**His Love Lasts Forever**

**Psalm 107**

11/23/14

Thought for Meditation:

“The worst moment for the atheist is when he is really thankful, and has nobody to thank.”

*Dante Gabriel Rossetti*

“If the only prayer you say in your whole life is “Thank you” that would suffice.” *Meister Eckhart*

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Before Max Lucado became a popular Christian author he was a missionary in Brazil. He tells the story of going to a funeral on a hot summer day. In the middle of a crowded chapel was the casket of a woman who had been killed in a car accident. Her name was Dona Neusa. She had a son named Cesar, who was one of the first members in Max's church. Cesar and his sister, and several other family members were standing around the casket, weeping openly and comforting each other. There was another young lady standing with the family, very dignified and elegantly dressed, yet she didn’t look like she belonged. She was taller than the others and had much darker skin. She stood there without weeping, neither comforting, nor being comforted, by the others. Her name was Carmelita. I’ll tell you who she was and why she was there after we look at our Scripture passage this morning.

Psalm 107 is a Psalm of Thanksgiving. It has a clear structure. It starts with an

introductory call to give thanks – verses 1-3:

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, those he redeemed from trouble and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.

(*Psalm 107:1-3*)

The key word in this introduction is steadfast love. Sometimes it is translated love or mercy. It is one of the classic Hebrew words used to describe God – chesed. God’s chesed includes his feelings of love for his people. God loves us. God even likes us. But God’s chesed is more than just his feelings about us. It is also an action. Chesed includes what God does for us. *God fulfills his promises to us. He protects us. He feeds us and keeps us alive. God saves us.*

I want your help as we try to remember God’s chesed, God’s love. Every time I say “Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good;” I want you to respond, “His love lasts forever.” Let’s try it. **“Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good;” “*His love lasts forever.*”**

 After the introduction there are four stanzas. Each stanza follows a pattern. First, there are some people who have a problem. Second, these people cry out to God and God helps them. Finally, the people who have been helped are called to give thanks for God’s steadfast love.

The first problem is that some people were lost in the desert. Look at verse 4:

Some wandered in the desert wastes, finding no way to an inhabited town; hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress; he led them by a straight way, until they reached an inhabited town. Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind. For he satisfies the thirsty, and the hungry he fills with good things.

(*Psalm 107:4-9*)

The desert can be a beautiful place, but it can also be dangerous and scary, a place you could die. The people who were in the desert ran out of food and water – they were hungry and thirsty. They were also lost – they couldn’t find their way to a town where they would be safe. The desert felt like a god-forsaken place. But it wasn’t. God was there. And because of God’s steadfast love he delivered them. They couldn’t find their way to the town, but God led them on a straight path into the town. They were saved. Therefore they were called to give thanks.

 I hope that no one here ever gets lost in a desert. And certainly as we think about Thanksgiving Day, most of us are not going to be hungry or thirsty. Yet, we’ve all had times when we were lost, if not literally, then spiritually. We lose our faith. We lose our hope. We lose our sense of God’s presence and love. We’ve all experienced emptiness. Our hunger is emotional or vocational. Our thirst is for relationships or peace. We know what it is like to be lost and afraid, to be spiritually hungry and thirsty. Jesus is the one who fills us up and satisfies our hunger and thirst. Jesus is the bread of life who says “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matthew 5:6). Jesus is the living water who says “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me” (John 7:37). **“Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good;” “*His love lasts forever.*”** [7:00]

The second situation involves people in prison. Look at verse 10:

Some sat in darkness and in gloom, prisoners in misery and in irons, for they had rebelled against the words of God, and spurned the counsel of the Most High. Their hearts were bowed down with hard labor; they fell down, with no one to help. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress; he brought them out of darkness and gloom, and broke their bonds asunder. Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind. For he shatters the doors of

bronze, and cuts in two the bars of iron. (*Psalm 107:10-16*)

3000 years ago prisons were far worse than they are today. In most prisons in the ancient world, if you did not have someone on the outside to take care of you, bringing you food and bribing the guards so that they didn’t beat you, you probably would not survive. Notice, in this second situation, why these people were in prison – sin. They had rebelled against God. They had ignored and despised God’s words.

 These people who were in prison cried out and God saved them. God brought them out of darkness. He broke the chains that held them down. He shattered the doors of the prison and set them free.

