Four Portraits of the Thankful Redeemed
Scripture: Psalm 107
Code: 80-176

Well, let's open our Bibles back to Psalm 107. I wanted to redirect our thoughts away from our ongoing study of 2 Corinthians because this is such a special weekend, as we celebrate our time of thanksgiving and I wanted to turn to the Word of God, this morning, and to a Psalm, that is notably a Psalm summoning us to thankfulness. This is such a Psalm.

Now this Psalm has a very special place in my heart for a very interesting reason. One Sunday not too many years ago I read this Psalm as I did this morning. I didn't realize how the reading of that Psalm would impact a young man who was sitting back in that section over there to my left and toward the back. I later came to understand that this Psalm just being read without comment was the turning point in his life.

This was a young man, a very tall and handsome young man named Robert. Some of you came to know him eventually, although he was with us only a short time. He had been for many years a part of the Gay Activist Group in Los Angeles. He was a homosexual. He had lived that lifestyle for many years. He was even involved with people planning the Gay Pride Parade, so he was very aggressive in his advocacy. He had become HIV positive and was told that he had AIDS and had a very, very brief time to live.

Interestingly enough, and he reiterated this entire testimony not only to me but to our congregation when he was baptized a few weeks after the Sunday I read that Psalm, but he said that interestingly enough he asked a friend, "Do you know anywhere I can go and get help? I am going to die and I'm afraid to die. I don't want to die not having a relationship with God and I'm afraid."

And one of his homosexual friends told him, "You need to go to a place called Grace Community Church." Now that's the kind of reputation we want.

And so he came because of the advice of this friend, never having known about our church or been here, and he sat back there. And I started read Psalm 107 and I read verse 6, "They cried out to the Lord in their trouble; He delivered them out of their distresses. He led them also by a straight way," and "straight," of course, has a very strong connotation in homosexual terminology. And then I continued to read and I got down to verse 14...or 13, "They cried out to the Lord in their trouble; He saved them out of their distresses. Brought them out of darkness, the shadow of death, broke their bands apart." And then verse 16, "Shattered gates of bronze and cut bars of iron asunder." And he

said to me, "When you read that I knew I was in the right place." And he said, "I burst into tears and I wanted to cry out to God and I wanted God to lead me in a straight way and break the bars that held me."

But he said, "Then you sang songs, then the choir sang, then you kept preaching and preaching and all I kept thinking was...Why doesn't the guy shut up so I can get up there and find out how to do this?" He said, "I don't remember anything you said except that it just irritated me because I was a wreck and I was weeping and I just wanted somebody to tell me how to cry out to God."

And so he came and that Sunday morning he cried out to God and God heard him and he was delivered from his distress, he was wonderfully saved. He became a shining witness in that community at every opportunity possible proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ to the people who were a part of his former life. He became a part of our church fellowship, gave a wonderful testimony in the waters of Baptism and within a matter of months was in heaven.

This Psalm has a very special place in my heart because of Robert Lagerstrom(?), a quite remarkable testimony of the power of the Word of God just read in the hearing of someone desperately needy. This is a Psalm of desperation. It's a Psalm of thanksgiving from people who have experienced that desperation. I don't think Robert would have any problem responding, he certainly didn't immediately after his conversion, with the summons in verse 1, "Oh give thanks to the Lord." Or the repeat of that summon in verse 8, "Let them give thanks to the Lord," or the repeat of it in verse 21, "Let them give thanks to the Lord," or verse 31, "Let them give thanks to the Lord." This is a summons to give thanks.

From whom is this thanks to come? Verse 2, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say it." Here is a call to us who have experienced redemption, who have experienced deliverance, rescue, renewal, restoration to give thanks.

Over the last few days we have all heard many people expressing thanks. Usually in the public realm that thanks is somewhat vague because it is not directed at anyone in particular. People say, "Well, I'm really very thankful for my family, I'm thankful for my home, I'm thankful for my job. I am thankful for family, friends, love, the provisions, joys, good circumstances." But what is glaringly absent is to whom are you thankful. Blind chance, luck, random circumstances or maybe somebody who came along and sort of manipulated the coincidental forces of life to bring about your good circumstance.

The obvious missing element is to whom all of this thanks is directed and the Psalm is very clear in verse 1, "O give thanks to the Lord." And each time that's repeated all the way through the Psalm it is, "Give thanks to the Lord." It is characteristic of the unregenerate that they are not thankful. They do not give God thanks. Romans 1:21 makes that very clear.

