

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Psalm 107

Bob Bonner

November 22, 2015

We are now entering into the holiday season, and with that comes great expectations: what we would like to see our family doing together, how we expect to spend Thanksgiving dinner, looking forward to being with close friends, or playing in the snow with kids or grandkids. And oh yes, “What will I get for Christmas?”

Life is filled with dreams and expectations. We have great expectations of events like weddings. Anticipations of what it will be like to be married or to be parents or grandparents. We have expectations of what it will be like to retire. We look forward with great expectation to that next vacation. There is nothing wrong with dreams and expectations, except for the fact that reality rarely lives up to them, and only some of our dreams are fulfilled just the way we had hoped. More often than not, dreams and expectations fall short of what we anticipated.

When our expectations are not realized, most often we become disgruntled, discouraged, angry, depressed, or all of the above.

This Thanksgiving Sunday morning, we want to look at a psalm that has some excellent instruction as to how to rejoice when our expectations are not met--how not to be a miserable grump like Eeyore when things don't go our way. This psalm can help us regain perspective and shows us how to find our joy in the Lord. If you have your Bibles with you, I invite you to open them to **Psalm 107**. Because this is a long psalm, we will not read it all the way through and then come back to piece it together. Rather, I'm going to give you an outline of how the psalm breaks down, and then we will take it one point at a time.

This Psalm is made up of four parts. First, there is an introduction that explains the purpose behind this praise song, in **verses 1-3**. Then in **verses 4-32** we have four different vignettes, pictures that are linked together and illustrate the purpose that drives this psalm. Thirdly, in **verses 33-42**, we see

God's program to bring praise and thanksgiving to His name. And finally, in **verse 43**, the psalmist concludes with God's plea.

Let's begin by looking at the introduction in **verses 1-3**. The psalmist's purpose is to call us to give thanks to God for two things.

¹Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever! ²Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble ³and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.

The first mentioned, for his character, is in **verse 1**. The psalmist directs our attention to three of God's attributes that are deserving of our praise and thanksgiving to the Lord.

First, we are told that God is "**good**." And when the psalmist says God is good, he means absolutely good in all His actions. He is not talking so much about God's good thinking or good morals here as He is His good and profitable actions toward those who seek Him. Our God, by his very nature, can never produce an evil action or wicked deed. He is absolutely good.

Closely related to this concept of God's good actions toward us, is God's actions moved by His lovingkindness. God is always motivated by His love toward us. This fact is stated right at the very beginning of the psalm, because if we don't keep in mind that God is a loving God, we will have a difficult time with bitterness when we don't understand why God allows for our expectations to go unrealized or difficult times to come uninvited, crashing into our lives. Although we will never fully understand why God allows even our good expectations to be dashed, we must not allow doubts of God's love for us to continue to go unchecked.

The third attribute of God of which the psalmist reminds us and which is worthy of our praising God's character is that He is everlasting. This means that He is a God whose good and loving actions toward us endure forever. He is a good and loving God who never gives up on us as children. He never

turns His back on us, regardless of what we do to Him. Again, that will be important for us to remember in each of the four vignettes that will be coming up shortly.

In **verses 2-3**, the psalmist gives us a second reason to be thankful to God. We can be thankful for His past actions toward us. As we reflect backwards on our lives, we can see that even though we may have had some harsh events occur, God never abandoned us. He provided for us a way out. Because of this, we can give Him thanks.

What are some of His past beneficial actions toward us? Basically, God has redeemed us, purchased us, forgiven us of our sins, delivered us from the hands of a very real evil enemy, and placed us into His family. He has called us and gathered us from the four corners of the world to worship Him and to know Jesus Christ personally as our Lord and Savior. As a result of God's drawing us to Himself, He has made it possible for us to learn and experience how to live a meaningful life in the midst of the most terrible of conditions. If He hadn't made the first move, we would have been miserable here on earth and lost forever.

Well, why does the psalmist feel led to remind us of all this? Why does he call us to stop, consider these things, and then thank God?

The answer is that we don't always sense God's leading in our lives, do we? Sometimes even as committed believers we forget to acknowledge Him, or from time to time we may turn our backs on Him or ignore Him. We continue on down the road of life blissfully whistling a happy tune until a dream or expectation is not met, and then we get upset and start whining about life and all of the injustices we appear to be facing.

