

God's Covenant Commitment

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Preacher: Nsikan Friday

[0 : 00] The scripture for today comes from Psalm 107. O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.

Some wander in desert wastes, finding no way to a city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, they are so 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 till they reached a city to dwell in.

Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man. For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things.

[1 : 04] Some said in darkness and in the shadow of death, prisoners in affliction and in irons. For they had rebelled against the words of God, and spurned the counsel of the Most High.

So he bowed their hearts down with hard labor. They fell down with none to help. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.

He brought them out of darkness in the shadow of death, and burst their bonds apart. Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man.

For he shatters the doors of bronze, and cuts in two the bars of iron. Some were fools through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquities, suffered 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 delivered them from their distress.

[2 : 09] He sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from their destruction. Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man.

And let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, and tell of his deeds in songs of joy. Some went down to the sea in ships, during business on the great waters.

They saw the deeds of the Lord, his wondrous works in the deep. For he commanded and raised a 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 evil plight. They reeled and staggered like drunken men, and were at their wit's end.

Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed.

[3 : 10] Then they were glad that the waters were quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven. Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man.

Let them extol him in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders. He turns rivers into a desert, springs of water into thirsty ground, a fruitful land into a salty waste, because of the evil of his inhabitants.

He turns a desert into pools of water, a parched land into springs of water. And there he lets the hungry dwell, and they establish a city to live in.

They sow fields and plant vineyards and get a fruitful yield. By his blessing, they multiply greatly, and he does not let the livestock diminish.

When they are diminished and brought low through oppression, evil, and sorrow, he pours contempt on princes, and makes them wander in trackless ways.

[4 : 21] But he raises up the needy out of affliction and makes their families like flocks. The upright see it and are glad, and all wickedness shuts its mouth.

Whoever is wise, let him attend to these things. Let them consider the steadfast love of the Lord. This is the word of God.

Good morning, everyone. Brilliant. You know you're meant to respond. My name is Nsikan. I co-leader CG called The Messengers with Leo and Henrique.

It's an honor to bring God's word to you this morning. I'm going to share a quick life experience, and I think everyone would attest to it that if you've ever been in trouble or in grave danger and your stomach sinks, then you start to sweat really bad.

Years ago, I just finished driving school, and I decided to take my mom's car for a ride.

[5 : 33] She sent me on an errand quite alright. So I went out with the vehicle, but I didn't go out with my driver's license. I didn't have the L inscription on the vehicle.

I just thought it's a few blocks away. It's not too far off. I could get the petrol and come back home. I didn't go alone. I went with the family driver. He was with us that day.

So I drove to the petrol station, got the petrol, and on driving out of the petrol station, I ran into another vehicle. There's no need to panic.

No one died. There wasn't anything drastic or anything. The only thing bad was the headlamp of the other vehicle was completely gone. It was off.

My mom's car was still good, which was great. It meant no trouble. But because our vehicle wasn't damaged at all, the lady insisted that we had to pay for damages.

[6 : 32] So my sister called, noticing that we're running too late, and I told her about what happened. She called my elder brother. My elder brother came in, and he saved the day.

No grounding, no scolding. It was good. Thankfully, that happened. If that did not happen, I would surely have been in trouble that day.

And the psalm that we're about considering is quite similar to my story, where God redeems his people from trouble. And the Bible currently is, coherently tries to communicate one message.

God's desire to have a relationship with his people. And it is centered on the people of Israel.

Because I believe God would want to use Israel as an example for all of humanity to sort of see.

And this is an example for all these people. And the book of Psalms, though it is centered on the people of Israel, it's collected over a period of years.

[7 : 39] And we're currently in book five, one of seven. And it's written by, as you've noticed, it's written by several authors. There's David, there's Asaph. Last week, we considered one of the psalms by Ethan.

And though this week, the writer is anonymous, because it was collated over a period of time, but it still tells of the people of Israel and their history.

And the timeline on where we are with Psalm 107 is just before when Israel is leaving exile and they're on the merry way to Jerusalem.

And I believe Neil sort of touched in the exile last week. So I wouldn't want to go over that again today. But today we would consider God's covenant, God's covenant commitment to Israel in light of their redemption as they leave to exile.

But before we sort of understand what is in 107, we would quickly touch base with 106. And I'll read it quickly in the concluding verses of 106.

[8 : 49] Save us, O Lord, our God, and gather us from among the nations that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise. Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting.

And let all the people say amen. Praise the Lord. On hearing this, you would sense the outcry of the people of Israel asking God to save them because they were in distress, they were in trouble, they were in a tight corner.

