

- Rev. Grant Mangold, www.RiversideChurchIowa.com

PILGRIMS PSALM

Did you know? - if it wasn't for persecution, you wouldn't be celebrating Thanksgiving today. This drama of history is packed with profound meaning for us, about the providence of God for His people.

"O give thanks to the LORD, for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever!" begins Psalm 107. It traces the ancient Israelites returning from exile to their Promised Land. But it's called "The Pilgrim's Psalm" because it echoes the real life experience of this famous group of freedom-seeking Christ-followers. Due to the Reformation, ordinary people were able to own and read the Bible in their everyday language. Except when to do so violated the law of the land. Kings and corrupt church officials conspired to deprive basic human rights of speech and religion and the freedom to assemble.

Psalm 107: 5-7 says **"Their soul fainted within them. Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and He delivered them from their distress. He led them by a straight way till they reached a city to dwell in."** Hounded by English authorities, in 1609 the Pilgrims finally escaped to Holland, where they found some measure of religious freedom. Their pastor, John Robinson, was former dean of Cambridge University. He taught them the Bible and foundational principles of religious, civil, and economic freedom. But they lived in poverty. And a godless culture threatened to snatch away their children.

Psalm 107:13-15 says, **"Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and burst their bonds apart. Let them thank the LORD for His steadfast love, and for His wondrous works."** After much prayer, and with formidable difficulty, including multiple betrayals, imprisonments, and humiliations, a few Pilgrims finally were able to sail for the New World in summer 1620, hoping to escape impending death.

Psalm 107:22 says **"Let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, and tell of His deeds in songs of joy."** Intrepid faith sustained them through a traumatic 66-day journey in tumultuous seas. Storms blew them far off course. Their deprivations and impending winter left them in an extremely dangerous situation.

Psalm 107:29-31 says, **"He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. Then they were glad that the waters were quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven. Let them thank the LORD for His steadfast love."** Five hundred miles north of their destination, they sailed into Cape Cod. They found suitable harbor near Plymouth Rock, and already-cleared land which had been abandoned years before when a plague had wiped out the Pawtuxet Indians.

Psalm 107:32 says, **"Let them extol Him in the congregation of the people, and praise Him in the assembly of the Elders."** Forty-six men crowded into the captain's cabin on the 11th of November 1620. They had to form their own government, to replace their official charter for Virginia. They wrote the Mayflower Compact, "In the name of God, Amen!" It describes their purpose to plant a colony for the glory of God and advancement of the Christian faith. The World History Institute describes this covenant for a new civil body politic to govern themselves as the first-known document of its kind in history.

Psalm 107:36-38 says, **"there He lets the hungry dwell, and they establish a city to live in; they sow fields and plant vineyards and get a fruitful yield. By His blessing they multiply greatly."** Half of them died that harsh first winter. Finally in 1623 their resolve for God's principles and free enterprise, with help from friendly Indians (especially Squanto), resulted in growing crops. After a drought, they remembered they had not thanked God for His providence. And after a day of fasting, repentance and prayer, gentle rains fell. They were saved, and Governor Bradford declared a Day of Thanksgiving.

Psalm 107:43 says, **"Whoever is wise, let him attend to these things; let them consider the steadfast love of the LORD."** There's a plethora of fascinating details about the Pilgrims, persecution, and God's providence, which reveal ever more layers of the lovingkindness of our faithful God. Persecution prompted their pilgrimage. Hardships steeled their character. Miracles delivered them time and again. Fervent faith fueled their trust in the bounty of Almighty God's grace and truth.

As you pause to thank God this THANKS-giving Day, pray for Christians around the world experiencing dire persecution for their faith. Pray for God's steadfast love to give them - and you - the needed strength to live for the LORD in every life situation, trusting and obeying Him day by day!