In fact, that is exactly what happens to believers in these next four vignettes. Public thanksgiving of God, which is vital to our living a meaningful life, often gets ignored by believers. And when we do forget to regularly give thanks to God, we see what happens in the common instances that follow. In **verses 4-32**, we have four pictures that lead to giving thanks to God. There are four parts to each of these scenes. First, each relates a problem in someone's life. Second, after the problem is defined, the people pray or cry out to God.

Third, God answers and provides for the need. Fourth, the rescued are called to acknowledge God and to thank and praise Him for His loving kindness.

Another interesting observation about these successive vignettes is that each gets progressively worse. It's as though the person doesn't learn the lesson in the first scene, doesn't start publicly thanking and acknowledging God's work in his life, but instead thanklessly goes on his merry way. In turn, God uses more trying circumstances to bring him to his knees to acknowledge Who He is. When this is finally done, all is well with their world, because God blesses them.

Let's look at the first vignette, found in **verses 4-9**. I'm calling him the unhappy wanderer. In **verses 4-5** we see the problem. **"They wandered in the wilderness in a desert region; they did not find a way to an inhabited city. They were hungry and thirsty; their soul fainted within them."**

This first picture is that of an unhappy wanderer, innocently meandering in his ignorance. It's a picture of restless and disenchanting persons. There is no inhabited city or place to go to find security or rest for their souls. These are the types of people who move from one experience to the other, from one fad or cheap thrill to the other—adrenaline junkies. They have no absolute beliefs. Their souls are desperate. Nothing seems to satisfy. They are **"hungry,"** meaning their deep inner cravings are not being met.

They are thirsty and hopeless, like a plant drying up in the desert. They have nowhere to turn. They don't have a clue as to how they arrived at the condition nor do they know the way out of their sorry state. Their world is so dark; they can see nothing going right. They have little or no enthusiasm for life.

The only thing they can think to do is to pray, and that's what we see in **verse 6**, their prayer, and then in **verses 6b-7** we see God's provision. Let's read it, **"Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble; He delivered them out of their distresses. He led them also by a straight way, to go to an inhabited city."**

God heard their prayer for a new life, one filled with enthusiasm, security, hope, and meaning. For the moment, He satisfied the deepest hunger of their

hearts. Some of us have experienced God’s moving in our lives in this very manner. What a thrilling time it is.

In response, God expects these rescued believers to praise, to give thanks to Him publicly before others. In **verses 8-9**, the psalmist begins with a “**Let them.**” Any time you see in English a “**let them,**” understand that that is a command. It is a strong plea. It is an instruction. And in this case, this strong instruction is for these people who have been blessed to stop and publicly thank God. We read, “**Let them give thanks to the Lord for His lovingkindness, 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.**”

Why does the psalmist direct us to publicly praise God for what he has done? Because it is not natural to us. We live as though we are independent agents, and that God has no part of our lives. We are filled with such pride so as to think we don’t need God for anything. All of our accomplishments have come solely from our own efforts. Furthermore, it is embarrassing and humbling to speak up in “From the Heart” to tell everybody your personal hurts or mistakes from which God has rescued you. However, that’s exactly what God wants us to do, so that we will all be reminded that God is alive and working among us!

So what happens when we ignore God’s lovingkindness and don’t thank Him publicly? These believers become what I have called from this next vignette, “prisoners of the world.” **Verse 10** describes their problem, “**There were those who dwelt in darkness and in the shadow of death, prisoners in misery and chains, because they had rebelled against the words of God and spurned the counsel of the Most High.**” Which counsel was that? To give thanks! “**Therefore He humbled their heart with labor.**” By “**labor**” the psalmist is not saying that work is a punishment from God. The term here is a reference to bitter, hard, and meaningless labor, a job that has lost any kind of purpose other than bringing home a paycheck. He continues, “**They stumbled and there was none to help.**”

In this scene, we have the prisoners of the world. Different than the unhappy ignorant wanderer, this scene pictures those who find themselves a prisoner to misery because they have not obeyed God. Specifically, they have not obeyed

His command to continually, publicly give thanks to Him for all that He has done and how He has delivered them. Instead of giving God thanks, they put Him back up on the shelf until they feel like they need Him again. Although believers, they act like non-Christians, because, for the most part, they ignore God or have put Him in the background of their lives at work, school, home, or play.

