

September 19

Psalm 102, 106, 123, 137

Psalm 106 is a song of confession - confession and hope. The first key to understanding it is verse 6: *"We have sinned, even as our fathers did – We have done wrong and acted wickedly."* That is the confession - a simple admission: 'God, we have sinned. We have done wrong. We are wicked.' The hope comes in verses 44-46. After a recitation of a dozen or so of the more horrifying sins committed by the nation of Israel, it says: *Yet he took note of their distress when he heard their cry; for their sake he remembered His covenant and out of his great love he relented. He caused all who held them captive to show them mercy.* If God could forgive Israel for all of these things – if after all that they had done, He would still love them – then there is real hope that God will now forgive us for the sins we have committed and the rebellions in which we have engaged.

Then in verse 47 comes the request - the plea: *"Save us, O Lord our God and gather us from the nations that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise."* It ends - as do so many of these songs of faith – on a note of high triumph. *"Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Let all the people say 'Amen.' Praise the Lord."*

In between the initial confession of sin and the proclamation of hope, the song records about a dozen instances of major rebellion against God. 'Rebellion number one' in verse 7 and 13 regards their forgetfulness of God during their exile in the land of Egypt. It would seem that during those long 400 years of captivity Israel pretty much forgot about God. It may be that one of the reasons their captivity lasted so long was that God was patiently waiting for them to ask to be delivered. The second event mentioned in verse 7 is referring to the grumbling and murmuring against Moses at the side of the Red Sea. But verse 8 goes on to say, *"Yet He saved them for His name's sake to make His power known."*

The other five events noted are really a brief history lesson regarding the sins of Israel. In verse 15, the incident of the quail is probably what the Psalmist has in mind with those memorable words, *"He gave them what they wanted and sent a disease upon them."* Next in verse 17-a horrible judgment is recalled – the rebellion of Dathan - where it says, *"the earth opened up and swallowed them and fire consumed their followers."* Verse 24 speaks of the rebellion after the report of the ten spies– and verse 28 references the incident at Peor, when the Israelites yoked themselves to Baal through their idolatrous worship – and finally in vs 32, the sad, sad day at Meribah, when Moses' rash words cost him the opportunity to lead the people into the Promised Land.

Verses 34-39 recall for the people of Israel several more incidents, which relate to experiences that came after the settlement of Canaan. Serious rebellions against the God of Israel are in view here – idolatrous mixing with the nations, human sacrifice of their own children and rebellion after rebellion after rebellion.

The Psalm is a confession of sin and a cry for forgiveness. It is uttered in great hope and faith precisely because, through all of the sin and rebellion of the nation of Israel, God has not reneged on His covenant promises, and the children of Israel, though chastised, have not been abandoned. The sin is awful. The retribution is awesome. The repentance is genuine,

and through it all there is this constant God keeping His promises, establishing His word, and moving Israel toward His established destination.

From all of this we must learn, just as the writer of Psalm 106 had to learn, that:

- 1) Sin is awful.
- 2) Judgment follows sin.
- 3) When repentance is genuine, forgiveness follows.
- 4) And finally, and most importantly, God's faithfulness endures through it all – unwaveringly keeping His promise, unrelentingly moving His people and all events of history toward His eternal goals.

In the middle of the 123rd Psalm we find a simple but powerful expression of prayer, "*Have mercy on us O Lord, have mercy on us.*" Someone once said that whenever they were in trouble or confused, they would just pray "O Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me". If we sincerely offer that simple prayer from the heart it can be very powerful and much more than just a mechanical repetition of meaningless words. "O Lord" meaning that Christ is the absolute sovereign Master of the universe with all power and authority in His hand. "Jesus" who is our Savior and with whom we can have a personal relationship. And One who is "closer than a brother" will surely respond in time of need. "Christ" is the title that points to the office that Jesus occupied- HE is Messiah, the anointed one of God. And then -- "mercy"- the loving kindness of an infinitely loving God. "Mercy is what we need when we are confused and in trouble". "Have mercy on us, O Lord" – It's still a great prayer to pray when in a difficult situation and needing help and wisdom.