

The Unrelenting Love of God!

Call to Worship: Psalm 117

Hymn #453 - *Oh the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus*

1st Scripture: Psalm 118

Hymn #547 - *My Jesus, I Love Thee*

2nd Scripture: Psalm 107

Hymn #27 - *Great is Thy Faithfulness*

Introduction:

Sometimes in the Scriptures, you will find certain words that are often repeated, and used in ways that would lay hold of your heart with the intention of carrying it away into a deep vat of comforting treasure. They are words, which in themselves, standing alone, can be easily passed over or overlooked, were it not for the way in which surrounding contexts bring out their true glory and color. One such word in the New Testament is the Greek word, "Charis," which means "grace." Within the context of Christianity and the New Testament Scriptures, the word, "Grace," is one of the richest, theologically jam packed words, and we can never get enough of it. You bring the word to mind, and everything about the Gospel; and everything about God's sovereign, compassionate love toward His children, generates in the heart, and compels us to pour forth praise and worship to our great God. But wrest the word out of its Christian context; consider it in the secular realm, and it loses so much of its richness and sweetness. We speak of things like people walking with an aroma of grace and the like. Biblical context has a way of taking a few letters and elevating them in neon lights, or splashing them on the artist's palette, to be displayed as a treasured, meaningful work of art. Other such Greek words might include, "agape" (love), "pisteuo" (faith), "nomos" (law)...etc.

Well, in our text, we come upon one of those words, which, when colored by the context, ought to penetrate the heart of every believer with a profound sense of the glory and majesty of God. It is a "movement word," a word that is full of energy and power, which is meant to shake the child of God out of any sense of spiritual lethargy and complacency, driving us onward in the battle for the glory of Christ! It is a word packed with passion and resolve; a word, that when used to describe God or God's virtues, in any sense, immediately explodes with rich meaning and great depth of theology. This Hebrew word is used 241 times in the Old Testament, and out of

that 241 times, it is used 127 times in the Psalms! Over half of its uses are found in the Psalms! And it is used six times here in our main text, Psalm 107 (sadly, you would not know this in the NKJV/KJV, which translates the word in three different ways, within the same Psalm). In fact, it is the very theme of this Psalm, and the whole context; the entire 43 verses of this Psalm, are given for the very purpose of coloring and opening up the meaning of this glorious word.

This word, is the Hebrew word, "Khesed" (Chesed/Hesed), which can be interpreted to mean, "goodness, kindness, faithfulness, mercy, lovingkindness," or perhaps most suitable to our given context, the ESV's "steadfast love." Most of these interpretations are virtually sapped of their intended meaning, when considering them in our modern day cultural context, and one of them, "lovingkindness," would seem to be inexplicable. How can one explain lovingkindness, as something different than just "kindness." That said, I will stick with "steadfast love," which I believe best defines this term, especially within our present context.

For this morning then, I want to open up the "steadfast/unrelenting love" of God toward His children, as defined by the context, with the hope that our understanding of this very real divine virtue, will compel us to thrive (spiritually) by it.

I. The Steadfast/Unrelenting Love of God

Now, let me preface our textual study by saying two helpful things:

1) When we think of the word, "steadfast," it might be helpful to carry our understanding of the word into the realm of our own "faith." For example, the Apostle Paul charges us in 1 Corinthians 15:58 with these words, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be *steadfast*, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." Within this context, and other like contexts, which call us to remain steadfast, we can begin to see that the word "steadfast," implies "staying the course; remaining focused, unrelenting, unwilling to budge to the left or the right," no matter what obstacles you may encounter. In fact, the idea portrayed is to "remain fixed and moving forward" in spite of any and all obstacles. Be faithful even unto death.

2) And secondly then, we find that the whole assumption; the very existence of the word "steadfast," hinges upon the fact that obstacles (indeed often very difficult and challenging obstacles), will stand in your way, seeking to turn you aside from reaching your goal.

Well, as we consider the "Chesed" (the steadfast love) of God, it would be good to have these two things in mind. God's love is steadfast toward His people because it remains immovable, unbudging and fixed upon them. It is determined to maintain its focus on its objects; indeed, it is riveted within them. And secondly, there are very relevant obstacles that would seek to dis-attach or wrest the love of God from us, hence, calling Him unto a "steadfast" love. God's love contends with some form of strong resistance, but it overcomes nonetheless, because it is steadfast.

Now, as we look at our text, we will find the same obstacle challenging God's love toward His children, within four particular scenarios. Again, the obstacle remains the same on all four occasions, but the occasions themselves are different. And so, what you will find then, when breaking down the text, is an introduction to the main theme of the song, a closing reminder of the main theme, and four middle sections which graphically support, identify and confirm the reality expressed by the main theme. And each of these sections hinges upon the main theme, which is of course, the "steadfast love" of God. And so, we will survey this text within the context of its introduction, the four given circumstances/occasions, and the conclusive remarks.

