

Exposition on Psalm 107

by St. Augustine

The Psalm commends the mercies of God, proven in ourselves, and encourages us to confess and praise Him for His wonders.

Scripture: Psalm 106:1-2, Psalm 106:4, Psalm 106:10, Psalm 106:13, Psalm 106:18, Psalm 106:23, Psalm 106:30, Psalm 106:43, 1 Peter 2:3

Topics: "Gods Mercy", "Spiritual Restoration"

Description

St. Augustine preaches on the mercies of God as seen in the Psalms, emphasizing the importance of experiencing God's goodness personally to truly appreciate His praises. The Psalms reflect the universal Church's redemption from enemies, leading to a spiritual journey symbolized by the Israelites' exodus from Egypt. Through various trials and deliverances, God's mercies are evident in leading His people to repentance, healing, and restoration, ultimately bringing them to a place of praise and thanksgiving.

Transcript

1. This Psalm commends unto us the mercies of God, proved in ourselves, and is therefore the sweeter to the experienced. And it is a wonder if it can be pleasing to any one, except to him who has learned in his own case, what he hears in this Psalm. Yet was it written not for any one or two, but for the people of God, and set forth that it might know itself therein as in a mirror. Its title needs not now to be treated, for it is Halleluia, and again Halleluia. Which we have a custom of singing at a certain time in our solemnities, after an old tradition of the Church: nor is it without a sacred meaning that we sing it on particular days. Halleluia we sing indeed on certain days, but every day we think it. For if in this word is signified the praise of God, though not in the mouth of the flesh, yet surely in the mouth of the heart. His praise shall ever be in my mouth. But that the title has Halleluia not once only but twice, is not peculiar to this Psalm, but the former also has it so. And as far as appears from its text, that was sung of the people of Israel, but this is sung of the universal Church of God, spread through the whole world. Perchance, it not unfitly has Halleluia twice, because we cry, Abba, Father. Since Abba is nothing else but Father, yet not without meaning the Apostle said, in whom we cry, Abba, Father; Romans 8:15 but because one wall indeed coming to the Corner Stone cries Abba, but the other, from the other side cries Father; viz., in that Corner Stone, who is our Peace, who has made both one....

2. Confess unto the Lord that He is sweet, because for aye in His mercy Psalm 106:1. This confess ye that He is sweet: if you have tasted, confess. But he cannot confess, who has not chosen to taste, for whence

shall he say that that is sweet, which he knows not. But ye if you have tasted how sweet the Lord is, 1 Peter 2:3 Confess ye to the Lord that He is sweet. If you have tasted with eagerness, break forth with confession. For aye is His mercy, that is, for ever. For here for aye, is so put, since also in some other places of Scripture, for aye, that is, what in Greek is called $\hat{\iota}\mu\acute{\alpha}\frac{1}{4}\circ\hat{\iota}$, $\hat{\iota}\pm\acute{\alpha}\frac{1}{4}\circ\acute{\alpha}\zeta\eta\hat{\iota}\frac{1}{2}\hat{\iota}\pm$, is understood for ever. For His mercy is not for a time, so as not to be for ever, since for this purpose His present mercy is over men, that they may live with the Angels for ever.

3. Let them say who are redeemed of the Lord, whom He has redeemed from the hand of their enemies Psalm 106:2. Redeemed indeed it seems was also the people of Israel from the land of Egypt, from the hand of slavery, from fruitless labours, from miry works; yet let us see whether those who say these things, are they who were freed by the Lord from Egypt. It is not so. But who are they? Those whom He redeemed. Still one might take it also of them, as redeemed from the hand of their enemies, that is, of the Egyptians. Let them be expressed exactly who they are, for whom this Psalm would be sung. He gathered them from the lands; these might still be the lands of Egypt, for there are many lands even in one province. Let him speak openly. From the east and the west, from the north and the sea Psalm 106:3. Now then we understand these redeemed, in the whole circle of the earth. This people of God, freed from a great and broad Egypt, is led, as through the Red Sea, Exodus 14:22 that in Baptism it may make an end of its enemies. For by the sacrament as it were of the Red Sea, that is by Baptism consecrated with the Blood of Christ, the pursuing Egyptians, the sins, are washed away....But all these things happened to them in a figure, and were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come. 1 Corinthians 10:11 ...

