

November 26, 2006 by Steve Brandon



Let the Redeemed Give Thanks (part 2)

Psalm 107:17-43

1. A Call to Give Thanks (verses 1-3)

2. Four Testimonies of Deliverance (verses 4-32)

3. A Lesson of God's Providence (verses 33-43)

This past Thursday, we, in America, celebrated the Thanksgiving holiday. As we celebrated our time together as a family, we went to my sister's home and enjoyed the three F's of Thanksgiving: Food, Football, and Fellowship. After the football game we watched the star player being interviewed (as often happens after athletic contests). As this player was asked particular questions about the game, it was very easy for him on the field to explain what just happened from his own perspective. It's not difficult to give testimony to what you have seen and heard and experienced yourself. This is exactly what Psalm 107 is calling those who have been redeemed by God to do. It is a call for us to talk about what we have experienced in our lives and give thanks to the Lord for redeeming us.

You can see the theme of the Psalm in the first three verses:

1. A Call to Give Thanks (verses 1-3)

Psalm 107:1-3

Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good, for His lovingkindness 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.

This is a call for the redeemed of the LORD to give thanks to Him. It doesn't matter whether you are redeemed from the east or from the west. It doesn't matter whether you are redeemed from the north or from the south. All of those who have been redeemed through the blood of Jesus Christ are called in these three verses to give thanks to His name.

The things that we have in Christ are amazing. The apostle John said, "See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God!" (1 John 3:1). Through faith in Jesus Christ, we become God's children. In that sense, we ought to give thanks to the Lord for the lovingkindness of the Lord in bringing us to Himself.

As this Psalm develops, we see ...

2. Four Testimonies of Deliverance (verses 4-32)

Each of these testimonies have a similar flow. Those involved in giving these testimonies are brought to then end of themselves, with nowhere to turn, but to the LORD. In their desperation, they cry out to the LORD, who shows his goodness to them by rescuing them from their peril. In so doing, the only natural response of those being delivered is to give thanks to the LORD for delivering them out of their distresses. Each of these testimonies have a similar outline:

1. Trouble
2. Cry
3. Deliverance
4. Testimony

Last week, we looked at two of these testimonies. The first described the wandering soul (in verses 4-9). This was the soul that was lost and searching for answers. The second described the imprisoned soul (verses 10-16). This was soul that was bound in prison and in darkness.

For each of these testimonies, I read from the autobiographies of two saints who experienced these things. We first read from John Bunyan's autobiography, entitled, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. We read how he had wondered and strayed and was visionless and without God, until finally, he came to see the realities of the cross of Christ. It was then that the Lord heard John Bunyan's cry and delivered him from his wandering ways.

We also looked at the autobiography of George Müller, who was imprisoned for his rebellious ways. He was bound in his sinful ways, until finally, he cried out to the Lord. The Lord was faithful to deliver George Müller out of his troubles. He then continued to live a life of faithful service unto the Lord, expressing his thanks to God in many different ways during the course of his life.

We come this week to our third testimony.

Testimony #3 (verses 17-22).

This week, we come to the third testimony. This is a testimony of the foolish soul, who has rejected God. Consider the following verses:

Psalm 107:17-22

Fools, because of their rebellious way, and because of their iniquities, were afflicted.
Their soul abhorred all kinds of food, and they drew near to the gates of death.
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.
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.

The first word in verse 17 shows us who we are talking about. We are talking about the foolish person. In the Bible, the fool is never described as being the fool because of a lack of intelligence. Rather, the Biblical fool is described in the one who lacks moral constraint. Would the truth be known, fools are often the most intelligent among us. But, their intelligence often brings them to a point of trusting in themselves, and not trusting in the LORD. This is what Proverbs 28:26, "He who trust in his own heart is a fool." It is the fool who has said in his heart, "There is no God" (Psalm 53:1) and thus does his own thing.