But as Christians, we don't render such oblique and ambiguous thanks. For all we are and all we have and all we ever hope to be we give direct thanks to God. He is the source of absolutely everything good. As James 1 says, "He's the Father of lights in whom there is no variableness or shadow of turning and every good and perfect gift comes down from Him." We understand that. And so, we will understand the summons of Psalm 107 verses 1 to 32.

Let me read you the opening three verses again. "O give thanks to the Lord for He is good, for His loving-kindness," which is an Old Testament word that sort of combines grace and mercy, "is everlasting. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He has redeemed from the hand of the adversary and gathered from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south."

There is that opening direct call to give thanks to God. Now this wonderful Psalm, this summons to thanksgiving was sung by the Jews, especially sung to thank God for redeeming His people, for redeeming the nation from disaster and captivity and death. And the Psalm provides a rich picture of the nature of God's divine work of redemption in redeeming and restoring Israel because of His mercy and His goodness.

As a nation Israel was delivered, redeemed, rescued and restored by God through the centuries. You can go back to Exodus chapter 12 through 14 and you can read about how Israel was redeemed from Egypt to the south. Or you could go over to 2 Kings 19 and read how Israel was redeemed from Syria and Assyria to the north. Or you could go to 2 Samuel 8 or 2 Kings 18 and read how Israel was redeemed from Philistines to the west. Or you could go to the book of Ezra and read how Israel was redeemed from Babylon to the east when brought back from Babylonian captivity. So literally verse 3 was Israel's experience. They were gathered from lands in the east, the west, the north, and the south. God has redeemed His people from the hand of the adversary and gathered them from lands in every direction. And all of Israel had experienced that, either from Egypt or from Assyria and Syria, or from the Philistine empire which basically occupied the coastline of Israel when they moved into the land of Canaan, or from Babylon to the east. This then is a summons for all of Israel to thank God in general for all of His good and merciful deliverances of that nation.

But as important as national and temporal deliverances were, they were merely signs of God's ability to deliver men personally and spiritually from sin. As God demonstrated His great delivering power out of Egypt and from the Assyrians, the Syrians, the Philistines, and the Babylonians, He gave evidence of the fact that He could deliver men not only from earthly and temporal enemies but from spiritual enemies, enemies of the soul, namely the great adversary, the great adversary being Satan who wants to capture all men for his evil purposes and his kingdom of darkness.

The Psalm was most likely sung by the congregation of Israel to celebrate all these historic deliverances and to remind them of God's ability to deliver them individually from sin. It was most likely written after the Babylonian captivity had ended and so they could recite all the past history of these wonderful deliverances. The deliverance from Babylon was really the last of those ancient deliverances and this Psalm, I think, specifically looked at the Babylonian deliverance...not exclusively but certainly it's obvious as we shall see when we go through it that it could have been applied to their seventy years in Babylon. But again, I remind you, it provides general pictures of God's deliverance applicable to all of us who have been delivered from sin.

It's likely that the Psalm was used in worship, sort of liturgically. When the Jews got together after having returned from Babylon and held their first Feast of Tabernacles recorded in Ezra chapter 3, it's very likely that they sung this great hymn. Why? Because they had just experienced rescue, restoration and deliverance. They had just been redeemed from Babylon and this would have been the fitting Psalm to sing. So it perhaps was written very soon after their deliverance.

It is key again to note verse 2 that it is the redeemed of the Lord who are saying thanks for the goodness of God expressed in verse 1 in everlasting grace. An everlasting grace is the grace of salvation. So even though it deals on a historical level, it is that everlasting grace that is the issue here. So we who are also redeemed by everlasting grace can join ancient Israel and genuinely sing this song. We have been touched with eternal mercy. We have tasted its sweetness and so we too are invited to sing this great Psalm...not just Israel but any sinner delivered from death and hell. In fact, Jesus said we too would come from the east and the west, Matthew 8:11, and recline at the table with Abraham, with Isaac, with Jacob in the Kingdom. So He will have redeemed us, the church, from east and west and north and south. And then if you read Revelation 7:9 and 10, out of the time of Tribulation to come before the Lord sets up His Kingdom, He will redeem a people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation and that too would be north and south and east and west, and they also will be gathered to that throng that forever will sing "salvation unto our God." All believers then redeemed by God at all times, whether Israel of old, or whether the present-day church, whether the future gathered out of the Tribulation, all of us are to sing the songs of redemption and to express our gratitude to God. So we who have received God's redeeming mercy and grace join with Israel to sing this Psalm of thanks for our redemption.