And shortly after these verses and jumping to 107 that we just read, you'd see this outburst of praise and thanksgiving. It's just an immediate start.

Start. It wasn't, the psalm doesn't start off slow and builds up to the end. It sort of just starts in between and there's that outburst of praise and thanksgiving, like in verses 1 to 3.

O give thanks to the Lord for He is good and His steadfast love and He is yours forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He has redeemed and gathered from, gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west and from the north and from the south.

[10 : 04] You could sense that joy and thanksgiving because there's that transition from the people of Israel being in exile and asking God for help and them leaving exile and being thankful that that

has happened.

And maybe for us, the word exile might be a bit too abstract. Our closest experience with exile would be COVID times where we had lockdown and restrictions and no traveling.

And we would attest that when there were no longer restrictions, there was that jubilation in our hearts. I even had colleagues who were saying that they're going on revenge travel.

Like they have all their tickets planned out. They're going to Singapore. as much as many countries they can afford at that time. And we're not any different. Just like the people of Israel who were one time in exile and now we're walking towards redemption.

And in likewise manner, in our time and day, we're still growing. We're still learning. And I hope that as we go through the passage, we'd see that there's a parallel between the people of Israel and our own journey and experience.

[11:22] The introductory verses sort of set a precedent for the structure of the Psalms. There's that introductory verses in verse 1 to 3. And there are two other subsets that sort of, that can be summarized in two points.

God's steadfast love or God's confident commitment in the past and God's confident commitment in the future. In the first portions, which is God's confident commitment in the past, which is between verses 4 to 32, it can be summarized into four stories.

The four stories are more like reflections of what the people of Israel had gone through and God's redemption in the midst of all of that. The first story is between verses 4 to 9, which reads, Some wandered in desert waste, finding no way to a city to dwell in, hungry and thirsty.

Their soul fainted within them then they cried to the Lord in their trouble and He delivered them from their distress. And I don't think the desert is one of the best places to wander. It is not a fun place. It is dry, it's scorching hot, the weather conditions are not one of the best. it is, they're sandstorms, and even more, they're dangerous animals that you would not even sort of have a means of protection.

[12:50] But if we put this in the context of the people of Israel and we would try to take it back and wonder, like, when did this happen? How did this happen? But it would tell us that this wandering in the desert brings us back to one time in Exodus where the people of Israel, out of disobedience, wandered for 40 years.

The second story, which also starts from verse 10 and runs through to 16, I'd read in part, Some sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, prisoners in afflictions and in irons, for they had rebelled against the words of God and spun the council of the Most High.

So he bowed their hearts down in hard labor, they fell down with none to help. Historically, it is evident that when nations conquer another nation, they take people off as slaves.

And for the case of Israel, this describes the invasion that happened to them that led to their exile. The people were bound in chains and this is a result of their disobedience.

Not only that slaves were locked in caves and dark places, but they were forced to do laborer's attacks and it sort of sounds like the invasion that happened with Assyria and the Babylonians.

[14:17] The third story, which is still in the first part that we're considering, is between verse 17 to 22. And I'd read it in part, some were fools through their sinful ways and because of their iniquities suffered affliction.

They looted any kind of food. They drew near to the gates of death. And the wilderness experience is very likened to this.

Because if you're in such a condition, I'm sure you would have several near-death experiences where you're in trouble. And finally, the fourth story, which starts from verse 23 to 32.

Read, some went down in ships doing business in great waters. Some saw the deeds of the Lord, his wondrous walks 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 up to the depths. Their courage melted in their evil plight. They reeled and staggered like drunken men and were at their wits end.

[15:27] Though Israel's geography doesn't necessarily is anywhere borderline close to the river, but we know that a key part of Israel's history is also the prophets.

prophets and one would conclude that this would be a typical story of Jonah and him fleeing from God and getting on a ship to Nineveh.

Though he fled in disobedience and he saw the wonders of the sea, but for the sailors that was their redemption. But if you were reading it from afar you would wonder why does the writer have to write four stories to say the same thing all over and over again?

What would be the point? He could just well read in just one story, say one thing and conclude there. And even in the structure there seems to be a pattern where there's an introduction and a couple of repeated statements.

I believe there's an importance to that. The importance is in repetition. repetition. This repetition leads us to what we see in the interlude between the structure.

[16:46] It's seen in verses 6, 13, 19, and 28 which reads I believe repetition is a good approach when you want to lay emphasis on what you're trying to communicate in hopes that if you missed it the first time, you would not miss it in the second time.

