

# Psalm 107

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[ 0 : 00 ] Paul has very kindly allowed me to choose what to preach from this morning and I have something of an ongoing love affair with the psalms. And so I've picked a psalm which has meant a great deal to me recently and my hope and prayer is that it may mean a great deal to us.

Psalm 107. So I'd be very glad if you could turn back to that, the psalm that Rachel read to us earlier. Psalm 107. If you've got one of the church Bibles, it's page 506.

Page 506. And before I preach, let's, as we sit, bow our heads and pray for God's help. Gracious God, our Heavenly Father, we thank you that by your Spirit you've caused these psalms to be written and prayed and sung over many years.

We ask that as we consider this psalm now, you would put it into our hearts and onto our lips, that we too might join your people in singing it.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

[ 1 : 28 ] I want to begin with a question which is enormously important. And the question is this. What will it feel like to be loved with an unchanging love?

If it is true, if you and I are men and women in Christ, if it is true, as the Bible teaches, that you and I are loved with an unchanging love, that we have a Heavenly Father who has loved us, as one of our songs said from before the world began, that he loves us now, that he has demonstrated his love in the coming and the death of the Lord Jesus, that he pours his love into our hearts by his Holy Spirit, that he will love us always, and that his love never changes, the question is what will it feel like?

And it's an enormously important question. Because one of the things I often feel, especially when I have the privilege of being a visiting speaker somewhere, is how lovely it would be if we had time to share our stories.

All of us have stories to tell. Some of them are stories of our past and their hopes and aspirations and perhaps fears for the future.

Depending on your age, the balance will be different. So, younger children, you'll have stories from the past, but they may not be very long ones yet, but you'll have a great many hopes and aspirations for the future.

[ 3 : 04 ] Those of us who've been around the block a few more times have got a few more stories from the past, and maybe not quite so many for the future. Who knows? But we all have stories.

Now, is it not true that our natural feeling as we go through life, the ups and downs of life, is that there are days when everything's marvellous.

We're in good health, we're perhaps happy in relationships, friendships, perhaps happy in marriage, perhaps happy in parenthood, perhaps happy at work, and everything's going well.

And we feel that it's a natural thing to say that God loves me, because everything is great. But there are other days, and there'll be plenty of us here, I have no doubt, who can echo this.

Other days when our health is difficult, perhaps seriously difficult, when those we love are struggling, perhaps when we're going through bereavement, perhaps when there've been sadnesses and disappointments, when we naturally feel that God doesn't love us as much.

There are times of darkness, times of uncertainty. And so the question, what should it feel like to be loved with an unchanging love, is a really important one.

[ 4 : 31 ] If you're here this morning and you're not, as yet, a Christian believer, it's so lovely to have the chance to talk to you about the love of God for these minutes, and I hope you'll listen carefully.

The psalm begins with the words, O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. The God of the Bible is good. His steadfast love endures forever.

And his steadfast love is the theme of the psalm. So you see it again in verse 8. Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love. You see it again in verse 15.

Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love. You see it again in verse 21. Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love. You see it again in verse 31. Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love.

And you see it again at the end. Let them consider the steadfast love of the Lord. so that's the theme and the psalm invites us to think about the steadfast unchanging love of God and you'll notice in the last verse that we're invited at the end that if you want to be wise and we all want to be wise wise doesn't mean having a high IQ wise doesn't mean clever it's possible to be clever and a fool and it's possible to be not so clever and to learn wisdom but if you want to be wise and we all want to learn wisdom then says the psalmist attend to these things listen, consider, think about this and think about what's going to happen so verses 2 and 3 set the agenda so verse 1 says the theme it's about the love of God what it is to be loved by the steadfast love of God incidentally if you've been a Christian for a while and a Bible reader for a while

