

Psalm 106 • Recounting the Failings of Israel

Teacher: Pastor Paul LeBoutillier
Calvary Chapel Ontario

Now, as we get into Psalm 106, this is where the psalmist recounts the failings of Israel. And I need to tell you that this is an interesting Psalm as it systematically steps through all of their blunders, all their really bad choices and stuff like that. And this alone makes this Psalm unique. Not necessarily to the Bible, but it makes it unique in the sense of ancient writings.

I don't know if you're aware of this, but ancient nations used to conveniently forget about their bad stuff. In other words, they would keep a record of their dealings with other countries, as long as they were doing well. But if they would get beaten in a war, they wouldn't record it. Or, if they had something happened that was just an embarrassment to the kingdom, they wouldn't write it down.

And so this is unique in the sense that the psalmist is using this overview to show the incredible ways that Israel failed over the years again and again and again, and yet God was faithful.

One Bible commentator that I read, observed that the theme of the previous psalm was remembering God's mighty deeds. And he said, the theme of this Psalm is, they forgot His mighty deeds, and that's it. He did all this wonderful stuff that we just read about in the previous Psalm, and they forgot about it. And that's what this Psalm is going to sense or say.

In that way, Psalm 105 is offering praise to God because of His faithfulness, mercy, even in times of unbelief and failure.

By the way, have you ever gone through a time of unbelief and failure? Yeah, me too. You know what I found out? God's still faithful. He's still faithful. When we fail, He succeeds. When we are unfaithful, He is still faithful because He cannot deny Himself.

Verse 1,

"Praise the LORD! Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!

2 Who can utter the mighty deeds of the LORD, or declare all his praise?"
(ESV)

I sure can't. We don't even know it all.

He says,

"3 Blessed are they who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times!

4 Remember me, O LORD, when you show your favor to your people; help me when you save them,

5 that I may look upon the prosperity of your chosen ones, that I may rejoice in the gladness of your nation, that I may glory with your inheritance."

That's the preamble. That's the preface right there to the psalm. Now he's going to get into confessing the sin of Israel.

He says, in verse 6,

"Both we and our fathers have sinned; we have committed iniquity; we have done wickedness." Let's just flat out call it what it is.

"7 Our fathers, when they were in Egypt, did not consider your wondrous works; they did not remember the abundance of your steadfast love, (and then he says,) (they) rebelled by the sea, at the Red Sea." (correction - but rebelled)

Do you remember what happened at the Red Sea? They were up against the sea and there was no way of escape. And the Egyptian army was coming for them. And they could hear the thundering probably of the horses hooves. And the people just began to absolutely freak out instead of trusting the Lord. And that was what God considered to be rebellion. They rebelled.

And what did God do as a response? He saved them. He saved them out of their distress. Even in their unbelief, He saved them. That's exactly what it goes on to say.

Look at verse 8,

"Yet he saved them (for their) for his name's sake, that he (may) might make known his mighty power.

9 He rebuked the Red Sea, and it became dry, and he led them through the deep as through a desert.

10 So he saved them from the hand of the foe and redeemed them from the power of the enemy.

11 And the waters covered their adversaries; not one of them was left.

12 Then they believed his words; they sang his praise."

Remember the song that Miriam sang? The horse and the rider thrown into the sea, she sang after the LORD delivered them. (Exodus 15:1-2)

Verse 13,

"But they soon forgot his works; they did not wait for his counsel.

14 But they had a wanton craving in the wilderness, and put God to the test in the desert;

15 he gave them what they asked, but sent a wasting disease among them."

Now the Psalmist is telling about that time when they wanted meat. And they were complaining and saying, we're sick to death of this manna. We eat it every day and we're tired of it. We want meat. And back when we were in Egypt, we had all kinds of meat. And we were in... and we're just, we're going... We hate this stuff. And God gave the meat. And they paid the price for it. And a wasting disease went along with it. And it was not good.

Verse 16,

"When men in the camp were jealous of Moses and Aaron, the holy one of the LORD,

17 the earth opened and swallowed up Dathan, and covered the company of Abiram.

18 Fire broke out in their company; the flame burned up the wicked."

You remember that story? Well, this is crazy. It talks here about Dathan and Abiram, who were Levites. And they came to Moses and Aaron and they said, we're just as holy as you guys. Why are you guys getting all the press? We're just as holy as you are. And we ought to be able to do all the things that you can do.

And the Bible says, that Moses and Aaron fell onto the ground. And they and humbled themselves before the Lord. And they said, well, okay, fine. Let's see who the Lord has chosen to be his high priest. And that's what they were really angry about. Because Aaron and his sons were chosen to be the line of high priests.

And they said, we're all from the same lineage of Levi. We should all have the same honor. And Moses said, all right, fine. Take your censors and put fire in them and you offer them up before the Lord. And the fire the Lord accepts are the men that God has chosen. Let's, we'll leave this up to God. They said, fine!

And you'll remember that they were burned up. Many of them were... The flame burned up the wicked. And it says, that the ground actually opened up and swallowed Dathan and all of his family and Abiram. And it was just, the Lord brought great judgment. But the psalmist is recounting these things.

And then of course the great failure of Aaron is what's coming up next.

"¹⁹ They made a calf in Horeb (even though Aaron isn't mentioned, you know the story.) and worshiped a metal image.

²⁰ They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass.

²¹ They forgot God, their Savior, who had done great things in Egypt,

²² wondrous works in the land of Ham, and awesome deeds by the Red Sea.

²³ Therefore he said he would destroy them- had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before him, to turn away his wrath from destroying them."

