

Psalm 107 – John Karmelich

1. We are now starting the fifth and final book of the Psalms. This fifth book runs all the way until the end, which is number 150. If I knew now, what I knew the day I first started writing on the psalms, 1) I would be shocked it is taking me this long to get through them, 2) I would be amazed at how much I have personally learned from them and 3) I would be amazed at how much it has affected my prayer life and in particular my attitude about how I pray.
 - a) That last point leads directly to this particular lesson. The focus of Psalm 107 is on being grateful for what God has done for our lives and specifically about looking back at one's life and realizing how much He had changed us for the better.
2. This psalm also ties well to the last two psalms we studied in the last lesson. Let me explain:
 - a) If you recall, the last two psalms were "history lessons". Psalm 105 focused on Israel's history with a particular emphasis on appreciating all the good things God has done for our lives. Psalm 106 was also a history lesson, but with a focus of seeing history from God's perspective. A key point of Psalm 106 is that despite our disloyalty to God at times, (i.e., we sin and turn from what He wants us to do at times), He is still loyal to us.
 - b) This does lead us to Psalm 107. The point here is in effect, God is still loyal to us despite all the sins we commit. Therefore we should show Him gratitude when we realize God was right and we are wrong, and praise Him when we are thinking about Him.
 - i) In effect, Psalm 107 fits those moments in time, where we realized our ways of living were wrong, and God's ways were right.
 - c) Psalm 107 to me, is also an Old Testament equivalent of the "Prodigal Son" story in Luke 15, 11-31. That story is about a man who wanted his share of his father's inheritance now while his father was still alive. The father sold half of his possessions and gave it to his son then, because assumedly the father loved the son so much. After the son wasted away his inheritance the father still welcomed the son back home. Yes the son lost his earthly inheritance, but not his "son-ship", which is the key point of that story. It also ties to the idea of gratitude as being taught in this psalm.
 - i) The point as it relates to you and me is that we can waste the opportunities God gives us to be a witness for Him, but not salvation. If we believe Jesus is God and He died for our sins that is in effect a separate issue from being called to serve God by being a good witness for Him.
 - ii) In other words, one can "blow" being a good witness, but still inherit eternal life.
3. OK John, I know all of this because you have beaten it into our heads for many lessons now. ☺
 - a) Why should I study this particular psalm and in effect read further? The answer is in effect that temptations will always come in our lives and we need to remind ourselves regularly that the purpose of this life is to make a difference for God with our lives.
 - b) By reading about others who have realized the errors of turning from God, it reminds us of the purpose of our lives and helps us to focus on what He has called us to focus on.
 - c) Let me try this concept another way: It is easy in life to get bored with what we are doing. It is easy to be tempted to turn away from what God wants us to do. Remember that Satan and his army of demons don't want you and me to be a good witness for Him
 - i) They will try anything and everything to keep us away from what He has called us to do. With that temptation always there to turn away from God, it is helpful every now and then to remind ourselves of the importance of keeping our focus on Him and remembering that like the prodigal son, there is always a price to pay in this lifetime when we turn away from what God has called us to do.
4. This leads to my lesson title: It is appreciating the benefit of following God. It is about being grateful that God still love us despite our faults and the benefits He gives for trusting in Him.

5. Before I start Verse 1, its time to return to another of my favorite topics: It is how each of the first five books of the Psalms ties well to the first five books of the bible. Since this psalm begins the fifth book of the psalms, let me discuss how this ties to the fifth bible book, Deuteronomy.
 - a) The original purpose of the book of Deuteronomy was to prepare the second generation of Israelites to enter the Promised Land. This book is nicknamed the "The Second Law" because it repeats many of the laws of the Old Testament for the second time.
 - b) I have found the best description of Deuteronomy is the "Book of Preparation". Before the Israelites were first about to enter the Promised Land, Deuteronomy describes what the Israelites should know prior to entering that land. If the "Promised Land" is symbolic of learning to trust God with every aspect of our lives, think of Deuteronomy as a preparation guide for living that life. You may find it interesting that Jesus quotes from this book more than any other book in the Old Testament.
 - c) OK John, I'm getting the idea that Deuteronomy is about preparation, and I sense that you are telling me then, that this fifth book of the psalms is about preparation as well.
 - d) If that is true, what is Psalm 107 about and what is it preparing me for?
 - i) It is preparing us for living a rich full life of trusting Jesus. Psalm 107 is first in the final book of the Psalms because it describes specific examples where God has rescued people who have been called to serve Him. It also describes the price to be paid when they or us turn their back on Him.
 - ii) Think of it this way: This book is not for the unbeliever, but for the believer. It is for the person who already believes in God but due to circumstances of their lives they have turned away from Him and now God is drawing them back to Him.
