

Title: **THE WAY HE GATHERS THEM**

Text: Psalm 107:1-43

Subject: *The Mystery of Providence*

Date: Sunday Evening — January 18, 2009

Tape # Z-62b

Readings: *Bob Poncer and Ron Wood*

Introduction:

How often we read in the Book of God about the Lord God gathering his elect from the four corners of the earth. We are repeatedly assured that he will gather his own to himself from the North and the South and from the East and the West. He promises, “*Yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there.*” — “*He shall gather them as the sheaves into the floor.*” — “*I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the LORD*” (Nehemiah 1:9; Micah 4:12; Jeremiah 29:14; 32:37; Ezekiel 34:13; 37:21; Zechariah 10:8, 10).

(Zechariah 10:8) “I will hiss for them, and gather them; for I have redeemed them: and they shall increase as they have increased.”

(Zechariah 10:10) “I will bring them again also out of the land of Egypt, and gather them out of Assyria; and I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon; and *place* shall not be found for them.”

The Lord God will gather his elect. out of the nations. Tonight, I want to talk to you about **THE WAY HE GATHERS THEM.** Turn with me to Psalm 107, and we will read together about the way God gathers his elect to himself.

Hail, sovereign love that first began
 The scheme to rescue fallen man,
 Hail, matchless, free, eternal grace
 That gave my soul a hiding place.
 Against the God that rules the sky
 I fought with hands uplifted high;
 Despised His rich abounding grace,
 Too proud to seek a hiding place.

Enwrap in Egyptian night

THE WAY HE GATHERS THEM

Qnd fond of darkness more than light,
Madly I ran the sinful race,
Secure without a hiding place.
But thus the eternal counsel ran,
“Almighty love, arrest that man!”
I felt the arrows of distress
And found I had no hiding place.

Indignant justice stood in view,
To Sinai’s fiery mount I flew;
But justice cried with frowning face,
“This mountain is no hiding place!”
Ere long the heavenly voice I heard
And mercy’s angel form appeared;
She led me on with gentle pace
To Jesus as my hiding place.

Should storms of thundering vengeance roll
And shake the earth from pole to pole,
No flaming bolt shall daunt my face,
For Jesus is my hiding place.
A few more rolling suns at most
Will land me safe on Canaan’s coast,
Where I shall sing the song of grace
And see my glorious hiding place!

Here in Psalm 107, God the Holy Spirit shows us how God gathers his elect to Christ, the way the Lord God graciously brings sinners safely into Christ, the refuge of mercy. This 107th Psalm is a beautiful display of God’s adorable providence in saving his elect. — “*We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to the purpose of his grace.*”

This Psalm is an allegory picturing God’s ways of grace. You know what an allegory is. It is a parable. It is an earthly picture of a spiritual truth. The allegory may or may not be a fact of history; but its purpose is to illustrate some spiritual truth. For example:

- In Galatians 4 Paul uses the story, a historical story, of **Sarah and Hagar**, Isaac and Ishmael to represent the covenant of grace and the covenant of works.

THE WAY HE GATHERS THEM

- In **Luke 16** our Lord used a fictional story of the rich man and Lazarus to illustrate the life and death of the wicked and the life and death of the righteous.
- In **Psalm 105** David used the story of Israel's history from Abraham to Canaan as an allegory of God's salvation of his people.
- In **Psalm 106** he shows us why God's saves sinners – "*For his name's sake.*"

And here, we have an allegorical picture of the way in which God saves his people, the way he gathers them.

The providence of God is simply God's universal government of all things. In providence God brings to pass what he has purposed in eternity. There is a general providence of God in the world; and there is a special providence of God toward his elect. **God's general providence** is his superintendence and government of the world. We do not believe in the laws of nature. We believe in the laws of God. We believe in a God "*who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.*" Our God did not create the world, and then leave it. No. He is actively presiding over all the affairs of the universe. The dew falls and waters the earth by his decree. The grass grows for the cattle in his appointed place. The sparrow is fed from his almighty hand. And the planets are held in their orbit around the sun by the Word of God. This is his general providence.

But **his special providence** is something else. It is God working all things together for the good, for the eternal salvation of his elect. Get this if you can, — everything that has ever taken place in the history of the world, since the beginning of time, whether good or evil, has been ruled by the providence of God for your salvation! That is a stupendous thought! And that is what our Psalm is all about. Empires have been raised up and empires have fallen by the hand of God so that he might save you and me. This is what God says, — "*I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Savior: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honorable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life*" (Isaiah 43:3-4). Truly, his thoughts are not our thoughts, and his ways are not our ways!

Proposition: The 107th Psalm magnifies the triune Jehovah for his spiritual blessings, of which temporal blessings are but types and pictures.

