



©2021 Ginger Hertenstein
SERMON TITLE: *The Balm of Forgiveness*
SCRIPTURE: Psalm 106:40-48
DATE: January 24, 2021
View online service at www.fpcd.org/live-stream

Read also Romans 7:14-8:1

This is the third week we have been talking about Psalm 106. The first week we talked about the power of praise. It's a Hallelujah Psalm. God's people had been exiled. God's power seemed hidden and quiet. Perhaps even non-existent. But God knows the future. God has a hand in orchestrating it. God puts people in strategic places. God listens to prayer. God gives reward to accomplish God's work. God deserves to be praised because God will come through.

Daniel began seeing all of this and it gave him confidence.

How do we get to that place where we can confidently show great respect for God and even praise God and move forward in hard times? How can we confidently see the right source in hard times such as we are experiencing now?

This was a very difficult challenge for the people of God. They struggled to see God as their source and so again and again they disobeyed, turned away, replacing God with their own desires or something else that was "easier" than the real God who held them (and holds us) accountable. But God raised up leaders to continually tell them the truth to help them.

Yet they refused to look back and remember. **Instead, they were stuck in the present and stuck in the problems.** A friend and colleague, Dr. Dale Patterson wrote *they were addicted to living in the immediate*. God requires, though, that as we move forward, no matter the difficulty, we should always look back at the past and remember God's works.

Are you addicted to living in the immediate? Are you mired in the problems?

As Israel stepped away from God, God responded with consequences—stated in more pointed terms: punishment.

So here's where we are in Psalm 106 this morning. Let's read where we left God's people:

(Then) the anger of the LORD was kindled against his people, and he abhorred his heritage; he gave them into the hand of the nations, so that those who hated them ruled over them. Their enemies oppressed them, and they were brought into subjection under their power. Many times he delivered them, but they were rebellious in their purposes, and were brought low through their iniquity (Psalm 106:40-43).

Israel suffered consequences and we do, too, both personally and as a nation.

But God also has a future for us. God has a hand in orchestrating it. You have to look closely. You have to discern. God puts people in strategic places. God listens to prayer. God gives reward to accomplish God's work. God deserves to be praised.

That's why we should praise God under adverse situations, whether national or personal. Israel's story is told from both a national and familial point of view. That's because God cares about people and nations.

In our nation, about a week ago approximately half of our citizens believed the political situation was adverse. This week the other half of our citizens believe the political situation is adverse. So what are we to think? What are we to focus on?

Let's lift our sights higher. Remember, God's goal is not punishment forever. God has not left us, even though we struggle to see. God has not abandoned us even though we have often failed to obey.

There is nothing better than honesty. Paul states the struggle we find ourselves in:

"I know that all God's commands are spiritual, but I'm not. . . . Yes, I'm full of myself. What I don't understand about myself is that I decide one way, then I act another, doing things I absolutely despise. . . . I obviously need help! I realize I don't have what it takes. I can will it, but I can't do it. . . . Something gets the better of me every time."

'Isn't this also your experience?' Paul asks. (Romans 7:14-20 excerpts, *The Message* by Eugene Peterson)

So when God's people have not been able to accomplish faith in the God they cannot see, the Psalmist points us to the promise.

God is so good. Are you feeling like a failure this morning? Are you filled with anxiety about personal or national problems? Are you fearful of the pandemic?

God knows all about these things. Take a listen. READ Psalm 106:44-47:

Nevertheless he regarded their distress when he heard their cry. For their sake he **remembered his covenant**, and showed compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love. *He caused them to be pitied by all who held them captive.* 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.

God asks us to look back, but God looks back, too! God remembers the good covenantal relationship God made with Abraham. God remembers back to Adam and Eve and creating them for each other and for himself and it was *oh so good!*

God always does himself what God requires of us.

God remembered his covenant and the covenant takes priority over bad human behavior. God's steadfast love supersedes God's punishment. The New Testament says:

"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" (2 Peter 3:9).

So God is patient with us and God forgives.

Do you feel distant from God because maybe you are so mad at God? Do you feel your anger and your pulling away from God has brought a great divide between you? Do you think things are not going so well for our nation because we have turned from God?

Remember, whether on a personal or a national level, there's always purpose in punishment. Things will not go wrong forever! We are not left to struggle through by ourselves. God has great compassion and an abundance of love.

How is that expressed? Isaiah says,

"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (53:6).

That's the Lord Jesus Christ, who offers us the balm of forgiveness, seventy times seventy. He himself does exactly for us what he tells us to do for others.

This is amazing freedom!

There is a Jewish man who remains anonymous but shares this story. He grew up a Conservative Jew. His grandfather lived in Paris and fought in the French Resistance during WWII. He was captured several times but survived. Most of his family did not. His grandfather's survival made the grandson think God had a special purpose for his grandfather and him, too. So he thought of God often as a boy. But in college, he started smoking pot and drinking and became directionless. One night it was so bad he thought he was going to die. He cried out to God that if God would get him through the night he would change.

However he got in with a new crowd and became worse! He started doing cocaine. He finally realized he had to change but he just couldn't do it. It was like Paul said, the desire was there, but he could not make it happen.

He got a construction job and one day a bricklayer named Larry gave him a Bible tract. You know what that is. He read it but he didn't understand it. So he read it over and over. One day the light bulb came on that *he was a sinner. He needed atonement. He needed a savior*, as it said in the booklet. But the problem was

Jesus was that savior. Would he lose his Jewishness if he believed in this Jesus?

So he prayed to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As soon as he did, he looked up in the sky and there, he saw a vivid image of Jesus. God assured him at that moment the prayer he had prayed was okay.

Later he acquired a Bible. He began reading in Genesis and discovered that Jesus was throughout the Old Testament. He knew Jesus was the Messiah who was the atonement for his sin. This began a relationship with Jesus. Only then was he able to find forgiveness and purpose, and Jesus helped him give up his addictions.¹

How are you doing living into the balm of forgiveness so that you can transcend the tough times we find ourselves in? How are you doing in building a relationship with Jesus? He is the one who can help you remember what God has done, overcome your sins, and effect God's promises in you.

Our Psalm ends with these words. Let's say them together:

"Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. And let all the people say, 'Amen.' Praise the LORD!" (Psalm 106:48)

AMEN

¹ "I Saw Jesus with My Own Eyes," at One for Israel Ministry website. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5CWAjcZLQSo>, accessed January 18, 2021.