 - iii) In effect, this psalm is an expansion on the "Prodigal Son" who has wandered away from God and now is being drawn back to Him again.
6. OK John, what if I haven't wandered away from God and have been loyal for a while? Why should I study this psalm if I haven't been the "Prodigal Son"? Another good question. ☺
 - a) The answer is that each one of face temptations to turn away from God. If we have been called to serve Him, then accept that there are demonic forces out there that are doing all they can to keep us from being a good witness for God. Studying psalms like this remind us of what to do when we face such temptations. Remember the specific purpose that God has called on each of us to be a witness for Him.
7. OK, what if I am new to Christianity? Just know that God is preparing you for a life of serving Him. Believing in Jesus is more than just knowing you are going to heaven. The idea of living the Christian life is to live to make a difference for Him.
 - a) How do you do that? The answer varies from person to person. I find it becomes obvious over time what God calls each of us to do for Him when we seek Him regularly. In short, be patient. Stick to studying His word, prayer and hanging out with other Christians and God will make it obvious over time what He calls you to do.
 - b) OK, enough yapping about what God has called us to do as Christians. Let us see how that concept actually ties to Psalm 107.
8. Psalm 107 Title, None.
 - a) There is no title to this psalm. That simply tells me the psalmist wants us to focus on the message of the psalm itself: Giving gratitude to God for sticking with us and describing the price to be paid when we do turn from Him in our lives.
 - b) Since there is nothing the author wants us to know about any title, let's start Verse 1.
9. Verse 1: Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.
 - a) Notice that the psalmist does not want us to feel sorry for ourselves. There is no, "I'm so guilty that I have turned from Him". Instead, the psalmist wants us to focus on His love.
 - b) Do you ever feel at times like you are not close to God? The way to change that is simply to focus on His love. In other words, "Focus on Him and He will respond."
 - i) The reason we give God praise is because that act draws us closer to Him.

- c) Sometimes I go through periods of time when I feel sorry for myself. I have to remind myself that the solution to life's problems always begins with drawing close to Him and His love for us. Focusing on that love changes our perspective about life and reminds us of just how good He is to us and how much He does care for guiding our lives.
 - i) The point is no matter what we are dealing with at any moment in time, the way to overcome worries, problems and fears does begin with drawing close to Him.
 - ii) Why? The answer is in Verse 1: Because He is good and His love endures forever.
 - a) Think about how long you plan on living. The correct answer is forever. We should desire things that will literally last forever and one of those things is His love. I read today about a man who lived ninety five years and one of his comments on his death bed was just how fast it all went by.
 - iii) My point here is whether we realize it or not, one big purpose of this life is to prepare us for the concept of living with God forever. Realizing that God is good to us and realizing that we will live forever in His presence should get us to want to draw close to Him and that is the point of this opening verse.
- 10. Verse 2: Let the redeemed of the LORD say this-- those he redeemed from the hand of the foe,
³those he gathered from the lands, from east and west, from north and south.
 - a) If you study the history of ancient Israel, at many points in their history they have had to fight against groups who have lived all around them, in all four directions. In other words, they have had enemies to the east, to the west, to the north and the south.
 - i) Despite all of that, the Israelites still exist as a group. Yes, many have died in those wars, but the point is that God has separated them (and us) out of whatever battles they have had to face and wherever they had to face them.
 - ii) This does lead to you and me. If you and I believe that Jesus is God and He has died for our sins, then we too, have been redeemed from the "hand of the foe".
 - a) It means that we too have been called to a life of drawing upon His love in order to live the type of life that He desires we live.
 - iii) To put it another way, do you want to live a joy filled life? Do you want to turn from sorrow? It does begin with the simple act of worship. Realizing how much God loves us not only should cause us to love Him back, but that act of love also gives us the strength to face whatever we have to face in life.
 - b) Verse 2 mentions the "hand of the foe". Whose hand is that and how did we get rescued from that hand? To answer, let me start with a quote from the Gospel of Luke:
 - i) Satan once said to Jesus, "I will give you all the kingdoms of this world if you (Jesus) bow down and worship me (Satan)". (Paraphrase of Luke 4:6-7). When Satan made that statement, Jesus never said, "You don't own this world and therefore, you can't make that deal." Jesus did respond by saying in effect that all of us (including Satan) should serve God the Father and no one else.
 - ii) Since Jesus claimed Satan is in charge of this world, know that there is coming a future day when Jesus will "redeem" this world from Satan. In the meantime he does in effect own this world. That was the true penalty when Adam and Eve sinned and God said in effect, "You want to live a life without Me? Go ahead and try and I'll be right here if you change your mind".
 - iii) The point is that all of us who believe in Jesus did at one time belong to that "foe" which is Satan. What is also worth considering is that every time we make the decision to turn from God to do things our way as opposed to His way, we are turning back to that foe whether we realize it or not.