[ 6 : 32 ] I hope you know that the steadfast love the word translated steadfast love loving kindness in the old versions sometimes just love but steadfast love is a good translation it doesn't just mean God generally smiling and being nice so God is very kind Jesus said he lets the rain fall on wicked people so that their crops grow he's kind to people in all sorts of ways but the steadfast love means the promised love the pledged love the covenant love that God gives to all who are in relationship with him ultimately in the Lord Jesus Christ that's what the steadfast love is that's what it's about so it's about what's it like to be loved to be a man, a woman or a child in Christ so verses 2 and 3 give us a little bit of context and the agenda let the redeemed of the Lord say so and when you get the word redeemed it reminds you of the exodus the slaves in Egypt being bought out of slavery and the exodus by God's mighty act of rescue let the redeemed of the Lord say so let them tell their stories it's a kind of invitation to have some story telling those he's redeemed from trouble and verse 3 those he's gathered notice that word gathered from the east, west, north, south and the word gathered reminds us much later in Old Testament history so the exodus from Egypt right near the beginning and the gathering reminds us of coming back from exile in Babylon much later in Israel's history so as we read the stories we remember the people of Israel who were slaves in Egypt coming out and we remember the exiles in Babylon hundreds of years later being regathered into the land and you'll see that this is the beginning of book 5 the books of Psalms are divided into 5 books and once you get to book 5 some of the Psalms are very, very old Psalms but they're put together late in the Old Testament history they're put together at the time when the people have been gathered back from exile it seems if you glance at the second last verse of the previous Psalm verse 47 on the same page there's a prayer verse 47 save us O Lord our God gather us it's a prayer to be gathered back from the nations to come back from exile so the person leading the singing here says let's tell some stories what's it like to have been a slave in Egypt and redeemed what's it like to have been an exile in Babylon and been redeemed what's it like to be loved with the steadfast covenant love of God and they're very, very vivid stories so let's let's listen to these stories the Psalm begins with four very similar stories there are four stories they each begin with trouble and then there's a prayer and then God answers and then there's thanksgiving so there's four stories very similar structure as we go through them we'll discover that these stories are not four different groups of people these are the same people telling their stories in poetic form in different ways so it's not like

I'm the leader and I say let's have some stories and a bunch over there stand up and tell us verses 4 to 9 the first story and then another bunch stand up and say oh our story's different it's verses 10 to 16 and so on it's actually the same people telling the stories but in different ways and they're very vivid and I want us to in a sense get into them in our imaginations so verses 4 to 9 here's the first story I'd call this lost in a wasteland world so some people as it were they stand up the people of God and they say well we were we were wandering in desert wastes like the Sinai Desert or the Sahara Desert a place where there aren't any roads and road signs and there's no water and it was a it was a it was a miserable business verse 4 we couldn't find any way to a city a place where there'd be food and drink and verse 5 we were hungry and thirsty and our soul our being fainted within us we were weak and we were lost and we couldn't find where we were going and you think of the the slaves in Egypt at the beginning lost not literally in a desert but metaphorically lost not knowing where they were going and unsatisfied appetites hungry thirsty you think of the exiles in Babylon not literally in a desert but unsatisfied appetites hungry thirsty then you think of the Lord

Jesus singing this psalm later you think of him in the desert hungry thirsty in the desert and then you think of

Christian people all down the years saying I know what it feels like to have unsatisfied appetites I know what it feels like to be hungry to want something maybe literally food or drink it may be something in a relationship or a job or health you know what it feels like to be hungry and thirsty and they go on verse 6 we cried they said they cried to the Lord in their trouble they prayed he rescued us verse 7 he led them by a straight way to a city to dwell in where their appetites could be met their hunger and thirst so verse 8 and 9 let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love he satisfies verse 9 the longing soul the hungry soul he fills with good things so you get to the end of that first telling of the story and you say aha I've got it now now I know how God loves me I know God loves me when I was hungry and thirsty and now I've got food and drink

I know God loves me when I had unsatisfied appetites and now they're satisfied I know God loves me when I wanted to be married and now I'm happily married I know God loves me when we wanted children and now we've got children I know God loves me when I was in need of a job and now I've got a job that's how I know God loves me or is it?