Throughout the Bible, the foolish person is describes as the one engaging in wickedness. It is the fool who makes sport of doing wickedness (Prov. 10:23). The fool refuses to turn away from evil (Prov. 13:19). The fool lives for the moment (Prov. 21:20). The fool is the one who repeats his folly (Prov. 26:11).

This is exactly what we see here in Psalm 107. In verse 17, we see these fools being described as rebellious and engaged in iniquity. As a result of their sin, they were brought low, as verse 18 demonstrates. They lost their appetite, abhorring all kinds of food. They came close to death. Their sin had brought them to a point where they had lost their will to live. They were sick. They no longer wanted to eat. They were at the brink of death. This is the point of desperation.

And again, as we have seen in every single one of these testimonies, a point of desperation is reached. The situation is so bad that there is nowhere else to turn, except to the LORD, which is exactly what they do. Verse 19, "Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble." And our faithful God comes to the rescue, ... "He saved them out of their distresses. He sent His word and healed them, And delivered them from their destructions" (verses 19b-20). He saved them from certain death. He restored them to health. He gave them an appetite again. He restored them to life.

And the response is only natural, "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" (verses 21-22).

This is New Testament worship. Our response to God's redeeming us. In Hebrews 13, verse 15, we receive the admonition, "Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name." It is through faith in Christ Jesus, that we have been redeemed from our sins. We have gone our foolish way and have suffered the consequences, but the LORD has heard our cry of desperation and has brought us to Himself. We are forever thankful. Thus, we are compelled to "offer up a sacrifice of praise to God ... [giving] thanks to His name.

I can think of several instance in the Bible where God brought the foolish person to a point of desperation and saved them out of their troubles, only to respond in praise and thanks to the LORD. Nebuchadnezzar stands out in my mind. "Walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, the king reflected and said, ... 'Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?'" (Dan. 4:29-30). That's the epitome of foolishness. Rather than acknowledging God's place, Nebuchadnezzar took God's place as the ruler over the world. As a result, Nebuchadnezzar was afflicted. The LORD took away the kingdom from Him (Dan. 4:31). He was made to dwell with the beasts of the field (Dan. 4:32). He was given grass to eat like the cattle of the field (Dan. 4:32). His hair grew long like eagles' feathers (Dan. 4:33). His finger nails grew long like the claws of a bird (Dan. 4:33).

Now, the good news concerning Nebuchadnezzar is that he reached the point of desperation and realized his folly. It was then that he cried out to the LORD in his distress. The LORD delivered him from his trouble and restored his kingdom in Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar became a worshiper of the LORD. He said those great words, ...

Daniel 4:34-35, 37

His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; And no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, "What have You done?"

I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride.

What a great example of a fool finding deliverance in the mighty hand of God!

I can think of another instance in the Bible like this: The Prodigal Son. Jesus told the story of the foolish son, who took half of his father's inheritance and squandered it on wasteful living in a far off land. After the money was gone, this son was at a point of desperation, working as a hired hand, feeding pigs (Luke 15:15). It was there that he finally came to himself and understood what he had done (Luke 15:17). In repentance, he returned to his father, who gladly received him and restored him as his son (Luke 15:21-24). There was much rejoicing in the home that day, because the foolish son had come back home. He had reached the point of desperation and had called out to the LORD in

his distress.

Like last week, I again want to invite a man to come and give testimony of thanks to God for being delivered from his wayward ways. This morning, I want for you to hear from the pen of Augustine of Hippo, in his autobiography, entitled, "The Confessions of St. Augustine."

Augustine lived in the late fourth century. His father was not a believer. But, his mother, Monica, was a devout believer in Christ. She urged her son to follow Christ and prayed constantly for him in his rebellion. And Augustine lived in great rebellion against the Lord for many years. His intellectual abilities were great! His father saw this and worked very hard to give him the very best education that he could. As a young boy, he was sent to Medaura, about 20 miles from home, until he was 17, when he was sent to Carthage to study.

Augustine was a brilliant man. But, that's not what made him a fool. What made him a fool was his lust for pleasure. He said, ...