 - c) OK, enough of understanding our enemy, remember the key point in this psalm is that we can waste the opportunities God gives us to serve Him but if we believe Jesus is God and He has died for our sins, we can't lose our salvation. That is a key point of this psalm

11. Verse 4: Some wandered in desert wastelands, finding no way to a city where they could settle. ⁵They were hungry and thirsty, and their lives ebbed away. ⁶ Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.
- a) Beginning here in Verse 4, we get the first of four stories about four groups of people (one group per story) that has wandered away from God. I don't believe these are specific historical stories, but just examples of how one can turn from God one's life.
 - b) In this first story, it mentions people who have wandered in "desert wastelands".
 - i) In a literal sense, it is describing someone wandering around in "no man's land" trying to find a city in which they could find comfort and rest.
 - ii) The visual picture is looking for a place that has food, water and shelter and there are none of those things wherever this group was at that moment.
 - c) OK John, why this example? What is it teaching us? Yes it could literally be describing a situation where one has nothing and realizing one needs help in order to stay alive.
 - i) To come back to the story of the Prodigal Son, the main character used up His inheritance and was complaining of no food. At that point, the son wanted to return to his father's house and be treated like a servant for the sake of food.
 - a) It was the effort to return to his father's house that caused his father (a picture of God the Father) to rejoice over his son coming back home.
 - b) The point of the prodigal son story as well as this psalmist story is that once someone cries out to God, "miraculously" they were rescued.
 - ii) So does that mean if I am wandering around in "no man's land" and I cry out to God, He is going to instantly bring me what I need? If and when God does rescue us out of situations is in effect His business and not ours.
 - a) I recently finished a book about a World War II veteran who was tortured for years in a prisoner of war camp. He went on to be saved after he came home and became an evangelist for many years. My point is God does rescue people out of horrible situations on His timing and often for His reasons. (The book is "Unbroken", the story of Louis Zamperini.)
 - iii) OK John, you and I are already saved. How does this wandering in the desert story affect us as believers? It is about trusting God when things are falling apart. It is about the reminder that He is still there when we don't know which way to turn in our lives. It is to say in effect, "I'm stuck in this bad situation and don't know what to do next, so God I need your guidance here".
 - a) Like the main character in the book I just read, things may even get worse before they get better. Life is about following His plans for our lives even when those plans are painful at any given time.
 - d) This leads us to the "happy ending" of this first of four stories within the psalm itself:
12. Verse 7: He led them by a straight way to a city where they could settle. ⁸ Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men, ⁹ for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.
- a) Remember in this little story, it is describing a group wandering in the desert. In Verse 7, this group is lead "straight way" to a city where they could settle. Verse 8 then tells them to give thanks to God for His love and the good deeds He does for us.
 - b) A key point of this story is not only does God rescue us to eternal salvation, but that He also cares for our lives and wants to satisfy our current needs with "good things".
 - c) This verse is not guaranteeing that if we just stand there and cry out to God that He will drop food in our laps. There may be some situations where God does that, but often He just guide us to where He can satisfy our needs so we can live to praise Him another day.
 - d) The lesson of this psalm parable is in effect, "Trust Him through all of our situations and He will guide us to give us what we desire in our lives." He may not give us everything we want, but He will provide what we need to survive.

- e) Going back to the biography I read of Louis Zamperini, it is amazing to read how hard it was for him to survive through some really horrible situations. In between describing the torture and starvation conditions he endured through for years, there is an occasional reference of hearing singing that no one else hears or some strangers who help him survive through a particular moment in time. Although the book doesn't say so I am convinced God sent those people (or even angels) to help him survive that ordeal.
 - i) You or I may never see such tough situations or we may even know of people who died at a young age. The point is in effect like the psalm stories God does rescue some people through tough situations ultimately for His glory.
 - ii) OK enough of my other book. ☺ Back to Psalm 107.
- 13. Verse 10: Some sat in darkness and the deepest gloom, prisoners suffering in iron chains,¹¹ for they had rebelled against the words of God and despised the counsel of the Most High.¹² So he subjected them to bitter labor; they stumbled, and there was no one to help.
 - a) Here we start the second of the four stories in this psalm about being rescued.
 - b) Back in the first story, we had someone or a group wandering in the desert. Here in this second story, we have a group of people in prison. Notice in Verse 11 that these people were in prison for rebelling against God's words.
 - i) Effectively, most people are in jail for rebelling against God's words. If people are in jail for stealing or murder, that is in effect rebellion against His word.
 - ii) I have to admit I never thought of prison as God giving people what they want in the sense that they have chosen to rebel against His desires for their lives. Yes that is not the case for all prisoners, but in effect it describes a lot of people.
 - iii) The effective point is that God wants people to turn to Him with their lives.