After then that opening call of those three verses the Psalm gets very interesting. There are four illustrations of God's redemption, four illustrations running from verse 4 to 32, and we're going to cover them all this morning. That surprises you but it can be done and we will do it...four illustrations of God's redemption.

First, God's redemption is like a lost caravan being led to a safe city. God's redemption is like a captive prisoner in a dungeon waiting execution being set free. God's redemption is like a sick person with no appetite on the brink of death recovering full health. And God's redemption is like a doomed

sailor being rescued from a life-threatening storm. Those are the four magnificent pictures that are given here to illustrate God's redemption. Each of them is poignant, each of them is graphic, each of them is an analogy illustrating the blessedness of God's redemption, how He rescues sinners out of dire circumstances. And one can only envision that when the temple was filled and its courtyard with worshipers and they were crowded from wall to wall in that temple built by Zerubbabel in the restored land after the city was rebuilt, when they came back from Babylon, as they filled up that temple for worship one can only imagine that in preparation for the singing of Psalm 107 verses 1 to 32 that some priest stood up and perhaps pointed to some people in that great throng who had been lost in the desert in some wilderness caravan and who had run out of water and run out of food and were on the brink of death and were lost in the trackless desert with no ability to find the safety of a city and the water and the food that would be there, there were some who knew that experience and knew it well. And, no doubt, he could look out over that great throng and he could identify some who had been prisoners, who in their captivity somewhere had been in a dungeon in the black of that hole, in the filth and misery of that kind of incarceration, in chains waiting execution but had been set free. There were others in that great throng who knew what it was to be on the deathbed, languishing on the brink of death with life ebbing away, having lost their appetite with no hope at all and had been wonderfully and miraculously healed. Surely there were those who had sailed the seas and been on a ship in the midst of a life-threatening storm and the storm had broken and the clouds had parted and the blue sky had been seen and the sea had been stilled and they were able to find their way to a port alive. All of them would be living the illustration that the Psalm makes about God's redeeming grace. It's a beautiful, beautiful picture as the priest would stand before this great throng and recite to them this Psalm for their singing and they could sing it with joy because they understood these illustrations so well.

Now each of the four illustrations has four parts and we're going to take the same little four-part outline to unfold each. First of all is the predicament and that describes the sick situation they were in. Secondly, the petition, that's the cry for deliverance that came from them. Thirdly, the pardon, the merciful redemption that God granted. And fourthly, the praise. Predicament, petition, pardon, praise, just those four, we'll unfold each illustration.

Our redemption from sin then is...is imaged in these analogies. Our redemption is like lost people being found, locked people in a prison being set free, languishing people with a deadly sickness being healed and life-threatened people at sea being led to a safe harbor. Each of these provides a look at God's goodness and mercy in very simple and yet very beautiful terms.

Let's take the first one, lost in a wilderness...lost in a wilderness. And here we meet the restless soul, here we meet the aimless people wandering all over the place with no particular direction in mind, having lost their bearings no knowing where they're going, restless, aimless, lost sinners running out of food, starved and thirsty, wandering hopelessly in a trackless desert trying to find a city they cannot find, a city that would provide food and water and rest and joy and fellowship and safety.

Let's look at their predicament in verses 4 and 5. "They wandered in the wilderness in a desert region." They didn't find a way to an inhabited city. "They were hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them." This could well depict Israel in the wilderness for forty years after the exodus from Egypt as they wander around in the desert in circles, aimlessly, restlessly. You can read about that from Numbers 14 through Joshua chapter 2. And the Jews roamed the wasted and howling desert between Egypt and Canaan as a result of divine judgment. And, of course, most of them died in that wilderness, never having been led to an inhabited city.

It is also true, however, that the imagery could describe Israel in Babylon because Babylon, of course, is a desert place. It is a desert as a nation, it was a cultural desert, it was a social desert, it was a religious desert of paganism. And they were as a nation at the very point of perishing. Israel in Babylon was on the brink of going out of existence.

But beyond that, this imagery can also describe any troubled destitute, forlorn, lost sinner...any wandering aimless sinner struggling to find his way in the trackless barrenness of sin with no soul supplying spiritual bread and no soul supplying spiritual water and no hope but to perish in the wilderness.

So sinners wander. They wander looking for a place of safety. They wander looking for a place of refuge, a place of security, a place of fellowship, a place of joy, a place of provision. They find it not. And so the wandering sinner is in a predicament.

