

Psalm 107 – Sermon Tregear – 7.2.2021 – God loves you. Really?!

We often say, sometimes rather lightly, that “God loves you”. But what does that mean? Just suppose that God really does love you, with an unchanging love – that he has always loved you, that he loves you now, and that that he will love you until eternity. Imagine that he can never love you more than he loves you today, and he will never love you less. It sounds wonderful. If it is true.

This is what the New Testament teaches is true of all who belong to Christ. At Mary Kay’s memorial service we heard read from Romans 8, “nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord”. We are told that all through the Old Testament God kept his covenant love for his people and this continues today.

So. Let us suppose it is true. What happens when you set your story – the story of your life as it is actually lived – alongside this claim about the love of God? Does it seem to be true? Or would it be more accurate to say that our experience suggests that God loves us more on some days than on others? We have good times and bad times: can it really be true that God loves us as much on the darker days as on the brighter ones.

This psalm invites us, if we are wise, to listen carefully to the psalm.

Books 4 & 5 of Psalms were collected and compiled for those who had returned from exile. The focus is very much on God and the hopes that the people had in him. The exile was a huge event; it hung like a huge shadow over the Jews in the 700 years leading up to Jesus.

God had brought his people into the promised land, he had established the kingship of David, the temple had been built – yes God was with us. There might be problems outside of Israel, there might even be problems in my own life, but as long as Jerusalem was ok, as long as the Temple was still there, then God was still

with us, watching over us, protecting us. But then the Temple had been destroyed, the city of Jerusalem left in ruins, and many people killed or carried off into captivity to a foreign land. God's presence had been taken away from them. It's hard for us to imagine what this felt like for the Israelites. It was probably a bit like some of the people a year ago who lost their houses in the bushfire; but many didn't just lose their houses, they lost their business; years of hard work gone up in smoke in a few minutes of devastating fury. If you then added to that that they were taken off to another country and they would likely never return; they could never rebuild their home. That's what it was like for these exiles who had returned.

This psalm 107 is written as the exiles have started to return home. They were still under the domination of a foreign power, yet they were living in the land that God had said this is for my people. Where is God in all this? It seemed a bit like he'd abandoned us when we went into exile. Does God still love us? And this is the central cry of this psalm. As we read this psalm together let us consider for ourselves today – Is God still with us during this time of Covid? Does God still love us when we see oppression, people standing against God? When we suffer sickness? Difficult relationships?

Psalm 107 is a very ordered and carefully arranged psalm:

v.1-3 – Intro – Give thanks to God, for he is good; his love endures forever. Now remember this is a person who has grown up in a foreign land; he'd heard of how his ancestors had their homes destroyed and then were taken to Assyria or Babylon. He heard how the Temple had been smashed, and he's been in exile in a foreign land. But he's still telling us "God's love endures(doesn't end) forever." It's like that battery, is it Eveready that just goes on and on. And then in v.2 and let

those who have been rescued or redeemed, set free and those who've been gathered/rounded up tell others your story.

v. 4-32 – We're given 4 different scenarios about difficult situations. Although our passage says "Some" so it seems like there are 4 different groups of people, the word should be translated, "They". It's a reference to the whole group of Israelites who were in exile have experienced difficulties in these kinds of ways:

It's a poem remember, and this follows a particular pattern.

a) Description of the condition/situation of these people

b) "Then they cried out to the Lord" – looking to God for help and how he rescues them

c) Thanksgiving to God – in the first two he describes how God changes their situations and in the last two how they should tell others of God's acts (like the opening in v.2&3)

So let's look at these 4 Scenarios:

a) They had no city (v. 4-9) – they are lost v.4 they can't find a way,v.5 – they are hungry and thirsty, exhausted, and isolated. Then they cry out to God in their trouble and God leads them to a city where they could settle. The people were lost and dissatisfied. We too experience this lostness and hunger in different ways – maybe through difficult relationships. But God brings us home; it is God who satisfies our hunger; he is the God of **unfailing love; his love does not change.**

Jesus knew this God, his Father, as the God of unchanging love. He made his Father known as he fed the hungry. And Jesus is in his own person, the Way – the one who leads us to a city, a place where we'll always be with God, never separated or lost.

b) The 2nd group in v.10, they sit in chains; they're captives (v.11-16) – they are guilty, people who rebelled against God. We know, don't we, how our sin

drags us down to a place that can be like the darkness described in v.10. We do things that hurt ourselves, we feel a sense of shame and a sense of condemnation from which we cannot break free ourselves. In response to the people's cry God breaks their chains and bars (v.14,16). But notice, it was God himself who had chained them in v.12. If they deserve his punishment, which they did, how can he do this? This connects to the mentions of God's wrath last week (in v.7-11 of Psalm 90) – why is God full of wrath – I thought he was a loving God. Well He is but he is also a God who is just – there are consequences for rebellion. Just imagine if he was not just?!! If there was no justice and we could all just do whatever we wanted, no consequences. It would be hell.) What does God do though? Yes, the people have been disobedient and they have been punished. But what does God do. He rescues them, delivers them, brings them out of darkness, breaks their chains. And as we reflect on Jesus we know now that God can cut through his own bars because he bore his own judgement in Jesus (Isaiah 53:6; Gal. 3:13; Romans 3:25). It's crazy isn't it? God takes the punishment that is rightfully ours; he takes it on himself. So v.13 urges us, Cry to the Lord – no matter how great the sin – and he will hear you.