let's park that and go on to the next story we'll come back to that in a minute here's the second story verses 10 to 16 same people telling their story from a different perspective you might want to call verses 10 to 16 trapped in a dark world so verse 10 they're describing it now they're saying they sat in darkness and a shadow of death that's deep deep darkness that's darker than a dark night in the countryside that's a spiritual darkness and then you discover verse 10 that it's the darkness of a dungeon prisoners in affliction they're in a dungeon they're trapped and it's because they'd rebelled against God's words they'd spurned him verse 11 and so they were bowed down with hard labour verse 12 you think of the slaves in Egypt before the exodus bowed down with hard labour falling down verse 12 no one to help you think of the exiles in Babylon metaphorically in a prison a prison is where you can't go where you want to go and do what you want to do you're trapped and you know the strange thing is that it's possible at the same time to be lost in a world that's too big a desert and at the same time to be trapped in an inward world that's too small and dark same people telling their stories from a different angle as it were think of the Lord Jesus a prisoner really ultimately a prisoner before the cross but not able to go where he wanted not able to do everything he chose trapped watched dark ultimately dark at the cross with the darkness of the shadow of death and you think of

[ 15 : 31 ] Christian people all down the ages saying yes I know what it feels like to be in darkness I remember trying to open up this psalm to the students at Corn Hill actually and one of them said to me afterwards that these descriptions in these stories matched exactly with their experience of depression I can identify with all of that they said to me but again they pray verse 13 they cry to the Lord in their trouble he delivers them he brings them out of darkness you think of the slaves coming out of Egypt at the exodus the exiles coming back to the promised land from Babylon the Lord Jesus being raised from the dead and Christian people being brought out of darkness he burst their bonds apart they were set free my chains fell off my heart was free and so verse 15 they thank God because he shatters doors of bronze verse 16 cuts the bars of iron so you see now I get it now I know how God loves me

I know God loves me because there were times in my life when it was dark and I felt trapped and constrained and I couldn't go where I wanted to go but now my heart is free and I found freedom in Jesus and it's wonderful and that's how I know God loves me or is it hold on to that and we'll go on to the third story we've got a lot of loose ends here so hold on to that and we'll go on to the third story verses 17 through to 22 we might want to call this telling of the story weak in a sick world lost in a wasteland world the first one trapped in a dark world and now it's sickness weak in a sick world so verse 17 some were fools through their sinful ways and because of their iniquities they suffered affliction they got ill and sick verse 18 they lost their appetite they loathed any kind of food one of the common symptoms of sickness and they drew near to the gates of death death pictured like a city with gates and they got so close that the gates were beginning to open and any second now they were going to die and that's what it was to be like that you think of the slaves in Egypt with the diseases of Egypt you think of the exiles in Babylon you think of the Lord Jesus sick all the way until the gates of death opened for him and us with inward weakness so verse 19 then they cried to the Lord in their trouble he delivered them we've heard this before haven't we he delivered them sorry I've got the wrong story but it's much the same where are we no

I've got the right story I'm getting in a muddle verse 19 that's right we're in the right story they cried he delivered them he sent out his world he healed them from their sickness he delivered them and so they're to thank him verse 21 and be grateful for his love that's the third story so this is someone I understand I know God loves me when I was sick and now I'm better I was talking to a student at a church student house party just a week ago and he was telling me a fit strong man he was telling me about his brother who's played rugby schoolboy rugby for England fit strong man suddenly taken ill and according to the doctors when he was operated on he was overseas he was operated on the doctor said he was within an hour of dying suddenly the gates of death were opening so close but now he's strong he's back to health again so you see that's how I know God loves me because there have been times when I've been ill and sick and weak and now I'm strong again and now I know God loves me or is it or is it let's park that and go on to the fourth one here's the fourth one verses 23 to 32 we might want to call this something like scared in a dangerous world so verse 23 some went down to the sea in ships doing business on the great waters and as we read the description it's both a literal description of a storm and a metaphorical description of a storm so they went to the sea in ships verse 23 and they saw the deeds of the Lord verse 24 and you think that's nice his wondrous works in the deep until you see what they are verse 25 he commanded he raised the stormy winds there was a gale a severe gale a hurricane lifted up the waves of the sea and you picture this terrible storm at sea and they mounted up to the heaven as they went up to the top of these huge waves and down to the depths in between the waves and their courage melted away they were scared they were terrified in their plight and they reeled and staggered you can see them can't you on the deck holding on as if they were drunk it's so terrifying and they're at their wits end and it's both literal and metaphorical there's a prophecy in Isaiah which describes