In verse 6 we find that this sinner comes to a petition. "Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble." Israel cried to the Lord in Egypt and He heard them and delivered them. Israel cried to the Lord in Babylon and He heard them and delivered them. Cyrus made a decree that sent them back to the land to rebuild their city. They told God of their famished condition. They told God of their oppression. They told God they were lost in a wilderness, in a desert and God responded. They illustrate then sinners, sinners of every age of any time, even today, who recognize their aimlessness, who come to the end of the restlessness, who realize their hunger and their thirst, who know their deprivation, who have a grip on the danger of their condition. They're wandering in the wilderness of sin from place to place, from thrill to thrill, from job to job, from marriage to marriage, relationship to relationship, from experience to experience without ever finding any soul food, without ever finding any lasting satisfaction. They're trying to find the way to an inhabited city that will satisfy them and give them security and safety but they can't. They're looking like Abraham did in Hebrews 11 verse 10 for a city whose builder and maker is God. And in the midst of their desperation they finally recognize that's who they need, that only God can provide that refuge. And so they cry out to Him as all of us did in our lostness. The whole world is a vast and barren desert, a place that is a wasteland, empty, stark and threatening and deadly. And those who are desperate enough and hungry enough and thirsty enough and lost enough finally come to the place where they cry out to God. They call to Him

as the King of an eternal city in which there are limitless resources, provisions, rest, security and satisfactions.

And how does God respond? The third point is the pardon. From the predicament to the petition, and then the pardon...this is so wonderful. Verse 6, "He delivered them out of their distresses, He led them also by a straight way to go to an inhabited city." When the sinner cries to God, He answers. When Israel called to God, He answered. He heard Israel, He brought Israel out of Egypt. He heard Israel, He brought Israel out of Babylon. And though all hope seemed gone, they were redeemed. And God led them out of Babylon by a straight way. Cyrus made that decree, he made the way open, he provided all that they needed, sent them on their way, gave them Nehemiah to be their leader, gave them someone to make sure they were safe.

The journey was a straight journey, right into an inhabited city...the city of Jerusalem which they rebuilt and restored. So it is with God. When the sinner comes to Him and cries, that's all it takes, there's not any works here, this is all about lovingkindness which is the Old Testament word chesed meaning grace or mercy. This is all about grace. It doesn't day they did a few things, they straightened up their life. It says they cried out to the Lord in their trouble. And that's where the sinner has to come. He offers nothing. He brings nothing. He has nothing to offer, no works, no achievements, no accomplishments. He just says, "I am dying." And he cries to God and God responded with a pardon. "He delivered them out of his distresses, led them by a straight way to go to an inhabited city." That is grace, my friend, that is grace.

And a straight way...all that means is it's direct and it's not circuitous, and it's not up and down, and it's not hard to travel. It's reminiscent of what Jesus said when He said, "Come into Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you...what?...rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me for My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

The way is the way of grace, not the way of works. And when the sinner comes and cries to God, God pardons the sinner. And that leads to the fourth point, that kind of goodness, that kind of grace, that kind of mercy carries an obligation. And what is the obligation? Verses 8 and 9, "Let them give thanks to the Lord for His longing kindness and for His wonders to the sons of men for He has satisfied the thirsty soul and the hungry soul He has filled with what is good." You who were thirsty and hungry, out on that wandering barren desert with no way to go and no map, no direction, no path to an inhabited city, no hope for resources cried out to God, He gave you everything you needed. Certainly you are obligated to give Him thanks for that grace. What could deserve more the thanks of God's people than that we are safely led to that inhabited city. What is that inhabited city? It's heaven, the heavenly city and we have a straight path and we're on it headed to that city. Revelation 7 verse 15 puts it this way, "When we get there, before the throne of God, we will serve Him day and night in His temple. He who sits on the throne shall spread His tabernacle over them, they shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore, neither shall the sun beat down on them, nor any heat...we're out of that

desert, we're in the inhabited and wonderful city of heaven...the Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their Shepherd and guide them to the springs of the water of life and God shall wipe every tear from their eyes."

That's heaven. It's not a desert, it's not barren, it's a rich and wonderful place. In Revelation chapter 22 it has a river of the water of life, it has trees on either side of the river yielding fruit, there's no curse there. And we'll see His face and His name will be on our foreheads. And in chapter 21 He'll wipe away every tear. There will be no more death, no more mourning, crying, pain, it's all gone. That's the inhabited city we're headed for. And the redeemed of the Lord are called to say thanks. Lost in a wilderness we have been rescued and we are on our straight way to that inhabited city. And even though we haven't gotten to the city yet, the King who is in charge of that city has sent resources to us to help us on our journey, to enrich us on our journey so that we lack nothing.