For in that youth of mine I was on fire to take my fill of hell. Outrageously in all my shady loves I began to revert to a state of savagery: my beauty consumed away and I stank in your sight; pleasing myself and being anxious to please in the eyes of men (Confessions 2.1). [\[1\]](#)

I broke through all the boundaries of your law but did not escape your chastisement. What mortal can? For you were always with me, angered against me in your mercy, scattering the most bitter discontent over all my illicit pleasures. ... Where was I, and how far was I banished from the delights of your house in that sixteenth year of my flesh when the madness of lust ... held complete sway over me and to this madness I surrendered myself entirely! And those about me took no care to save me from falling by getting me married; Their one aim was that I should learn how to make a good speech and become an orator capable of swaying an audience (Confessions, 2.2).

He continued, ...

I came to Carthage, and all around me in my ears were the sizzling and frying of unholy loves. ... I was starved inside me for inner food (for you yourself, my God), yet this starvation did not make me hungry. I had no desire for the food that is corruptible, and this was not because I was filled with it; No, the emptier I was, the more my stomach turned against it. And for this reason my soul was in poor health. (Confessions 3.1).

These sentences sound amazingly like what we have seen in Psalm 107:18, "Their soul abhorred all kinds of food, and they drew near to the gates of death." Augustine's sin had caused him to lose his appetite and even come to a point of ill health. His misery continued on, ...

And above me hovered your mercy, faithful however far I strayed. I wasted myself away in great sins. I followed in the path of sacrilegious curiosity, allowing it to lead me, in my desertion of you, down to the depths of infidelity and the beguiling service of devils, to whom I made my own evil deeds a sacrifice, and in all these things you beat me with your rod. Once when your solemnities were being celebrated within the walls of your Church, I actually dared to desire and then to bring to a conclusion a business which deserved death for its reward. For this you lashed me with punishments that were heavy, but nothing in comparison with my fault (Confessions 3.3).

Augustine goes on and on and on and on of his sinful ways in His confessions. In fact, that's what his autobiography is all about. It's all about his confessions of his sin before the Lord. It's all about his testimony of finding redeeming grace in Christ Jesus, foolish and sinful though he was. Through his sin, he became disillusioned in the truth of the Bible. He rejected the Old Testament, and embraced a teaching called Manichaeism, which taught a dualism in this world: Good and Evil, Light and Dark. It has some Christian elements sprinkled throughout its teachings, but it is far from being able to be labeled as "Christian." Eventually, he became disillusioned by this and began following the teachings of Plato, which emphasized the purity of the spiritual world and the baseness of the material world. Neither of these beliefs were able to rid him of his sexual lusts. For a decade, Augustine followed in his sinful desires, living with an African concubine for 15 years, until he finally sent her away, never to see her again.

The good news concerning the life of Augustine was that he found grace at the cross of Christ. He cried to the LORD in his trouble, and He saved them out of his distress (Ps. 107:19). He described what took place on one occasion when he entered a certain garden with his friend Alypius. He was under much conviction of sin, when he cried out to the Lord. Listen to his testimony in his own words, ...

And now from my hidden depths my searching thought had dragged up and set before the sight of my heart the whole mass of my misery. Then a huge storm rose up within me bringing with it a huge downpour of tears. So that I might pour out all these tears and speak the words that came with them, I rose up from Alypius (solitude seemed better for the business of weeping) and went further away so that I might not be embarrassed even by his presence. This was how I felt and he realized it. No doubt I had said something or other and he could feel the weight of my tears in the sound of my voice. And so I rose to my feet, and he, in a state of utter amazement, remained in the place where we had been sitting. I flung myself down on the ground somehow under a fig tree and gave free rein to my tears; They streamed and flooded from my eyes, an acceptable sacrifice to Thee. And I kept saying to you, not perhaps in these words, but with this sense: "And Thou, O Lord, how long? How long, Lord; wilt Thou be angry forever? Remember not our former iniquities." For I felt that it was these which were holding me fast. And in my misery I would exclaim: "How long, how long this 'tomorrow and tomorrow'? Why not now? Why not finish this very hour with my uncleanness?"