Jerusalem at the time of the exile as being a storm tossed city lash with storms and it wasn't literally that but metaphorically it was that and the storm is the time when you're chugging through life and life seems quite stable and you've got your diary or your planner and what you plan to do tomorrow more or less happens tomorrow and the day after it more or less happens and the storm hits when what you thought you were going to do tomorrow doesn't happen at all the storm hits when suddenly there's a sickness suddenly there's a terrible diagnosis suddenly there's a death suddenly there's a redundancy notice suddenly there's a breakdown of some precious relationship and the storm hits and suddenly you don't know where you are you thought you were on solid ground and now everything's moving around you and you just don't know where you are and you're holding on you might as well be drunk you're holding on and you're at your wits end that's the picture so you think of the slaves in Egypt you think of the exiles in Babylon you think of the Lord Jesus on the sea of Galilee with this life threatening storm on this small fishing boat threatening threatening threatening to kill him and all his friends so what happens well again verse 28 they cry to the [ 22 : 30 ] Lord he delivers them from their distress he makes the storm still think of the Lord Jesus standing up on the front of the boat be quiet shut up tells the wind and the waves shut up and they do and they're still they're stilled and they're hushed verse 29 and verse 30 they're glad that the waters are quiet they get to their haven they get to the harbour so verse 31 they thank God verse 32 they extol him and they say what a great God now I know he loves me I wasn't so sure but now I know now the storm is stilled he loves me and if you're a thoughtful person as I'm sure you are you'll be thinking to yourself this preacher is being mischievous are you thinking that?

you think this preacher is being a little bit mischievous? this preacher is deliberately being mischievously shallow this preacher is saying the times you know God loves you are the times when your appetites are fulfilled rather than when you're in the desert the times when you're strong rather than sick the times when you're free rather than trapped in darkness the times when you're on solid ground rather than being washed around by storms that's how you know God loves you and you must be saying hang on a minute because we're we're not all English but even those of us who aren't English are being enculturated to Englishness or Welshness but anyway Britishness and sort of politeness but if we had a different culture you'd have been interrupting me by now wouldn't you?

you wouldn't have been saying preach it pastor you know like the Jamaicans would you'd be saying hang on a minute stop that can't be right what about those times when Christian people feel lost and they're hungry and thirsty literally or in other ways when they have appetites that are not satisfied what about those times when Christian people feel trapped and in darkness and go

through times of darkness what about those times when Christian people get sick and die what about those times when Christian people are tossed by storms what's with the love of God then? I don't think you've quite got the point of the sermon so let's have a look at the surprise verse 33 there's a the closing section is very surprising verse 33 we've had these four stories and verse 33 he that is God turns rivers into a desert and you say hang on a minute Mr. Psalmist haven't you made a mistake isn't that a typo I thought bad things happened and then God did the good stuff but now you're telling me that God turns rivers which are good and life giving into deserts and I thought deserts were bad springs of water to thirsty ground fruitful land into salty ground like Sodom and Gomorrah where nothing grows because of the evil but you hang on in there verse 35 when you find the desert he turns it into pools of water and you think ok it's going to be like Disney it's going to work out ok parched land springs of water hungry people live there their appetites are fulfilled verse 36 there's a city they can live there verse 37 they sow fields the vineyards there's harvests they multiply more and more people healthy happy smiling

