

Tell Your Story
Psalm 107:1-3 (NIV)

29 August 2021 | RVTA

Hear now this reading of God's Word:

¹ Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his love endures forever.
² Let the redeemed of the LORD tell their story—
those he redeemed from the hand of the foe,
³ those he gathered from the lands,
from east and west, from north and south.

Let's pray.

INTRO: Certain Psalms are meant to be a comfort for the people of God, bringing hope in the midst suffering and sorrow. Other Psalms give voice to lament: crying out in the face of evil and injustice. Yet still other Psalms encourage praise and thanksgiving to God, for all that he has done and for who he is.

Psalm 107 is different, and somewhat unique within the book of Psalms. **Psalm 107 is an anthem for the people of God.** It's a rally cry, calling God's people into action. And just what the psalm is calling you towards is clear in verse 2: **Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story.** This psalm is a call for the people of God to tell their story. It's my hope, it's my prayer, that we would hear this call and respond. That Reality Ventura, and Reality Church London, indeed every church in the Reality family, will be churches filled with people telling their story. So that we might become such a people, let's look at this passage and see the following four things:

1. What Your Story Is
2. Why to Tell Your Story
3. How to Tell Your Story
4. The Hero of the Story

(1) WHAT YOUR STORY IS

Every person has a story, their own personal life story. You were born somewhere, at a certain time. Your life is made up of moments and experiences, dreams, and failures. Your life is filled with people: family and friends, strangers you pass every day. There have been joys and there have been sorrows, battles and victories. Some days have felt ordinary, even mundane, while others have surprised you beyond your wildest imagination. Every person has a story. And yet, what Psalm 107 is teaching is that if you're a Christian, your individual life story has actually been drawn up into another story, a bigger story, the story of God.

Look with me again at verse 2: *Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story.* **'Redeemed'** is this psalm's word to describe someone who is a Christian. Notice that the psalm doesn't say, 'Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story... if they have one'. No; the psalm says that **if you are a Christian then you have a story**. Right here in these three verses the psalm tells us what the story of the Christian is. If you are a Christian here today, this is your story. If you are here today visiting, exploring Christianity, maybe even a little sceptical about the claims of Christianity, let me say: you couldn't have picked a better Sunday to come. Because here in these verses you get to see heart of what it means to be a follower of God. This story could be your story.

In these three verses there are four things that describe the story of the redeemed. I want to spend some time identifying what those four things are and briefly unpacking what they mean. **What is the story of the redeemed?**

Love that never ends,
Freedom from a terrible enemy,
A family to belong to,
And a home that fits you.

Love that never ends: Look at verse 1: *Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, his love endures forever.* To be a Christian is to receive the unending, enduring, unstoppable, love of God. The word 'love' is used a lot but it doesn't always mean the same thing. As someone visiting California I am happy to say that I 'love' In-N-Out. I do. But I also love my wife and my daughter. It's the same word but I mean completely different things when I use it. Thankfully in the Hebrew language in which the Bible was written, we are able to see more of the richness of this word 'love'. It's the word **hesed**, and is used throughout the Bible to describe God's **covenant relationship with his people**. It's a loyal love, a love that commits and never breaks its commitment. It's love that says, 'I'm with you to the end, come what may'.

If you read through all of Psalm 107 you'll see how enduring God's love is. Sometimes God's people suffer at the hands of others; God's love remains. Sometimes they suffer because of what we call natural disasters; God's love remains. Sometimes they suffer because of their own foolishness, their own mistakes, their own sin; even still, when suffering if your fault, God's love remains. Psalm 107 says that if you are a Christian, you are loved by God with a love from which you can never be separated, and which will never end.

In John 13, on the night before his death, the Lord Jesus Christ gathered with his disciples for a meal. And as they prepared to sit down and eat we are told about the heart of Christ. We see what he was feeling, what he was thinking about, as he gathered with his friends just before he was to die. Here's what John says: ***Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end*** (13:1). Jesus loved his own to the end. The end of what? The end. The end of themselves. The end of his own life. The end of strength. His is a love that endures to the end.