God, whose lovingkindness endures forever, does not give up on them. He does what it takes to get them turned around. As a form of discipline, He allows them to wander further away until they agonize as prisoners in this world, until they are miserable and cry out to Him for deliverance.

And that's what they do. From their newly-found hopeless state, from their own created darkness and depression, they cry out to God for help in **verse 13**; they pray and God, in His loving kindness which endures forever, answers them and makes provision for them in **verse 14**. **“Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble; He saved them out of their distresses. He brought the out of darkness and the shadow of death and broke their bands apart.”**

Because God has delivered them and met their needs, all He wants them to do is to thank Him and to acknowledge that He is the master of their lives. That's why He commands once more in **verses 15-16** to praise Him. **Verse 15** says, **“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.”** He has let them out of their proverbial self-constructed jail!

But do these believers wisely obey God after He has delivered them? Do they start to focus on His blessings in their lives and publicly start giving Him thanks? No. So look what happens in the next vignette, which is a description of emotionally neurotic believers in **verses 17-22**. The psalmist writes about their problem in **verses 17-18**. **“Fools,”** (literally, “insane ones”) **“because of their rebellious way, and because of their iniquities, were afflicted. Their soul,”** (once again, their deep inner man) **“abhorred all kinds of food.”** This is both physical food and even instruction from the Word of God. What were the results of this in their lives? **“And they drew near to the gates of death.”**

Again, left to their own ways, these neurotic believers became controlled by their fears and anxieties. They were afraid to go out and face life. They were having such emotional problems that they didn't even want to eat. The problem became so serious that they were sick to the point of death. If they didn't do something soon, they would die. The cause of their condition was given--their "rebellious way." They refused to honor God or publicly give Him thanks.

Once again, out of desperation, they turned to God, they prayed, and God provided. **Verse 19, "Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble; He saved them out of their distresses. He sent His word and healed them and delivered them from their destructions."**

Notice what God did to deliver these emotionally distraught people. He did not have them psychoanalyzed. He sent His Word, the scriptures, to them. My friend, if you are troubled, the answers are found in His Word.

Sometimes we get so far down, we need a counselor who can insightfully discern our condition and is familiar with the Word to take us back to it, to God's promises and principles, and to point us to God's steps to recovery. If you are in counseling and your counselor is not directing you to the scriptures to focus on what God says are the steps out of your dilemma, or if you listen to a counselor who does not use the Word very much, you will end up listening to the wisdom of the world, which at first may sound good, but will leave you unrescued.

In **verses 21-22**, the psalmist repeats his exhortation to praise God publicly for His deliverance when it comes. He writes, **"Let them give thanks to the Lord for His lovingkindness and for His wonders to the sons of men. Let them also offer sacrifices of thanksgiving and tell of His works with joyful singing."**

When God delivers, true worship directed toward God involves giving generously and sacrificially to God. Beyond regular giving, Jewish believers gave generously of their money to God as an act of thanksgiving to praise Him for his deliverance. Notice that this sacrificial giving, which is to be

above the normal title of the Jew, is not a suggestion but a command. It is a “**freewill**” offering.

But do these people obey God’s command after He has once more delivered them? No. They still don’t make public praise a matter of their everyday lives, they still refuse to give to Him their financial love gifts of appreciation, and few daily sing joyful songs of praise to Him. So what happens? They eventually find themselves once more in a desperate situation. But this time, instead of immediately turning to God, in order to feel better they run away. They try to take a vacation to see if that will cheer them up. Or they change professions. Or change spouses. Or they change churches. They make outward changes in their lives that hopefully will make them feel better.

Notice that these runaways are Jewish believers who are headed to sea. This is an important clue to understanding the paragraph. The Jews were not sailors. They were predominantly farmers, ranchers, and nomads, but not sea goers. That’s why their going to sea stands out like a sore thumb, when the psalmist states in **verse 23**, “**Those who go down to the sea in ships, who do business on great waters.**” These Jews have tried another lifestyle to see if that would bring more meaning to life, more satisfaction. But what happens when they get out on the open sea? He tells us in **verse 24**:

They have seen the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep.

For He spoke and raised up 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.

