

Psalm 107 - Help for the Foolish

Ps. 107:17-22 This whole psalm shows how God often uses unpleasant means to bring people to confront their sins and the consequences of their foolishness. It can describe the circumstances by which God draws a soul to conversion, and also His ways in bringing a wayward believer back to him. We should see in this an encouragement not to despair, but to know that there is help (and hope) for us even if we have suffered for sins or foolish decisions.

1. Sin and iniquity, and foolishness have serious consequences here in this life.

107:17 – “Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted.”

119:67 – “Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.”

Sometimes these consequences are punishment, sometimes chastening, and sometimes a matter of sowing and reaping. They can include diseases, unwanted pregnancies, loss of job, broken bones, fractured friendships or family relationships, divorce or “break-ups”, addictions, imprisonment, etc. Fools will refuse to learn from their mistakes, and even compound their troubles, but the wise in heart will return to God and cry out for mercy.

2. God allows the affliction to become so severe that men can no longer ignore the causes of their troubles.

107:18 – “Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat; and they draw near unto the gates of death.”

There are times even in these horrible consequences of sin that God is working in his mercy to turn the soul from sin and foolishness, like Nebuchadnezzar scrabbling in the dust.

We should not automatically assume, like Job’s friends, that afflictions are evidence of God’s displeasure, or of personal sin. HOWEVER, often people are too quick to assume that there is no spiritual cause of their affliction. If God is chastening you for some reason, the affliction will not be removed by ignoring it.

Prov. 26:2 – “As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying, so the curse causeless shall not come.”

3. Because of these troubles, we cry out to God for help, deliverance, and mercy.

107:19 – “Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble”

In college I was having “girlfriend troubles”, and I believe God was using those, and other things, to get my attention on my need of him. I wanted to be a Christian but didn’t know how. Conviction of sins caused me to cry out to God. I specifically said “I don’t know what it means or what it will cost, but I want to be a Christian.”

What is this cry? Obviously a cry of pain and a request for help, but deeper down, it comes from an honest confronting of sin, and a desire to fully repent. In fact, if there is never repentance or recognition that the soul itself is unclean and in a state of sin, then God does not respond, he just leaves the unrepentant sinner to reap the consequences of his rebellion. Prov. 1:24-31

4. In his great mercy, God responds to save and deliver us from our own destructions.

107:19-20 – “and he saveth them out of their distresses. He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.”

103:8 – “The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.”

103:11-12 – “For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.”

We should take these verses, and many others, as an encouragement to come to God, either in an initial conversion to Christ, or in repentance from subsequent sins and transgressions.

Ezek. 18:30-32 – “... saith the LORD God. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.”

5. Upon God’s forgiveness and our restoration to his favor, our response should be

a. Genuine and heartfelt praise to God

107:21 – “Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!”

b. Sacrifices of thanksgiving

107:22 – “And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving”

Heb. 13:15 – “By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.”

c. Joyful public testimony, and profession of Christ

107:22 – “and declare his works with rejoicing.”

107:2 – “Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy;”

It is always interesting to notice a repeating cycle in Ps. 107 – verses 4-8, 9-16, 17-22, 23-32, 33-43. Men get into trouble, they cry out to God for help and deliverance, and God responds. Two verses occur repeatedly:

“Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses.” (6, 13, 19, 28)

“Oh, that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!” (8, 15, 21, 31)

This sequence (sin, affliction, cry for help, and deliverance) is common in the Bible and in our own experience. We have examples of the children of Israel in Egypt, the serpent on the pole in the wilderness, the period of the judges, various events with the kings of Judah, and Jonah. We have heard of many testimonies of jailhouse, foxhole, or deathbed conversions (some true, some false). We have all heard fantastic testimonies of those who have hit the depths of sin and despair, who then were brought to Christ and delivered from lives of sin. Unfortunately, some of these testimonies go on for 45 minutes describing their sins in all their gory details, and then end with, “Then I got saved”.

But some people have wondered if they are really saved, because they never experienced the depths of sin and troubles that they hear in these “gutter-to-Christ” testimonies. They were just “normal”, church-going sinners. While we do appreciate and truly thank God for these kinds of stories, we should recognize that God does not always require someone to experience the depths of drunkenness or debauchery to recognize their need of a Savior. Some people are so entrenched and entangled in sin that severe means are necessary to bring them to Christ. Others, like Saul, are not involved in sins of immorality or addictions, but are so religiously deluded that only a serious crisis can bring them around to see the truth. But many believers come to Christ simply because they hear the gospel, believe it, and respond to it. They don’t have life stories that will make it into books or the “Unshackled” radio program, but nevertheless give evidence of new life, and holy living in God’s service, and a conscience cleared from the condemnation of sin.

Although it is not always necessary to experience extreme depths of pain and difficulties to come to Christ, the one thing that is always necessary is to see our need of forgiveness and salvation. How can one desire or expect forgiveness, who sees no need of it? We must understand, not just that God loves us, but that we are in a state of alienation from him because of sin and uncleanness, and that unless we repent and turn to him, we will suffer everlasting damnation. We then hear of God’s provision of a means of salvation through Jesus Christ by his death and resurrection, and we receive Christ by faith.

Jn. 1:12 – “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.”

Jn. 3:36 – “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.”

Invitation: Do you have real peace with God, or are you suffering in some way that you can attribute to transgression or foolish decisions? Come to God in repentance and cry for mercy, and expect him to respond!

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