 - a) If prison (or a desert place like the first illustration) is what it takes to turn to God with people's lives, we should pray for His will to be done and not to pray to end a bad situation that God does not intend to end at this time.
 - c) The main point of this little story within the psalm is not to wallow in the suffering of prison, but for such people to realize the error of turning from God. The people in this story were literally sentenced to harsh labor for a crime they were guilty of committing.
 - d) There is a famous expression and hymn title that goes, "There for the grace of God goes I".
 - i) John Bradford wrote that as he was watching criminals in England being executed.
 - ii) He wrote that hymn as he realized that the only reason he was not being killed at that moment was due to the grace of God changing his life to serve Him.
 - iii) That hymn reference ties well to our psalm story. This "jail" story is not about being released early because one is now saved. The point is God guides us during the worst of times and being in prison definitely counts as the worst of times.
 - iv) I have met some people who have been involved in the prison ministry. When they speak about it, they describe a hunger that prisoner's have for God's word.
 - a) I believe that is true, because people who have nothing need a sense of hope and God's word provides hope in such difficult situations.
 - e) OK, John most of us are not in prison at this moment. How does this story affect the rest of us? It is about knowing that when we feel like a prisoner due to the circumstances of our lives, we should remember that God is still there guiding our lives. He is also guiding us to a mental state of freedom by trusting Him with the results of our lives.
 - i) When we are overwhelmed in life, it is trusting in the fact that God is still guiding us and in effect "lightning our burden". Remember that God Himself doesn't want us to worry. He wants to be in charge of our lives and our situations. In that sense, He relieves us of our burdens, and in effect frees us from our "prison like" situations when we are overwhelmed by what we are dealing with in life.
 - ii) Which believe it or not, leads us perfectly to the next two verses of this psalm.

14. Verse 13: Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress.
¹⁴He brought them out of darkness and the deepest gloom and broke away their chains.
 - a) Yes one can read these verses about literally being in prison and literally being freed from serving time for one's crime. I'm sure that over the centuries, many people have taken these verses literally as they have been set free from captivity.
 - b) The greater application of these verses is the knowledge that you and I don't have to worry about the outcome of our situations, knowing that God is in charge and desires to guide us through our lives. It doesn't mean we ignore our problems. We still have to work our way through our situations. At the same time, we can have peace knowing that God is guiding the situation and the results in effect are His problem and not ours.
15. Verse 15: Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men, ¹⁶ for he breaks down gates of bronze and cuts through bars of iron.
 - a) In these two verses, we finish the second of the four stories giving in this psalm about situations where people were rescued as they learn to trust God in their lives.
 - i) The point here is to remember to give God the credit during and after He has gotten us through our various trials in life.
 - b) OK, why stop and give credit to God? As I have pounded into all of our heads for a good number of lessons now ☺ it is not for His sake but for ours. To pause and give God credit makes us appreciate all the more how He is working in our lives. More importantly, that act of worship literally gives us the strength to continue working our way through the challenges that this life has for us.
 - i) We praise God during and after our trials to prepare us mentally for whatever it is we have to face next. One reason to go to church is to be with other Christians to "strengthen each other" as to help us face the world the rest of the week.
 - c) I can't leave these verses without talking about the bible story of Peter being in prison and quite literally, God rescued him by literally allowing his chains to come off and allowing Peter to get out of prison. Does that mean that God literally will work that way in our lives? Peter's story of his escape in Acts Chapter 12 does teach that if it is God's will for us to literally be free of the chains of jail, He can make it happen. It also teaches us that God is in control of all situations and literal chains don't make a difference to get His will done.
 - i) More importantly, it also reminds us that giving God the results of what we are dealing with does release the "mental chains" that bind us to our problems.
 - ii) With that happy thought stated, we can move on to the third story in this psalm.
16. Verse 17: Some became fools through their rebellious ways and suffered affliction because of their iniquities. ¹⁸ They loathed all food and drew near the gates of death.
 - a) Let us recall what we have read so far in this psalm:
 - i) In the first story, we had people being stuck in the desert until God rescued them.
 - ii) In the second story, we had people being stuck in jail until God rescued them.
 - iii) Here in Verse 17, we start the third story, which is describing people being so sick that they are close to death. Of course like the first two stories in this psalm, God is going to rescue this group from whatever that sickness was.
 - b) I think the key point of this third story is simply that we can worry so much about our problems and issues, that we literally become so sick, we are facing death "that way".
 - c) Of course, there is a literal aspect to this. These verses can be describing people who turn away from God and He attempts to draw them back to Him by allowing a bad illness.
 - i) I have learned that there is nothing like being really sick to make us pray. ☺
 - ii) Does being that sick guarantee that people will turn to God? Of course not. Does it guarantee that God will literally bring an end to that disease? Of course not.
