

## Trash to Treasure!

**Scripture Reading** - Reading my own version of the Message Translation....this Word.. is from Psalm 107.

107

*1-3 Oh, thank Heaven — God is so good! The Lord's love never runs out. All of you set free by God, tell the world! Tell how God freed you from oppression, Then rounded you up from all over the place, from the four winds, from the seven seas.*

4-7

*Some of you wandered for years in the desert, looking but not finding a good place to live, Half-starved and parched with thirst, staggering and stumbling, on the brink of exhaustion. Then, in your desperate condition, you called out to God. And the Lord saved you in the nick of time; Jehovah put your feet on a wonderful road straight to safe haven.*

33-41

*God turned rivers into wasteland, springs of water into sunbaked mud; Luscious orchards became alkali flats because of the evil of the people who lived there. Then the Creator changed wasteland into fresh pools of water, arid earth into springs, Brought in the hungry and settled them there; they moved in—what a paradise! They sowed fields, they planted vineyards, they reaped a bountiful harvest. ...God gave the poor a safe place to live, shepherded them all.. like well-cared-for sheep.*

Brothers and Sisters, Sing a new song. God's word is good! To Heaven...we belong.

### **Sermon -**

Here's a familiar scene.

At graduation...some parents proudly hold up smartphones, eager to capture photos of their capped-and-gowned progeny. It's "commencement" -- a day of hopes and dreams, of imagining who and what their sons and daughters will one day become.

▷ It's pretty safe to presume those parents never pictured their kids as.. trash-pickers. But hold on.... What if trash-picking can pull in a million dollars each year?

That's what Matt Malone estimates he could make.

Every weekend, Malone leaves corporate life behind, climbs into his Chevy Avalanche and goes dumpster-diving. Yes, "dumpster-diving". But - not just any old dumpsters.

Malone is discriminating. He targets dumpsters behind retail chain-stores. Much of what he finds there are *store returns*: products customers took home, didn't like and brought back. Most are in... like-new condition, some still in the original packaging: vacuum cleaners, power tools, furniture, carpeting, industrial machines. Consumer electronics. Even scratch-and-dent items can be restored to pristine condition with "a little love" he says.

Someone like Malone - willing to work with cast-off items one by one, who is creative about refurbishing and reselling them at his weekly garage sales -- can make a great deal of money.

~.....In America, our dumpsters - *runneth over* .....with nearly new but serviceable merchandise, destined only for the trash heap.

What does that say - about us? ....Nothing good...for sure.

But dumpster-divers like Matt Malone..follow an ancient, ..even biblical tradition.

Scripture depicts **God**.. as being the Lord of *Saving Grace*, a deity who can transform trash ~ into treasure. Our Psalmist puts it, God is a *goel*. ..Hebrew for ... Redeemer. A Savior!

"Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, those redeemed from trouble." - - - -  
(Has God ever saved you...from trouble?)

Consider Israel... God saw the people as Heaven's - own - children! Made in God's own image! And yes, sure...they had dents and dings but – still had potential. ~And the Lord can be counted on.. to ☹ "gather them in from the lands," from distant places where they have been exiled. (But not forgotten. No one is forgotten...)

These - are not vacuum cleaners...or computer printers. They're human beings, God's 'chosen'. They hunger and thirst. Their souls faint within them. They cry out to the Lord in their trouble!

And - God - answers.

Psalm 107 is a **poignant** *litany*... of redemption. God saving...us..children of Heaven.

Over and over again, in varying metaphorical examples, the psalm voices this call and response. < The anguished cry of the people.... > is answered by the comforting reply of God ..who promises to rescue them from affliction.

This is a psalm of testimony...

It draws its unique power from *concrete accounts of suffering* and salvation. Hearing these redemption narratives, one after another, we understand in **a visceral way...being saved... is no mere abstract theological concept**. Being saved...is a spiritual experience of stunning reality and clarity! Being saved...is as real as bone...and blood!

But many of us don't talk about it much. We don't use personal testimony as often as we could. Even in our churches we shy away from it. ...Because salvation stories can be gritty and unpleasant -- much like dumpster diving. Dirty. Smelly. Putrid! Some testimonies are more than rough around the edges. They're laden with more emotion and drama than we like in polite company.

Twelve-step recovery movements like AA and NA, SA and OA.. have long known the power of testimony.

Sit in on an Alcoholics Anonymous "speaker meeting," and you'll hear one story of redemption after another. They spare no gritty details. AA speakers talk openly ..about how horrific their lives were... until their Higher Power led them out of peril into the safety of sobriety.

And for us in the church... Christian proclamation should never go too long without dipping into the deep well of testimony. (Thank God I have heard it from you already. From the Hunzegers and Sonia Colberg, Randy Smith and the Bakers. Many of you! Our Bible Studies are full...of personal stories. When new members join....their stories brim....with visceral, life changing anecdotes.) We are alive here....with life changing...salvation..stories. We all - have - one!

..That's something the apostle Paul knew instinctively.

Again and again, in his letters, he tells of experiences he and others have had, stories of saving grace. In 2 Corinthians, .....Paul totes up five occasions he received, quote: "forty lashes minus one, three times beaten with rods, one time stoned, and three times shipwrecked". ..Not to mention hardship, sleepless nights, days of hunger and thirst..and imprisonment. Then - he tops off his litany of redemption with a nod to the "daily pressure" he is under ..quote: "because of my anxiety for all the churches."

In Philippians 4 he writes: "*I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed ..and of going hungry, of having plenty ..and of being in need. I can endure all things through him who saves me.*"

Then - there's this:

On September 5, 1979, a young man walked up the steps...to the High lectern in London's Westminster Abbey and began to read this very psalm. The Liturgist ...was Prince Charles, heir to the British throne. The service ...was the funeral for his cousin, Lord Louis Mountbatten, - - - a man who had been like a second father to him.

The circumstances of this royal funeral were tragic. ...Mountbatten had been on holiday on the Irish coast, taking family members and friends on a boat ride. (And) The Irish Republican Army exploded a 50-pound, radio-controlled bomb they'd earlier hidden in the boat's hold, blowing it to pieces. Mountbatten and several of his passengers were killed. Other members of his party survived, but with horrible injuries.

Mountbatten, - - who was 79 years old, had left behind ...explicit instructions.. for his own funeral service, including Prince Charles reading.. Psalm 107, our psalm today.

As a Royal Navy officer, Mountbatten made this request deliberately. He prayed for a song, a psalm of God's redemption for those who ..."go down to the sea in ships."

~~Who could have known....that was how he would die?

They mounted up to heaven,  
they sank down to the depths;  
their courage melted away in their calamity...

Then..... they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and God brought them out from their distress ...

And they were glad ...because they had quiet,  
and God brought them.... to their desired haven.

Safe haven ...for Prince Charles' beloved cousin, this.. ancient mariner, was no **..earthly** port.

And for us, beloved, in death... as in life, this.. four-stanza song of redemption is the same: in our distress and desperation, God ....gives....deliverance...and we are grateful!

Thank God, our Great Redeemer...for saving us from the trash heap. For recognizing our inestimable value. For seeing us as precious....no matter the refuse...which clings to us.

You....are ....loved.

Amen.