

When the Journey Gets Hard

Scripture Reading: Psalm 106

Text: Psalm 106:11-13

1

Introduction:

One of the things that most of us share in common is this. One day the Lord said to each of us, “I want you to go to Nazarene Bible College.” I have heard that three times in my life. First I responded as a student, then as a member of the Board of Trustees and now as a member of faculty and administration.

Each time I responded in obedience, “Here I am send me.” Like Abraham, we struck out on the journey not really knowing all that it would mean. I don’t know that we would all describe Colorado as the Promised Land, but we have arrived here clinging to the promise of the Lord, “I will be with you.”

I don’t think it would be an uncommon testimony if I were to say, “But the journey has not been all we expected it to be.” Perhaps the journey has proven to be much more difficult than we anticipated. Maybe there have been some twists and turns in the journey that were not on our map of understanding. Yet, here we are on the journey and we find that there have been some “surprises” along the way. Some of those surprises have been times of great blessing and others may have proven to be times of great testing.

2

The truth is, the road that we will follow as followers of Christ, will be like the road that Jesus traveled. Sometimes it is going to be hard. The Apostle Peter wrote:

1 Peter 4:12-13 (NIV)

¹² Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

I think it would also be true that we would all testify and say, “Yes, sometimes it has been strange and difficult, but God has been faithful!”

Psalm 106 is a recounting of the love and faithfulness of God extended to His people as they responded to the call to follow Him. It is a psalm of both triumph and tragedy. It chronicles the ups and downs of the Jews as they struggled to follow, trust and obey. Too often they did not trust and obey and we can see the consequences.

After reading this psalm we might be tempted so say, “Those Israelites were a sorry bunch!” But before we condemn them, let us look at ourselves. Too often, like them, we have made the journey harder than it needed to be because we too failed to trust and obey.

Verses 12 and 13 adequately describe how and why all of these things happened the way that they did. And from these verses, we can also learn how to respond to God and to life when the journey gets “hard.”

Psalms 106:11-13 (NIV)

¹² Then they believed his promises and sang his praise.

¹³ But they soon forgot what he had done and did not wait for his counsel.

As I look back over my 52 years of being a Christian, I can see how these verses adequately describe my own journey and the journey of others who heard the call and said, “Here am I, send me.”

As a matter of fact, if you look at the major divisions of the Psalm; it really sounds like the journey as most of us have experienced it.

Time does not allow for pure exegetical justice here. I certainly encourage you to take the time to really go through this psalm verse by verse. But let’s look at its major divisions and see if we can relate to the journey of the Jewish people from Egypt to the Promised Land.

Verses 1 -6 Starting Out With Joyful Faith

v. 1-3 The Psalm begins on a high note of worship and praise. God is good and loving and deserves our praise. He rewards obedience and trust. Is this not how we all felt when we began our journey?

V. 4 – 5 The psalmist turns to prayer and asks God to include him in the blessings of the Lord’s favor and promise. Is this not what we expected when we started our journey with Jesus? We anticipated all the blessings and good times.

V. 6 From praise, to prayer to penitence... “We have sinned.” Perhaps there is nothing more disappointing than when we realize that we started well, enjoyed the start, but got distracted along the way and failed to remain obedient.

One commentator said, “As we study this psalm, it may be like witnessing an autopsy, but we will benefit from it if, like the psalmist, we keep our eyes on the Lord of glory and see His kindness and faithfulness to His sinful people.” (Bible Exposition Commentary – OT)

Verses 7 – 13 Fear and Doubt Led to Forgetfulness and Failure

Israel started well. After all they had seen the miracle of the plagues and heard the Pharaoh say, “Let them go!” But the moment they got to the Red Sea they got a big dose of fear and forgetfulness. Now, before you and I pick on them too much, guess what? Fear will do the very same thing to us. This is why God commands us over and over again, “Do not fear!”

Fear changes our perspective so that instead of being participants of faith and promise, we become mere spectators of a spectacular event. God’s former care becomes for us a pleasant memory but not a powerful platform that enables us to remain victorious.

Verses 14 – 42 Dangerous Decline – Tragic Cost of Disobedience

The Psalmist goes into great historical detail of the tragic events that follow. “The seeds of unbelief buried in the hearts of the Jewish people took root and bore bitter fruit in the years to come. As George Morrison wrote, “The Lord took Israel out of Egypt in one night, but it took Him forty years to take Egypt of Israel.” (Bible Exposition Commentary – OT)

In spite of the parting of the sea, manna from heaven, meat enough to feed the entire nation and water from the oasis and later from the rock... they became so preoccupied with “survival – what shall we eat, drink, possess” that they could not live by faith and stand on the promises of God.