THE WAY HE GATHERS THEM

This Psalm is like the Interpreter's house in Pilgrim's Progress. There Pilgrim was told that he would see excellent and profitable things. And, truly, if the Lord will give us eyes to see and ears to hear, we will see and hear excellent and profitable things from this song of the redeemed.

Divisions: Let's now look at the Psalm together, and I will call to your attention to four things in these 43 verses:

1. We are called upon to extol and give thanks to God for his goodness (vv. 1-3).
2. We are given four illustrations of Divine providence in salvation (vv. 4-32).
3. We are given insight into the mystery of providence (vv. 33-42).
4. We are exhorted to observe the lovingkindness of God in his providence (v. 43).

THANKS GIVING AND PRAISE

First, we are called upon to extol and give thanks to God for his goodness (vv. 1-3).

(Psalms 107:1) "O give thanks unto the LORD, for *he is good*: for his mercy *endureth* for ever."

David is here speaking to the people of God. Those who have been saved and gathered from among the heathen ought to extol the Lord God for his goodness to them and give thanks to him continually.

- We should give thanks to the Lord for **his goodness**. The very name God is but an abbreviation of the word good. God is good. He does good; and he is the author of all good. — All Temporal Goodness! — All Spiritual Goodness! — All Eternal Goodness!
- We should give thanks unto the Lord, because **his mercy endures forever**. — God's mercy is from everlasting to everlasting. From generation to generation, the sons of men experience the mercy of God in Christ. — His Purpose Of Mercy! — His Electing Mercy! — His Redeeming Mercy! — His Regenerating Mercy! — His Preserving Mercy!

Who should give thanks to the Lord? (3-4).

THE WAY HE GATHERS THEM

(Psalms 107:2-3) “Let the redeemed of the LORD say *so*, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy; (3) And gathered them out of the lands, from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south.”

All men ought to extol God’s goodness and give thanks to him continually, even the reprobate who are as yet out of hell. Anything this side of hell is mercy and the display of God’s goodness to men. All men should praise God for all have their life and being, food and clothing, health and strength by the hand of God. But those who have experienced his grace in all parts of the world are under special constraint to praise him. The redeemed of the Lord, the gathered ones of the earth, should break forth in continual thanksgiving to God.

In mercy and goodness the God of all grace has redeemed us with the precious blood of Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ has redeemed us from the hand of the enemy.

- He has redeemed us from the law by price.
- He has redeemed us from Satan and sin by power.
- He has redeemed us from death by his resurrection.

Another example of God’s goodness and mercy is that **he has gathered us to Christ by effectual power.** We had all gone astray. We had turned everyone to his own way. But the Lord observed our ways. And in the fullness of time he gathers his elect to Christ by sovereign power, from the four corners of the earth.

Those who are redeemed of the Lord will, most assuredly be gathered to him. — “*I will hiss (call) for them, and gather them; for I have redeemed them.*”

(Isaiah 43:5-6) “Fear not: for I *am* with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; (6) I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth.”

“*Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.*” We have found him to be good, and we must say so.

- Is God good when he takes away, as well as when he gives? — “*The redeemed of the Lord say so.*”

THE WAY HE GATHERS THEM

- Is God merciful when he frowns, as well as when he smiles? — *“The redeemed of the Lord say so.”*
- Does God work all things together for good to them that love him? — *“The redeemed of the Lord say so.”*

FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS

Second, in verses 4-32, we are given four illustrations of Divine providence in the salvation of God’s elect. The redeemed of the Lord say that God is good and his mercy endures forever. Now, the Psalmist displays that mercy in providence.

Mark it down, child of God, the mercy of God toward you did not begin when you first believed. God’s mercy arranged all the affairs of your life in order to bring you to faith in Christ. Indeed, he arranged all the affairs of history to secure your eternal salvation. What the old timers used to call “prevenient grace” is, at least in part, the grace of providence, which precedes the grace of salvation and prepares the way for salvation to come.

Sometimes God’s good providence appears to us to be hard and rough; but he always has a good purpose even in the most painful and bitter experiences of providence. In providence he may bring Gomer down to the lowest pit of degradation. He may even use Satan to do it. But his purpose is to exalt her in due time. Before God ever exalts a sinner to his place among the sons of God, he will bring him down in the dust of humiliation.

Look now at these illustrations of Divine providence, these illustrations of God’s wondrous, mysterious prevenient grace.

1. **We were all lost, weary travelers in need of a guide to bring us home to God** (vv. 4-9). **We were lost in the wilderness of sin by reason of our own rebellion and ignorance** (v. 4). Like silly, ignorant sheep we all went astray. We all went our own way, according to the bent of our will. And we wandered on in darkness, so ignorant that we did not even know our condition.

(Psalms 107:4) “They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in.”

But God, in his providence, made us hungry and thirsty (v. 5).