4. They wandered in the wilderness, in a dry place, they found not the way of a city to dwell in Psalm 106:4. We have heard a wretched wandering; what of want? Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them Psalm 106:5. But wherefore did it faint? For what good? For God is not cruel, but He makes Himself known, in that it is expedient for us, that He be entreated by us fainting, and that aiding us He be loved. And therefore after this wandering, and hunger, and thirst, And they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them out of their distress Psalm 106:6. And what did He for them, as they were wandering? And He led them in the right way Psalm 106:7. They found not the way of a city to dwell in, with hunger and thirst they were vexed and faint, and He led them into the right way, that they might go into a city to dwell in. How He helped their hunger and thirst, He says not, but even this expect ye: Let them confess unto the Lord His mercies, and His wonders towards the children of men Psalm 106:8. Tell them, you that are experienced, to the inexperienced; ye that are already in the way, already directed towards finding the city, already at last free from hunger and thirst. Because He has satisfied the empty soul, and filled the hungry soul with good things Psalm 106:9.

5. Them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, fast bound in beggary and iron Psalm 106:10. Whence this, but that you were attributing things to yourself? That you were not owning the grace of God? That you were rejecting the counsel of God Luke 7:30 concerning you? For see what He adds: Because they rebelled against the words of the Lord through pride Psalm 106:11, not knowing the righteousness of God, and wishing to establish their own, Romans 10:3 and they were bitter against the counsel of the Most High. And their heart was brought low in labour Psalm 106:12. And now fight against lust; if God cease to aid you may strive, you can not conquer. And when you shall be pressed by your evil, your heart will be brought low in labour, so that now with humbled heart you may learn to cry out, O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? Romans 7:24 ...Freed, you will confess the mercies of the Lord. And they cried unto the Lord when they were troubled, and He delivered them out of their

distresses Psalm 106:13. They were freed from the second temptation. There remains that of weariness and loathing. But first see what He did for them when freed. And He led them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and broke their bonds asunder Psalm 106:14. Let them confess to the Lord His mercies, and His wonders to the children of men Psalm 106:15. Wherefore? What difficulties has He overcome? Because He broke the gates of brass, and snapped the bars of iron Psalm 106:16. He took them up from the way of their iniquity, for because of their unrighteousnesses they were brought low Psalm 106:17. Because they gave honour to themselves, not to God, because they were establishing their own righteousness, not knowing the righteousness of God, Romans 10:3 they were brought low. They found that they were helpless without His aid, who were presuming on their own strength alone.

6. Their soul abhorred all manner of meat Psalm 106:18. Now they suffer satiety. They are sick of satiety. They are in danger from satiety. Unless perchance you think they could be killed with famine, but cannot with satiety. See what follows. When he had said, Their soul abhorred all manner of meat, lest you should think them, as it were, safe of their fullness, and not rather see that they would die of satiety: And they came near, he says, even unto the gates of death. What then remains? That even when the word of God delights you, thou account it not to yourself; nor for this be puffed up with any sort of arrogance, and having an appetite for food, proudly spurn at those who are in danger from satiety. And they cried out unto the Lord when they were in trouble, and He delivered them out of their distresses Psalm 106:19. And because it was a sickness not to be pleased, He sent His Word, and healed them Psalm 106:20. See what evil there is in satiety; see whence He delivers, to whom he cries that loathes his food. He sent His Word, and healed them, and snatched them, from whence? Not from wandering, not from hunger, not from the difficulty of overcoming sins, but from their corruption. It is a sort of corruption of the mind to loathe what is sweet. Therefore also of this benefit, as of the others before, Let them confess to the Lord His mercies, and His wonders unto the sons of men Psalm 106:21. And sacrifice the sacrifice of praise Psalm 106:22. For now that He may be praised, the Lord is sweet, and let them tell out His works with gladness. Not with weariness, not with sadness, not with anxiety, not with loathing, but with gladness.