So I spoke, weeping in the bitter contrition of my heart. Suddenly a voice reached my ears from a nearby house. It is the voice of a boy or a girl (I don't know which) and in a kind of singsong the words are constantly repeated: "Take it and read

it. Take it and read it." At once my face changed, and I began to think carefully of whether the singing of words like these came into any kind of game which children play, and I could not remember that I had ever heard anything like it before. I checked the force of my tears and rose to my feet, being quite certain that I must interpret this as a divine command to me to open the book and read the first passage. ...

So I went eagerly back to the place where Alypius was sitting, since it was there that I had left the book of the Apostle when I rose to my feet. I snatched up the book, opened it, and read in silence the passage upon which my eyes first fell: 'Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying: but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh in concupiscence. I had no wish to read further; there was no need to. For immediately I had reached the end of this sentence it was as though my heart was filled with a light of confidence and all the shadows of my doubt were swept away (Confessions 8.12).

"Let the redeemed of the Lord ... give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness, and for His wonders to the sons of men" (Psalm 107:3, 21). The rest of Augustine's confessions is a testimony to his continued struggles in the Lord as well as his continual praise unto the Lord for everything that the Lord had done for him. To be sure, he continues to share his struggles, but much of the remaining book is praise and thanks to God. After all, this entire book is a prayer to the Lord! Listen to an example:

For my strength is brought down in need, so that I cannot support my good, till you, Lord, who have been gracious to all mine iniquities shall heal all my infirmities. For Thou shalt also redeem my life from corruption, and crown me with loving kindness and tender mercies, and shalt satisfy my desire with good things, because of my youth shall be renewed like an eagle's. For in hope we are saved, therefore we through patience wait for your promises. Let him that is able hear your discourse deep within him. I, in the words of your oracle, will confidently cry out: How wonderful are Thy works, O Lord, in Wisdom hast Thou made them all, and that Wisdom is "the Beginning," and in that Beginning you made heaven and earth (Confessions 11.9).

Testimony #4 (verses 23-32)

Let's turn our attention now to our forth testimony. We have heard the testimony of those who wandered, those who were imprisoned, and those who were foolish. And now, we will hear the testimony of those who were in danger on the sea. Once again, this testimony follows the same pattern as all the others. As you read it, look for the (1) trouble, (2) cry, (3) deliverance, and (4) testimony. The only thing that is different about this testimony is that it is a bit longer than the other testimonies.

Psalm 107:23-32

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.
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.
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.
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.

Now, I've never been on the high seas before. But, from everything that I have been told or read, it is a terrifying experience to be out on the sea when a storm comes up. One man said, "He that cannot pray, let him go to sea, and there he will learn!" ^[2] I have heard a man who served in the Navy describe the 50 foot breakers that came upon his ship during a storm. He said that the only way to get any sleep in such a storm is to tie yourself to the bunk, because the shifting horizontally and vertically is so great. The boat's going up and down with an amplitude of 50 feet. On top of that there's the swinging from side to side. This man said that they were driven 300 miles off course one time because of the storm. All this took place on a modern day warship. ^[3] I can only imagine what it might be like to be caught on the sea in one of the boats that they were using 2,000 years ago when this was written. At those times, the largest sailing vessels were a touch over 100 feet long. Fifty foot swells would totally encompass a typical boat in those days.

This Psalmist describes those who were in the habit of going "down to the sea in ship, [and doing] business on great waters," (verse 23). They would go out and back and out and back, carrying cargo of all types. The storm was large enough for these men to fear for their lives. When you consider the storms they encountered and their little boats. In verse 26, we read that because of the great swellings rising them up to the heavens and down to the depths, "their soul melted away in their misery." They were out to sea and lost in the great storm, facing the real possibility of drowning. At the end of verse 27, we read that they "were at their wits' end." Literally, "all their wisdom was swallowed up." They had nowhere else to turn. And so, they turned to the only One who could possibly help in a situation like this: the LORD of hosts, "Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and He brought them out of their distress. He caused the storm to be still, so that the waves of the sea were hushed" (verses 28-29).

