

Lake Cities Community Church
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Crying out in Prayer

I found myself behind bars. I was much younger then and immature. As I stood up on wobbly legs my hands gripped the bars so tightly that my knuckles turned white. The room was dark and I was a mix of emotions: fear, anger and longing. Then I started to cry and cry. I sobbed and could not stop. My cries turned into wails and then to screams. Wouldn't someone help me? Wouldn't someone rescue me? Then my Mom came into the room and lifted me out of my crib... I was 18 months old and the fresh diaper made all the difference in the world. 😊

This morning we are talking about what it means to cry – to cry out to God in prayer. Have you ever been so desperate that you literally cried before the Lord because your situation was so serious? Have you felt that deep sense of urgency – that your request could not wait until tomorrow – you shout “God help me now – please grant relief!” As we continue in our study of prayer, we consider today what it means to cry out to God in prayer.

So, turn with me to our text, Psalm 107. As you turn there let me give you some background. No one is exactly sure when this Psalm was written, but it may be the time when God's people were returning from exile to Jerusalem. And those who have returned have gathered for public worship - and in that worship service it is time for the prayer testimonies. Four groups of people are going to stand to give praise to how God responded to their desperate cries for help. You see, even though our topic is crying out to God, this is

not a psalm of lament, but a Psalm of thanksgiving – as we are reminded today how we worship a good God who answers our prayers. The Psalmist calls the people to the worship service in verses 1-3:

Psa. 107:1 Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good, for His lovingkindness (his *hesed* love) is everlasting. Psa. 107:2 Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, Whom He has redeemed from the hand of the adversary Psa. 107:3 And gathered from the lands, From the east and from the west, From the north and from the south. Imagine yourself slipping into the back of the auditorium, just after the service has begun. Let's listen together to this ancient thanksgiving service

The Wanderers (4-9)

The first group of individuals rise up to give their testimony. The Psalmist records the story: Psa. 107:4 They wandered in the wilderness in a desert region; They did not find a way to an inhabited city. Psa. 107:5 They were hungry and thirsty; Their soul fainted within them. These we will call the wanderers. They had started their journey with the goal of reaching an inhabited city – perhaps Jerusalem. But along the way they got lost in the worst possible place - the hot, desolate desert. They started the journey with excitement and vision. Their water containers were full and their food supply abundant. The leadership said that they knew the way and they set out with enthusiasm. However, after a time, some started saying, "You know, I think we should have been there by now." The leader's responded: "Don't worry, it is taking a little longer than we thought, but surely we will find the city tomorrow." But each morning as the group woke and strapped on their sandals, they set out with a little less hope, and a little less food than the day before. Then,

one day the cry went out that the food and water were gone. This was not a reporting of inventory, but an announcement of death to this group; for in the desert there was no source for replenishing the water and no way to get more food. The text tells us that they were at the brink of death. Their souls fainted within them – it was a desperate situation.

[Psa. 107:6](#) Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble; The Hebrew word for cry is plural – perhaps they gathered together for a meeting, and they realized all they could do was to cry out to God. The word cry is an intense word – meaning to shout, with a loud voice. It is the same word used to describe how Esau’s cried bitterly after Jacob stole his blessing: “Bless me also Father” Esau cried. So they cried to God.

He delivered them out of their distresses. [Psa. 107:7](#) He led them also by a straight way, To go to an inhabited city. God is the original GPS and he “recalculates” their position - transforming their wandering into a straight path, right to the door of their destination. Therefore -- [Psa. 107:8](#) Let them give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness, And for His wonders to the sons of men! [Psa. 107:9](#) For He has satisfied the thirsty soul, And the hungry soul He has filled with what is good. Praise God! The gathered people clap and shout praise to God for his amazing deliverance.

I imagine now an old Rabbi gets up and addresses his congregation, “Are you lost this morning? You don’t know where you are, but you know that you are not where you should be? Is your belly full but your soul hungry? Are you wasting your life wandering around without purpose or meaning?” The people consider their own plight. The great Spurgeon said that, “Some men will never pray till they are half-starved, and for their best interests it is far better for them to be empty and faint than to be full and stouthearted. If

hunger brings us to our knees it is more useful to us than feasting...Supplications which are forced out of us by stern necessity are none the less acceptable to God..."