7. ...They who go down on the sea in ships, doing their business on the mighty waters Psalm 106:23; that is, among many peoples. For that waters are often put for peoples, the Apocalypse of John is witness, when on John's asking what those waters were, it was answered him, they are peoples. They then who do their business on mighty waters, they have seen the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep Psalm 106:24. For what is deeper than human hearts? Hence often break forth winds; storms of sedition, and dissensions, disturb the ship. And what is done in them? God, willing that both they who steer, and they who are conveyed, should cry unto Him, He spoke, and the breath of the storm stood Psalm 106:25. What is, stood? Abode, continued, still disturbs, long tosses; rages, and passes not away. For He spoke, and the breath of the storm stood. And what did that breath of the storm? They go up even to the heavens, in daring; They go down even into the deeps Psalm 106:26, in fearing. Their soul wasted in miseries. They were disturbed, and moved like a drunken man Psalm 106:27. They who sit at the helm, and they who faithfully love the ship, feel what I say. Certainly, when they speak, when they read, when they interpret, they appear wise. Woe for the storm! and all their wisdom, he says, was swallowed up. Sometimes all human counsels fail; whichever way one turns himself, the waves roar, the storm rages, the arms are powerless: where the prow may strike, to what wave the side may be exposed, whither the stricken ship may be allowed to drift, from what rocks she must be kept back lest she be lost, is impossible for her pilots to see. And what is left but that which follows? And they cried out unto the Lord when they were troubled, and He delivered them from their distresses Psalm 106:28. And He commanded the storm, and it stood unto clear air Psalm 106:29, and the waves of it were still. Hear on this point the voice of a steersman, one

that was in peril, was brought low, was freed. I would not, he says, have you ignorant, brethren, of our distress, which befell us in Asia, that we were pressed above strength, and above measure (I see all his wisdom swallowed up), so that we were weary, he says, even of life. 2 Corinthians 1:8 ...

And they were glad, because they were still, and He brought them into the haven of their desire Psalm 106:30. Let His mercies confess unto the Lord, and His wonders towards the sons of men Psalm 106:31. Everywhere, without exception, let not our merits, not our strength, not our wisdom, confess unto the Lord, but, His mercies. Let Him be loved in every deliverance of ours, who has been invoked in every distress.

8. And let them exalt Him in the assembly of the people, and praise Him in the seat of the elders Psalm 106:32. Let them exalt, let them praise, peoples and elders, merchants and pilots. For what has He done in this assembly? What has He established? Whence has He rescued it? What has He granted it? Even as He resisted the proud, and gave grace to the humble: James 4:6 the proud, that is, the first people of the Jews, arrogant, and extolling itself on its descent from Abraham, and because to that nation were entrusted the oracles of God. Romans 3:2 These things did not avail them unto soundness, but unto pride of heart, rather to swelling than to greatness. What then did God, resisting the proud, but giving grace to the humble; cutting off the natural branches for their pride; grafting in the wild olive for its humility?

