

The God who rescues us from sin

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[0 : 00] Great, so if you're using a church Bible, we're on page 608, Psalm 107. Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble, and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south. Some wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to a city to dwell in.

Hungry and thirsty, 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. Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of men. For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things.

Some sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, prisoners in affliction and in irons, for they had rebelled against the words of God, and spurned the counsel of the Most High.

[1 : 12] So he bowed their hearts down with hard labour. They fell down with none to help. 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, for his wondrous works to the children of men.

For he shatters the doors of bronze and cuts in two the bars of iron. Some were fools through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquities suffered affliction.

They loathed any kind of food, and they drew near to the gates of death. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.

He sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from their destruction. Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of men, and let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving and tell of his deeds in songs of joy.

[2 : 17] Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the great waters. They saw the deeds of the Lord, his wondrous works in the deep.

For he commanded and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea. They mounted up to heaven. They went down to the depths. Their courage melted away in their evil plight.

They reeled and staggered like drunken men, and were at their wit's end. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.

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, for his wondrous works to the children of men.

Let them extol him in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders. Let them extol him in the assembly of the elders.

[3 : 43] They multiply greatly, and he does not let their livestock diminish. When they are diminished and brought low through oppression, evil, and sorrow, he pours contempt on princes and makes them wander in trackless wastes.

But he raises up the needy out of affliction and makes their families like flocks. The upright see it and glad, and all wickedness shuts its mouth.

Whoever is wise, let him attend to these things. Let them consider the steadfast love of the Lord. And I thank you very much for reading that.

Let me just pray before we start. Heavenly Father, thank you that we have your word. Thank you that we can be in relationship with you through it.

I pray through your spirit this morning we'll be transformed as a result to live for you in all that we do. Amen. Hello, everyone.

[4 : 52] If you could please keep your Bibles open, that would be great. If you haven't had a chance to meet me before, my name is Warren. I'm a member of the church family here at Grace Church Dulwich, and I've got the joy and privilege of being able to explain the Lord's word to us today.

Now, over the summer, we've been looking at Psalm 107 and 8. There's one big overarching theme we'll be exploring, and that's to do with the wonderful love that God has for his people.

And over the coming weeks, we're breaking down the different dimensions of that love. Now, if you haven't had a chance to listen to Benji and John's talk from the past few Sundays, please do.

That would be, I think, very helpful. Now, who doesn't like a rescue story? Perhaps some of you will remember this one from last August in Pakistan.

It started out a routine Tuesday morning. Car mechanic Goufras have planned to accompany his nephew to school and then go home.

[6 : 08] They made the journey, as they had done for many years, on a makeshift cable car that would take them across the steep Alai Valley in the northwest of Pakistan.

But minutes into their ride, two cables supporting their car snapped. They were trapped in the car with six other passengers, dangling almost 300 meters above the ground, buffeted by gusty winds. Now, the cable car wire snapped around 7.30 in the morning, but it was not until 14 hours later that all eight people, six teenagers among them, were pulled to safety in a complex operation involving at least four helicopters and a team of zip wire experts.

Many of the trapped passengers did not think they would survive. I thought it was my last day and I will be no more, one of the rescued boys said.

God has granted me a second life. Now, what's crucial to know here, there had been safety warnings that these makeshift cable cars were very, very unsafe and they should not be used.

[7 : 17] But many of the users made the choice to take the risk to use them to save lots of time. Sometimes they'd save two hours in each direction from walking up and down the steep cliff.

Seems a good reason to use them, you could argue. But you could also argue they were saved despite the choice that they repeatedly made. And so today, we're looking at why the Lord's love means he chose to rescue us despite our decision to ignore him.

So, from sin. Let's be clear what sin is then. Sin is the decision to choose what we want to do and ignore the Lord, to ignore his teaching.

Advice, warnings on how we should live. We put ourselves in charge. And so, to begin, I have a question for all of us this morning. Do you fully understand the richness of the Lord's mercy?

Do you fully understand the richness of the Lord's mercy? Do you really know how good he truly is? Now, those are the words that look back at me for a long time as I was sketching out this sermon.