I'm drawn back to think about what took place on the Sea of Galilee in the days of Jesus. His disciples were out on the sea with Him, after a long day of ministry. As the "great storm on the sea" (Matt. 8:24), covered the boat with its waves, the fishermen-disciples [who lived out on the sea], were terrified. They cried out to Jesus, who was sleeping in the boat, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing" (Matt. 8:25). And then, after a rebuke to the disciples, Jesus also "rebuked the winds and the sea" (Matt. 8:26), saying "Hush, be still" (Luke 4:39). Jesus performed two

miracles with those words. (1) He stopped the winds; and (2) He settled the sea. It caused the disciples to respond in fear of the majesty of God, who had just rescued them from their peril. The disciples knew full well who had delivered them. It was the mighty hand of God.

There is something about being delivered from a storm in the sea that gives you reason to worship the Lord. Perhaps you remember the story of Jonah. He was a runaway prophet. When God told him to go to Nineveh in the east, he boarded a ship to Tarshish going west (Jonah 1:3). When "the LORD hurled a great wind on the sea" (Jonah 1:4), Jonah knew that it was because of his disobedience. He told the pagan sailors, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea. Then the sea will become calm for you, for I know that on account of me this great storm has come upon you" (Jonah 1:12). Reluctantly, these sailors did so (only after throwing much of their cargo overboard). Once Jonah hit the water, the sea stopped its raging. The sailors "feared the LORD greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows" (Jonah 1:16).

This is exactly what Psalm 107 calls us to do. For those who have seen the mighty deliverance at that hand of God, ... "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." (verses 31-32).

I want to invite another person to come and give testimony of what the LORD has done in his life. We have already heard from John Bunyan, George Müller, and Augustine of Hippo. This time, I want to invite John Newton. Many of you know his story. He lived in the 1700's and was a wicked slave trader. In his wayward days, he spent much time upon the waters and knew of the power of God. But, it wasn't until he almost died that he finally gave his life to the Lord. I pick up the story of the time when he was employed upon a ship. He said, ...

My life, when awake, was a course of most horrid impiety and profaneness I know not that I have ever since met so daring a blasphemer. Not content with common oaths and imprecations, I daily invented new ones, so that I was often seriously reproved by the captain, who was a very passionate man and not at all circumspect in his expressions.

From what I told him of my past adventures and what he saw of my conduct, especially toward the close of the voyage, when he met with many disasters. He would often tell me that to his grief he had a Jonah on board; that a curse attended me wherever I went, and that all the troubles he met with in the voyage were owing to his having taken me into the vessel.
...

Four or five of us one evening sat down upon deck to see who could hold out longest in drinking Geneva and rum alternately. A large sea shell supplied the place of a glass. I was very unfit for a challenge of this sort, for my head was always incapable of bearing much strong drink. However, I proposed the first toast, which I well remember was some imprecation against the person who should start first. This proved to be myself.

My brain was soon fired, I arose and danced about the deck like a madman. While I was thus diverting my companions, my hat went overboard. By the light of the moon I saw the ship's boat, and eagerly threw myself over the side to get into her, that I might recover my hat.

The boat was not within my reach as I thought, but perhaps twenty feet from the ship's side. I was half over, and should in one moment more have plunged into the water when somebody caught hold of my clothes behind and pulled me back. This was an amazing escape. I could not swim, if I had been sober; The tide ran very strong; my companions were too intoxicated to save me; and the rest of the ship's company were asleep. So near was I to perishing in that dreadful condition, and sinking into eternity under the weight of my own curse! (Out of the Depths, pp. 65-67). [\[4\]](#)

Such was the description that John Newton gave of his own wicked ways. He continues on to tell of the storm that brought about his conversion through the Lord delivering him out of his trouble.