THE WAY HE GATHERS THEM

(Psalms 107:5) “Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them.”

God knows how to create dissatisfaction in a man’s heart. God knows how to make the prodigal hungry. We found ourselves in desperate need, with no means of provision.

Then, in the time of our soul’s trouble, we called upon the Lord (v. 6).

(Psalms 107:6) “Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, *and* he delivered them out of their distresses.”

- It is a time of trouble when awakened sinners are convinced of sin by the Spirit of God.
- We were pricked to the heart by a sense of sin.
- The terrors of death and hell got hold of us.
- We saw our lost and undone condition, ready to perish.
- Then, and not till then, we cried to God for mercy.

Then, the Lord God led us to Christ the Way, our City of Habitation (v. 7).

(Psalms 107:7) “And he led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation.”

All of this we owe to God’s providence. Therefore, we will praise him (vv. 8-9).

‘Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.

(Psalms 107:8-9) “Oh that *men* would praise the LORD *for* his goodness, and *for* his wonderful works to the children of men! (9) For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.”

None abut Christ can satisfy the hungry soul.

THE WAY HE GATHERS THEM

2. We were all prisoners, in bondage to sin, Satan, and the law of God, but Christ set us free (vv. 10-16; Isaiah 9:2; 42:7; 49:9).

(Psalms 107:10-12) “Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, *being* bound in affliction and iron; (11) Because they rebelled against the words of God, and contemned the counsel of the most High: (12) Therefore he brought down their heart with labour; they fell down, and *there was* none to help.”

- We were prisoners sentenced to death (10).
- Our sentence was just (11).
- God graciously humbled our proud hearts (12).

(Isaiah 9:2) “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.”

(Isaiah 42:7) “To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, *and* them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.”

(Isaiah 49:9) “That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that *are* in darkness, Show yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures *shall be* in all high places.”

With one afflictive providence after another, the haughtiness of man is laid low. When a man is humbled under a sense of sin, then he is willing to submit to Christ and his righteousness. Then the guilty sinner falls down and pleads for mercy. He has no other hope.

When the guilty, weary, helpless sinner cries for mercy, the Lord sets him free (vv. 13-14).

(Psalms 107:13-14) “Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, *and* he saved them out of their distresses. (14) He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder.”

All of this, we owe to God’s providence. Therefore, we will praise him (vv. 15-16).

THE WAY HE GATHERS THEM

(Psalms 107:15-16) “Oh that *men* would praise the LORD *for* his goodness, and *for* his wonderful works to the children of men! (16) For he hath broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder.”

Grace, ‘tis a charming sound!
Harmonious to mine ear!
Heaven with the echo shall resound,
And all the earth shall hear.

Grace first inscribed my name
In God’s eternal book:
‘Twas grace that gave me to the Lamb,
Who all my sorrows took.

Grace taught my soul to pray,
And made my eyes o’erflow;
‘Twas grace that kept me to this day,
And will not let me go.

3. **We were all sin-sick souls in need of a healing Physician** (vv. 17-22).

(Psalms 107:17-20) “Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted. (18) Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat; and they draw near unto the gates of death. (19) Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, *and* he saveth them out of their distresses. (20) He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered *them* from their destructions.”

- Sin has made fools of all men (v. 17).
- In our folly we despised the good Word of God, and Christ the Bread of Life was rejected by us. We were famishing and ready to die, by reason of our sin-sick souls (v. 18).
- When we were at the point of death, we called upon the Lord and he saved us (v. 19).
- Sending his Word, the Word of the gospel he healed us (v. 20). — The gospel is a tree of life.— Its doctrines are leaves for the healing of the nations.

THE WAY HE GATHERS THEM

- All of this we owe to the good providence of God. Therefore, we will offer to him the sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving, the calves of our lips (vv. 21-22; Hebrews 13:15).

(Psalms 107:21-22) “Oh that *men* would praise the LORD *for* his goodness, and *for* his wonderful works to the children of men! (22) And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing.”

(Hebrews 13:15) “By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of *our* lips giving thanks to his name.”

4. We were all like seaman on the raging sea, ready to perish, until the Lord God intervened and gave us peace (vv. 23-32).

(Psalms 107:23-30) “They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; (24) These see the works of the LORD, and his wonders in the deep. (25) For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. (26) They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. (27) They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit’s end. (28) Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. (29) He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. (30) Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven.”

- We saw the wonders of God’s hand, but we paid them no heed (vv. 23-24).
- God tossed us about in his stormy providence until he made our souls melt within us and brought us to our wits’ end (vv. 25-27).
- Then, and not till then, we called upon him, and he gave us peace, great peace, peace that passeth understanding, bringing us to our desired haven of rest (vv. 28-30).
- All of this we owe to God’s adorable providence. Therefore, we will give thanks and praise to him (vv. 31-32).