If you probably missed it the second time, you would also see it in the third time. And repeatedly, the writer just kept emphasizing on this one thing that the people cried out to the Lord and the Lord delivered them.

Another key repetition that is seen through the series of stories that we just considered is in the conclusion which is seen in verse 8, 15, and 21 and he reads let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of men.

I believe the writer is emphasizing on one thing, that God truly redeems the people of Israel because of his character, his steadfast love, that the reason why they experienced deliverance and redemption wasn't because they were in trouble or they were in a tight situation, it wasn't because they cried out either, it was ultimately because of his character, his covenant commitment, to his people.

If you grew up in church like me, this word might not be new to you. Steadfast love is something that we probably have even heard in songs, we've had it with bumper stickers, there'll be wallpapers about it, it's a very Christianese word, if I may, and the translation just reads that's chesed, I know my Hebrew and Greek is not close to Nils, but the translation basically means God is committed to the people of Israel, there's a covenant that doesn't change irrespective of Israel's rebellion.

[19:01] Thankfully, Nils established what this means last week when we considered Psalms 8-9, but when we think of the character of God, we might want to assume that it is very distinct, it is separate.

We would consider it to be like a pie of pizza or a pumpkin pie, where you'd have a slice of God's goodness, a slice of His mercy, a slice of justice, a slice of love, a slice of patience, and any sort of excellence that we might ascribe to Him.

But the character of God is not the characteristics of God. The character of God is the character of God. It is absolute. There is no fraction, it is in complete measure.

The character of God is God by Himself-ness. It is who God is. If by any chance we take away the steadfastness of God or His confident commitment of God, then we have ripped Him off of His excellence.

Thus, He can be trusted. If God cannot be trusted, then He is no longer just. If God is no longer just, then He can occupy the place as God.

[20:27] But because He is steadfast or because He has His confident commitment towards us, then that is what makes Him holy, different, distinct from any other deity or any other celestial being that we can think of.

It is the steadfastness of God's character that makes Him loving or just or kind or any other excellence we can ascribe to Him. It's all intertwined.

There are no singularity. It's absolute together. So because since God is committed to us, does that mean that we would be reckless? Absolutely not.

I do not think so. But if we choose to be reckless, it only means that maybe we haven't fully understood the character of God. If we choose to be reckless, we would surely bear the fruits of our actions.

And just like this text has showed us in verse 4 to 5, the people who wandered in desert west, finding no way to a city to dwell in, hungry and thirsty, and their soul fainted within them, it was because of their reckless actions or their choices, they indeed bore the repercussions of the poor choices they made.

[21 : 43] But when we understand or embrace the reality of who God is or how He is committed to us, because He loves us, He should drive us to worship.

Shouldn't He drive us to worship? shouldn't the excellent of God drive us to worship? Because how can an excellent God be committed to us even when we rebel, if it is in love?

Just like the children of Israel, church, I believe we have wandered the desert waste of life, looking for rest for our souls. Haven't we sought in darkness or the shadow of death, becoming prisoners in affliction, under the irons of our own addiction?

Haven't we foolishly, through our own sinful ways, suffered repercussions in our bodies and in our souls? Haven't we, like Jonah, fled and as a result of our disobedience, experienced the wonders of God?

Even in the state of our rebellion, God is still committed to us. God still shows us mercy and brings us redemption through Jesus. Shouldn't that drive us to worship?

[23 : 03] Shouldn't his goodness lead us to repentance? That in looking back, just like the author reflecting over the history of Israel and the actions, that we see the consistent commitment of God in loving us, in redeeming us, despite when we rebel.

God and in doing so, that we be driven to worship the God of Israel and bust out with thanksgiving, just like the introductory verses.

Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble.

trouble. I believe God has indeed redeemed us from trouble and gathered us in this beautiful city of Hong Kong this Sunday morning. And when we reflect on that, I believe it should drive us to worship.

It should drive us to give thanks and not to be static or stoic. The writer reflection points us to two things.

[24 : 16] That when we consider all Christ has done, that we would surely attest to the faithfulness of God. Because to be honest, we forget too easily. We forget how much redeeming God is towards us.

We forget too easily because most times we are just narrowed down to how we want things to go or how we want things to pan out. And secondly, the writer writes in reflection of the people of Israel and their past, hoping to point us to the future that is ahead of us.

Which leads us to the second part, God's covenant commitment to us for the future. On the second part, it starts from verses 33 to 43.

Still on the context of the people of Israel, it's almost even repeating because he repeats the same thing about the people of Israel leaving exile and returning back again or them walking in rebellion and God showing them redemption.

