

#107, Week 2: Wilderness Wanderers / Dungeon Dwellers

The writer of **Psalm 107** is gathering a great and diverse choir from the north, south, east and west. They are not only diverse along geographical lines, they are also diverse in terms of personal challenges. Yet they all share one thing common: *they all cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them from their distress*. This is why they end up in the same choir, singing the same song!

This week, we're looking at two of the four metaphors found in verses 4-32. Our first category of person is found in verses 4-9.

Wilderness Wanderers

4 Some wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to a city to dwell in;
5 hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them.
6 Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and he delivered them from their distress.
7 He led them by a straight way till they reached a city to dwell in
8 Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,
for his wondrous works to the children of man!
9 For he satisfies the longing soul,
and the hungry soul he fills with good things.

This is a picture of the *philosopher*. The *thinker*. The *searcher*. Maybe an intellectual person? Verses 5 and 9 gives us a clue to this conclusion. Although they may have had physical needs in such a harsh environment, it was their **souls** which were in distress. This was perhaps the wasteland of an open mind. Yet it cannot necessarily be limited only to those who seem *clever* - as we all ask the big questions of life, don't we? *Who am I? Why am I here? How should I live?* We all would love a prescription to the problems of life. We all want security, certainty, and protection.

Unfortunately, these wanderers have not found their way, no path, no 'city' to settle in. They are not alone in their distress. Today still, many have read the books, listened to teachings, tried various outlooks on life, but remain unsettled within their souls. Blind army ants who have lost the pheromone track of ants before them, can start to walk in circles as they retrace their own steps, and in the process lead the other ants behind them astray in an endless mill until they all drop dead of exhaustion. It reminds me of Jesus' accusation of the Pharisees in Matthew 15:14 "*they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.*"

Thankfully, these people cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them from their distress. This is encouraging for a number of reasons. Firstly, salvation was experienced while they were still in the dry wasteland. They didn't need to go to salvation, salvation came to them. This is the gospel; Jesus left heaven and came to earth to rescue us. Secondly, God rescued them in person. He led them to a city, in person. The psalmist goes to the heart of the problem with mankind: our broken relationship with God. They may have *wanted* a collection of ideas, a philosophy of life,

rules and regulations. But God gave them what they *needed*. Himself. A person. Again, this is the gospel; Jesus said of himself. *"I am the way, the truth and the life"* (John 14:6). And elsewhere: *"I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."* (John 6:35)

In Matthew 4, Jesus himself wandered in the wilderness for 40 days, hungry and thirsty. There He was tempted to turn his back on the Father, to wander from the truth, but He resisted that temptation by the power of the Spirit so that he could lead us out of our own wilderness. And as our sin and brokenness was laid on Jesus while He hung on that cross, His relationship with the Father was broken so that our broken relationship with God could be repaired. Jesus is now our straight way, and in Him we are now on route to the heavenly city!

Dungeon Dwellers

*10 Some sat in darkness and in the shadow of death,
prisoners in affliction and in irons,
11 for they had rebelled against the words of God,
and spurned the counsel of the Most High.
12 So he bowed their hearts down with hard labor;
they fell down, with none to help.
13 Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and he delivered them from their distress.
14 He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death,
and burst their bonds apart.
15 Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,
for his wondrous works to the children of man!
16 For he shatters the doors of bronze and cuts in two the bars of iron.*

If the wilderness wanderers had the vast and barren spaces of an open mind, these people find themselves in an opposite scenario. Trapped in prison, in darkness, bound in chains and behind iron. Slavery and hard labour seems to be their lot. But they are here because of their own doing. They have rejected God's counsel, and have resisted and opposed His words.

This is again in stark contrast with what society is saying; *"If you want to be free, cast off all restraints. Faith is a cage. A crutch. Liberate yourself by turning your back on God"*. Ironically, this is not new thinking at all. Satan tempted Adam & Eve with that same lie at the dawn of humanity - and unfortunately our first parents fell for it (Genesis 3). That was the original sin. People often try to define sin in terms of *sin[s]*; unworthy actions. But they stop at that, and there is no mention of God. That's why nice, respectable people do not see themselves as sinners, because they do not commit such actions. But the Bible goes deeper than that, it addresses the cause of those actions: Autonomy. Independence. Rejecting God as our Lord. Failing to submit ourselves under His reign and rule. Man setting himself up as his own authority. When defined in such terms, it's not that difficult to see us all as sinners in need of saving!

Once again they cry out to the Lord in their trouble and He delivers them from their

distress. God's ability to rescue should not surprise us, as He is omnipotent after all. What should surprise us though, is that He even delivers such rebels! This is the gospel. *Grace*: people getting what they don't deserve. Jesus got our punishment, He got our 'prison' as He was held captive in darkness with iron spikes through His hands and feet on that cross. He did not deserve such a death, we do. He was no rebel either. Jesus submitted to the Father's authority, He was 100% obedient to Him. Because Jesus got what He did not deserve, we can now get what we don't deserve: Mercy, righteousness, freedom, etc.

But Christ's death on the cross not only sets us free from the *penalty* of sin. That prison sentence. His resurrection also sets us free from the *power* of sin. He breaks the bonds, He shatters the shackles. The same power of the Spirit that raised Christ from the dead is alive and at work in Christ-followers today! What an incredible resource. God's grace teaches us to say 'no' to ungodliness (Titus 2:11-12). We no longer have to be trapped in cycles of sin!

"For freedom Christ has set us free" Gal 5:1