He's telling now about how they turned away from God. While Moses was up on the mountain receiving the Ten Commandments, the people just went crazy immoral. And Moses had to intervene and pray and ask God to have mercy.

Verse 24,

"Then they despised the pleasant land, (meaning the promised land,) having no faith in his promise.

25 They murmured in their tents, and did not obey the voice of the LORD."
That's a speaking of their unbelief to enter into the promised land when God brought them there to the border.

"26 Therefore he raised his hand and swore to them that he would make them fall in the wilderness,

27 and would make their offspring fall among the nations, scattering them among the lands.

28 Then they yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor, and ate sacrifices offered to the dead;"

You'll remember that story when Balaam, convinced Balak the king of Moab, to cause the wrath of God to be poured out upon the Israelites, by leading them into pagan worship practices through immoral sexual contact. And this is the provocation the psalmist is talking about.

He says, in verse 29,

"they provoked the LORD to anger with their deeds, and a plague broke out among them.

30 Then Phinehas stood up and intervened, and the plague was stayed."

You remember what Phinehas did? It says, that Moses and the leaders of Israel, were sitting. And they were weeping over all of this immorality that was going on. And a man of the Israelites walked right past them brazenly with one of the Moabite women. And took her into his tent to have sexual relations with her. And Phinehas, he said, that's it, I've had it! And he grabbed a spear and he followed them into the tent. And he drove it through both of them.

And it says, that the anger of the Lord, receded at that time because of the righteousness of Phinehas and his actions. Because he was so grieved by the rampant immorality that was going on.

And that's what it means in verse 30 when it says, that *"Phinehas stood up and intervened, and the plague was stayed."*

"³¹ And that was counted to him as righteousness (In fact. it says,) from generation to generation forever.

³² They angered him at the waters of Meribah, (And you'll remember that's because... It says, "the waters of Meribah," but when they got there, there was no water. And the people were complaining. "We don't have any water to drink.) and it went ill with Moses on their account,

³³ for they made his spirit bitter, and he spoke rashly with his lips."

You'll remember that's when God told Moses to speak to the rock and it would bring forth water and he struck it instead. And that's why it says it went ill for Moses on their account because he'd been made, his spirit had been made bitter by their disobedience and rebellion. And Moses was unable to go into the land because of it.

Verse 34,

"They did not destroy the peoples, (meaning the peoples of Canaan) as the LORD commanded them,

³⁵ but they mixed with the nations and learn to do as they did. (Meaning their pagan practices.)

³⁶ They serve their idols, which became a snare to them.

³⁷ They sacrifice their sons and their daughters to the demons;

³⁸ they poured out innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan, and the land was polluted with blood.

³⁹ Thus they became unclean by their acts, and played the whore in their deeds."

And this is one of the darkest times in Israel's history, when they adopted the pagan religious practices of the Canaanites, and began to do as they did.

"⁴⁰ (When) the anger of the LORD was kindled against his people, and he abhorred his heritage; (correction - Then the anger)

⁴¹ he gave them into the hand of the nations, so that those who hated them ruled over them.

42 Their enemies oppressed them, and they were brought into subjection under their power."

Now we're up to the book of judges where this is talked about.

"43 Many times he delivered them, but they were rebellious in their purposes and were brought low through their iniquity.

44 Nevertheless, he looked upon their distress, when he heard their cry.

45 For their sake he remembered his covenant, and relented according to the abundance of his steadfast love.

46 He caused them to be pitied by all those who held them captive.

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

48 Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! And let all the people say, "Amen!" Praise the LORD!"

This is an interesting psalm from the standpoint that it's really kind of filled with bad news. It's a reminder. And the Jews would go over these Psalms and you would think that they would've remembered. They had a hard time sometimes remembering.

But these Psalms that talk about these mistakes that they've made repeatedly. Boy, you would think that this would be a wakeup call, we need to get these things fixed in our lives, and so forth. Look how God has been faithful to us in the midst of our rebellion.

I don't know if you're aware of it. There's a movement today that is all about self-forgiveness. And I've been hearing more and more about it. And it's the idea that you got to forgive yourself. And Christians have made a big, huge thing of it. Big doctrine. Self-forgiveness. It's just huge.

I don't think the self-forgiveness people would really like this Psalm very much. Because it's like, well, let's not just go back and revisit all of these things that we've done wrong over the years. Because we got to forgive ourselves and move on! As if that's the most important thing that you need. No, the most important thing for you and I, is to be forgiven by God. And then to learn from our mistakes.

This whole idea of self-forgiveness - people will ask me from time to time, well, what about that, pastor Paul? What does the Bible say about self-forgiveness? Nothing. Sorry. Didn't really say anything.

Don't get high-centered on things that are culturally hot button topics or important topics for our culture. We're into self-everything, not just self-forgiveness. We're into self-awareness. We're into self-exploration. We're into self-gratitude. We're into all the "self-things.

Even Christians, it's spilled over into our boat. And we start getting into self-forgiveness. You just really need to forgive yourself, brother. And it just, it gets very me oriented and it's dangerous. Can I just say that? And be careful if you run into that.

If you talk to some Christian... I mean, if somebody mentions something to you, I'm not telling you to bite their head off. But, you know better though. Okay? You know that's just cultural water spilling into the Christian boat. And we need to bail it out because it doesn't belong in there. And it just... It happens from time to time.

This Psalm is a reminder, that it's a good thing to go back, from time to time, and remember the things from which we've been saved. The mistakes that we've made in the past so that we don't make them again. Let's learn from our mistakes. Let's grow from the understanding of our past sins.