[8 : 30] Let me tell you. It took me a while. And I think there's a lot to unpick in that short sentence for Christians. And if you're exploring the Christian faith this morning, we'll also be exploring what this idea means for everyone as to why we as Christians think it's so important.

Now, we're going to be looking at verses 17 to 22 today. It's commonly agreed among scholars that Psalm 107 is broken up into four sections. And today's section is about how the Lord, in his mercy, chose to rescue us from sin.

The four sections focus on four different circumstances of God's people who'd recently been rescued from exile. And I'd like to break down today's sermon into two parts.

The first, focusing on the nature of man or humankind. And secondly, the nature of God. At the end, we'll come together to look at what this means for us and what it means regarding the resurrection of Jesus on this side of the cross.

Now, the nature of humankind. Now, last week, John gave us a very helpful summary about how some of the different books within Psalms serve different purposes. But just, I'll remind you about book four and five.

[9 : 44] Now, book four reflects on God's eternal reign, human frailty, and calls for worship. And book five, which we're in now, features lots of thanksgiving for deliverance, pilgrim songs, and praise for God's laws.

Now, we should realize that although Psalm 107 is the beginning of book five, it's actually a response to a prayer made at the end of Psalm 106. But before we focus on 17 to 22, please look back at me to the start of Psalm 107 so we can understand how the chapter begins and what it's about.

So please look down with me at the beginning of Psalm 107. Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble and gathered in from the lands from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.

And so the chapter begins with a call to give thanks to God because of who he is. It says, for he is good.

Then we have the command, let the redeemed of the Lord say so. Those who have been saved from sin or from their enemies, who should give thanks. And then finally, it's confirmation that all of those from all corners of the earth should give him thanks.

[11:00] That's everyone. That being said, following on from the opening, we have four different examples or pictures of how God's love presents itself.

And in this section, we're looking at how the Lord saved the people of Israel from sin. Now, it's thought that these Psalms were written in reference to the previous Babylonian exile, where the people of Israel had been taken captive.

Now, God's people had been rescued after being held captive between 586 and 538 BC. And now, the nation of Israel was in a state of rebuilding after returning.

Now, let's look at verse 17, the beginning of our section. Now, when reading this chapter, it's helpful to think using the word they rather than some at the beginning of each of the verses for a fuller understanding of each of the scenes.

It's seen as being a bit of a more helpful translation. Now, the term fool or foolishness is used a few times in the Psalms before now. For example, in Psalm 38, King David says, For my iniquities have gone over my head like a heavy burden.

[12:21] They are too heavy for me. My wounds stink and fester because of my foolishness. In this passage in Psalm 107, I think we can take it here as being in my rebellion.

And when it says their sinful ways, we know this means going against how God prescribes us to live. Not living in a way that befits him as our creator.

Is that lying, stealing, loving other things in the world before him, lusting, not honoring God with all that we have?

And so they came to be in rebellion, in opposition to the Lord through their decision to sin. They picked a side. Maybe it was comfortable. Maybe it was the easier thing to do.

Maybe they just wanted to do it. They just felt like it. Now, we have regrets in moments in life, don't we? I probably shouldn't have done that, you may say.

[13:30] We all act in this way in our lives at some stage. All of us. And what was the result? Look down again at the end of verse 17. Because, so, as a direct result, they suffered affliction.

Affliction. I'm not sure about you, but I don't really see the use of the word affliction. Or use it myself in everyday speech. Maybe we should. But if we think of affliction, that means pain, distress.

Illness, a form of suffering. Sickness. I think that would be a helpful understanding. Now, do we live in a way that acknowledges that sin can sometimes be responsible for sickness?

Do we know what the Bible says about sickness and sin? Now, at Grace Church, perhaps, we see the value in being Christians who are reasoned.

You can see that science has a place in how we make sense of the world. And it's valuable in understanding how we live our lives. But have we thought that our decision to sin can directly lead to sickness?

[14:44] Is that what this verse is saying? Can God use sickness as an instrument to highlight sin? Now, we're fortunate to have scientists and medical professionals amongst the congregation here.

I am going to raise your hands this morning, if that's you. But speaking directly, I wonder, has anyone ever presented themselves to you in hospital or in the surgery when being ill and said, I think a certain sin is making me sick?

Sounds fanciful, doesn't it? Maybe someone should tell West Streeting about that.

