

Let the Redeemed of the Lord Tell Their Story

Psalm 107 Sermon Series
Kenwood Baptist Church
Pastor David Palmer
January 4, 2015

TEXT: Psalm 107:1-9

This morning we will direct our attention to Psalm 107. This Psalm begins with a summons in verse 1:



“Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; His love endures forever.”

Give thanks to God out of His goodness. His steadfast love is never failing. Psalm 107 is a summons, a challenge for us to be a people whose speech pours forth thanksgiving to God. Psalm 107:2 calls forth all who have been

touched by God’s saving hand in this way:

“Let the redeemed of the LORD tell their story—those He redeemed from the hand of the foe, those He gathered from the lands, from east and west, from north and south.”

This month of January, we are going to focus our attention on this image, this summons, this command for the redeemed of God to share their story, to tell what God has done in our lives. It is an interesting world we are in. I woke up on the morning of Christmas and looked out my window, and on the front lawn of my neighbor, who has shown no signs of interest in the Christian faith, there was a sign for a church plant in my community. I thought, “Wow, that's amazing! I would never have expected to see that sign in my neighbor's yard.” On the other side of that emotion, I picked up *The Wall Street Journal* yesterday, and on the cover, there was a young man, and he was skateboarding. I thought, “Wow, look at that!” Then I noticed behind the skateboarder some Gothic arches, and I thought, “That's really quite an avant-garde design for a skate park!” I looked closely, and I saw it was actually a church, a church that had been decommissioned in the Netherlands. It was a church that had had 1000 worshipers, now no longer used, and it was converted into a skate park. I set these two contrasting images before you to say that we are in a world that is rapidly changing around us, and though the world is rapidly changing, God is not changing. His plan and purpose for the nations is unchanging, and how He fulfills that plan and purpose continues with every generation. We at Kenwood need to rise up and fulfill what Psalm 107:2 commands, that the redeemed of God must tell their story. They must tell their story in a way that brings glory and honor to Jesus Christ.

One of our best resources for sharing the Gospel with our friends and family and neighbors is to share what Christ has done uniquely in our own lives. It is irrefutable. You cannot lose your job for that; you cannot be kicked out of the next Thanksgiving meal for that. You can share your story, and the challenge of Psalm 107 is to share your story in a way that is both vulnerable and Christ exalting. We want to follow the movement of Psalm 107 this January. Psalm 107 actually tells four different testimonies: *“Let the redeemed tell their story, those gathered from east, west, north, and south.”*

There are four different patterns or examples of testimony. The first one, which we will focus on this morning, is the testimony of the lost person who has been found and thanks God. The second testimony, which we will hear next Sunday, is that of when God lifts up the depressed man, raises him up, and sets him free from sorrow. The third Sunday of January, we will hear one of my favorites, how God heals the foolish person from the consequences of his actions. Have you ever made a dumb decision and God then rescues you? On the final Sunday of Psalm 107, we will look at the example of the person who is caught in the middle of a storm. The waters of the storm are raging around him, and yet God leads him safely home. Each of your stories is different, and that's okay. 2 Corinthians 3:3 says:

“You show that you are a letter from Christ.”

I want you to own your story and to share it. I've asked each of those who will be preaching in January, as they pursue their portion of the Psalm, to share their own story in the context of the passage, and so I want to do that as well this morning.

This is the testimony of God's finding a lost person. Let's look at the first stanza of Psalm 107. Psalm 107:4 begins with the image of a lost person:

“Some wandered in desert wastelands, finding no way to a city where they could settle.”

I include myself in this category. The image of Psalm 107:4 is literally of a person who is moving about, wandering in a desert wasteland, in a land where there are no tracks, no distinguishing markers, no clear landmarks. Everything is indiscriminate, no path marked out. This is my story as a young person growing up in the United States. I grew up in a broken family like 55 percent of American homes today. Fifty-five percent of children in the United States grow up in a home that is broken, as my home was. My parents were divorced. Individually, my parents had all that they could handle to try to keep their own lives on track. I received very little guidance or direction, and as a young man, I found myself rootless and restless and in search of a story to satisfy my heart. I pursued the available stories that the culture provided me.

The first of my aspirations was to be a professional athlete, and I had strong reasons for thinking this was my path. I remember the day, a sunny summer day: T-ball. The bases were

loaded, and I was playing second base. The ball was set on that rubber stand, and one of my classmates whaled at that tee stand, missing the ball almost completely. A strong rubber thud could be heard as he caught just enough of the ball to send it sky high. All my classmates, not knowing the rules of baseball, just started running around the bases. I stood at second base, tugged my cap, looked up at that ball and thought, "I'm going to catch this ball." I waited, I moved a little bit to the right and caught the ball. Then, I just stood there, with my arm out, and as my friends ran by, I simply tagged them out, one after another. I remember thinking, "How many Hall of Famers start their career with an unassisted, triple play? This is me. This is my destiny!" I did play baseball through high school and loved it, but realized, about halfway through high school, that everyone else kept growing. I realized this was not my destiny.