The second illustration is locked in a prison. Lost in a wilderness and locked in a prison, verses 10 to 16. If the word "restless" marks the first illustration, the word "miserable" marks this one. This is misery. The predicament in verses 10 to 12, "There were those who dwelt in darkness and in the shadow of death, prisoners in misery and chains." What you have here is someone in a dungeon on death row waiting imminent execution. It is pitch-black dark. They're in the very shadow of death, which means their execution is looming near. They are in chains and the consequent misery and filth of that condition is depicted. People in ancient times knew well what horrors that kind of imprisonment produced.

Why are they there? Verse 11, "Because they had rebelled against the words of God and spurned the counsel of the Most High, therefore He humbled their heart with labor, they stumbled and there was none to help." The predicament could speak of Israel being in Egypt. They stumbled. They had to make bricks. They had to make bricks without straw. It was hard, hard labor. It was a kind of darkness, it was definitely the shadow of death, even the angel of death came. They were prisoners in a foreign land. They had a miserable kind of existence as slaves in Egypt.

More recently, however, it could also depict the Babylonian experience. That too was like an imprisonment with no hope of freedom. They were captive there in that...in that dungeon of paganism. There was no light of day for them. And they were at hard labor working to eke out an existence as a people in a foreign land. They were on death row. They was the possibility of national extinction, or national execution. The calamitous situation was brought about because of their rebellion against God. And, of course, all the prophets had told them that. All the way along the prophets had told them, "You're going to go into captivity." Isaiah told them all about it. Jeremiah told them all about it. Ezekiel, of course, went in the first deportation and reiterated the destruction of Jerusalem is going to come and rebellion against God was the root sin that led Israel into their imprisonment in Babylon. And the sad condition of Israel's imprisonment is made even more poignant when you think about what happened to their king. The king in actually the land of Judah, but we say Israel because that

was all there was of the nation Israel after the northern kingdom had already left in 722. Over a hundred years later, all that's left of Israel is the southern kingdom, Judah.

They were taken into captivity and along with them their evil king who also had rebelled against the Lord, as Isaiah clearly tells us. It's also told in 2 Kings 25. His name was Zedekiah. And Zedekiah was hauled off with the rest of the Jews into this captivity and he becomes like an illustration of their imprisonment. What happened was, they took Zedekiah there, they took his sons there and they took all the nobles of his court there. Then before the eyes of Zedekiah, you can read about this in 2 Kings 25, Jeremiah 39 and then over in Jeremiah 52, before the eyes of Zedekiah they massacred his sons and then they slaughtered all the nobles of his land right before his eyes. And immediately after they massacred all those people in his full vision, they ripped his eyes out. That was to be his permanent torture that the last thing he ever saw was this massacre of the nobles and of his own children, and then they hauled him off in chains. He is a...he is a sort of microcosm of the whole Babylonian captivity of the disobedient nation Israel because he was part and parcel of their disobedience as an ungodly and wicked king. They had chosen to disobey God. He had chosen to disobey God. And so they were hauled off into the dungeon of Babylon.

But beyond that, this is the illustration of any sinner who is in the misery of the dungeon of his own making, who himself has rebelled against God, disobeyed God's Word, disregarded God's Word, found life to be hard, found himself stumbling and falling and helpless and dark. All that slavery, servitude and a dungeon existence could bring about the sinner experiences spiritually. He is chained to his own iniquities. He is sort of sitting and wallowing in his own filth. He is in the darkness with no hope of light and life is very, very hard. When he does work it's just hard labor without help. Any man who rejects God is going to find that's how life is. And even though he may try to overcome his misery by sort of gritting his teeth and getting a firm grip on life and doing it his way and trying to master life and cram it with numbing experiences that sort of take away the pain of its hardness and failure. Can't be done...can't be done.

Adam and all his posterity have rebelled against God and His Word. The whole race is imprisoned in the dungeon of darkness, sitting in its own filth. Life is hard. Life is unfulfilling. All of Satan's pledges and promises are only lies and they only afflict sinners with more cruelty and pain. The soul of sinners then is confined to the prison of iniquity, guilt and dissatisfaction bound with chains, too strong to be broken and living in total darkness. Sinners are confined then to the deepening misery of their own lust and their own passion which becomes like so many tormentors inflicting them even more. And all they can look forward to is execution.

