before God graciously brought them into the Promised Land.

Once they made it there, God kept his word and they built Jerusalem! They fortified the walls, they built the palace of David, and the most beautiful temple for God. But their hearts were still sinful. Happy in the city—they were discontent with God. Their bodies were in Jerusalem—but their hearts were in Egypt. So God sent nations to judge Israel and he turned their pleasant city into a desolate waste.

Despite their efforts—they couldn't find a way to a city that lasted.

In our pluralistic culture you'll often hear it said that all roads lead to the same truth. But if you've ever been a traveler in a new city, or lost in the wilderness you will know that the more accurate truth is that most roads don't lead anywhere helpful. There's far more opportunities to wander away than there are to find the straight way.

And here, these Israelites couldn't find a straight way. So what happened? Look at verse **5**, "hungry and thirsty their soul fainted within them."

I wonder if you've ever felt that way in your own life. Maybe it started by thinking that you had a good idea of where you wanted to go. You wanted to go to school here--you wanted to get that job--live in that city--have that kind of family--but the more you walked it felt the more you were wandering.

Or maybe you're a Christian and you have known the love of God for you--but one small turn, has turned into a big turn, and you're in the wasteland. You wonder if you can ever make it out of this. Does anyone see you? Can anyone find you?

You see when we were stranded in the desert, I had just eaten. I had a water bottle full. And yet as soon as I came to grips with what went wrong I knew I didn't have enough supplies to make it. There are not enough resources in wastelands. The GPS of our hearts love the wasteland. It's where we go for adventure—but we won't find what we are looking for there. And when we come to that realization it's often too late. We can't make it out on our own. Someone else has to redeem us from our own trouble, and from the inhospitable land.

God sent help when I was stranded in the form of some wandering Bedouins. But God sent help for all of us when Jesus came into our own wasteland. It's one thing for a Montanan to feel the wasteland of the desert. But imagine how out of place and inhospitable creation would be to the Creator. Jesus entered our barren place, he came to our broken world. He left the comforts of eternity and glory to experience manglers and murder. Why?

Do you remember how Luke introduced us to the ministry of Jesus? **Luke 4:1-2**, "And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry."

Here the king of kings from the heavenly city was driven into the wilderness. There he was hungry and assailed by the Devil, tempted and tested. Jesus, as the representative of what Adam should have done, and what Israel should have done—entered the wasteland for us.

But he trusted the Father in the wilderness in ways Adam couldn't in the garden, in ways Israel couldn't in Jerusalem. He made it safely. And afterwards we read this: **Luke 4:14**, "And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country."

What do you think that report was? Local man has a good fast? No. I think people were starting to put it together. For forty years the Israelites couldn't find a way out of the desert because they were lost in their own sin. But here, the Jesus who was said to be the Jewish Messiah went into the desert like Israel, was tempted like Adam, but he made it out. Why? Because his Spirit didn't faint. He didn't need a city to find rest—he found rest in the Spirit, with the Father, in the middle of the wilderness. He trusted and rested in God's word, his promise, and his purpose and he made it out. Not without hunger, not without resistance, but with the reward of obedience.

Brothers and sisters our spirits have failed, we have wandered and we are lost. But where we lose our way—let us find our voice. Let us cry out to the one who came to save us.

That's what we see in **107:6-8**, "Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He led them by a straight way till they reached a city to dwell in. Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man."

Here is our second point this morning: **The Experience of Finding the Way.**

These lost souls in Israel didn't find their own way out of the desert. They had to be shown it. And what did they do in order to be shown it? They cried out to the Lord. They saw their trouble, they humbled their hearts, and they cried out to the Lord.

The book of Psalms was set up by the Jews to follow a general thematic pattern. This Psalm opens up what is called, book five, of the Psalms. Some parts of the Psalms were written before their exile, some during and some after. But look at how they pieced together the transition between book four and five. The end of book three concludes with this in **Psalm 106:47**, "Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise."

And after they sing this song in Psalm 106, what do they sing of in **Psalm 107:2-3**, "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 and from the north and from the south."

What did Israel do on account of their sin in Egypt? They cried out. And what did God do? He showed them the way and led them on it. What did Israel do when they were captive in Babylon? They cried out. And what did God do? He showed them the way and led them out.

Their problem was twofold. When they saw only the wilderness in front of them—they couldn't imagine that there would be a city for them better than Egypt. Then when they were finally established in Jerusalem—they couldn't imagine a glory greater than it. And each time they turned away and wandered from God, and each time left them lost.

"Prone to wander Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love." That's the state of our hearts. But remember this Psalm is meant to be an encouragement of God's goodness and love which leads us to praise God for his good and loving redemption of us. That's why this chapter closes this way: **Psalm 107:43**, "Whoever is wise, let him attend to these things; let them consider the steadfast love of the Lord."

The Psalmist wants us to think deeply on God's love by thinking deeply on how he saved us and from what he saved us. If you want to be wise, think of how and what God saved you from.

And what we see here is that their deliverance wasn't ultimately the result of them finding a city--it was the result of them finding their God. There's a wonderful inversion that takes place in verse 9. Remember the hungry and longing soul of earlier? Look at **107:8-9**, "Let them thank the steadfast love of the Lord...for he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry he fills with good things."

They weren't satisfied and lead to praise because they found the city. They found the city--but their song for the first time isn't about the city--it's about the God who filled them with good things. From where? The market? Well, remember it's said in the opening verse that the Lord is good--therefore we should give thanks.

If we want to stop getting lost, if we find ourselves lost, we need to give up trying to find a city and instead realize a city is only as good as its king. And that guy who made it out of the wilderness--he died. He fainted. Not in the wilderness for his own foolishness, but on the cross for yours!

But he did that and he rose again so he might say, **John 14:6**, "I am the way the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father except through

me." He rose from the dead, he found a way not out of the wilderness to the city, but out of death and into life. That's our biggest problem!

Dear Christian, when feel lost again--maybe for the umpteenth time--run to no other way but this one. Because while your wandering has shown you your sin--your returning will show you God's steadfast love and goodness. He will never tire to lead you home and to satisfy you with himself. Look for no other provision--and then set yourself to tell others about it to.

Only the redeemed can know God like this.

But for those who don't feel like the redeemed--notice how God's wondrous works of for the children of man. While no one can know God's goodness and love with gratitude and praise but the redeemed--his work to redeem is sufficient for all who cry out to Jesus.

Would you this season consider what the Bible says about you, and consider how it does so for the purpose of brining you to the praise and thankfulness of God's goodness and love.