My observation from 35 years of pastoral ministry – when people or churches fall into survival mode, faith, trust, obedience, and spiritual growth go out the door!

Instead of living like the redeemed, we become the rebellious, weak and defeated people that Satan desires us to become.

5

Verses 43 – 48 Glorious Deliverance

When they become tired of being captive to their own rebellion, they discovered mercy and grace from the God whose “love endures forever.”

Psalms 106:43-48 (NIV)

⁴³ Many times he delivered them, but they were bent on rebellion and they wasted away in their sin. ⁴⁴ But he took note of their distress when he heard their cry; ⁴⁵ for their sake he remembered his covenant and out of his great love he relented. ⁴⁶ He caused them to be pitied by all who held them captive. “

Look at God’s awesome response. This is grace. It is not mercy based upon merit, but redemption based upon need. God was there all the time, waiting for His people to call upon His name and to trust Him.

Psalms 106:47 (NIV)

⁴⁷ Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise.”

When the journey gets hard, if you have taken a detour, or if you feel lost along the way... Call on the Lord... he will answer you and redeem you from the pit.” In Psalm 143 the psalmist prays:

Psalms 143:7-10 (NIV)

⁷ Answer me quickly, O Lord; my spirit fails. Do not hide your face from me or I will be like those who go down to the pit. ⁸ Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul. ⁹ Rescue me from my enemies, O Lord, for I hide myself in you. ¹⁰ Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground.

Transition

It may seem at first that the Psalm has more to say to us about what NOT to do when the going gets rough, but verses 11 - 13 also help us to know what we ought to do as well.

Let us look at these verses again: Psalms 106:11-13 (NIV)

¹¹ The waters covered their adversaries; not one of them survived.

¹² Then they believed his promises and sang his praise.

¹³ But they soon forgot what he had done and did not wait for his counsel.

Within these verses I find three things that we are to do when the journey gets hard, so that we do not travel the road of discouragement, fear, doubt and disobedience that lead us to the wilderness.

6

I. Rely on God's Power

¹¹ The waters covered their adversaries; not one of them survived.

From the moment God saved us and made us a new creation, He has demonstrated that His power is sufficient for all of our need.

We are most vulnerable when it seems that matters are only getting worse instead of better.

I know how the Jews must have felt as they stood at the shores of the Red Sea, as they heard the rumble of the chariots, the clanging of the spears, and the threat of the army, A natural emotion overtook them... Fear!

But, we have a choice. We can fear the circumstances or we can face that fear with faith. Fear immobilizes you until you cannot find the strength to put your foot into the water. Faith empowers you to cross over on dry ground.

Remember Jesus said to his disciples:

Matthew 17:20 (NIV)

²⁰ "..., I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

Our circumstances at times seem like mountains too high to climb and too vast to tunnel through. But God is always greater than the mountain.

Growing up in the church we used to sing:

7



Got any rivers, you think are un-crossable.
Got any mountains you cannot tunnel through.
God specializes in things that are impossible.
And He can do what no other power can do.

Let us stand with the Apostle Paul and say:

Are you facing a mountain?

Well, expect God to give you the strength to climb it, tunnel through it, or cast it into the sea... for God is always greater than our mountains!

II. Remember God's Promises

¹² Then they believed his promises and sang his praise.

God's promises are reflections of His character. He does not lie. He does not change. He will do what He says He will do!

Notice how faith, trust and praise go together.

1 Chronicles 16:8-12 (NIV)

⁸ Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done.

⁹ Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts.

¹⁰ Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.

¹¹ Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always.

¹² Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced,

I have a promise that I am clinging to... but nothing is happening!

2 Peter 3:9 (NIV)

⁹ The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

So when you are holding on to the promises of God... this is your testimony:

Psalms 18:29-32 (NIV)

²⁹ With your help I can advance against a troop; with my God I can scale a wall.

³⁰ As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the Lord is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in him. ³¹ For who is God besides the Lord? And who is the Rock except our God?

³² It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect.

III. Return to Godly Counsel

Psalms 106:13 (NIV)

¹³ But they soon forgot what he had done and did not wait for his counsel.

The way we think and believe determines how we act. So, what is the foundation of your actions? Is it faith based upon the Word of God or fear based upon your circumstances?