Here, these non-sailors get their first taste of the sea. God sends a storm, and it is hard to imagine if you have not experienced the rolling seas of a storm. It is frightening and leaves you very sea sick. You stagger about, and all you want to do is die. You are at your wits’ end. So what did they do? They cried out to God, they prayed once more, and in **verses 29-30** God in His lovingkindness delivered them again! **Verse 28** says, “**Then they cried to**

the Lord in their trouble, and He brought them out of their distresses. 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.”

Once more, in **verses 31-32**, God commands that they give Him the credit for the blessings in their lives and that they continually look to Him. **Verse 31** says, **“Let them give thanks to the Lord for His lovingkindness, and for His wonders to the sons of men! Let them extol Him also in the congregation of the people, and praise Him at the seat of the elders.”**

Do you get God’s point? He wants us to publicly share with each other our mistakes and our problems and to publicly praise God for how He is delivering us or dealing with us in the midst of these problems.

Then in **verses 33-42**, after giving us these four vignettes by way of illustration, God reveals His method of working in people’s lives. This is His program to bring about the praise of His people. In **verses 33-34**, the psalmist shows us that when people avoid God, God uses adversity to gain their attention. He states, **“He changes rivers into a wilderness, and springs of water into a thirsty ground; a fruitful land into a salt waste, because of the wickedness of those who dwell in it.”**

But in contrast to the wicked who ignore God and refuse to thank Him continually for the many blessings they do have, the psalmist now shows us, in **verses 35-38** God’s response to those who seek to worship Him and thank Him for His lovingkindness toward them. He writes:

He changes a wilderness into a pool of water and a dry land into springs of water. And there He makes the hungry to dwell, so that they may establish an inhabited city and sow fields and plant vineyards and gather a fruitful harvest. Also, He blesses them and they multiply greatly; and He does not let their cattle decrease.

But what so often happens even to the believer when God blesses him or her? What has happened to our own nation when the one-time pilgrims of the 17th century turned into the 21st century's most wealthy and powerful nation in the world because of God's blessing? What happens is that the rich will have the tendency, if they are not committed to the Lord, to oppress the poor. And that's just what we see in **verses 39-42**. The psalmist tells, "**When they [poorer folks] are diminished and bowed down through oppression, misery, and sorrow, He [God] pours contempt upon princes [the wealthy ruling class that has turned its back on God] and makes them wander in a pathless waste.**" In other words, even though they have the riches of this world, their lives will be empty, vain, wasted, and without purpose. "**But He sets the needy [the seekers, the poor and oppressed] securely on high, away from affliction, and makes his families like a flock.**" The needy who seek to thank God even in the midst of their need find meaning in life, and compared to the wealthy, their troubles are not nearly as bad. In comparison to the troubles of the wealthy who don't seek God, it's as though they don't have any. "**The upright see it and are glad; but all unrighteousness shuts its mouth.**" What can a wealthy man who is living a meaningless empty life say to the poor man whose life, although harsh, has significance? Nothing.

In conclusion, God makes a plea that goes all the way back to the point He expressed at the beginning of the psalm, "**Who is wise? Let him give heed to these things and consider the loving kindnesses of the Lord.**"

I believe that it was C.S. Lewis who said, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our work, but shouts at us in our pain. Pain is His megaphone to reach a deaf world." God doesn't enjoy using adversity in our lives to capture our attention, but He loves us too much not to. And once He has our attention, all He wants is for us to have a working relationship with Him, whereby we experience His good works in our lives and His endless lovingkindness. In return, all He asks is for us to give Him the honor, respect, and thanks that He so rightly deserves.

This Thanksgiving week, daily read over this psalm by yourself or with your family, asking the Lord to show you further insights from this passage concerning your need to give thanks regardless of your circumstances. Since this is Thanksgiving week, ponder what you can truly thank God for. Then on

Thanksgiving Day, share around the festive meal those things for which you are truly thankful to God. Be very specific.

Let's pray,

Father, this Thanksgiving we have much to be thankful for; but most of all we can thank You that You have never turned your back on us. You have promised us a meaningful and abundant life. You have given us security and mental stability in a world that is coming apart. We have received these simply as a result of walking with Jesus Christ. God, thank you that in Him you not only brought us forgiveness of sin, but eternal life that begins right now. It is with this in mind, and with our hearts full of thanks, that we praise you this morning.