But this time, rather than telling four stories, he borrows a very poetic style from the books of the prophets. And there's that juxtaposition between what God does that is almost impossible, like bringing desert to a fruitful place or a fruitful place becoming a desert.

[25 : 43] If we read from verse 33 to 38, he turns rivers into a desert, springs of water into thirsty ground, a fruitful land into salty waste, because of the evil of its inhabitants.

He turns a desert into pool of water, a parched land into springs of water, and there he lets the hungry dwell. He establishes a city for them to live in. They sow fields and plant vineyards and get a fruitful yield, but his blessing they multiply greatly and he does not let their livestock diminish.

If we consider the people of Israel, it relates so much to them, because before the people of Israel inhabited Canaan, there were the Amorites. The Amorites were this pagan nation that were the original inhabitants of Canaan.

God spoke to Abraham in Genesis 15, telling him that your people would go through slavery in Egypt, but 400 years later they would come back and dwell in this land because the inhabitants of this land, their wickedness had not, their wickedness is not yet full, or my justice hasn't gotten to them yet.

A similar reference is also with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, this fruitful city that became completely ruined because of the evil of the inhabitants. And we see that God's covenant commitment is not just only in bringing fruitfulness of blessing, but it's also in justice.

[27 : 17] It's also in bringing justice to the evil of the land. But the writer doesn't end yet on the history of Israel because Canaan as we know it, which was a desert place, suddenly becomes this

fruitful land.

It wasn't because of the agricultural practices of Israel. It's not because they had the best technology either. The reason why Canaan became fruitful was because of God's covenant commitment.

It was God's covenant commitment that took this empty land that is flat to become fruitful. It was that miracle of God. And almost towards the ending from 39 to 42, we're introduced to another period of Israel's history when they also rebelled against God and God brought justice to them. It reads, when they were diminished and brought low through oppression, evil and sorrow, he pours contempt on princes and make them wander in trackless wastes.

But he raises up the needy of affliction and make their families like flocks, your pride see and are glad and all wickedness shut his mouth. We know Israel's, a key part of Israel's disobedience was because they chose to have kings.

[28 : 40] And because they chose to have kings, the kings let them astray and they started worshipping other gods. The choice to have other kings led even to that great oppression and exile.

But in the midst of all of that, we still see God's hand redeeming the people of usual. Why? It's clear.

It's his covenant commitment. In considering the writer or in looking at the perspective of the writer, why does he do this? Why does he go over the same thing all over again?

I believe as the people live in exile, they would be shattered with no hope, with no certainty of what's ahead of them.

And as covenant of Israel, I'm sure they are aware that Jerusalem is in ruins. There is no certainty of a house or cattle or food.

[29 : 51] And the writer reflects in that past, hoping that in looking back, the people of Israel will look forward and remember that it is God who made Canaan what it is.

It is not their best practices that made Canaan fruitful. It is God who brought the miracle of desert land becoming fruitful.

Israel. The writer also writes in response to remind the people of Israel not to repeat the same thing that the past generation made in going in rebellion and idol worship, hoping that he would encourage them not to forget quickly the covenant commitment of God and to remember that God is indeed faithful in the past, in the present, and even in the future that they are heading into, that they will see through the lens of faith and not through despair and trust in God.

I know someone in the crowd has already started yawning and saying, this is not a history class in Sikan, this is 2023, there is no business between me and Israel, I am firing Hong Kong.

but we can attest that though that we might not have gone through a political exile, but we are on the journey of life and to be honest, each and every one of us have questioned what's ahead of us.

[31 : 26] We have looked, looking across the crowd and seeing whether young or old, we have considered that question, like what's ahead, be it when you're just graduating or you're just starting a new role, and you're wondering in the next three, four years, what's ahead of me?

And in most cases, when we consider this question, we end up in a rabbit hole of despair, of anxiety, of worry, and the writer in response to our own situation would be to point us to a better reality, point us to remember that God is indeed faithful, faithful, and his covenant commitment is not just only for the times of the old, but it's also for the future that is ahead of us that we do not know.

The closest historical, how do I know this is true? The closest historical, tangible facts that we can hold on to is there was this man called Jesus of Nazareth, this random guy, born in the family of the lineage of David.

this man died, he rose because of God's covenant commitment. The greatest tangible expression of God's covenant commitment is in the presence of Jesus because he speaks of a greater redemption, a greater provision, a security that we would have not just for our bodies, but ultimately for our souls.

And this is what we must consider. Even in looking forward in what's ahead of us, we can also reflect and look back and see that in the timeline of historical events, there was this man Jesus, and he is the most tangible expression that we can hold on to.