 - iii) What it does do is get us to put our trust in Him through such a painful time. It reminds us that either through recovery or death, either way God can and does rescue us from the pain caused by such illnesses.

17. Verse 19: Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress.
²⁰He sent forth his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave.
- a) Whatever were the specifics of this sickness, the important point is that these suffering people did turn back to God and they were rescued from the sickness.
 - i) If you get nothing else out of story #3, accept the idea that God is in charge of all sickness and disease and if it is His will, He can bring such things to an end.
 - b) Many years ago I heard the radio ministry of Chuck Swindoll, when he talked about how he never understood how God allows some to suffer and others He miraculously cures. Mr. Swindoll spoke of one person who after they prayed, cancer just disappeared without any human explanation. Other good Christians had to suffer and die from such diseases.
 - i) This leads us back to the text itself. Verse 20 says that these specific people were rescued from the grave. It could refer to salvation itself in the context that the people in these verses lost their trust in God and turned back to Him and now they get to live forever because of their trust in Him.
 - ii) These verses could also be saying that God did miraculously cure them. Since we don't know the specifics, we just have to take the text at face value.
 - c) When it comes to prayer for healing, I don't think the method is as important as the effort to seek Him in the first place. I don't believe we have to go to a special healing service or find just the right person to pray over us. It is simply a matter of sincerely asking God and trusting in His answer.
 - i) So why does God allow many good Christians to go through horrible pain? As I have been saying a lot lately, I don't know. I just know that God promises to see us through difficult times and often allows them ultimately for His glory.
 - d) OK John, how does this affect my own life? Sometimes sickness can be self-inflicted in that we worry about things and that causes our bodies to go through horrible illnesses due to that worry. One of the great purposes of Christianity is to let God take over our lives in that the results of whatever we are dealing with is His problem and not ours.
 - i) Sometimes just knowing that the results of our sickness are now God's problem gives us a sense of relief. In that sense, He is rescuing us from our sickness just as these verses are describing here in the psalm. After that, we still take whatever steps are necessary to get better and again, the results are God's problem.
18. Verse 21: Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men. ²² Let them sacrifice thank offerings and tell of his works with songs of joy.
- a) The essential point is that when we recover from whatever illness we are dealing with, we shouldn't just move on as if it never happened. We should take the time to give God thanks for seeing us through such trials and tell others of how He has rescued us.
 - i) Remember again that stopping to give God the credit not only gets our focus on Him but also literally gives us the strength to face whatever is next in life.
 - b) When we take the time to praise God for the good things He has done for us, that effort of praise gives us the ability to share our testimony with others. It is a normal to be scared about sharing our love of Jesus with others. The secret to sharing one's faith is not by trying harder, but by drawing on His strength through praise to be a witness to others.
 - i) That is why Verse 22 comes right after Verse 21. In Verse 21, people are praising God for their recovery. In Verse 22, the same people are making sacrifices to God and sharing their story with other people.
 - ii) OK what sacrifice does God want from me? I am all out of lambs. ☺ The sacrifice is simply about taking the time to praise Him for what He has done for us.
 - iii) A great witness for God is about sharing how He has helped our lives. People can't argue with what God has actually done in our lives and how He has literally worked to heal us. That is what is in view here in Verse 22.

19. Verse 23: Others went out on the sea in ships; they were merchants on the mighty waters.
 - a) We now start the fourth and final story within this psalm, about people who went out to sea for the purpose of making a living by trading with others. These verses could be describing fisherman or they could be describing people traveling by ship in order to make money by trading goods or services.
 - b) Let me quickly tie this verse to the other three stories:
 - i) In the first story, we had people turn from God as they were in the desert.
 - ii) In the second story we had people stuck in jail and then turn to God.
 - iii) In the third story we had people who were sick and cried to God for help.
 - iv) Here in this fourth story, we have people who literally went away from the land of Israel in order to make money. That is the idea being a "merchant".
 - v) I should quickly add here that the bible is not against people making a living or being a merchant. The issue is being a witness for God even as a merchant.
20. Verse 24: They saw the works of the LORD, his wonderful deeds in the deep. ²⁵ For he spoke and stirred up a tempest that lifted high the waves. ²⁶ They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths; in their peril their courage melted away. ²⁷ They reeled and staggered like drunken men; they were at their wits' end.
 - a) Like the first three stories, the group in this fourth story choose to get away from God. Instead of turning from God in an isolated location (story #1) or being in jail (story #2) or being sick (story #3), this story is about turning from God by being so busy making a living that God used the perils of the sea to get these people to trust in Him.
 - i) The people in this story get on a boat and then they experience seasickness from a bad storm. Let me say right off the bat that the moral of the story has nothing to do with being in bad storms, but again, it is about God rescuing people who are living through such a storm.
