

The God who rescues us from judgement

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[0 : 00] So the reading's from Psalm 107, and it's page 609 of your Bible. So it's verses 23 to 32. So Psalm 107 on page 609.

Okay. 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 man.

[1 : 07] Let them extol him in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders. Allow me to lead us in a prayer as we start.

Let them extol him in the assembly of the Lord.

Amen. I wonder what you think the greatest need is in Dulwich, the spiritual need, or perhaps what the greatest danger is.

And might I suggest an option? I get to, you don't. I'm standing at the front, so I know that's slightly unfair. But might I suggest an option? That it is self-sufficiency. Dulwich is a beautiful place.

And as I look out, I see so many beautiful people. Beautiful schools. Beautiful everything. People are well-to-do.

[2 : 23] With safe jobs. Safe prospects. And a safe outlook for the future. And I often hear from friends of mine who are ministers in different contexts.

And I have to confess, I don't enjoy these conversations particularly. That middle-class places like Dulwich are an easy place. I wonder if you've ever heard that. An easy place to be a Christian. An easy place to do ministry. And they reassure me that I'll have a shock when I do ministry for the first time in a real place. With real people.

I know what they mean. There's an ease of life here, isn't there, that seems to reduce or make harder, perhaps, the friction of suffering for Christ.

But really, all of us who've lived here for any length of time will know that such an ease of existence, beautiful people, beautiful place, beautiful things, is precisely the reason being a Christian in Dulwich can be so hard.

[3 : 26] Because the devil does not care if you aren't a Christian because of suffering, ignorance, or middle-class comfort. The only thing he cares about is that you don't bow the knee to King Jesus.

If he does that with a fever or a Ferrari, either way he wins. He doesn't care. And so if he can keep people in Dulwich so busy, so consumed with their idols of career, family, and wealth, it matters not for a moment that those things are middle-class and comfortable.

If anything, middle-class comfort is an enormously successful weapon in our enemy's arsenal. The idol of self-sufficiency, it has to be, surely, one of the major reasons why out of the tens of thousands of people who live in Dulwich, there is but a handful of us here this morning.

And I often want to respond to my dear friends who say such, might I suggest, ignorant things. You try teaching the gospel to people who believe they have everything.

Try telling the middle-class mum at the school gate that she's a wretched sinner in need of saving. Good luck. Or the city lawyer that his career is powerless in the face of death and judgment.

[4 : 50] Good luck. No, self-sufficiency is a great and powerful weapon. And the nicer it looks, the more powerful it is. And the elephant in the room here, it is if we're honest with ourselves, it seems to work.

Sometimes. It seems to work. Sometimes. Self-sufficiency, if we don't look carefully enough, seems to work.

So when the Christian, looking around at the world, and she looks around at Dulwich and sees self-sufficient people ignoring the gospel, and not only ignoring it, but maybe even thriving, maybe even thriving, what will keep them, what will keep us trusting in the one true God?

What will keep us trusting in the one true God? We've been saying to come to the psalm that the psalms are written for people like Joseph. Don't worry if you haven't been here over the last couple of weeks. Jesus' father, Joseph.

Jesus' father. Under the psalter, this is the book of Psalms, 150 Psalms, it opens with the promise that the righteous man or woman is the person who meditates on God's word day and night. If you want to be blessed, if you want to be righteous, you meditate on God's word.

[6 : 06] And Joseph is described as a righteous man in Luke chapter 1. He is the Psalm 1 man. He meditates, he thinks as he reads the Psalms. And the Psalms are for the returnees from the exile to Babylon to reassure them to wait for the coming of God's king in Psalm 2.

And Joseph is in that generation. So when you think about the book of Psalms, who are they written to? They're written for people like Joseph. So as Joseph, the righteous man, the man who meditates on God's word day and night, as he looks, waiting for God's king, and he sees so many self-sufficient evil men profiting, his Roman occupiers, Jewish tax collectors, abusing their own people to line their own pockets.

And as he sees that their self-sufficiency seems to work, what will keep Joseph trusting in the one true God and not in his own self-sufficiency?

In the face of self-sufficient success, what can keep Joseph, what can keep the Christian trusting in the one true God?

Now we'll get into the Psalm. Point number one, there's one sentence you'll notice on the back of your handout, there is a brilliant lack of any points. So that's even more of a reason that we need to concentrate with me here this morning.