This first testimony of "the wanders" reminds me of what Jesus said in Matthew 18:12, "If you had 100 sheep, but one wandered off, wouldn't the good shepherd leave the 99 to find the one?" Jesus came to seek and save those who are lost. If you are lost, then cry out to God, do it today. You don't need to wait until the food and water have run out.

The Prisoners (10-16)

The second group now stands to give testimony. There is a murmur among the gathered as they are a rough looking crowd – long hair, tattoos, scars on their faces. It is evident they had been down a hard road. And so they had – verse seven: **Psa. 107:10 There were those who dwelt in darkness and in the shadow of death, Prisoners in misery and chains.** These are the prisoners. You could see the years of prison life etched in each man's countenance. They were in chains for years living with the smell and reality of death. The prisons of that day were sometimes nothing more than holes in the ground and reflected the worst the cruelty of man could devise. Why were they in prison? Were they being persecuted for their faith? No **Psa. 107:11 Because they had rebelled against the words of God And spurned the counsel of the Most High.** It was not their *walk with* God, but their *rebellion from* God that landed them in prison. These are hard-core sinners! They had robbed innocent travelers or even killed them. They had created victims. Their own executions were close at hand. They were suffering justly. **Psa. 107:12 Therefore He humbled their heart with labor; They stumbled and there was none to help.** Through the hard labor of prison life, through loneliness, God in His great grace humbled their stubborn,

prideful hearts. And in this humble state [Psa. 107:13a](#) Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble; They shouted, “God save us!”

And God rescued them: [He saved them out of their distresses. Psa. 107:14](#) He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death And broke their bands apart. [Psa. 107:15](#) Let them give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness, And for His wonders to the sons of men! [Psa. 107:16](#) For He has shattered gates of bronze And cut bars of iron asunder.

So we don't miss it, the Psalmist emphasizes the completeness of God's rescue three times; he (a) *breaks their bands apart*, (b) *shatters the gates of bronze* and (c) *cuts the bars of iron*. In some dramatic miraculous way, God delivers these death-row inmates who are now humble followers of God. The assembly is amazed that God would do such a thing. No obstacle is too great for God. No person is too deep in sin that God cannot save, if they would but cry to Him.

And the old Rabbi gets up once more. He asks, “Is there anyone here this morning who knows what it means to be enslaved by sin? The misery you live in is a self-created nightmare. Do you understand that rebellion from God leads to death? Have you learned that sin promises everything but delivers nothing and that God requires nothing but delivers everything.” Again the people consider their own lives. As my former pastor used to say: “Sin always keeps us longer than we intend to stay and costs us more than we want to pay.”

The story of “the prisoners” remind us of time Jesus said, “He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives...to set free those who are oppressed.” Luke 4:18. Praise God – it is never too late for us to cry to God, and to see Him redeem our evil and exchange

it for good.

The Fools: (17-22)

The third group now make their way to the platform - and honestly they look a little weak and pale, like they have been inside for many months. Listen to their story: [Psa. 107:17](#) Fools, because of their rebellious way, And because of their iniquities, were afflicted. These are the fools. And their foolishness led to an affliction. What is a fool? A fool is someone who knows God's counsel, and decides not to obey. And because of their foolishness, like the prisoners, they had brought suffering on themselves. Because of their sin they were afflicted with what appears to be some kind of bodily sickness.

[Psa. 107:18](#) Their soul abhorred all kinds of food, And they drew near to the gates of death. This sickness causes them to abhor all kinds of food. They became so sick they could no longer eat or bring any nourishment into their bodies. On the first day they felt a sign of sickness they thought, "Oh this will pass, I'll be fine tomorrow." But, the second day they were a little more sick and as the days went on, their condition grew worse and worse. And that is what it took for them to realized that they were in desperate need of God.

Now please let's be clear -- not all sickness is caused by personal sin, and not all sin results in physical sickness. That is not what this passage is teaching. This story, like the others, focuses on their self-induced desperation and the urgency of the situation. They are so weak perhaps their cry is really a croak or whisper to God.