A. The Introduction (Read verses 1-3)

Here the Psalmist calls the people of God to give thanks to the Lord for His goodness, which is revealed by the fact that His steadfast love endures forever. It is steadfast, with no end in view. It remains constant and fixed on His people in spite of all obstacles.

And then the Psalmist moves on to identify the people, who especially, above all people, ought to continuously offer thanks and praise to God. In fact, you might call this, the drive of the Psalm; a simple and yet, fervent call, given to the people of God, charging them to give sincere and heartfelt thanks to the Lord. "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so!" Above all, let those

who have experienced God's gracious and peculiar deliverance from out of the hand of their enemies, continually acknowledge the goodness of God, and His certain steadfast love toward them. For the people of Israel, this would have highlighted their undeserved deliverances from various forms of exile and bondage (such as their deliverance from Egypt, their deliverance from Assyria and Babylon, and all enemies who have taken them captive throughout their history). God had graciously gathered them from out of the land of their captivity; they were miraculously delivered and brought into the Promised Land, and therefore, it was more than fitting for them to acknowledge and whole heartedly praise God for His goodness; for His kindness, and for His steadfast love. This then is the introduction to the Psalm, and now we move into our first specific occasion, which supports and confirms the theme of the introduction. One among the remaining, remnant of the Jews, might ask, "In what ways has God proven His steadfast love to us?" Well, the next four sections answer that very question.

B. The First Occasion (Read verses 4-9)

When the people of God have been scattered because of their sin (the main obstacle---we will see this more as we work through the remainder of the Psalm), at times, they were caused to wander through deserts and dry wildernesses, where they were left without food and shelter. And their souls fainted within them. They were without hope and on the verge of drowning in utter despair, and so, once again, they turned their eyes toward their God, and cried out to Him in their desperate trouble, and He heard their cries. He delivered them out of their distresses. He led them the right way, so that they might find food, sustenance, shelter and restoration. Such a deliverance; such an undeserved deliverance, confirmed the goodness of God and the substance of His steadfast love, warranting a response of acknowledgement, thanksgiving and praise, from the people of God. His evident goodness, His powerful deliverance, His unrelenting determination to do His people good, and His ability and willingness to satisfy the longings of those weary souls, which call upon Him, calls forth His praise from the lips and hearts of men.

C. The Second Occasion (Read verses 10-16)

The second occasion mentioned, speaks of those who were imprisoned in some sense, because of their sin. In some way, God had given the Israelites over to be imprisoned by their enemies, because of their ongoing sin, idolatry and rebellion. The fact that their sin was the cause of this, is now very evident in the text (see vs. 11). Not only did the people rebel, but furthermore, they rejected the counsel of God, given by the prophets. And so, they were brought low; they were given over to hard, slave labor; their souls were broken; they were imprisoned and left in chains of darkness, teetering in the shadow of death. From every outward sense, their life was over. And, in their agony, they cried out to the Lord. And because of His steadfast, covenant love toward them; because of His unrelenting love, He heard them. He saved them and delivered them out of their impossible distresses. He brought them out of the shadow of death; he broke their chains in pieces and brought them into the light of life! Again, their deliverance was wholly undeserved. And yet, God was yet pleased to deliver them and to issue His blessing upon them. And so, the Psalmist comes back to his main theme in verses 15-16, and says, "Oh, that men would give thanks to the Lord for His steadfast love, and for His wonderful works to the children of men! For He has broken the gates of bronze, and cut the bars of iron in two."

D. The Third Occasion (Read verses 17-22)

Here, right from the outset, we see that the consequence of the Israelites suffering was directly related to their ongoing sin and rebellion (verse 17). They were brought to the point where their souls abhorred all manner of food. They were so distressed; so full of terror and anxiety, that they could not eat (can relate?). What they once engulfed themselves in, has now become abhorrent to them, because they drew near to the gates of death. And so, again, they cried out to the Lord, in the midst of their suffering. And He graciously and kindly delivered them out of their distresses. Because of His steadfast/unrelenting love toward them, He relieved them of their anxious burden; He sent His Word and healed them, and rescued them out of destruction. And so, the Psalmist, again, carries this evidence back to his main theme, namely, that men ought to give thanks to the Lord for His steadfast love, and for His wonderful works to

the children of men! And he calls men to sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and to "declare His works with rejoicing" (vs. 22).

E. The Fourth and Final Occasion (Read verses 23-32)

This occasion brings us to God's dealings with His people, on the rough and stormy waters. In these four examples, we are spanning through four different scenarios, showing that God's sovereignty and His steadfast love reach across all boundaries.