Look at the verse again. Some were fools through their sinful ways and because of their iniquities, iniquities suffered affliction. Now, I want to make clear this is a very difficult topic.

And we have to be mindful when discussing and explaining what it all means. The very easy thing for me to say from this kind of lofty vantage point is that some choices that we make in life directly can lead to sickness, addictions of various kinds, perhaps.

[15 : 55] And these things have serious consequences which aren't good for us. Perhaps we should think of sickness as being a potential warning sign.

We know from elsewhere in the Bible that clearly sickness is not always a result of sin. But here, maybe, there's no harm in asking ourselves the question, if we would apply this to our own lives, is there anything that we need to repent about?

Verse 18. They loathed any kind of food and they drew near to the gates of death. We all know that we need food to stay alive, to live.

Food's good for us. It fuels us. We're right to take pleasure from eating, sharing meals, being in relationship with others through food. We don't invite friends for dinner because we don't enjoy eating with them.

Enjoy being in community with them. In fact, a research study by Oxford University in 2017 found the more often people eat with others, the more likely they are to feel happy and satisfied with their lives.

[17 : 16] They're more likely to be connected with others, less likely to have arguments. I can't speak for my family here, but it's something to bear in mind. But back to the verse.

Here it's saying the very thing that we know that we need to survive no longer appeals to us. They loathed it. They loathed the very idea of living. That to me sounds like despair.

And so their sinful choices leave these people to be so horrified with life, so much so they wanted to leave it behind. Drawing near to the gates of death does sound like a really disturbing image, doesn't it?

And now verse 19. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.

And so when they knew they faced death, it was at that moment they cried out to the Lord. There's a clue to understanding what happens next.

[18 : 26] If we look back earlier in the chapter, where we see there's a bit of a pattern. There's a pattern of God's people crying out, and then of deliverance.

In other pictures within the chapter, the people cry out to God in their trouble, and then God delivers them. So look down with me at verse 6. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.

And in verse 13. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. So the children of Israel in the wilderness cried to God, and he saved them.

They couldn't save themselves. They couldn't do anything to rescue themselves. They were so sick. They were drawing near to death.

They could call out just a sentence, just a cry. And of course we have it here again in verse 19. And I think it's fair to say that the writer is trying to emphasize something.

[19 : 27] He wanted to sink in. He's showing us that repeatedly in that whatever situations we face, no matter how grave our sin, the Lord is merciful.

Maybe we already know what our nature is like, but do we live like it? Do we acknowledge that we're broken and in need of rescue?

Do we know what our nature is like? Do we know what our nature is like? By knowing our nature, we'll be better equipped to understand why we need to have a relationship with God, because he is the one who can save us.

I'm not sure if anyone here has been with someone just before they've died, if they're not a Christian. Perhaps this verse could be comforting in the future to know that even at the absolute very end of life, we can share that the Lord offers hope.

So God's people here are clearly sinners. They cry out to be saved and the Lord responds.

[20 : 37] He responds and says, yes, I'll save you. But why? Now that brings me to the second point today, which is the nature of the Lord. What do these verses show us about the nature of the Lord?

Look down with me at verse 20. He sent out his word and healed them and delivered them from their destruction. When we think about the nature of God here, maybe we should start by looking at what he's doing in the passage.

You've already seen that despite the decision to sin by God's people, he made the decision to deliver them from their distress. I'm not sure about you. I've got lots of friends who aren't Christians and I have lots of conversations that go a bit like this.

So you're telling me the mass murderer, Pol Pot, Stalin, Hitler, Mao, it's possible for all those horrendous men to go to heaven despite what they've done, despite the pain and suffering they've inflicted by just asking for forgiveness.

Are you serious? Yes. Yes, I am. To us it seems so unfathomable. Where's the justice?

[21 : 52] So much evil, pain, suffering, hurt, sin, terror inflicted, but no penalty. And this is the reality. God's nature is such that the decision to grant forgiveness for the very worst things that we've done seems so absurd to us that it must be wrong.

But it's even bigger than that. Even bigger. As well as being forgiven, even though we're unworthy, we're also healed, restored. We get two things when we deserve nothing.