[7 : 23] And I know it's warm, but I promise you that it is worth it. And point number one is that in the chaos of life, people will prosper for a time. In the chaos of life, people will prosper for a time.

And we're looking primarily at verse 23. Now the astute among you will have noticed that in our introduction, we haven't once spoken about boats.

We notice that? We haven't once spoken about boats. No reference of water. I was thinking about using a Titanic illustration, but thought that was slightly on the nose. No reference of boats. But yet, I wonder if we notice in the reading that there is a lot about sea and boats in our verses.

And I also wonder if, like me, when I sat down to begin my prep for this, you were slightly perplexed as to what to get out of this section, given that I don't think any of us in the room are mariners. No, I don't think so.

And why all this talk about boats? Have a look down with me. Verse 23. A lot about water and boats.

[8 : 47] And seemingly not much about self-sufficiency. Well, this is where I'm afraid we're going to have to do a little bit of work. There's going to be some cross-referencing, which I'm sure we're all thrilled about. But we have to ask ourselves, what does the sea represent in the Old Testament?

Why is the psalmist using this image? Presumably, he isn't just writing to sailors. And we're used to this idea. If I was to stand here and go, meh, most of you in the room are thinking that I'm having some kind of stroke, which is a totally fair thing to think.

But if you were a football fan of the greatest team in the world, Millwall FC, you will know that that is the chant that Millwall fans scream incessantly for 90 minutes throughout the entire game.

And if I was to come to a Brit and say, Big Ben, you would know that I'm not referring to my waistband, but rather I am referring to the clock. The clock, Big Ben.

And so when a Jewish person hears the word sea, when they keep seeing imagery of boats and sailors and water, what are they conjuring up in their minds? The Brit, Big Ben, the clock, the Jew, the boat, the what?

[9 : 59] What is the image that they are bringing up in their mind? So would you turn with me to the very first page in the book, Genesis chapter 1, verse 1. Genesis chapter 1, verse 1.

I won't ask you to shout out a page. Starting at verse 1. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

I wonder if you ever noticed that when you're reading Genesis 1. Apparently there's nothing, but there's water. There's a sea. And then out of the sea, God creates. It's cool, isn't it, that in that detail, right at the beginning, there is sea.

What is going on? Well, the sea represents chaos, disorder, destruction, decreation. What is it that God does to evil humanity in Genesis 6?

[11 : 08] He floods the world. He brings it back to decreation. And if we were to flip right to the end of the book, flip right to Revelation chapter 21. Revelation 21. Again, I won't ask you to shout out a page number.

Revelation 21, just verse 1. Revelation 21, verse 1. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

Sea representing all of life's chaos, destruction, disorder. And in the new creation, there won't be any ever again. So do we see the image?

So in Genesis 1, God conforms the sea into a perfect organized world. Sin enters, and so chaos enters once again. But in the new creation, in the new heaven and new earth, there is no sea, no chaos, no death, no sickness, no loss.

And the sea, it's an apt metaphor, isn't it? I don't know how arrogant or hebristic you might be, but we don't have much control over the sea, do we? I don't know if you've ever gone down to the beach. I've done this in order to prepare for this sermon.

[12 : 29] I went down to the beach, and as the tide was coming in, I put out my hands and I said, stop. And like my child, it did not listen. And it continued to come in. We have no control over the sea whatsoever.

And also like my child, the sea will continue to wear away and destroy everything that is in front of it. We have no control over the sea. And so verse 23, back to our psalm, sorry, psalm 107, page 609. Some went down to the sea in ships doing business on the great waters. So here, in one little verse, is a brief but poignant snapshot of self-sufficient man on their little boats.

They enter into the chaos of the sea, the chaos of life. Seemingly, they prosper. Why self-sufficiency as well? Well, just have a look down with me at verse 26. The end of verse 26, their courage, melted away in their evil plight.

So here is a brief snapshot of self-sufficient man living for themselves. They do business. They make a living. They look like they've tamed the sea, the chaos of life.

[13 : 39] They've turned it to their own ends. And is this not really a picture of prospering Dulwich? Men and women in their little boats on the surface of a calm sea, fishing, enjoying seemingly and prospering for a time.

For a time. Point number two. But when inevitable chaos comes. So we had point number one. In the chaos of life, people will prosper for a time.

Point number two. But when inevitable, chaos comes. As soon as the self-sufficient picture in verse 23 has begun, it's ended.

And the storm begins to brew. From the picturesque summer holiday, we are straight into the middle of a tempest. Starting at verse 24. They saw the deeds of the Lord, his wondrous works in the deep.