c) The 3rd scenario describes the self-damaged – here are people who have ruined themselves. They are sick (v.18) "drawing near to the gates of death" because of their sin, because they have become fools (v.17). "Fools" in the Bible are not just regular sinners but those who become destructively self-absorbed and self-deceived and often actively oppose God. The picture is of those who have badly damaged their spiritual and physical health through foolish lifestyles. They've just indulged themselves, doing whatever they want. When God responds, they are not merely forgiven but healed by His Word(v.20), this is a theme that runs throughout the Bible. God speaks a

word and the world is created; a miracle takes place. Jesus speaks a word and healing and wholeness come. Again, it is God's unfailing love that shines through. So we give thanks to the Lord again for his unfailing love. Now, in v.22, those who were dying tell of God's works with songs of joy. Believing the Gospel does not bring pardon for sin but also renovates us wholly – mind, will, and emotions. (Romans 6:15-23)

d) The last scene of the sea reminds us of how small we are and sometimes feel, and how powerfully dangerous is the world in which we live. Here people are threatened by forces far beyond them. Yes, they do see, in v.24, the works of the Lord, and his wonderful creations in the sea. But the sea is often seen in the bible as a place of chaos, a place where powers greater than us threaten us and are too strong for us. Sea travel can be a metaphor for life. There are clear days in which we feel we are in control, that our seacraft can take us anywhere we want to go. But when great storms come up, we realise we are helpless before the huge waves (v.26). The illusion is shattered that life (or the sea) can be tamed through our management skills ("wits", v.27) or with our own strength. Life troubles will sink us, if we are on our own. But God is our haven, our safe place, in storms (v.30). And the NT reminds us that he helps us in two ways – either by removing the storm (Mark 4:35-41) remember when Jesus told the storm to stop or by enabling us to walk through it, looking to him as he did with Peter when he called him to walk to him on the water.

v. 33-43 – Two concluding stanzas are sort of saying to us, ok what do we learn about God, how do we respond. So in v.33-42 the psalmist says that God takes us

through both hard times v.33-34 and 39,40, and also good times. Notice that it's God who is in control of both. The bad times do not just happen: God allows them. Both the bad times and the good times are the consistent outworking of God's unfailing love.

A few weeks ago, as Georgina was leading us, she encouraged us to think about 2020, to reflect on the year. A lot of the talk we hear around us in the world says, "Thank goodness that year is over and behind us. Now let's get a year that takes us back to normal. A year that is better." And yet there are voices aren't there that have said, "Wow, last year we were forced to do things differently. Many of us learnt afresh how much we valued relationships. Or how important it was to maybe have a slower pace to life." So in v.43 the psalmist finishes the psalm by saying, if you're wise you'll think about these things that God has done; these things that have happened in 2020. Heed them, pay attention to them. What is God teaching me? It's easy to just get upset and cry out to God, "Fix it for me". But God wants us to ponder these things and consider them not just as things to put behind us. But to ponder or consider them as loving deeds of the Lord. What is God teaching us? The psalmist has experienced the horrors of exile yet he can say at the end of the psalm – think over the loving deeds of the Lord. Meditate on them. He's convinced that God loves us. Take time with God prayerfully to consider these things.

The psalmist, here in Psalm 107, is convinced that God is good, that God's love endures forever. He tells the exiles give thanks to God, tell others of his unfailing love. I couldn't help thinking, what would he have said if he had written this after seeing Jesus?

You want to know if God loves you?? Look at Jesus. I reckon if this psalmist was writing the psalm now he would rewrite v.43. "Let the one who is wise heed or listen to what I have said AND AND consider, think over the loving deeds of Jesus."

We look at Jesus today, my friends, and we see the love of God walking on this earth.

The New Testament writers continually marvelled over God's love seen in Jesus. Writing to the Romans Paul says, "But God demonstrates his love for us in this: While we were still sinners, enemies of God, Jesus died for us." When writing to the Philippians Paul says you want to know what humility is, gaze on Jesus. He made himself nothing, became a servant, humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross. And the writer to the Hebrews in chapter 12 says you want to know how to overcome sin, how to run the race here on earth, how to live real life.

He says, "Fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith (ie the one who started our faith and the one whose going to perfect and finish it) who for the joy set before him endured the cross....Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." The writer to the Hebrews, I think, has v.43 of Psalm 107 in his mind as he writes. But now he says look at Jesus, this is the one you need to gaze on, to look at closely, to learn from. My friends, it's the same for us today. You want to know how to live; you want to know how to love. Ponder, consider Jesus who shows us God's unfailing love; who shows us that God's love endures forever.

God loves you. Really? Yes, absolutely.