But now the Lord's time was come, and the conviction I was so unwilling to receive was deeply impressed upon me. I went to bed that night in my usual security and indifference but was awakened from a sound sleep by the force of a violent sea, which broke on us. Much of it came down below and filled the cabin where I lay with water. This alarm was followed by a cry from the deck that the ship was going down or sinking. As soon as I could recover myself, I started to go up on deck, but was met on the ladder by the captain, who desired me to bring a knife with me.

While I returned for the knife, another person went up in my place, who was instantly washed overboard. We had no leisure to lament him, nor did we expect to survive him long, for we soon found the ship was filling very fast. The sea had torn away the upper timbers on one side, and made the ship a mere wreck in a few minutes. I shall not describe the disaster in the marine dialect, which would be understood by few; therefore I can give you but a very inadequate idea of it.

Taking all circumstances, it was astonishing, and almost miraculous, that any of us survived. We had immediate recourse to the pumps, but the water increased against all our efforts. Some of us were set to bailing in another part of the vessel, that is, to lade it out with buckets and pails. We had but eleven or twelve people for this service. Notwithstanding all we could do, she was full, or very near it. With a common cargo she would have sunk, of course, but we had a great quantity of beeswax and wood on board, which were specifically lighter than the water. As it pleased God that we received this shock in the very crisis of the gale, toward morning we were enabled to employ some means for our safety, which succeeded beyond hope.

In about an hour's time the day began to break, and the wind abated. We used most of our clothes and bedding to stop the leaks, though the weather was exceedingly cold, especially to us who had so lately left a hot climate. Over these we nailed pieces of boards, and at last perceived the water abate. At the beginning of this I was little affected. I pumped hard, and

endeavored to animate myself by my companions. I told one of them that in a few days this distress would serve us to talk of over a glass of wine, but he, being a less hardened sinner than myself, replied with tears, "No, it is too late now." About nine o'clock, being almost spent with cold and labor, I went to speak with the captain, who was busy elsewhere. As I was returning, I said, almost without any meaning, "If this will not do, the Lord have mercy on us!" This (though spoken with little reflection) was the first desire I had breathed for mercy for many years. I was instantly struck with my own words. As Jehu said once, "What have you to do with peace?" so it directly occurred, What mercy can there be for me? I was obliged to return to the pump, and there I continued till noon. Almost every passing wave broke over my head, but we made ourselves fast with ropes, that we might not be washed away. Indeed, I expected that every time the vessel descended into the sea, she would rise no more. I dreaded death now, and my heart foreboded the worst, if the Scriptures, which I had long since opposed, were true. Still I was but half convinced, and remained for a space of time in a sullen frame, a mixture of despair and impatience. I thought that if the Christian religion were true, I could not be forgiven, and was therefore expecting, and almost at times wishing, to know the worst" (Out of the Depths, pp. 65-71).

Newton continues on, ...

March 21 is a day to be remembered by me. I have never suffered it to pass wholly unnoticed since the year 1748. On that day the Lord sent from on high and delivered me out of deep waters. I continued at the pump from three in the morning till near noon, and then I could do no more I went and lay down upon my bed, uncertain, and almost indifferent, whether I should rise again. In an hour's time I was called. Not being able to pump, I went to the helm, and steered the ship till midnight, expecting a short interval for refreshment. I had here leisure and opportunity to think of my former religious professions, the calls, warnings, and deliverances I had met with, the licentious course of my life, particularly my unparalleled effrontery in making the gospel the subject of profane ridicule. I thought, allowing the Scripture premises, there never was, nor could be, such a sinner as myself. Then, comparing the advantages I had broken through, concluded at first that my sins were too great to be forgiven. ...