 - b) The idea here is again God allows us to wander away from Him, but because we are "one of His". God goes to great lengths to get people to acknowledge Him and allows storms to occur in our lives. No, this does not mean every sea storm is God ordained.
 - i) As a bible student, it is hard to read this story and not think about the story of Jesus calming the seas when He was in a boat. (See Matthew 8:6 or Mark 4:39.)
 - ii) The purpose of that story is to show that God is greater than the storms of the sea and He can calm a storm at any time. Like the issue of illness, I can't explain why God allows some storms to exist and others to end. I just know God is in charge of this world, and He can, if it is His will to change a situation if He wants to.
 - c) Getting back to the verses, they are literally describing a storm so bad that it appears as if the lives of those aboard are about to end due to this storm. The idea for us is that we too can be in a situation that seems so bad, there does not appear to be any solution. That is when true trust in God comes into place.
 - i) In the last lesson, I discussed the Israelites crossing the Red Sea. Right before God parted the sea, the Israelites were convinced they were about to die. (See Exodus 14:10.) There was nowhere to run and the Egyptian army was approaching them.
 - ii) The point of that story in Exodus as well as this story about being in a bad storm, is that when all seems lost is often when God does His "best work" of showing His existence and leading us down a path to show us that He is in charge of our lives.
 - iii) Do I know how God is going to calm our storms? Of course not. Can I guarantee God will rescue us out of our storms? Of course not. I believe the point is God loves to get us in situations where in effect we have no choice but to trust in Him and Him alone to see us through a situation and then He can do His best work. The one thing I am sure of in life is that God does His "best work" when we have no choice but to trust in Him alone to see us through our own storms.

21. Verse 28: Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress. ²⁹ He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed.
- a) Speaking of God guiding us through our storms, I present Verses 28 and 29. Like the previous three stories, there is a happy ending where the main characters in these stories put their trust in God and all of a sudden the storm just stopped.
 - b) OK John, good for them. However, my storms often continue even though I believe in God and trust that He will see me through them. Why does my storm continue?
 - i) The answer is often that God still has things He wants us to learn from our storms. Getting back to the book I read about a WWII survivor of a POW camp, he did pray and developed a trust in God, but his "storms" went on for years. The main character had to learn that God had a plan for his life and had to learn that He was working in his life despite all of the tragedies and deaths all around him.
 - ii) My point is God does not usually just end our storms just because we pray to Him.
 - iii) God allows us to go through things for His purpose and always on His timing. It is a matter of having the faith to let God get us through those storms and when His timing is done, then our own storms will calm down.
22. Verse 30: They were glad when it grew calm, and he guided them to their desired haven. ³¹ Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men.
- a) Like the other stories in this psalm, once the problem is over, those who were in trouble were grateful to God for ending the storm.
 - b) Notice in Verse 30 that after the storm was over, God guided them to their destination. God was not angry that they were merchants. There is nothing wrong in principal about being a "merchant" or doing things to make money. The issue is our trust in God through our businesses and trust that He is guiding us in that aspect of our lives.
 - c) I have to admit, I rarely think about taking the time to thank God for getting me to my desired destination. I have prayed for safety in my travels but I rarely stop to give Him the credit when I get to where I need to go. This doesn't mean we have to recite elaborate prayers every time we get somewhere. It just means we appreciate Him getting us through our storms of life and allowing us to get to where we are going in our own lives.
 - d) Verse 31 encourages us to give thanks for His love. In other words, the characters of this story sinned, turned from God, but He was still loyal to them despite that turning.
 - i) Even if we have never experienced a bad "storm" like this, we can show gratitude for God for the fact that He does go to great lengths to show His existence and guide us to a relationship with Him.
 - e) OK John, I have enough problems to deal with than to worry about stranger's problems and how God has rescued them. Why should I show gratitude for them? The idea is to care for people and care about what He cares about: Working to draw other people to Him in the first place and working toward drawing believers closer to Him.
 - i) To put it another way, God does not call us to be a billion "individuals" for Christ. God desires group effort and group prayer to make a difference for Him. God wants believers to encourage each other and work with each other for His sake.
 - ii) Have you noticed that in each of these stories, it was always a group that was in trouble and a group that sought to be rescued? That was not a coincidence. Just as God works on us as individuals, He also works on us as groups to get us to praise Him together and get together to make a difference for Him in our lives.
 - iii) Getting back to the question of why should I care about these strangers getting rescued, the answer is that just as God has done great things for them, He can and does things in our lives to draw us closer to Him. Even if there is no storm in our lives right now, God will allow storms in our future to see if we trust Him.