In that condition we come in verse 13 to the petition and this is where we all had to come. "Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble."

Somebody might say, "Well it's probably a hopeless cry if you've lived your life like that, if you've been a rebel against God. If you've been wandering in the wilderness of sin, what use to cry out to God?" But Israel cried to God for deliverance and it came. And they went back and rebuilt their land.

And when the imprisoned sinner's so humbled and so recognizes his own filth that he pleads with God for deliverance because there's nowhere else to turn, then comes number three, the pardon. Verse 13 again, "He saved them out of their distresses; He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death and broke their bands apart." This is grace, folks, this is absolute pure grace. There's nothing achieved here. There's nothing offered except the wreckage of life. This is grace at its most graphic. This is lovingkindness which is grace. The sinner's chains, like Peter's, fell off at the word of the Redeemer and he's brought into the light. Not because of anything he's done, but in spite of everything he's done. Charles Wesley said, "He breaks the power of cancelled sin and sets the prisoner free." Suddenly and instantaneously he is freed.

Isaiah saw this, Isaiah 55...Isaiah 42 rather, Isaiah chapter 42, "It is the Lord the God who created the heavens and stretched them out, the One who spread out the earth and its offspring, the One who gives breath to the people in it and spirit to those who walk in it. I am the Lord. I've called you in righteousness. I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you. I will appoint you a covenant to the people, a light to the nations...verse 7, Isaiah 42...to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon and those who dwell in darkness from the prison." God delights in setting the people in the dungeons free.

Isaiah 45:1, "It is God who opens doors." Verse 2, "It is God who goes before and makes rough places smooth. It is God who shatters the doors of bronze and cuts through iron bars." God loves to set sinners free from their prisons and He does it suddenly and instantaneously just because they ask.

What do you tell a sinner who's at this point? Cry out to God and ask for redemption, ask Him to forgive your sin. Jesus said, "Him that comes to Me I'll in no wise cast out." He hears the cry of the desperate sinner.

And that leads us to the fourth point in the second illustration and it means that such deliverance brings an obligation. The obligation is praise, verses 15 and 16, "Let them give thanks to the Lord for His lovingkindness and for His wonders to the sons of men for He has shattered gates of bronze and cut bars of iron asunder." The only proper response to grace, to grace redemption is thanks.

The third illustration, lost in a wilderness, locked in a prison, thirdly, languishing in a sickness...languishing in a sickness. Verses 17 to 22, another picture of lostness, it's the picture of a person who is sick and depressed.

The predicament, verse 17 and 18, "Fools because of their rebellious way," again there's always culpability, there's a reason why people are in this condition, it's because they rebel against God, "and because of their iniquities were afflicted." That's the consequence of sin. They were so afflicted, here's the severity, "Their soul abhorred all kinds of food; and they drew near to the gates of death."

I have been at the bedside of a number of people recently who have died of cancer, and one of the characteristics of near death is disdain for any food. They begin to have no appetite and perhaps for days, or certainly for hours and sometimes even weeks they refuse to eat. This is the severity of their illness, severe near-death illness results in a loss of appetite. And that's what he's picturing here. The predicament is Israel is like a sick person with a fatal disease in their Babylonian captivity and redemption would be like some kind of healing, but they've lost all hope, they've lost all appetite. They don't want to eat, they don't even want the very food that could give them life and sustain them. Sickness then pictured as so severe that there is a loss of appetite and nearness to death.

Israel in Babylon was like that, languishing in sickness, near extinction, near to be obliterated, wiped out with absolutely no appetite for the very godly things in some ways that could have rescued them. It's reminiscent of Numbers 21, you can read it yourself, verses 4 through 9, the story of the serpent, Moses making a bronze serpent and the people that were sick could look up to the serpent and be healed. Of course, it's a picture of Jesus Christ. This is the same kind of desperate sickness that they had experienced back in Numbers 21. The imagery also has, of course, application beyond Israel. Sinners are sick and sinners have a deadly incurable ailment and some of them have lost all interest in what is true, in what is right, and what is good what could be the food to sustain their life? They're hopeless and they're on the brink of death. There's a consequent loss of appetite for life, for anything else. There's a consequent depression, probably the reason so many people commit suicide. They are void of any appreciation for anything. Life becomes jaded and bizarre. You see it in the youth culture of today in these many people who kill themselves, like this guy this week, this rock musician who hanged himself. They...they're so depressed, so neurotic, so unfulfilled, so unable to handle life with its anxieties and its guilt that there's just no peace for the wicked, Isaiah 48:22. And they hate the only food that can save them. And once they've denounced all the people, helpers, all the physicians and all the psychiatrists and all the psychologists, they're hopeless.