When I saw beyond all probability there was still hope of respite, and heard about six in the evening that the ship was freed from water, there arose a gleam of hope. I thought I saw the hand of God displayed in our favor and I began to pray. I could not utter the prayer of faith; I could not draw near to a reconciled God and call him Father. My prayer was like the cry of ravens, which yet the Lord does not disdain to hear. I now began to think of that Jesus whom I had so often derided. I recollected the particulars of His life and of His death--a death for sins not His own, but for those who in their distress should put their trust in Him. And now I chiefly wanted evidence. The comfortless principles of infidelity were deeply riveted, and I rather wished than believed that these things were real facts. (Out of the Depths, pp. 73-76).

For the next few pages, Newton describes how the ship was crippled due to the damage that it sustained. On several occasions, they saw land, but were unable to sail near the land, due to the condition of the ship. He also spoke of the rations that they were limited to. They were not eating much during these weeks. Then, he tells of the LORD's mighty rescue, ...

"When we were ready to give up all for lost, and despair was on every countenance, the wind came about to the very point we wished it, so as best to suit that broken part of the ship which must be kept out of the water. As gently as our few remaining sails could bear it continued (though at an unsettled time of the year) till we once more were called up to see the land. We saw the island Tory, and the next day anchored in Lough Swilly, Ireland. This was April 8, just four weeks after the damage we sustained from the sea. When we came into this port, our very last victuals were boiling in the pot. Before we had been there two hours, the wind began to blow with great violence. If we had continued at sea that night in our shattered, enfeebled condition, we would to all human appearance, have gone to the bottom. About this time I began to know that there is a God who hears and answers prayer. How many times has He appeared for me since this great deliverance! Yet, alas! How distrustful and ungrateful is my heart unto this hour! (Out of the Depths, pp. 79-80).

John Newton knew full well of the level of thanks to God that he should express as a redeemed soul. He had been redeemed from the sea as well as from the pit of hell. The one who experiences such a rescue ought to be incredibly thankful to the Lord. And yet, sadly, like all of us, John Newton felt that he failed to be thankful as he ought to be, "How distrustful and ungrateful is my heart unto this hour!" Yet, John Newton lived to be a great pastor and well-known hymn-writer, ...

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears reliev'd;
How precious did that grace appear,
The hour I first believ'd!

Thro' many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

Finally, let's turn our attention now to the last portion of the Psalm. I'm calling it, ...

3. A Lesson of God's Providence (verses 33-43)

Psalm 107:33-43

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.
 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.
 When they are diminished and bowed down through oppression, misery and sorrow,
 He pours contempt upon princes and makes them wander in a pathless waste.
 But He sets the needy securely on high away from affliction, and makes his families like a flock.
 The upright see it and are glad; But all unrighteousness shuts its mouth.
 Who is wise? Let him give heed to these things, and consider the lovingkindnesses of the LORD.

We are talking here about providence. That is, what God does in the live of people. He brings famine upon lands (as in verse 33). That which used to abound with fruitfulness, God changes into a wilderness of waste. What used to be fertile and abounding in abundance, he brings down. Remember the days of Elijah. He shut the heavens for 3 1/2 years and caused the people much distress. And then, Elijah prayed and then, it rained. This is what takes place in verse 35, "He changes a wilderness into a pool of water and a dry land into springs of water." In this verse, the Psalmist is describing the blessing that God brings. God brings both the calamity as well as the blessing upon people. He brings the abundance in the land when he brings the rain. The hand of the Lord brings great blessing when He so desires. This is providence.

Not only does the Lord bring calamity and blessing upon lands, but he also does upon people. He pours contempt upon those in the high places. Those who are high and lofty and proud are made to wander in a pathless waste. But, on the other side, He takes the needy and sets them up on a secure place. So, the high he brings low and the low he brings high. God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. In His providence, God will take people in their lofty situation (like Nebuchadnezzar) and will bring them low. He will also bring the lowly up. It is here that we see the cross. We come to the cross in humility.