While we have often reduced "What Would Jesus Do?" to a slogan... the truth is, we should ask ourselves this question, especially when we are confused, unsure, fearful or in crisis. For Christ in us is our source of hope and strength. It is **His Word** that is our source of wisdom.

Colossians 3:16-17 (NIV)

¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

It is unfortunate that our “forgetters” work too well. But we can depend upon the Holy Spirit to help us remember the Word of the Lord.

We should also surround ourselves with family and friends who are people of faith who can encourage us and admonish us to act wisely according to the Word of the Lord.

And, when you choose to take action... ask yourself, “Can I glorify God with this action?”

If you are struggling to seek to do things God’s way, then you need to call on the Lord for help. Pray this prayer: “Lord help me to obey Romans 12: 1-2:

Romans 12:1-2 (NIV)

¹ Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.

² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.

12

You see, if we let fear of our circumstances determine our actions we are allowing the forces of the world to conform us toward doubt and disobedience. But, if we let the Spirit transform how we think, so that our understanding is based on godly wisdom, we will choose godly actions.

But, you say, “I just do not know what to do!” And God says...

13

James 1:5-8 (NIV)

⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

⁶ But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.

⁷ That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord;

⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

Who are the wise persons from whom you should seek counsel – the ones whose lives demonstrate humility, trust and faith. Don’t look around for the “successful” or so-called “blessed” who seem to have it better than you. How easy it is to envy those who are not going through the trial. How quickly that envy distracts us and turns us bitter toward the Lord because our journey does not seem to be as blessed, easy, or successful as someone else’s.

James 3:13-18 (NIV)

¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

¹⁴ But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.

¹⁵ Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.

¹⁶ For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

¹⁷ But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

¹⁸ Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

But if you seek godly wisdom, you will find it to be ...

pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

So...

14 **James 1:2-4 (NIV)**

² Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds,
³ because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.

⁴ Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

God is at work on your behalf. This mountain is not an obstacle... it is an opportunity for God to do something miraculous in your life!

CONSLUSION:

Here we are then. Fellow sojourners who heard the call and said, "Here am I." The journey may have taken us to places we did not expect, but God is with us.

You know why, the enemy works so hard to discourage us? It is because we have been called to lead others on the journey as well.

15

Spiritual stability is a key factor for those who lead others. So when trials come, we must guard against allowing ourselves to be overcome by emotions and circumstance which will take us on a spiritual roller coaster ride.

16

Instead... ***RELY ON HIS POWER***

REMEMBER HIS PROMISES

RETURN TO GODLY COUNSEL

When we do these things our perspective changes. We are encouraged because we begin to see God's hand at work, even if things seem to be turning worse at the moment.

Let us not be like those who, in hard times, suffered from spiritual forgetfulness. For soon doubts, fears and questions arise that get us off track and cause us to falter and fail. In those moments we must remember God's promises and his presence with us. When we choose faith over fear, we can stand firm and move forward knowing the Lord is at work in our behalf.

ARE YOU RELYING ON GOD'S POWER OR YOUR OWN?

HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN HIS PROMISE TO BE WITH YOU?

HAVE YOU SOUGHT GODLY COUNSEL AND GODLY WISDOM?

ACTION:

WHICH OF THESE DO YOU NEED TO DO TODAY?

RELY ON HIS POWER

REMEMBER HIS PROMISES

RETURN TO GODLY COUNSEL...

PRAYER

Dear Lord,

I confess I need your strength. I cannot face this mountain, test, trial, circumstance on my own. I want to rely on YOUR power. I will rely on You for strength.

You have always seen me through the storms of life. Help me recall those moments when I face trying times. Help me to remember them right now! Let me not fall into spiritual forgetfulness but instead, help me to keep my eyes on Jesus and trust totally in Him.

Teach me to seek godly wisdom and the godly counsel that comes from people who live Christlike lives. Let me learn to always trust Your ways.

Today, I choose faith over fear... humility over pride... assurance over doubt... and Your Word and Your Will over my present circumstances. I will not run from You... I will run to You, for you are my Rock, my Redeemer, my Fortress and my God!

In Jesus' Name,

Amen

17 BENEDICTION

Climb those mountains, scale those walls, advance against the enemy, endure that test, grow in that trial, and conquer that circumstance... and

Romans 15:13 (NIV)

¹³ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Sources:

Wiersbe, Warren W. *Bible Exposition Commentary – Old Testament*. David C. Cook, 2004.