[Psa. 107:19](#) Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble; He saved them out of their distresses. [Psa. 107:20](#) He sent His word and healed them, And delivered *them* from their destructions. [Psa. 107:21](#) Let them give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness,

And for His wonders to the sons of men! [Psa. 107:22](#) Let them also offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, And tell of His works with joyful singing. Again the assembly rejoices in a good and gracious God who deals kindly with fools who repent from their sins.

The Rabbi knows his words are going to hit home as he asks, “Are you even today acting foolishly – ignoring God’s counsel, and thinking you can get away with it? It is never too late for a fool to be transformed into a wise man or woman. Wisdom is found in anyone who obeys God. Remember that Jesus said, Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock - Matthew 7:24.

The Sailors (23-31)

When the fourth and last group speaks up, you perceive an electric excitement in the air. Those in the congregation sit up in their chairs and children stop fidgeting. **These are the sailors.** The Hebrews are not a seafaring people, so to hear a story from a brave strong sailor is like us having the opportunity to hear an astronaut talk about a trip to the moon. Listen to...

[Psa. 107:23](#) Those who go down to the sea in ships, Who do business on great waters; The reference to “great waters” probably refers to the Mediterranean sea (not the small Sea of Galilee). [Psa. 107:24](#) They have seen the works of the LORD, And His wonders in the deep. [Psa. 107:25](#) For He spoke and raised up a stormy wind, Which lifted up the waves of the sea. [Psa. 107:26](#) They rose up to the heavens, they went down to the depths; Their soul melted away in *their* misery. [Psa. 107:27](#) They reeled and staggered like a drunken man, And were at their wits’ end.

The storm is brought about by God for His purposes. We observe in the text that this is not a gentle spring shower. The storm becomes increasingly violent. The waves grow to tremendous size, raising the ship up to their crest and dropping them to the depths. The sailors cannot manage the ship, and are tossed and bantered about until they seem to be like staggering drunks. Then at the end of verse 27 we are told that they come to their wits end. I love that. Have you come to your wit's end recently? These men realized that with all their experience as sailors and despite the strength of their craft, they were helpless to survive this storm, and they realized that the next wave could be the one which would sink their ship. And as they stagger about, they cry out to God.

I wonder how long it took them to get to their wit's end. After all they were sailors. They had seen storms before. They thought they could handle it. I can imagine that when the first clouds appeared on the horizon the more experienced sailors lectured to the new recruits, "Just pay attention and watch us, and whatever you do keep your wits about you." I think it would have been better, don't you, if after viewing the first storm on the horizon they said, "A storm is coming our way, let's get down on our knees and cry out to God for mercy and strength in the coming hours, and that he would deliver us from any danger." But they did not. We are not inclined to cry out to God when the seas are calm, even if we know a storm is coming our way.

But in the urgency and desperation of the moment: [Psa. 107:28](#) Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble. We are getting used to God's response by now, aren't we? Could we guess what He does? [And He brought them out of their distresses. Psa. 107:29](#) He caused the storm to be still, So that the waves of the sea were hushed. [Psa. 107:30](#) Then they were glad because they were quiet, So He guided them to their desired haven. And I

just love the top of that phrase, “then they were glad.” If you have ever been delivered from a storm of life, you will understand their gladness. [Psa. 107:31](#) **Let them give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness, And for His wonders to the sons of men!**

On more time the old Rabbi brings the point home. He said, “Are you facing a terrible storm today? Is the ship of your life being tossed about. Do you feel that one more wave might just do you in? Cry out to God today and He will save you.”

Do you remember when Jesus got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Hush, be still.” And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm. Jesus said to them, “Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith? – Mark 4:39-40. God has the power to either calm the storm, or to calm your heart - to take the fear away in a minute.

Conclusion / Application

As we go into the coming week, I would like for you to think on the wandering Israelites, who were lost in the desert and to remember that Jesus came to seek and save the lost -- if you will cry out to him for help! Also think about the prisoners who were reaping what they had sown because of their sin, and to remember that Jesus came to set us free from bondage to sin – if we will cry out to Him. And think, too, about the fools, who had teaching and instruction yet did not obey, and found themselves on the path to death – and cry out to God who can make the foolish wise through obedience. And finally think this week about the mighty sailors who were paralyzed because of their great fear, and cry out to God who has the power to calm the storm and bring perfect peace.