[33 : 27] And we wouldn't, by God's grace, not longer look into the future with despair, anxiety, would know that God is faithful and he is good because he brought Christ from the dead, and even

more because Christ was even faithful to the cross.

Now that we have sort of learned about this, how do we respond? To be fair, when I studied the psalm, and knowing that this is what the psalm is saying, the psalm is saying God's covenant commitment is unchanging, and I question, how does this mean, or what does this mean for me? Do I actually trust God's covenant commitment, or do I actually try to fix things my way, get it done? And to be fair, I think I have my moments, there are periods where I trust completely, and at times I'm like, God, I think I can do a better job, I can make things happen.

And maybe for someone who is here that is not a Christian, a practical application would be, a good place to start would be just to acknowledge that indeed God has worked behind the scenes. Maybe a good time would be to consider your life and reflect on several events and see that indeed God has been working behind. maybe we would need to acknowledge that you are finite and God is infinite.

[35 : 09] And even more, maybe you should consider the cross and this man, Jesus. The cross that speaks of a public display of trust and affection, that also speaks of your own redemption.

And in response to that, maybe you would be, you would say like the psalmist, oh, give thanks to the Lord, because he has been committed to me all this while and I never knew. And for us Christians, maybe a good place to start would be in prayer and thanksgiving.

Because most times we think that prayer would sort of change things or make things go away, but I'm learning to see that most times what prayer first changes is your heart.

Prayer would change your heart to see Jesus and see that he is committed, even though things are not necessarily going how you planned it to be. And I'll share this as an encouragement because I don't think I'm 100% there yet.

During the COVID periods, when COVID started, I used to worry a lot about my parents because they're in the early 60s, going to the 70s, and one evening I remember just being blunt and like, I do not know what to do, Lord.

[36 : 33] I worry about these people and I'm miles away. And the question popped to my head was, where would you rather have them be? Would you rather keep them and keep them safe or would you trust them to me so that I would keep them safe?

And I wrestled with that for a moment and I realized that maybe I'm not as meticulous as I think that I am. Maybe my parents are even way more safer in his arms more than mine.

Because what's the best I could give them? Health insurance? Paying the hospital bills? That would, it's not a guaranteed safety.

It's not a guaranteed security. Maybe, I came to a resolution that day that maybe they are rather safe with him rather than with me.

And I am trying to apply that same resolve to every other thing in prayer and in thanksgiving that even in the future, maybe my career is safe in his arms rather than my network and connections.

[37 : 47] Maybe my security and provision, everything that I worry over is safe in his arms rather than my good AIA insurance policy. And that's the comfort I am resolving to.

That even though one day my parents might pass on this life, I would be comforted, not because I have everything, but because I know God's covenant commitment is true, it is faithful.

And I would hold on to the truth that if God said those who mourn will be comforted, then I'm sure he would comfort me because he is committed to make that happen.

And for as a community, I think a good way would be to keep our eyes on Jesus. Keeping our eyes on Jesus would be, would somewhat mean that each and every one of us in an old way, we would encourage each other to see that God is indeed faithful.

Like this is what happened in my life. This is the faithfulness of God. Even in our small community groups or TGs or family groups, we can attest to each other.

[39 : 05] Maybe we can have a journal or a praise report that we read to each other each time. This is God's covenant commitment. This is the time God came through in order to encourage us not to forget, but to remember that God is indeed faithful and he's committed to secure us, to keep us through all that we might face in his life.

And in conclusion, I hope we consider our life experience. I hope we consider and see the patterns just like the Psalms.

And maybe we would have more than four stories or five stories. Maybe we would have infinite stories to tell that God has indeed faithful. God has indeed been faithful and he is indeed committed

to keep us.

And whether in the past or in the future to come, we would be like the Psalmist. And shout in outburst or solemnly attest, Oh, give thanks to the Lord for his good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, for he has redeemed us from trouble. Let us pray. Lord, we thank you for today.

[40 : 26] We thank you that by your grace, may your word be an encouragement to everyone who hear it. We pray, oh Lord, that when we forget, that we will be reminded that you are indeed faithful and you are committed to us because you love us.

And Lord, may we walk in understanding, not to take it for granted, but in open arms, rever that you are indeed the God who walks behind the scenes and you are the God who delivers, you are the God who rescues and saves us.

Help us to trust in you and not on the idols that we've created, not in the securities that we've guided or mounted around our heart. Help us to see you as our only resort.

Help us to trust you even in the mundane things, Lord. In Christ's name that we pray. Amen.