In verse 20, though, we see quite clearly it says, God made a decision. He sent out his word.

Now, you don't send something that you don't want someone to receive, do you? And it's the power of his word alone that leads to two things happening. Healing and deliverance.

Saving and restoration. And do we know anyone who can do this just with words alone? Words that can intervene in the material world to change our reality?

[23 : 00] It sounds like what Jesus did. Now, for those looking in on the Christian faith today, maybe you've heard the term, the word used before.

Now, a popular Christmas Advent reading is taken from the book of John in the New Testament. Chapter one begins like this. In the beginning was the word.

And the word was with God. And the word was God. The connection between Psalm 107, 20 and John 1, 1 suggests that Jesus is the word sent by God to bring healing and deliverance.

We should see this as being a prophecy, a preview, if you will, of what Jesus was to do. And now, from this side of history, we know he has done. Not sure if you know, but the Psalms are written over an extended period.

Between 1,400 and 500 years before Jesus came to earth. We saw that Jesus often healed the sick by just using a word.

[24 : 06] For example, if we think of the centurion servant in Matthew 7. We see lots of prophecy about Jesus in many of the Psalms. And isn't it reassuring to know that God had this plan so many years in advance of Jesus even coming to earth.

A plan to save us from ourselves in such an amazing way. If we look at the four pictures or scenes in totality from this chapter, we see God's people enduring the agony of hunger in the desert.

We see them imprisoned. In our passage today, we see facing death due to the sickness of sin.

And the next week from Andy, you'll hear how God's people were drowning at sea in the waves of God's wrath.

Jesus suffered hunger for 40 days. The darkness of the prison cell was replicated on the cross. He dealt with death in our place. And also God's wrath too, on our behalf, due to his sacrifice.

So God's nature is so great. His love's so great for us. He decided to do all of this for us. Now let's look back at the first verse in this Psalm 107.

[25 : 34] Oh, give thanks to the Lord for he is good. For his steadfast love endures forever.

The first thing we're told to do at the beginning of this Psalm is to give thanks to the Lord because he is good.

And because his love is always the same. It endures. It's a guarantee that we can rely on. We have certainty.

God loves us. So thanking him and loving him comes first. Now that we have a better understanding of ourselves and who God is through his nature, it's easier for us to be humble before God.

It's right that we thank him for who he is. And let's just pray that those words continue to transform our hearts. We see that call to thank the Lord again in verse 21.

[26 : 40] But notice the reason for why we should thank him this time around. And please look down at me at verse 21. Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man.

And let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving and tell of his deeds in songs of joy. Now notice the term children of man. It's usually repeated in this Psalm.

So it's used repeatedly in this Psalm. And also here in Psalm 33. The Lord looks down from heaven. He sees all the children of man. In Proverbs 8.

To you, O man, I call and cry. I call and my cry is to the children of man. The term children of man means all of humanity.

So the possibility of being a recipient of God's mercy is open to everyone. That's good, right? [27 : 46] And it's no wonder then that in the final verse in this section, we're encouraged to offer thanksgiving. Tell others of what he's done. And then sing joyfully.

We've got an opportunity in a moment in the next song to think about doing that. The next song we're singing is Praise My Soul, King of Heaven.

And the words ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven. Who like thee his praise should sing? There's no time like the present. So going away today, do we fully appreciate that salvation is only possible due to God's mercy, his love for us, through what Jesus did for us on the cross?

We can see that the acts carried out by God in saving the people of Israel foreshadowed the greater rescue that was to come with Jesus and his much bigger rescue mission.

And so in closing, knowing our nature, knowing that we do sin and that we are given warnings about it from the Lord, knowing that the awesome nature of God and how much he loves us, and knowing what the Lord has done for us, and knowing that we are called to praise him, I have two questions for you to consider in groups in a minute.

[29 : 08] How can I thank God more in my life? And how can I praise God more in my life? How can I thank God more in my life?

And how can I praise God more in my life? You can get into small groups, five or six, I think, and we can do that. And then Benji will bring us back together.

But before we do that, let me quickly pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for your word. Thank you for sending Jesus. Thank you for your nature. Thank you that your nature means you're merciful and good.

Thank you that healing and deliverance is open to everyone. Help us all to share this good news. Amen.