For he commanded and raised the stormy winds 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.

[14 : 46] They reeled and staggered like drunken men and were at their wits' ends. Those of us who have our Old Testament ears attuned will be ringing many kind of Exodus bells.

This is exactly the language of the storm rising in the Red Sea as the Egyptians are about to be swallowed. It's a terrifying image. And do we notice that this moment is frozen in time within the psalm?

Verse 25. He commanded and raised the stormy wind which lifted up the waves of the sea. They mounted up to heaven. They went down to their depths. The courage melted away in their evil plight. They reeled and staggered.

And it's a picture imagining the Egyptians walking through the middle of the Red Sea. And either side, torrential water building up. And then we're frozen. Frozen in a moment of fear and terror. The water's raging in mountains either side. The chaos of the Red Sea, a foaming wall encircling them. And this is right where the psalmist takes us. And so that is where the self-sufficient people of our psalm find themselves.

[15:55] Right before the moment the walls of the sea come crashing over them. In the words of Herman Melville, which he wrote a book I think called Moby Dick, which I haven't read, but I'll quote to pretend that I have.

One moment the ocean was a tranquil mirror. The next it was a raging beast. As if the winds and waves conspired to show us our own insignificance. And here, of course, this is where we see the foolishness of sinful self-sufficient man.

Because this is such a brilliant metaphor, isn't it? Men and women on boats on the sea. Because self-sufficiency is a fair weather religion only.

Self-sufficiency is a fair weather religion only. It only works when things are going well. As one philosopher said, self-sufficiency is a myth perpetuated by those who've never faced true hardship. And all of us in this room, I think, if we're not being naive with ourselves, will know that to be true. You don't have to live on this world very long to know that the idol of self-sufficiency, well, it doesn't really work.

[17:04] When the sea begins to boil and life's chaos breaks in, self-sufficiency doesn't work. The job loss, the cancer diagnosis, death in the family, the child who falls unwell, marital strife that never seems coming towards an end, political turmoil.

The list could go on and on and on and on. And if we are honest with ourselves, we know that self-sufficiency for everyone has an expiry date.

The sea doesn't remain calm forever. God won't let it. God won't let it. All of us, inevitably, unavoidably, will face the chaos of life at some point.

And I know that many of us are in that now. And all of us really, deep down, if we've, as I said, lived life for any length of time, know this to be true. We all have our own stories.

We all know that when the storm of life rages out of nowhere, self-sufficiency cannot save us. We can prosper for a while in our little boats, floating on the calm sea.

[18:13] But eventually, inevitably, the Lord brings chaos. And notice in the psalm that it is the Lord doing this. Verse 24 and 25. In the words of Tim Keller, self-sufficiency is an illusion and a deadly one.

We need a saviour. And the good news is that one has been provided for us. Final point. Final point there. Only God can save.

Verse 28 to 32. Only God can save. This will be our last cross-reference, I promise. During this passage, our New Testament bells should have also been ringing.

I wonder if they were. And I'm going to ask us, if we can, to turn finally to Mark chapter 4, verse 35 to 41. Mark chapter 4, verse 35 to 41.

We'll give us a moment to find that. It will be a familiar story to many of us, but it's a great privilege to bring it to you once again.

[19:33] And I would just ask you to suspend your foreknowledge of how the story ends. I know that's impossible to do, but if you can, suspend your foreknowledge of how the story ends.

The disciples and Jesus are out on the sea. Verse 35. Let us go across to the other side. And leaving the crowd, they took Jesus with them in the boat, as he was, and other boats were with him. And they're out on the sea, and everything seems fine.

Until suddenly, out of nowhere, verse 37, a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But Jesus was in the stern, asleep on the cushion.

And they woke him and said, Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing? The storm brews.

The disciples become more desperate. And they wake Jesus up, saying, Do you not care?

Now, I know very little about sailing. I know there are some of you in the room who know an awful lot about sailing. But I would imagine that if your profession is fishing, you probably are used to bad weather. It seems like an inevitable occupational hazard that if you get on a boat, you'll get wet.

[20 : 34] And that you might have to come across some storms. Seems like basically something that you probably get used to pretty quick. I probably, you know, I would scream with a gust of wind on a boat. But these are hardened fishermen.

And so let's ask ourselves, what kind of storm would it take for hardened fishermen to be scared? So scared that do we notice in the story they even abandon trying to help themselves.