Freedom from a terrible enemy: look at the end of verse 2: *those he redeemed from the hand of the foe*. Your story means being freed from a terrible enemy. In the Old Testament, the great act of redemption, the story that everyone knew, was the Exodus story. The people of God were in bondage in Egypt, suffering at the hands of Pharaoh. He was a harsh taskmaster, saying to the people, 'More bricks, less straw'. He crushed them with an impossible burden that they could never lift. But God brought redemption. God did something to save his people: he delivered them from Egypt and the hand Pharaoh. He brought them out, he rescued them.

That's the story of the people of God: freedom from a terrible enemy. The Exodus story, though historically true, is meant to serve as a pointer. The ultimate enemy is not Pharaoh, but sin. Sin, the Bible says, is the burden that is crushing humanity. What is sin? Sin includes but is actually much more than a set of wrong behaviours. The teaching of the Bible is that sin is a posture of your heart. Sin is the refusal to submit to God as the ultimate Lord and king of your life. Instead of bowing the knee to God you put yourself on the throne. What's the result? Sin is a terrible taskmaster. It is always saying, 'More bricks, less straw', and so you move from person to person, job to job, dream to dream, experience to experience, always thinking that if I can just get there, I know I'll be okay. But the ache never goes away, the restlessness is only deeper and deeper.

The story of God is a story of freedom: **of God breaking in and delivering from the bondage of self-absorption**. Freedom from sin isn't only about stopping certain behaviours; it's about reordering your loves; it's about being able to love God more than self. The story of the redeemed is a story of freedom from the terrible enemy.

A family to belong to: Look at verse 3: *Those he gathered from the lands.* The story of the redeemed is a story in which people have been ‘gathered’. They’ve come together from the lands, from every direction. To be a Christian is to be brought up into a new story in which you have a family, **the family of God**.

Notice that the psalm says they’ve been gathered **from the lands**. That’s important: it means peoples of different places, different nations, different languages. This is a community of diversity. This is a community of people who are different. And yet even though they are truly, deeply different, still they *are gathered*, they are brought together as a family.

In a family you belong to each other. You have a claim on each other. I have a younger brother, two years younger than me. I thank God that we are very close. But you know, when I was one years old my parents did not sit me down and say, ‘Bijan we have something we want to talk with you about. We are thinking about having another child but before we do, we’d like to get your opinion. Because if you have a sibling it’s going to massively change your life. If you have a sibling then you are going to belong to each other, and their problems will be your problems, their joys your joys. So, what do you think?’ That’s not a conversation my parents ever had with me! They just sort of went for it and I had a brother. I have a brother. I belong and he belongs to me. In many ways we are so, so different. But we are family.

The people of God have been gathered together as a family. That means that there are people in your family that you did not choose. God chose them for you. You belong to each other. I don’t mean that you become best buddies with everyone in the church. But I do mean that this church, every church, is called to be a place of belonging for anyone, for everyone is who has been redeemed. This is a family of support in sorrow, of accountability in temptation, of friendship amid loneliness, of love in the midst of shame.

A home the fits you: Look again at verse 3: *those he gathered from the lands, from the east and west, from the north and south.* The imagery of this verse is that of God bringing people from all over to Jerusalem, the home of the people of God, the place of worship. It’s the activity of God which brings exiled people back home.

We live in London, as you know, and over the past few weeks I’ve been travelling around quite a bit. Thanks to kindness of friends and churches I’ve been fortunate enough to stay in comfortable places. But you know, no matter how comfortable a place is, it’s not home. What is home? Home is the place that fits you. It’s the place where everything is just so, just the way you’d like it. It’s the place where you are totally free to be yourself, with no fear, no inhibitions.