So, sinners are like lost wanderers, restless and aimless. They're like prisoners chained and held in dungeons waiting death. They're like depressed neurotics who can't cope. And in each case death is imminent.

But some sinners in the throes of the horrors of this sickness make a petition, verse 19, "Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble." Remember, they were rebellious. They were iniquitous. They were fools. And now they're in desperate condition and they cried out to the Lord in their trouble.

Somebody might say, "That's not fair." You're right, that's not fair, that's grace...that's grace. They cried out.

And the third point, pardon came. Verse 19, "He saved them out of their distresses." It says that every time. It doesn't give any qualifications, it just says He delivered them out of their distresses, He saved them out of their distresses. Why? Because they...what?...asked. You understand that? That's grace. Because they asked, not because they did anything else, they just asked. They cried out in desperation. And when the sinner realizes he's lost and starving, and when the sinner realizes he's bound in a dungeon and doomed to execution, and when a sinner realizes he has a fatal disease from which there is no cure, that level of desperation produces the petition that brings the pardon. Sinners sick with their guilt, sick with their anxiety, listless, depressed and troubled without an appetite for divine food, and having no inclination even for virtue, nauseated by the Scripture, nauseated by the bread of life may still call on the great Physician, the restorer and the Redeemer who will come to them and intervene with full healing.

All these sinners are sick but they were healed by grace. And that leads to point four, the obligation. Verse 21, "Let them give thanks to the Lord for His lovingkindness and for His wonders, wonderful acts, to the sons of men! Let them also offer sacrifices of thanksgiving and tell of His works with joyful singing."

That's what we do when we come together to worship. You understand that? Some people don't understand what the church is. It's a group of redeemed sinners that gather together to thank God for their redemption. That's what we are, that's what we do, to praise Him, to offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, to tell of His works with joyful singing, His wonders to the sons of men! And so, praise is the right response to the goodness of God.

Lost in a wilderness, locked in a prison, languished in a sickness, that's us. And finally, life threatened in a storm. We were also not only like lost people in a caravan and prisoners in a dungeon and sick people on a death bed, but we're like sailors in the midst of a deadly storm. Restless, yes; miserable, yes; sick, yes; and here fearful, frightened, terrified. This last illustration portrays the terrors of sinners as they really understand their condition. Some just drown, but some sinners get a grip on their condition. By the mercy of God they're brought to understand it.

Look at their predicament in verses 23 to 27. "Those who go down to the sea in ships, who do business on great waters, they have seen the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep." Talking about the ocean here. People who do their business on the sea, who travel all the time on the kind of ships in the ancient world that were so frail, do their business on great waters, they know what it's like. Verse 25, "They've seen the works of the Lord, for He spoke and raised up a stormy wind." They knew what it was to be in a stormy wind which lifted up the waves of the sea. "They rose up to

the heavens, they went down to the depths; their soul melted away in their misery. They reeled and staggered like a drunken man and were at their wits end." That simply means they had nowhere to go. There was no solution. They were at the end of any wise response. All their wisdom literally was swallowed up.

This requires very little comment. This is a situation where a ship is in a storm. Israel's captivity was like a storm at sea, like Jonah's experience with the sailors headed for Tarshish. There's nothing I hear...I understand from my reading, nothing more frightening than being on a sinking ship. Being on an airplane headed for the ground in a crash is not as frightening, the time, of course, is very brief. The defense mechanisms built into you called "shock," I understand, sort of enter in to that because it's such an immediate imminent death. But people who talk about these kinds of things, the fear of death, say that the most frightening kind of death is the death in a storm with the imminent possibility of drowning and all the time to imagine that consequence because you might be in that storm for days or even weeks, as we read in Acts 27 was the experience of the Apostle Paul.