They give up tossing water over the side. They give up trying to row to shore. They give up trying to bring the sails in and riding the storm out. So clear is their helplessness. So certain their death. They have only one recourse. So they wake Jesus up and shout at him, teacher, verse 38, do you not care that we are perishing?

And it's a question of terror and fear. But do we notice that it is not at all a question of hope? There isn't a Jesus, can you save us? There isn't a Jesus, can you do something about the storm?

[21 : 34] There is only Jesus, do you not care? Or in other words, Jesus, why are you not scared with us? They don't expect that he can help. And certainly, therefore, here is a powerful and accurate description of the great life, self-sufficiency, isn't it?

Self-sufficient, hardened sailors, perhaps confident in their skill, met with the great swell of the storm of life. And before it, even they, even these self-sufficient, hardened sailors, are utterly helpless.

And all of us will, as I said, experience or have experienced such a moment. Because really, in comparison to the storm and chaos of life, are we not just like these fishermen, clinging onto our little boat for dear life?

And I don't know what your storm is. Some of you, it's been wonderful to pray with you through some of them. But illness, job loss, mental health. But ultimately, of course, the ultimate and final storm of death, that one day, all of us, in our little boat of self-sufficiency, will one day meet.

Well, do we not all see, just like these fishermen, that it is utterly useless to rely on ourselves? But, and there is an enormous but, in the midst of the storm, the kind of storm that sends grown men into hysterics, where is our Jesus?

[23 : 08] Verse 38. But Jesus was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. Asleep. The only sign that this storm was causing our Jesus any discomfort at all was that he needed to grab a cushion for his head.

That was about the extent of fear that the storm gave to our Jesus. Hmm, this is slightly choppy. Better grab a cushion, or it's going to interrupt my Z's. As the storm rages, and mankind fears for their life, our Jesus is asleep.

And when he was awoken to the sounds of their cries, he stood. And notice that it doesn't say shouted. It doesn't say he raised his voice.

Jesus stood and said, and said to the sea, verse 39, peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.

And Jesus then rebuked them in verse 40, probably because they hadn't understood our psalm. Because finally, if we turn back to our psalm 107, verse 28 to 29, the people in the psalm got something right that our disciples got wrong.

[24 : 28] 107, verse 28. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. The people of our psalm knew who to cry to.

They cried to the Lord, and he saved them. But our fishermen, they didn't ask Jesus for help. They just raged at him. But if they had known who was in the boat with them, who was asleep in the stern on a cushion, that they wouldn't have feared the storms of that life at all.

Because for our Jesus, calming the storms of this life, illness, death, mental health, job loss, whatever you want to insert, calming the storms of this life is as simple for Jesus as speech.

And he said, peace. And the waves calmed. So, for Joseph, as we close, this psalm is here to remind him that in the face of self-sufficient succeeders all around him, men and women thriving in their little boats on the sea, there is only one God he needs to trust in.

The God who made the world from the sea. The God who destroyed evil with it. The God who promises to one day make all things new. Joseph is reassured that in the end, in the inevitable storms of life, there is only one sure rock upon which to stand.

[25 : 55] And so for us, as we finish, what is going to keep us in Dulwich, this easy place to be a Christian? What is going to keep us trusting in the Lord, waiting for his return?

And particularly in a place like Dulwich, where the temptation to trust in ourselves or institutions instead of God is so great? Well, this is the reminder.

There is only one person, one God who can deal with the storms of life. To put it another way, God is an expert with storms. And so he is an expert with ours.

Of course, as we heard the last couple of weeks, the ultimate reassurance and vindication of this is the empty tomb. The ultimate storm for all of us is that one day we will die. And all of us here, if we are a Christian, are trusting that when that day comes, we won't close our eyes forever.

But it will be the face of Jesus that we see when we wake up on that bright summer morning. But is there anywhere, and if you're not a believer in Jesus, I'd be keen for you to ask yourself this question this morning.

[27 : 04] Is there anywhere, anyone, who is a better person to trust in? It is as easy now for Jesus to defeat death as speech. Be still.

He has done it. The tomb was empty. And when the storms of life rise, he is fully sufficient to bring us home. Why don't I close us in a final prayer?

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 man.

Father, we thank you so much that in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have certainty in the face of life's storms, that despite self-sufficient people around us, we can have confidence that you will bring us safely home.

Please, therefore, Lord, would you help us to love and trust in the rescue of the Lord Jesus more fully. Amen.