I remember another time, lasting a very short moment, when I considered a different path as a young, high school student. I remember watching a television program with a live camera on the city square. People had gathered around the square and were watching a man in the middle of the square on a unicycle. He was juggling and doing different stunts and activities. This was one of those moments in my life, maybe it was only two minutes long, but I watched the man on the unicycle, and as he finished his routine, the people gave him a perfunctory clap, and then they dispersed. In that moment, I found myself thinking, "Is that what life is about, just seeking a few-second ovation? Should I be an entertainer or a musician? Shall I go to juggling school?" I quickly realized that that's not what my heart was longing.

The third direction I pursued, and that lasted much longer, was to be part of something bigger than myself, something that mattered. Part of it was my own ambition, but I began to dream of being a military hero. I spent two years going through the process of applying to go to the Naval Academy. I wore Marine tee shirts, Navy shirts, and was known in my high school as the person who was going to the Academy and take the Marine option. I wanted to do deeds that would be remembered. All within this, though a great public impression, I was slowly dying inside.

Psalm 107:5 continues and says:

"They were hungry and thirsty, and their lives ebbed away."

Those who wander in a trackless wilderness with no direction, no city in which they can settle, find themselves eventually hungry and thirsty. This was my situation, hungering, and thirsting and my life ebbing away. Wandering in the desert, you become lost and confused with the absence of core provisions in your life. Hunger and thirst become acute, and so I tried to fill my life with earthly pleasures, which only deepened my hunger and thirst. My soul was cracking; I caused distress for my family. When I was 16 years old, my father looked me in the eye and said: "I don't know what to do with you. If something doesn't change in a week, I'm going have

to send you somewhere.” My father was not a prophet, not a Christian at the time, but it was Thursday night of that week that Psalm 107:6 became true in my life:

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

It was Thursday night of that week that my high school classmate, my best friend to this day, invited me to play tennis with him at the strange hour of 11 PM. I snuck out my bedroom window, and we played tennis until the middle of the night. I remember powering off the lights of the tennis court and going into his silver Dodge Reliant K, the seats sporting a really nice red Naugahyde fabric. There he shared with me, as a peer, that he had a real relationship with God, I thought that was amazing, and I said: “Tell me more about that.” He told me that Jesus Christ was real and made a difference in his life. Though I was intellectually oriented, somehow I knew what he was saying was true. Even as I knew it was true, I knew I didn't believe it and that I stood at the opposite side of the shore. I longed for faith to believe what he was saying and that I knew to be true, and so the first prayer of my life was a prayer for faith. I told him I could feel evil in my veins, and I couldn't get rid of it. He didn't say to me: “Have an attitude change; you're really a good guy.” He looked me right in the eye and said, “That's your sinfulness, and it is the work of the Holy Spirit to bring that conviction.” He said, “Christ died to forgive you.” I said, “I need Christ,” and he led me in a sinner's prayer on that night.

What did it mean that God delivered me from my distress? In the first instance, it meant personal forgiveness. My sin was washed away. It came immediately with new desires: desires to worship God; desires to read His Word. A third immediate consequence was that I felt myself a part of the family of God. Though my own family was broken, I had membership and participation in God's family. I felt it right away. Lance went home to his family, it was probably about 1:30 or 2 o'clock in the morning. He woke up his whole family, threw on all the lights, and he said, “David has accepted Christ!” They picked me up for church the next Sunday and adopted me like another son. When you call out to the Lord in your trouble, according to Psalm 107, He will hear and deliver you.

I poured over this Psalm in preparing for this personal message, and I kept thinking, “This is my favorite verse. No, this one is my favorite verse.” Going over my notes this morning, I thought, “No, this is it. It's Psalm 107:7.” This verse continues and says that when God hears you and delivers you:

“He led them by a straight way to a city where they could settle.”

I was lost, and now I had been found. That was just the beginning, though I didn't know it. Accepting Christ is actually the beginning of life, not the end. The beginning of living is in having Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, as an active Shepherd in your life. Instead of wandering

about in a trackless wilderness, I found myself being led. I was led at every turn: led where to go to college; led what to study; led where to live. Instead of being lost, I was found. Instead of wandering, I was now being led. Instead of a trackless waste land, I was on a straight path. Instead of no place to settle, I found myself in pursuit of what the song calls *a city where you can settle*. Though I didn't know it at the time, what Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:1-5; 17 was proving true in my life. He wrote:

“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. . .He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.”

Paul goes on to say in Ephesians 2:12-13:

“Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”

The beautiful imagery of Ephesians 2 says that you are brought near to be part of God's family, a dwelling place. I discovered that the church was like a new family. I rode my motorcycle to church three times a week; I went to early morning prayer, five o'clock in the morning. That was tough to get to, but although I had always slept in, now I was waking up. I went to early morning prayer at the home of Isaac, an African-American brother in the church we were attending, and that man could pray! I learned to pray at five in the morning from him. I read the Scripture; I was disciplined; I was being led in big decisions, and God had plans for me that I didn't know. I was learning that being saved and delivered is just the beginning of this journey.