It is such a severe trauma that it says it caused their souls to melt. Literally terror seized their hearts...no harbor, no rescue, no hope, just a relentless smashing, frightening storm. And certainly the Babylonian captivity seemed like a relentless storm that swept the nation and threatened to drown it all. Certainly for the sinner, every sinner living apart from God is in a storm-tossed sea of terror without hope. The world, in fact, is a sea to sinners and it's a troubled sea. Temptations, sorrows and sufferings are its waves. And the prince of the power of the air is its stormy wind. And heaven is its only safe harbor but it can't be reached by all the sailor's efforts. The violence of life, the uncertainty of like pictured as the waves rise to the heavens and sink to the depths, the tremendous rise and fall and this little ship going to the heights and plunging to the depths, the agitations of life, the elevations and depressions of the mind, the impending death can produce terror in the sinner.

The sinner may respond with that petition, look at it in verse 28. When they've come to the end of their wits, when all wisdom has been swallowed up and there's nowhere to turn, "Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble." There it is again. No rescue possible humanly and they called on the Lord. And here comes grace again, "And He brought them out of their distresses." Just that matter of fact, just that sudden, instantaneous and immediate. He brought them out.

"He caused the storm to be still, so that the waves of the sea were hushed. Then they were glad because they were quiet. So He guided them to their desired haven." That depicts the rescue. People in the caravan found the city. The people in prison were set free. The ones who were sick were made whole. The people in the storm were safely led completely out of the storm into a haven.

From the restless, miserable, sick, fearful lives headed nowhere with no resources, hopelessly, aimlessly wandering toward death and hell God came. We called on Him. He rescued us, restored us, redeemed us. He led us to a city, a heavenly city, out of prison to freedom, from deadly

sickless...sickness to eternal health, from terror to safety in the harbor of His own glory.

And again, what's our obligation? Look at it, the last point, praise again. Verse 31, "Let them give thanks to the Lord for His lovingkindness and for His wonders to the sons of men!"

The same response. Folks, we're called to thanks in this incredible Psalm because we are these people. We are these people. We are the wanderers. We are the prisoners. We are the sick. We're the sailors. We've been rescued and the only appropriate response is to give thanks. And verse 32 says this, "Let them extol Him...here's the sum of it...in the congregation of the people and praise Him at the seat of the elders."

The seat of the elders was the place where the elders taught, the congregation gathered. What he's saying is do that when you come together. That's what we're supposed to be doing. We come together today and we sing, "Now thank we all our God with heart and soul and voices," right? That's what we do. That's worship...that's worship. This is a summons to an incessant gratitude for the grace of our salvation. You see the desperation of sinners and we have nothing to commend ourselves with and all we do is cry out and God delivers us. How can He do it? He can do it because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ who paid for the sins of sinners. And because He took your place and died your death and paid for your sins, God can give you His forgiveness and His deliverance.

For those of us who have received that deliverance, this is a call to thanks. But there are some of you who have not. You're still wandering in the trackless wilderness, hungry and thirsty and perishing. You're still in the darkness of the dungeon waiting execution. You're still on your deathbed with a fatal illness. You're still in a life-threatening storm that's going to drown you.

But I have some good news for you. Here is an invitation from the prophet Isaiah that is a good way to finish our message. Isaiah 55:6 and 7, "Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He's near." Before it's too late, before you've gone under the waves for the last time, before you have lost your way for the last time and have nothing to sustain your life, before you breathe your last breath, before you are taken to the executioner, call upon the Lord while He may be found, while He is near. "Let the wicked forsake his way," the way you're going, "and the unrighteous man his thoughts," the way you've ordered your own life, "and return to the Lord and He will have compassion on him. And return to our God for He will abundantly pardon." That is one of the great invitations of the Scripture.

Most of us have done that. We've come to God and He pardoned all our sin because of what Christ has done for us. So I say to you, let the redeemed of the Lord say thanks. And for those who aren't redeemed, call upon the Lord and be rescued and join us who thank Him for His redemption. Let's pray together.

Father, this is such rich, moving testimony of Your grace. It's so remarkable. The simplicity with which the psalmist expresses that You saved them out of all their troubles just because they asked...and that's how it still is. If a sinner will come, forsake his sin, his way, his own thoughts and ask You to save him from his sin and its consequence, You will do it. Jesus came to seek and save sinners, to seek and save what was lost. Father, we pray that sinners here who have not cried out to You will see the desperation of their condition. And while You are still near, while You can still be found, they will cry out to You for deliverance, forgiveness and salvation. We thank You, O God, with all our being for Your great redemption. Thanks be to God, thanks be to God.

We can say that every waking moment and never fill up the thanks that You ought to receive. Lord, little wonder that You have told us "in everything give thanks." How we fail to be thankful when we have such a great redemption and so undeserved. We bless Your name with thanksgiving. Amen.

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