But remember this, too - that while it is never too late to cry out to God, very often we would save ourselves *loads of trouble* if we would cry out sooner, rather than later. If we

would recognize the impossibility of our mission, as parents, as spouses, as church members, and therefore embrace prayer sooner and cry out frequently and often.

I'd like to conclude by reading you a short story. I picked this up off of our church floor several years ago, apparently discarded by a gradeschooler. I've always said that the lessons which our children learn in Sunday School are lessons which we adults would be wise to heed. I think this story illustrates what we have been talking about this morning.

It was a hot Saturday afternoon. Mrs. Jones heard a strange noise coming from the basement. "Harold, what's that noise?" she called. Mr. Jones was napping on the couch. "Harold." She called again, "it sounds like water running." "OK," said Mr. Jones. He got to his feet and walked toward the basement door. He was back in seconds. "There's a leak in one of the pipes. Don't worry. I'll soon have it fixed."

"I think you'd better ask God for help first," said Mrs. Jones. "What for?" asked Mr. Jones. "It's just a *little* leak." He went downstairs and started clanging and banging on the pipe.

Mrs. Jones was drying dishes at the kitchen sink. All of the sudden a stream of cold water shot out of the sink drain and hit her right in the face. Then it splattered against the ceiling and showered like rain all over the kitchen floor. Mrs. Jones rushed the basement door. "Harold," she yelled. "There's a fountain of water shooting out of my sink. What have you done?"

"Nothing to worry about," answered Mr. Jones. "I hooked the water pipe to the sink drain by mistake. I'll have it fixed in a jiffy." "Harold," I think you'd better ask God for help before..." Mrs. Jones began. "Don't need any help," said Mr. Jones. He began banging again.

In a few minutes the water stopped spouting out of the sink. Mrs. Jones mopped the floor. As she worked, she heard more sounds from the basement - laughing and shouting, splashing, quacking and barking. Mr. Jones yelled, "Beat it!" This is not swimming pool!"

Mrs. Jones hurried to look. The basement was filling up with water. A huge black dog was chasing two white ducks who were flying all around. In one corner a boy floated on an air mattress. "Hey, this is a great pool, Mrs. Jones!" the boy yelled.

"How did you get in?" cried Mrs. Jones.

"The outside door was open. I saw Mr. Jones filling your new swimming pool, so I brought my dog and came for a swim. I don't know where the ducks came from."

At that moment the ducks flew up the stairs into the kitchen. Up the stairs ran the dog, barking at them. The dog crashed through the house: dishes broke, chairs and lamps fell. Finally, one duck flew out the window.

Mr. Jones slogged up the stairs. "One of those ducks flew into me and I fell off the ladder," he complained. "I almost drowned. And I can't get the pipe back together to stop the water!"

"Harold Jones, I told you before, you needed help, but you wouldn't listen."

"But Martha, you know we can't afford a plumber," Mr. Jones said sadly.

“You never gave me a chance to finish what I was trying to tell you,” said Mrs. Jones. “The Bible says that if you will ask, the Lord will help you with any problem, even if it is fixing the pipes.”

“You’re right,” Mr. Jones sighed, “I always try to do things myself. Then everything goes wrong. I guess I would save myself a lot of trouble if I asked the Lord first.”

So, dripping, Mr. Jones asked the Lord to help him get his water pipes fixed. Then he went back downstairs to try again.

The doorbell rang. Mr. Sweeney the mailman, had a package. Mrs. Jones told him what happened.

“Why, I’d be glad to help, Mrs. Jones, I use to do plumbing in the Army,” he said. He went downstairs and banged and clanged for a few minutes.

Mrs. Jones looked downstairs. “Things are looking much better,” she called.

“Oh, yes.” Mr. Jones answered. “The problem was easy to fix. Mr. Sweeney showed me what to do. Everything’s fine.”

That evening Mr. and Mrs. Jones sat in the kitchen eating ice cream. “What a day,” Mr. Jones said, sighing. “I’m exhausted. I’d probably still be in the basement if the Lord hadn’t sent Mr. Sweeney. It sure pays to ask the Lord what to do first, instead of trying to do everything yourself.”