(Psalms 107:31-32) “Oh that *men* would praise the LORD *for* his goodness, and *for* his wonderful works to the children of men! (32)

THE WAY HE GATHERS THEM

Let them exalt him also in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders.”

This is God’s goodness and his wonderful work.

- He causes the lost to hunger and thirst. Then he brings them to Christ and satisfies their need.
- He causes the prisoner’s heart to be heavy. Then he brings him to Christ and sits him free.
- He causes sin-sick souls to feel their desperate sickness. Then he sends the Great Physician to heal them.
- He causes the rebel’s soul to melt into submission. Then he gives him peace.

THE MYSTERY EXPLAINED

Now, in the third place, we are given insight into the mystery of providence, and the mystery of God’s providence is explained in verses 33-42. David has told us how God deals with individuals to bring them to saving faith in Christ. Now, he goes deeper into the mystery of providence, showing us how God arranges the affairs of princes, and nobles, and nations in this world for the salvation of his elect.

God causes the fruitful places to be barren and the barren places he makes fruitful, according to his wise designs (vv. 33-35).

(Psalms 107:33-35) “He turneth rivers into a wilderness, and the watersprings into dry ground; (34) A fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein. (35) He turneth the wilderness into a standing water, and dry ground into watersprings.”

He takes the gospel from one nation and gives it to another.

- When a land is left barren, without a gospel witness, it is always because they have despised the goodness of God to them.
- When a land of darkness and ignorance is given the light of the gospel, it is because God has a people in that land whom he intends to save.

How often history has proved this fact. — “*Ephraim is joined to his idols. Let him alone.*”

- Israel despised the gospel, so Jerusalem was left desolate.

THE WAY HE GATHERS THEM

- Rome once flourished in the gospel, but now she is imprisoned in idolatry and superstition.
- Ethiopia was once the place of great gospel preaching, now it is the place of gross darkness.
- But God is not without a witness. He opened the borders of England, then America, then Canada. And the gospel now flourishes in the land of barrenness!

Why do you suppose that America was discovered? It was not just so that England might increase her colonies. It was because God would prepare a place for you and me to hear the gospel!

God makes the hungry and thirsty soul to dwell in a land where the gospel is preached (vv. 36-40).

(Psalms 107:36-40) “And there he maketh the hungry to dwell, that they may prepare a city for habitation; (37) And sow the fields, and plant vineyards, which may yield fruits of increase. (38) He blesseth them also, so that they are multiplied greatly; and suffereth not their cattle to decrease. (39) Again, they are minished and brought low through oppression, affliction, and sorrow. (40) He poureth contempt upon princes, and causeth them to wander in the wilderness, *where there is no way.*”

Those whom he intends to save, the Lord will put in a place where they will hear the gospel.

- He sows the seed of the gospel in a land by his servants.
- He plants his churches as vineyards in the land.
- And he gives fruit and increase.
- For a season, they prosper and flourish.
- But then, because of sin and unbelief, by an act of providence they are diminished and scattered.

Where are the flourishing churches of Jerusalem, Asia, and Rome? They have long ago been scattered.

But of these things we may be sure (vv. 41-42).

- God will save his own (v. 41).
- The righteous will see the wonderful works of God and rejoice (v. 42).
- The wicked shall be without excuse (v. 42).

THE WAY HE GATHERS THEM

(Psalms 107:41-42) “Yet setteth he the poor on high from affliction, and maketh him families like a flock. (42) The righteous shall see *it*, and rejoice: and all iniquity shall stop her mouth.”

LOVINGKINDNESS TO OBSERVE

Fourth, in verse 43, we are exhorted to observe the lovingkindness of God in his providence.

(Psalms 107:43) “Whoso *is* wise, and will observe these *things*, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the LORD.”

This I say, to you who are Christ’s to you who are my brothers and sisters in him, — “*All things are yours; whether...the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s!*” Whatever God does, he does because of his lovingkindness toward his children in this world.

- Let us give thanks to God for his goodness that he has shown to us.
- Let us cherish the blessings of God upon us. They can be removed as easily as they were given.
- Let us adore the good providence of God. — “*We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*”
- This is the way he gathers his chosen from the four corners of the earth.

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill,
He treasures up His bright designs,
And works His sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.

THE WAY HE GATHERS THEM

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind the frowning providence,
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour.
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan His work in vain.
God is His own Interpreter,
And He will make it plain.

Now I ask you, child of God, if God has given nations for you, and people for your life, don't you suppose he is worthy of your trust day by day? — *“He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”*

Go home, my friends, resting in the lovingkindness of God's good providence. Hear me, children of Zion. — All is well. *“Thy God reigneth!”*

Amen.