 - iv) As one of my favorite bible teachers likes to say, "I am convinced God stays up late at nights thinking of ways for me to ask Him, "Do I really trust Him or not?"" ☺

23. Verse 32: Let them exalt him in the assembly of the people and praise him in the council of the elders.
- a) We are now done with the four stories within this psalm. The last 12 verses are in effect an epilogue to discuss why it is we should be grateful to God.
 - b) To explain Verse 32, notice the word "them" at the beginning of this verse. This verse is saying in effect, may all of the people who have turned from God and are now trusting in Him again, take the time to praise Him among the congregation of believers (wherever they are physically located at that time).
 - i) Even if my explanations for these groups in these situations were wrong, the point is these people in these four stories were stuck in situations and then realized that God was in charge of their lives and they turned their lives back to Him.
 - ii) Now that they are seeking God again, He is calling them (and us) to praise Him among the "council of elders". That means may those who have turned from God join those in "church" and praise Him together.
 - c) Let's think about this verse from another angle. We may see someone come to church that we know has not lead a good life. It might be easy to walk up to them and say in effect, "How dare you come here to church after all you have done?" The related point is that if God has forgiven these people and He has drawn them back towards Himself, then we too must welcome them as lost brothers and sisters who have returned home.
 - i) In other words, it is not our job to fix them, but to let God work on their lives His way and on His timing.
24. Verse 33: He turned rivers into a desert, flowing springs into thirsty ground,³⁴ and fruitful land into a salt waste, because of the wickedness of those who lived there.³⁵ He turned the desert into pools of water and the parched ground into flowing springs;³⁶ there he brought the hungry to live, and they founded a city where they could settle.
- a) The point of these verses is that God can change the geography of a land if the people living in that land change from good to bad or vice versa.
 - b) I admit I have a tough time believing in the literal application of this verse. It describes lands that are deserts (i.e., waste lands) being used for good and vice versa.
 - i) What helped me was to learn about the geography of the land of Israel over the past century. In the last hundred years, there were many Jews who made an effort to repurchase parts of Israel from Arab owners before it was a country again.
 - ii) Much of Israel at that time was marsh wastelands. It took a lot of work to make that land literally "fruitful" again. By the time Israel became a country again, much of the topography that was a swampland was replanted, and is now one of the leading exports of agriculture to Europe.
 - iii) The point of this verse does not just apply to the land of Israel, but to the world as a whole. The idea is that God can bless a physical location if the residents of that location make an effort to collectively turn to God.
 - iv) I recently heard a story about a farm area of Colorado that once experienced a long drought. One pastor asked the local farmers to come pray with Him. The farmers agreed because they didn't know what else to do. Yes, rain did come and I can't promise it will always work that way. I just know that God acknowledges group effort to seek Him and can change our land based on our relationship with Him.
 - v) I can't promise a great restoration of a land will happen just because we trust in God. However, I do know that God can change the geography of a land if the people of that land collectively seek Him.
 - c) This leads me back to these verses. They are describing situations where God allowed a fruitful land to become a "salt waste" because of people who lived there. The next set of verses describe "bad lands" being made good again because God allowed it to happen.

25. Verse 37: They sowed fields and planted vineyards that yielded a fruitful harvest; ³⁸ he blessed them, and their numbers greatly increased, and he did not let their herds diminish. ³⁹ Then their numbers decreased, and they were humbled by oppression, calamity and sorrow; ⁴⁰ he who pours contempt on nobles made them wander in a trackless waste.
- a) The description of "bad lands becoming good lands" and vice-versa based on obedience to God (or a lack thereof) continues here in these four verses.
 - b) I want you to consider, why have this "bad to good land" story tied to the rest of this psalm? After all, most of the psalm was describing groups of people who have turned from God and suffered consequences from that turning. Once those groups realized that God was in charge of their lives, they turned back to Him. The text emphasized the fact that these same people took the trouble to praise Him after being rescued.
 - i) With that said, why have this psalm emphasize changing land topography at this point in the psalm? What's the connection to the other four stories?
 - ii) The answer is about continuing to trust in Him. In each of the four stories, those groups were away from "God's people" for various reasons. Now this psalm is saying in effect, if we are willing to turn back to God, He will make the place where we live "fruitful".
 - iii) I think the idea of this section of the psalm is much more than just describing change in agricultural conditions. It is about God guiding and changing our lives for the better. While I don't believe one is automatically guaranteed to be blessed with "physical stuff" once they are a believer, I have watched God bless my life and bless the lives of many people who have turned to Him.
 - iv) As I like to say, if every Christian just "automatically" got great physical blessings just for being a Christian, many people would give their lives to Jesus just to get more stuff in their lives. Therefore this principal is not always true.
 - v) What is true is that if we learn to live our lives by principals taught in the bible, our lives will be far more blessed than if we ignore Him. To put it another way, odds are good that if we trust in God, we will be less likely to end up wandering in a desert, rotting in jail without any hope, dying from a disease without any hope of a better life or even in a storm with no hope of survival.