He made the rivers a wilderness Psalm 106:33. Waters did run there, prophecies were in course. Seek now a prophet among the Jews; you find none. For He made the outgoings of waters to be thirst. Let them say, Now there is no prophet more, and He will not know us any more. A fruitful land to be salt pools Psalm 106:34. You seek there the faith of Christ, you find not: you seek a prophet, you find not: you seek a sacrifice, you find not: you seek a temple, you find none. Wherefore this? From the wickedness of them that dwell therein. Behold how He resists the proud: hear how He gives grace to the humble. He made the wilderness to be a standing water, and the dry ground to be outgoings of waters Psalm 106:35. And He caused the hungry to dwell there Psalm 106:36. Because to Him it was said, You are a Priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedec. For you seek a sacrifice among the Jews; you have none after the order of Aaron. You seek it after the order of Melchizedec; you find it not among them, but through the whole world it is celebrated in the Church. From the rising of the sun to the setting thereof the name of the Lord is praised.. ..And they sowed fields, and planted vineyards, and gat fruit of grain Psalm 106:37: at which that workman rejoices, who says, Not because I desire a gift, but I seek fruit. Philippians 4:17 And He blessed them, and they were multiplied exceedingly, and their cattle were not diminished Psalm 106:38. This stands. For the foundation of God stands sure; because the Lord knows them that are His. 2 Timothy 2:19 They are called beasts of burden, and cattle, that walk simply in the Church, yet are useful; not much learned, but full of faith. Therefore, whether spiritual or carnal, He blessed them.

9. And they became few, and were vexed Psalm 106:39. Whence this? From without? Nay, from within. For that they should become few, They went out from us, but they were not of us. 1 John 2:19 But therefore he speaks as of these, of whom he spoke before, that they may be discerned with understanding; because he speaks as if of the same, because of the sacraments they have in common. For they belong to the people of God, though not by the virtue, yet surely by the appearance of piety: for concerning them we have heard the Apostle, In the last times there shall come grievous times, for there shall be men lovers of themselves. 2 Timothy 3:2 The first evil is, lovers of themselves; that is, as being pleased with themselves. Would that they were not pleasing to themselves, and were pleasing to God: would that they would cry out in their difficulties, and be freed from their distresses. But while they presumed greatly on themselves, they were made few. It is manifest, brethren: all who separate themselves from unity become few. For they are many; but in unity, while they are not parted from unity.

For when the multitude of unity has begun no more to belong to them, in heresy and schism, they are few. And they were vexed, from distress of miseries and grief. Contempt was poured on princes Psalm 106:40. For they were rejected by the Church of God, and the more because they wished to be princes, therefore they were despised, and became salt that had lost its savour, cast out abroad, so that it is trodden under foot of men. Matthew 5:13 And He led them astray in the pathless place, and not in a way. Those above in the way, those directed to a city, and finally led there, not led astray; but these, where there was no way, led astray. What is, Led them astray? God gave them up to their own hearts' lusts. Romans 1:24 For led astray means this, gave them up to themselves. For if you enquire closely, it is they that lead themselves astray....And He helped the poor out of beggary Psalm 106:41. What means this, brethren? Princes are despised, and the poor helped. The proud are cast aside, and the humble provided for....And made him households like sheep. Thou understandest one poor man and one beggar of him concerning whom he said, He has helped the poor out of misery: this poor man is now many households, this poor man is many nations; many Churches are one Church, one nation, one household, one sheep. These are great mysteries, great types, how profound, how full of hidden meanings; how sweetly discovered, since long hidden. Therefore, the righteous will consider this, and rejoice: and the mouth of all wickedness shall be stopped Psalm 106:42. That wickedness that does prate against unity, and compels truth to be made manifest, shall be convicted, and have its mouth stopped.

10. Who is wise? And he will consider these things; and will understand the mercies of the Lord Psalm 106:43....Not his own deservings, not his own strength, not his own power; but the mercies of the Lord; who, when he was wandering and in want, led him back to the path, and fed him; who, when he was struggling against the difficulties of his sins, and bound down with the fetters of habit, released and freed him; who, when he loathed the Word of God, and was almost dying with a kind of weariness, restored him by sending him the medicine of His Word; who, when he was endangered among the risks of shipwreck and storm, stilled the sea, and brought him into port; who, finally, placed him in that people, where He gives grace to the humble; not in that where he resists the proud; and has made him His own, that remaining within he may be multiplied, not that going out he may be minished. The righteous see this, and rejoice. The mouth, therefore, of all wickedness shall be stopped.

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