Those who are involved with international commerce; those who travel the oceans and the seas, likewise witness the powerful and gracious works of God. For, He orders and commands the winds and the waves (sound familiar?). He blows upon them and creates catastrophe and turmoil, and He calls out to them to bring them to a perfect calm. Men reel to and fro; they battle hard; they cast their luxuries overboard, and do all that they can, to contend with the mighty waves of the sea. They come to their wit's end, realizing that all of their marine experience cannot ultimately help them. And so, they look up, and cry out to God in their trouble. And though they are undeserving; though they have looked to God as a last resort even, because of His steadfast love, He hears them, and He answers them. He calms the storm, so that the winds grow still, and He leads His people to their desired safe haven. He brings them from utter turmoil to peaceful rest. And so, once again, it is fitting for man to give thanks to God for His steadfast love and for His wonderful works to the children of men. They ought to praise Him among the gathered assembly, and among the elders.

F. The Conclusion (Read verses 33-43)

Finally, the Psalmist closes this Psalm, by bringing about a broad list of ways in which God shows His steadfast love, especially toward the poor and lowly. He realizes that there are numerous additional ways in which God has shown His steadfast love to His people, and so, He brings about a list of marvelous and miraculous ways, in which God exercises His power unto the help and support of His humble people. He brings about great and marvelous reversals, exalting the lowly and humbling the proud.

And then, the Psalmist concludes, not simply with a call for men to give thanks to God for His steadfast love, but rather with a bold declaration, claiming that the wise observe these things and understand the steadfast love of God. The wise are able to see God's gracious hand at work in history; they see His divine cause for the lowly, and they seek Him and praise Him for it. They recognize that there is indeed mercy with God, and that His steadfast love never turns away from His people. They see behind the deception of a godless, man-centered, humanistic society, and into the throne room of an Almighty God, who is able and willing to help and guide His people, when they humble themselves and seek His face. They understand His steadfast love. [Also, note how they see His hand against the proud and the wicked]

II. Conclusion

Now brethren, let us bring this message right home to our own hearts. You see, if you are a child of the living God this morning; if Christ is your refuge and hope, then you have great reason to rejoice in all that we have just gone over. The Psalmist has just revealed something profound and glorious about the character and heart of God, as He relates to His people; to all who call upon Him in Christ, in truth.

And that profound and glorious thing is this:

If you are a child of God, God's love is unrelenting toward you! It neither turns to the left nor the right; it is constantly fixed upon you. It is grounded in an eternal covenant and could never turn away from you. It is riveted in you, and no matter what you go through; no matter what you experience, God's love will always be upon you.

Early on, I stated that the whole notion of God's love being "steadfast," implies that there are obstacles that it must overcome. There is something which constantly challenges God's love toward us, but that something never deflects God's love, in any respect, away from us, because His love is steadfast and immovable. And what is that something? What is that constant obstacle? What was it in our text? It is our sin, brethren. Do you see that from the text? God's love must be steadfast, because He is a Holy God who cannot naturally have fellowship with sinners. But, in Christ, God has wholly overcome that obstacle, brethren! And that is the point

here! God's love is proven to be steadfast because He continually pardons us for all of our sins, and never ceases from doing us good! There is hope for your present guilt because God's love for you is steadfast and secure, in Christ! It cannot be redirected ever! Nothing could ever pluck you out of the hand of God...no, not even your sin.

And so, that is why we are called to remain steadfast in our faith, and never to give up, be it, in the face of persecution or even our own sin. Our sin should indeed grieve us, but if we humbly come before God and confess our sins, He is gracious and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. This indeed, is the glory of the Gospel!

Brethren, let me leave you with one final illustration, which I believe can help us appreciate the steadfast love of God. I want to give you a picture of the steadfast love of God, incarnate, reaching into our world in a most profound way. There was a particular point in the ministry of Christ, where He had turned to set His face toward His passion. There was a turning point, where He was specifically directed to head in the direction of the hell that He was to face for us in His crucifixion. And at that point in time, you might say, "Lord, do you have any second thoughts about doing this? Might you turn back, when you consider what exactly it is that you will be redeeming. I mean, look at us, Lord! Look at the horrible sins that we have committed against You. Look at the ways in which we will sin even after receiving the blessing of Your salvation. Will you still go through with this? Any second thoughts?" And yet, we are told that at that moment, Jesus set His face *like a flint* to go to Jerusalem. And brethren, that right there is steadfast love incarnate. It is the unshakeable, immovable, unflinching, determination of the will of Christ to purchase us, at the expense of His very life. He set His face like a flint. There was no budging or wavering whatsoever, on His part. His love for His Father, and His love for us, compelled Him to press forward without looking back. Even in the Garden, when He sweat drops of blood, forsaking us was a non-option. If there was another way to redeem us, He would have taken it, but to leave us unredeemed was always a non-option.

In the face of such unrelenting love, brethren, what will keep us from forever offering praise and thanks to God? And what will keep us from laying our entire lives on the altar, as living sacrifices, that we might proclaim His wisdom and His love to all, for His glory!

The Gospel : To those who are presently condemned (John 3). To those who will face an unrelenting hell and a steadfast hatred of God forever, unless they repent and flee to Christ now, before it is too late. Steadfast love belongs only to those who are in covenant with God!

AMEN!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25