Disney verse 38 and then you read on to verse 39 and it all goes wrong again verse 38 there's no diminishing everything's going well shares are going up portfolios are going up the footsies going up everything's going up house prices going up everything's happy verse 38 verse 39 suddenly they're diminished it's all gone bad again they're brought low through oppression bad government evil sorrow and God pours contempt on princes proud people makes them wander in trackless wastes just like at the beginning of the psalm but then he raises up the needy out of affliction he makes their families like flocks so it's good again and upright people who believe they see it they're glad and wickedness shuts its mouth it's got nothing to say and then you have the conclusion think about it so let's think about it together here's the thing and this is the one thing I'd love you to take away if you've drifted off and you've been thinking about yesterday's rugby or I don't know what you know yesterday's rugby is sort of up and down isn't it unless you're

[ 27 : 33 ] Scottish or Italian in which case it's all down but if you're kind of Welsh or Irish or English yesterday was an up and down kind of day wasn't it in the rugby so if you've drifted off and you've been thinking about that just come back for a moment and think of this the psalm is about the steadfast love of God the psalm is saying God's love is unchanging the psalm is saying in Old Testament language what we know in the New Testament that if you're a Christian I'm a Christian you have a heavenly father who's loved you from all eternity who loves you now who's demonstrated that love in the coming and the death of the Lord Jesus who pours that love into your heart by the Holy Spirit and who will love you to all eternity and whose love for you is unchanging so what's the psalm saying surely it's saying this isn't it what would you expect you expect times which feel like the desert but in the end

God will bring you to a city you expect times which feel like prison and darkness but in the end you'll be free you expect times of sickness perhaps death but in the end you'll have life you expect times of chaos of the storm at sea but in the end there'll be stability it's what the Lord Jesus trusted that in those times his heavenly father loved him as he had always loved him and would always love him so let me try and earth this we had a Carolyn and I had a strange summer last summer so in June my elderly father was taken ill in the end of March and in June he died it was very sad I grieved deeply in August our lovely daughter got married it was a really happy day we love her to bits we love our new son-in-law to bits it was a blissfully happy day and it seems to me the point of the psalm is this

God's love for me for the sake of example was no different on the day our daughter got married which was a day of smiles and laughter than his love for me on the day I saw my father fade away and die his love for me was unchanging his love for me was enduring his love for me is steadfast and although there will be times if we're Christian people when we do not feel that there will be times of desert and darkness and sickness and weakness and chaos and when it you think I don't I find it hard to feel that God loves me but the point of the psalm is if we're wise we get to the end and we listen to these stories and we think these stories demonstrate that God's love is unchanging and at the end of the story on that great day that resurrection morning when the new Jerusalem comes down the new heavens and the new earth and we live with God with the Lamb at the centre and there's no more sea in Bible imagery no more chaos that day we shall know as we can know by faith now that God's love for you and for me is unchanging so if you're not a Christian believer I'd love to invite you to join us to follow Jesus and I want to say to you that if you do that you will have times of desert and darkness and sickness and chaos but in and through them all you will be

able to say I know I have a heavenly father who has loved me from all eternity I know I'm in Jesus his son who has died for me I know the Holy Spirit pours that love into my heart and I know that the love of this heavenly father for me given to me in Jesus brought to my heart by the Holy Spirit I know that this love is unchanging I know that he has loved me from before the world began I know that he loves me now and I know he will love me forever sometimes I'm a typical eeyore and if there's any possibility of being gloomy I'm in you know gloominess I'm in like eeyore but even I sometimes am walking to work full of gloom and I say to myself I find myself saying to myself against my eeyore nature Christopher you have a heavenly father who has loved you from all eternity who loves you now who will love you forever and whose love is unchanging that is a wonderful thing to know and it's a wonderful privilege to be a man or woman or child in Christ