

“Finding God in the Dark”

Psalm 107

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • January 14, 2018

Have you ever gotten lost? I mean really lost. Where you have no idea where you are or how you got there. Many cities are laid out on a big grid with streets running north-south and others running east-west and so it's easy to navigate the city because it makes sense. I've never lived in a city like that. I thought Lafayette could be confusing. The best explanation was that they put the streets where the cow paths were because there were almost no straight streets in the city. But just to keep it confusing, the one major street that is mostly straight is named North University, West University, East University, and South University.

But Lafayette is a piece of cake compared to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. If you ask for directions you are likely to get the response, “well you can see it but you can't get there from here.” I will tell you there were a couple of times when we were pretty lost. That was in the days before GPS or smart phones.

Realizing you're lost is one of the most helpless feelings. What's worse is NOT realizing you're lost. And the only thing worse than that is your spouse not realizing you're lost. Even after you tell him.

In the Bible, being lost means being separated from God, having a broken relationship. Psalm 107 gives us four pictures describing the ways we tend to get lost, running away from God, trying to do life our own way. The first begins in verse 4: “Some wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to a city to dwell in; hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them.” What the psalmist is describing are people who have wandered away from God by wandering away from the church.

They probably didn't intend to. Likely these people never made a decision that they weren't going back to church and they weren't going to read the Bible. It just happened. But without the constant renewal that comes from the Word of God, from worship, and from

spending time with other believers, their souls begin to get dry and before long they are in a spiritual desert. We may not notice at first but over time God seems farther away and we spend more time thinking about our difficulties instead. We become dissatisfied—with our job, with our home, with our spouse, with our self. Something's missing from our life but we just can't put our finger on it. Maybe if I get a new car or take a vacation things will be better. But then they're not. If we've wandered away from God and ended up in the desert, what we are really hungry for is God Himself. And the only way to satisfy that hunger is with God's Word and God's people.

Verse 10 describes the second group of people who are lost: “Some sat 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.” While some people may wander away from God, more and more people today reject God and his Word. Sometimes you will hear people say that they think God is a myth and they prefer to believe in science. And yet the overwhelming scientific evidence points to the existence of God. The truth is that these people reject the God of the Bible so they can pursue their own pleasures. For the last 50 years or so, ground zero of the so-called culture war has been about sex. God has given us clear boundaries regarding sex. The easiest way to get around those boundaries is to reject God. But those boundaries are there for our own good. Recently in the news there have been a number of high-profile sex scandals. But those are really the natural outcome of what is called the “sexual revolution,” which was supposed to be about freedom from biblical morality. What has resulted, however, is bondage. The people who thought they would be free find themselves prisoners of their own desires. They remain in darkness.

Another group of people who are lost are described beginning in verse 23: “Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the great waters.” This is probably the one that most of us are susceptible to. The people who are described here put their work ahead of God. We think, “I just need to get this little bit of work done before Monday.” This is much deeper than whether you go to the office on Sunday. In fact, you can fall for this without going in to work. Maybe you’re sitting here in worship thinking about what you need to accomplish during the week. Maybe when the offering plate was passed you thought about other ways you’d like to spend your money. When you do that you’re putting other things ahead of God in your life. The issue here is not just behavior, it’s attitude. This is all about priorities—in your time, your money, your thoughts, and your heart. “You shall love the Lord your God with ALL your heart, mind, soul, and strength.”

That brings us to a fourth way that the psalm says we are separated from God. Starting in verse 17: “some were fools through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquities suffered affliction.” Life is hard. Things happen. Not everything goes our way, and there are always ups and downs. When we encounter difficulties in life they may just be normal parts of life. Or they may be struggles because you’re a follower of Jesus who said, “In this world you *will* have troubles.”

But Psalm 107 makes it clear that sometimes our difficulties may be God trying to get our attention, to call us back to him. Verse 12 tells us that for those who rebelled, God “bowed their hearts down with hard labor.” For those doing business in ships God sends storms. And those of us who are fools through our sinful ways suffer affliction. If you’re going through a difficult time, ask yourself if there’s some area of your life where God is trying to get your attention. Have you wandered from his Word? Are your priorities out of order? Where is your life not in line with the Bible?

Thankfully, the psalm gives us the remedy and the response. Over and over in this psalm we’re told, “they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. Even the ones who rejected him. Because as verse 1 says, “his steadfast love endures forever!” In Romans 8 Paul says, “For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” There is nothing you can do to make God love you any more than he does, and there’s nothing you can do to make him love you any less. The first step is recognizing you have a problem. Then when you cry to God, asking for his mercy and forgiveness, he will hear you and promises to deliver you from *your* distress.

That leads us to our response. Two of the most powerful words you can say are “thank you.” When someone tells us thank you or sends a note it can just make our day because we know we’ve been appreciated. Throughout Psalm 107, the response to God acting is, “Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man!” But here’s the thing. The only way you can ever genuinely tell God thank you is because you realize what He’s done for you. When you realize that God has done what you could not, that He’s repaired the relationship between you and God, you can’t help but be grateful. That gratitude comes out as worship and as service. “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.”

Amen.