The whole story of humanity is a story of trying to get back home, back to the place that fits. This is why in Genesis 3, the moment when humanity rebelled against God, we are told that Adam and Eve sewed fig leaves together to cover up their nakedness. They felt vulnerable and exposed; they were not 'at home' in their own skin. Ever since that day the story of humanity is the story of trying to find home. To be at home is to feel safe, like you fit, like you don't have to perform. Home is the place in which and with whom you can rest.

According to these verses, this is the story of the redeemed: you have a love that never ends, freedom from a terrible enemy, a family that you belong to, and a home that fits you.

(2) WHY TO TELL YOUR STORY

So far we've seen what is your story if you are a Christian. Now we want to turn our attention to see why you should share your story. That's the main thrust of this rally cry: *Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story*. There are cultural, personal, and relational reasons why it matters that the people of God tell their story.

Cultural: stories are everywhere, stories are all around us. The stories that are all around us are forming people. You can't answer the question, 'What should I do,' until you answer the question, 'Of what story am I part of?' In order to make sense of our lives and the world around us, you depend on some story. Rebecca Solnit is right when she observes:

What's your story? Stories are compasses and architecture; we navigate by them, we build our sanctuaries and our prisons out of them. To be without a story is to be lost in the vastness of a world that spreads in all directions like arctic tundra or sea ice.

To be without a story is to be lost. People need a story, and the stories we look to are the ones that shape us.

Now, we're here in a church today. There may be some of you, even as I say all of this, who are thinking to yourself, 'Well, I'm shaped by the story of God. The Bible is my story. But my experience is that even for many people who identify as Christians, it is the stories around us, not the story of God, that is far more fundamental in shaping how we live and how we think of ourselves and others.

Consider the *Frozen* movies. Our family likes the second one better, if you can believe it. If you've seen *Frozen II* you'll know that the main character is on a quest, a mission. At the climactic moment of her search she hears in resounding chorus, 'You are the one you've been waiting for all of your life!' The music builds, everything sparkles, it's the big moment of the story. What's happening? Here's Elsa, who all her life has been wrestling with who she is and what she's supposed to do. Finally she discovers the answer: *I am the one I've been waiting for*. I don't need to look outside of myself to know who I am, or what I should do. All I need to do is to look within. I am the one I've been waiting for.

What is that? That's a story about the importance of the individual, that what you really need is to look within, be yourself, trust yourself, and you'll have everything you need. What's happening? You might identify as a Christian, you might regularly attend church and gather in a small group, but the stories all around us—like the one in *Frozen II*—are circulating all around us, shaping people (and especially young people) in ways they may not even be totally conscious of.

That's the first reason why it matters the people of God are telling their story: because stories are floating all around us, and if you're not being shaped by the story of God, you will be shaped by some other story. **Living a story-less life is just not possible.**

Personal: here's the second reason why sharing your story matters: because you need to be reminded of the truths of your story over and over again. Throughout Psalm 107, as the story of God's people is recounted, we see this refrain repeated over and over again:

Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.

What's the psalmist doing? He's saying: look at all these stories of how faithful God was to his people! They were in distress, but they cried out to the Lord and he delivered them. And you know why he did that? Because God's people always go through trouble and distress. Some of you right now are in trouble and distress. And you need to tell your story, because as you tell the story God's faithfulness to you in your past, you experience again in fresh ways the closeness of God with you right now. The God who was faithful then will be faithful now. Tell your story, because you need the very truths you will share with others.