One of my biggest decisions was what to do with the offer of going to the Naval Academy and the newfound desire in my heart to serve Christ. I know many godly men and women who serve Him in the Armed Forces, but my motivation for pursuing the Academy was not a godly motivation. It was for personal ambition; it was for deeds to be remembered; it was to be part of something bigger than myself. I started wrestling with this. Should I do this? Should I accept the offer to the Academy, or should I do something different? I didn't tell anyone of my struggle. At the church we were attending, the pastor didn't even know my name, but in December of my senior year of high school this decision had reached the fulcrum: what will I do, where will I go? I brought one of my non-Christian relatives to church with me that Sunday.

At the end of the service, the pastor said that if anyone needs prayer, just come forward. I looked at my non-Christian relative and I said, "I need prayer about my future." That's all I said. I went down the aisle of the church, and I stood about 30 feet from the platform. The pastor didn't even know my name; he had never spoken to me; I hadn't shared with anyone the question of my heart about what I would do about this decision; and the pastor reached his hand out towards me, and in the hearing of several hundred people, began to pray for me. After just a few moments, he looked at me and said these words: "Young man, the Lord would say to you today that He has not called you to be a soldier in the armies of this world, but He has called you to be in His service." That's what it means to be led, and I wept. My non-Christian relative thought, "I think God is real."

So, I declined the Academy and went to a Christian college. Halfway through my Christian college years, there was a church meeting, and a pastor of a local church was invited to speak to the college group. The weather was terrible. A big snowstorm came through the area, and the big crowds we were expecting were reduced by 70 percent, minimum. There was a gathering of perhaps 15 or 20 students in the basement of a United Brethren Church. The pastor came and spoke for about 25 minutes, followed by light refreshments, the kind you find in a fellowship hall of a church. The students listened to this pastor as he spoke from the heart, as though there were 15 or 20,000, not just 15 or 20. Never underestimate what God does in small gatherings. In the middle of his talk, this pastor said, "If you want your life to be about Christ," he said, "many people think you can do that at the water cooler at work, but if you really want your major energies to be about Christ, there's really no better way to do that than in full-time ministry. Again, though I'm kind of a cognitive person not given to mystical visions, I saw that sentence, "There's no better place than full-time ministry." I saw the words come out from him and come right across the room and just land right on my chest. This was before PowerPoint. I knew there was no special effect in the room. I looked around and thought, "Did everyone else see that?" It was the second time I heard God leading me. I had that happen to me five times, and I want to tell you just one other occurrence.

At the end of college, I was living in Washington D.C. in the American Studies program, and I was worshipping at the Falls Church in Virginia with my mentor. We were coming through for communion, and right as I reached the communion station, along with several hundred people in this church, just as I get up to receive communion, I hear: "David, I want you to serve communion some day." I just heard it. That's what it means to be led. God can speak to you directly. He can speak to you through someone else. He will guide your path. I was in the process of discovering that being saved from my distress was for the glorious freedom of serving Him. Psalm 107:8 says:

“Let them give thanks to the LORD for His unfailing love and His wonderful deeds for humankind.”

Give thanks to God.

This stanza concludes concerning the lost man who gives thanks to God because, as Psalm 107:9 says:

“For He satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.”

I want to tell you, my brothers and sisters in Christ, my friends, my flock, that Jesus Christ satisfies, and now, in the almost 30 years it's been since He first delivered me from my distress, I have found no more satisfying thing in this world than serving Jesus Christ. The sense of rootlessness has been replaced with a sense of belonging. The meaning and purpose was found in Christ. Would you believe now that all of my immediate family has accepted Christ as Savior? I have had the privilege of being involved with two-thirds of those. It's amazing! Now we talk about Jesus together. My early athletic promise has been satisfied in soul winning. My ambition to be a military hero has found deep satisfaction by being engaged in the spiritual battle that we are in as I see Christ claim 174,000 every day. I no longer desire my deeds to be remembered or to create a great public impression, but I desire Christ's deeds to be remembered.

I want to challenge you from Psalm 107 to own your story. Over this January, I would like to invite you, encourage and challenge you, to prepare, preferably in writing as I think that's the best way to do it, your own story that's vulnerable and Christ exalting. It's one of your best resources for sharing Christ with those around you. I don't want you to compare your story with anyone else. As you see in my situation, God's call on my life was not to serve in the military because He had a different path for me. Others of you may be called precisely to the military for faithfulness to Him. You may be called to different vocations. Your story, though, is your own, and it's the story that Christ is writing in your lives, and I want you to own it. I want us, as a community, to own it. I want us to own it for Christ's honor, and I want us to possess these stories and to share them freely so that more of our neighbors have signs in their yard of a new church in their community, rather than more of our neighbors having children skateboarding in the ruins of where we used to worship. It's a new day. It's a day when God's people need to speak and share. Psalm 107 gives the imperative: “Let the redeemed tell their story!” We tell what Christ has done uniquely in our lives, living proof that He is who He said He was.

Communion:

The apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26:

“For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when He was betrayed took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, ‘This is My body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same way also He took the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.”

This is an act of worship, and it's for all who have been redeemed by Christ. Whatever the shape of your story, and we will hear different shapes all throughout this month, if Christ has redeemed you from east, west, north, or south, partake together with us and give thanks.

Amen.