 - vi) I suppose all of this means that God gives us hope. None of us know what our future holds, but I have learned and I have seen when people are willing to turn their lives over to God and trust Him to guide it, our lives are far better and usually end up with far greater blessing then we ignore Him.
 - vii) That is the point of this description of the land changing: Living our lives is more enjoyable when we live with the knowledge of God forefront in our minds and have trust that He is guiding us through our good and bad times.
 - viii) I hate to stop when I'm on a roll, ☺ but I have three more verses to go.
26. Verse 41: But he lifted the needy out of their affliction and increased their families like flocks.
- a) Getting back to the verses themselves, Verse 41 is describing the "needy" being rescued from their specific infliction and their family size increased. One could describe this historically of how God took the small family of Abraham's descendants, allowed them to suffer for centuries in Egypt and brought them out as a great nation. If this psalm was written during the time of the Babylonian captivity, as some scholars theorize, it could also being focused on the hope of a future day when God would rescue them.
 - b) The point is if we are suffering from some specific issue, God does promise to rescue us His way and on His timing. It is a matter of trust in that fact. Coming back to the book about a prisoner in a Japanese prisoner of war camp in WWII, despite tremendous suffering and death all around him, he got to live to tell about it. This man lead a long life after that time ear and became a powerful witness for Jesus as He forgave his captors and learned to trust God every step of the way through His life.

- c) Let me talk about the phrase "increasing one's family like flocks". For those of us who have children, we may think, it is hard enough to raise my own children, why would I want to be "blessed" with a bigger family? To answer that, first remember that in an agricultural society, more children meant more "free labor" to help with the farm. It was and still is considered a blessing to have a large family in such situations.
 - i) The point is even if we are single or God has not blessed us with a large family, trusting in Him does bring a blessing to life that we would never have if we have never turned to Him in the first place.
 - ii) The whole theme of this psalm is about the desire to draw closer to God and letting Him guide us through our particular situations in life. The examples of people and lands that ignore Him remind us of the importance of sticking close to God and the punishment when we don't. In summary, hang in there through one's situation as God is well aware of what we are dealing with. Through our trust in Him, he not only promises us blessing but a good eternal life for that trust.
- 27. Verse 42: The upright see and rejoice, but all the wicked shut their mouths.
 - a) To paraphrase this verse, those who trust in God "get it". We see our lives get better as we change our perspective as we watch Him work. We may not get rescued from our bad situation thirty seconds after realizing there is a God who wants to help us, but over the long run, our lives are far better if we learn to trust Him with our lives.
 - b) The second part of this verse says the "wicked shut their mouths". I suspect this refers to judgment day when those who refuse to trust in God see the errors of their way.
 - i) I'm sure there have been situations in history where those who didn't trust in God see the blessings of those who have turned to Him and in effect can't say anything about it. They can't deny how God has blessed those who trust in Him. I also know there are ungodly people who die rich and in effect don't care. That is why I believe this is a "judgment day" comment as much as a comment on life itself.
- 28. Verse 43: Whoever is wise, let him heed these things and consider the great love of the LORD.
 - a) OK, let me focus on "these things". Whatever "these things" are, we become wise by considering them and considering the great love God has for us.
 - i) The "these things" is the fact that God exists, He wants to guide our lives, and trusting in Him and trusting in His Son's complete payment for our sins does give us a peace that we don't have to worry about the bad aspects of this life. Yes, we too as believers can suffer any and all of the bad things mentioned in this psalm, but in effect we all get to be a part of a "happy ending" where God (and us) win.
 - b) OK John, how do you know that happy ending is true? How can I know for sure all of this stuff about "land getting better" and "I will be blessed" is true? For starters, history has shown all of this to be true. About one third of the bible is predictions to show us that God's word is true and does stand the test of time. Finally, it is best to simply live the Christian life and watch how He does lead us and bless us when we do trust in Him.
- 29. I want to end this psalm by discussing why this psalm is the first one in Book 5 of the Psalms. I stated in my introduction that the fifth book of the psalms ties well to the fifth book of the bible, which is Deuteronomy. The main purpose of Deuteronomy is to prepare the Israelites to enter the Promised Land. The book is in effect a set of rules that teach us, "If you want to live a life of trusting God, here is what you need to know in order to live that life of trusting Me."
 - a) It would seem logical that the first step in learning to trust God would be to describe difficult situations where believers have turned from Him and show examples of how God works to draw us back to Him or closer to Him. The stories in this psalm are all cases of people who have turned from God and He in turn goes to incredible lengths to show us that He exists, He is in charge of our lives and He desires to use us to make a difference for Him in this world. That is my ending prayer for all of us as well, that God use our lives to make a difference for Him. Thanks and we'll talk again next lesson.