In the context of Psalm 107, it is no accident that people are wandering around. It is no accident that people are in prison or feel the results of their foolishness. It is no accident when the storm comes upon the sailors in the deep. I can imagine the smile of God when John Newton was on the shore of the water. The Lord was thinking of how he would bring a storm upon his ship to terrify him to his bones and then he will call out to me and I will be faithful to him. The end result will be that he will turn out to be one of the greatest pastors of all time. God brings calamity for the good. This is Romans 8:28, "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God and who are called according to His purpose." Often times, this is His grace. He brings us down to a point of despair, that we might consider the lovingkindness of the Lord and cry out to Him while he is near.

In verse 43, we are told, "Who is wise? Let him give heed to these things, and consider the lovingkindnesses of the LORD." Should you look only at the first half of these testimonies, you might well say, "That's terrible that such a thing has happened to this person!" It's an awful thing to be wandering in the wilderness with a parched mouth, longing for water and direction toward safety. Isn't it a terrible thing to be bound in prison and in spiritual darkness? Isn't it bad to be a fool, who merely delights in his sin? Isn't it bad to be caught in a storm at sea? Of course it's bad, but oftentimes, it is the lovingkindness of the Lord that brings people down, that they might not have anywhere else to turn, but to the LORD.

Perhaps this day the Lord has brought you low. Perhaps you have been brought to a point in your life where you have no control of your situation and you are now desperate. Perhaps you have been wandering around looking for some type of solution. Perhaps you have been imprisoned by the darkness and foolish of your own sin. It may just be the grace of God, bringing you to a point of desperation. Perhaps you can identify especially with one of these four testimonies. Perhaps you can say, "You know, I am wandering right now." Or, "To be totally honest with you, the clouds of depression have come over me right now." Or, "I am sinning. I have been a fool, not seeking God, but seeking my own sinful lusts for my own pleasures." Or, "I have been experiencing a storm in my life." If you are there this morning, please consider the lovingkindnesses of the LORD (as in verse 43). Notice that this is in the plural. It indicates that the LORD demonstrates His lovingkindness in various different venues and circumstances. This is the point of bringing up four very different testimonies of people who have found themselves in very different sorts of circumstances. The point is that the LORD's lovingkindnesses are vast and different. So, please consider the tender heart of the LORD to deliver those who call upon His name. Be wise and cry out to Him in a day when He can be found. Find refuge in the cross of Christ. And then, give thanks unto His name. For those of you who have personally experienced one of these sorts of deliverances, the clear call to you is to give a testimony of thanks unto His name for redeeming you out of darkness and transferring you into His kingdom.

As we close, I would like for you to consider the thankful testimony of the apostle Paul. He wrote, ...

1 Timothy 1:12-17

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

With these words, Paul is describing his salvation experience. He was formerly a foolish, violent man, who found grace and mercy in Christ Jesus. Paul was persecuting the church, ravaging the homes in which the believers were meeting. He was arresting them, throwing them into prison, and perhaps, even stoning others. Why is it that Paul says that he found mercy? In order for him to demonstrate the "perfect patience"

in Paul as an example for others who would believe in Christ. In other words, his life stands as a strong testimony that none have reason to despair. We can always reason this way: "Hey, Paul was saved! I can be saved also!" This led Paul to worship the Lord, "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever" (1 Tim. 1:17). This morning, we have looked at four different testimonies of those who have been in similarly desperate circumstances. They have been delivered from their distresses. So too can you be delivered. You simply need to cry out to the One who is able to save: Jesus Christ.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on November 26, 2006 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] Augustine's Confessions, 2.1. (Each end note reference to is to the chapter and paragraph)

[2] John Trapp, as quoted by Charles Spurgeon in his Treasury of David, comments on Psalm 107, verse 28 in his "explanatory Notes and Quaint Sayings" section of this Psalm.

[3] George Zemek, Tape on Psalm 107, delivered at Grace Bible Church in Brandon, Florida, on July 18, 1999.

[4] John Newton, "Out of the Depths," p. 65. All other end note references refer to this book.

[5] Ibid., 8.12.

[6] Ibid., 11.9.