 I don’t know if anyone here has literally been in prison – I hope not – but all of us have

sinned and rebelled against God. We’ve all experienced darkness. All of us have areas in our lives in which we are held captive by our sins and by our past. There are things in our lives that keep us from loving and obeying God. We are helpless against them and they keep u from

living in God’s love, joy and peace. The good news for us is that Jesus is the light who shines into the darkness of our lives. Jesus is the one who died on the cross for us so that our sins might be forgiven. Jesus is the one who sets us free from anything that might keep us from God. **“Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good;” “*His love lasts forever.*” [9:45]**

 The third problem was sickness. Look at verse 17:

Some were sick through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquities endured affliction; they loathed any kind of food, and they drew near to the gates of death. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress; he sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from destruction. Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind. And let them offer

thanksgiving sacrifices, and tell of his deeds with songs of joy. (*Psalm 107:17-22*)

 These people were so sick that they almost died. They cried out and God saved them. God healed them and brought them back to life. They are called to respond with thanksgiving, but also by telling others what God has done for them. “Let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices, and tell of his deeds with songs of joy” (*Psalm 107:22*). If God is at work in your life, share it with the rest of us so that we might be encouraged and inspired.

 The ancient world didn’t know about germs. They thought disease was caused by sin. Today we understand that sickness is caused by germs, though we can’t completely ignore the possibility that sin is involved. Either way – when we are sick or when we are aware of sin in our lives, we are invited to cry to the Lord, who heals our sickness, who forgives our sins and gives us eternal life. This isn’t a promise that if we believe and if we pray, we will never get sick or die. It is a promise that no matter what our problem is God always welcomes our prayers. God always forgives our sins, and that even sickness or death can’t take away God’s love. **“Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good;” “*His love lasts forever.*”**

 The fourth stanza is interesting. Some people are caught in a storm on the ocean. Verse

23:

Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the mighty waters; they saw the deeds of the Lord, his wondrous works in the deep. For he commanded and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea. They mounted up to heaven, they went down to the depths; their courage melted away in their calamity; they reeled and staggered like drunkards, and were at their wits’ end. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he brought them out from their distress; he made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. Then they were glad because they had quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven. Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to humankind. Let them extol him in the congregation of the people,

and praise him in the assembly of the elders. (*Psalm 107:23-32*)

 Anyone who has been caught in a hurricane knows the destructive power of creation, and the fear that goes along with it. “Their courage melted away in their calamity; they reeled and staggered” (*Psalm 107:26b-27a*). Notice that in this situation the problem is not caused by sin. The people were going about their business and God brought a storm.

The storms of our lives may be cause by our sin. But they may not be. Sometimes in life storms happen for no apparent reason. We may never know why something happens, but in our storms we are invited to pray, to ask for God’s help. The storms of our lives may be physical, emotional or spiritual. You receive a diagnosis of cancer. The phone rings in the middle of the night – there has been a car accident. You go through a divorce. You lose your job. When a storm comes into your life, cry out to God. Call to him for help.

 I love the story in the New Testament of the time Jesus and the disciples were in a boat on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus went to sleep. A storm comes but it doesn’t wake him up. How can he sleep as the waves batter the boat and water comes in? Do you remember what wakes Jesus up? The disciples cry out for help. He wakes up and calms the storm. Jesus is the one who will save us from the storms of our lives. When he does **“Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good;” “*His love lasts forever.*” [16:00]**

 Twenty years before the funeral of Dona Neusa, Cesar and his family had visited a small town in the center of Brazil. While they were there they met Carmelita. At that point she was a seven-year-old orphan, living with poverty stricken relatives. Her mother was a prostitute. She never knew her father. Dona Neusa had been moved by Carmelita’s story. She knew that unless someone intervened, Carmelita would probably have a terrible life. To survive she might even need to become a prostitute like her mother. Dona Neusa was filled with compassion and invited Carmelita to come back with her and become part of her family. One day Carmelita had no love, no home, and no family. The next day she had all three.

At the end of the funeral everyone filed out of the chapel. Carmelita stayed behind by the casket. Max watched Carmelita from a distance. She stood at the side of the coffin, tears silently streaming down her face, saying goodbye to the woman who had given her life, who had given her hope for the future, who had given her love. Through her tears Carmelita spoke two words, “Thank you. Thanks you. Thank you.” **“Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good;” “*His love lasts forever.*”**

As you know Thursday is Thanksgiving – a day for giving thanks. The truth is we ought to give thanks every day. However, here is my challenge for you, and for me. Sometime this week I encourage you to get a piece of paper and write down ten things for which you are thankful, ten ways that God has blessed you, or ten ways that God has answered your prayers. **“Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good;” “*His love lasts forever.*”** [19:00]