Relational: why does it matter if you share your story? Because the people all around you need this story, too. In some ways you might say that the reason we moved to London was to tell this story. I remember reading about London that it is a place where people feel 'deeply stressed and deeply alone'. God's story is really good news for people who are restless and lonely. **I want to tell the story in London.** Though I don't know the ins and outs of life in Ventura, people need to hear the story here too. People need to know of a love that never ends; how they can be free from their greatest enemy, their daily bondage; about a family that is far from perfect but one they can belong to; and about coming home to a place that fits. Everyone is looking for what our story offers. Why should you tell your story? Because if you don't, who will? *Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story.*

(3) HOW TO TELL YOUR STORY

When I say ‘how’ I mean that practically: how do you do it? How do God’s people tell the story of how God loved them and saved them? And here’s the answer: **however you can**. Psalm 107 tells God’s people to share their story, but it actually doesn’t give us a roadmap for how to do it. That’s means you tell your story however you can, in the ways that are true to who you are, and in the relationships that you have.

I hope that this is encouraging, even a relief, for you. Sometimes when a pastor talks about ‘sharing your story’, there are people who get very intimidated, very afraid. Even the thought of talking to another person about Christianity fills them with anxiety. It’s not because they are ashamed, but because they are intimidated. They feel ill-equipped and unprepared. Sometimes people are afraid because they think they just don’t know enough. What if someone asks you a question you can’t answer? For others, you feel hypocritical. How can you tell others about God’s grace when you fall so far short of living for God yourself? For so many the thought of sharing your story is scary.

But what Psalm 107 is meant to do is take some of the pressure off. Share your story however you can. What matters is that you are sharing it, not always how you share it.

One of my favourite examples of this is **John 9**. There we come across a man who had been blind from birth. But then he meets Jesus and Jesus heals him, changes his life. Jesus gives him a new story. Well, some time goes by and the enemies of Jesus come along and they find this formerly blind man. And they start asking this guy all these questions about the identity of Jesus—who is he that healed you? How can we trust him? He’s actually a troublemaker! This formerly blind man is overwhelmed and so finally looks at these people and says, with profound simplicity: I can’t answer all of your questions, but one thing I do know: I was blind, but now I see. He’s telling his story. It’s so simple! He knows he doesn’t have all the answers, and he knows that he doesn’t have all the answers. But he knows that he’s been brought into God’s story, and he shares whatever he can. So how do you share your story? In whatever ways you can.

But at this point there are some who are thinking, ‘Well, how do I know if this story is even actually true of me? I mean, is this really my story? I don’t feel like I’ve experienced these things that you’ve described.’ Well, we all need

(4) THE HERO OF THE STORY

What's our rally cry? *Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story.* A redeemed people have a story to tell. And if a people have been redeemed, that must mean there is a redeemer. This story is true of the people of God not because of what they did, but because of what God did. It's so clear as you look at these verses that God, not the people, is the active one. *His love* endures forever. *He* redeemed. *He* gathered. **He was active; you were passive.** So that means that for this story to become true of you, you don't need to go and do something; you need to rest in something that's already been done. Here's what you need to rest in:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole' (Galatians 3:13)

You are redeemed through Jesus' death on the cross. And now, to close, here's what I want to do. I want to show you, as clearly as I can, how the death of Jesus actually makes this incredible story that we've been talking about true of for you. I'm going to give you verses Scriptures, connected to the four parts of the story we've already described. I hope that we anchor ourselves in these verses so that we find ourselves more and more immersed in God's story every day of our lives.

How do you know that you have a love that never ends?

- *This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 John 4:10).*
- *Jesus says, Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends (John 15:13-14).*

On the cross we see and experience in Jesus a love that never ends.

How do you know that you have been freed from sin, death, and the devil—the terrible enemy?

- *By his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is the devil—and free those who all their life were held in slavery (Hebrews 2:14-15).*

In his death, Jesus beat the power of sin and death.

How do you know that you have a family that you belong to?

- *His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross... Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of his household (Ephesians 2:15-16, 19).*

Jesus died to make us family.

How you do you know that you have a home that fits? Jesus, on the very night before he died, looked at his disciples, his friends, and promised,

- *My father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am (John 14:2-3).*

This story is your story because of Jesus, and his dying in your place. You are not the hero of the story; Jesus is. Give yourself to him today. Receive and rest in him today. And then, go tell your story.

Let's pray.