

Rescue from Trouble

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 January 2021

Preacher: Nick Louw

[0 : 0 0] Good morning, everyone. We're now going to look together at Psalm 107 and see what God has to say to His people through it. Do keep your Bible open, though, at Psalm 107. Don't just stare at the screen the whole time.

It's best, you learn best if you follow along in your own Bible at home. So I do encourage you to open to Psalm 107 if you haven't yet, and so we can work through that together.

But before we do, I want to ask you a question. Question, have you ever been rescued? Have you ever been in a situation that you could not get yourself out of, maybe a very dangerous situation, and you needed someone else to come in and rescue you?

Maybe you were swimming out at sea and you got swept away by a current and you realized that you could not swim back to shore in your own strength and you needed a lifeguard to come rescue you.

Have you ever been rescued by a lifeguard, I wonder? Or maybe you were broken down in a really dodgy part of town late one night and your car just stopped and you needed someone to come and fix your car or give you a lift out of there.

[1 : 0 6] You needed rescue out of a situation that you couldn't get yourself out of. Have you ever been in that situation? Have you ever been rescued? If so, I want you to try and remember how you felt when that rescue arrived.

What were your emotions at that time? Try to feel that again. Try to think back to how you felt when you were rescued. Now, the universal human response to being rescued is a feeling of deep relief and gratitude towards your rescuer, right?

When you see that rescuer coming, suddenly there's a weight off your shoulders. You know that you now can get out of the situation. And you have great gratitude, almost gushing, overflowing gratitude towards the person who rescued you.

That emotion of gratitude and relief. Well, as we read Psalm 107, what we realize is that the purpose of this Psalm in our Bibles is to get you and me to feel that emotion towards God.

The purpose of Psalm 107 is to get God's redeemed people to feel, really feel gratitude again for God's rescuing of them.

[2 : 2 6] And the way it does that is a very interesting way. It's a great Psalm, actually. It's very carefully laid out. And after a little introduction, it's laid out into four, well, five sections, actually.

But four of those sections are describing the different kinds of troubles that God's people have found themselves in, in history.

And generally, the types of troubles that humans find themselves in, and how God has rescued his people out of those troubles, one by one.

And so, to understand the Psalm, the best thing for us to do is to look at each of those sections, to understand each of those troubles, and what they look like for Israel, but also what they look like for us today.

The first one, then, we find from verse 4 onwards. And it's the situation of being lost. That's the first kind of trouble humans find themselves in.

[3 : 25] Look at verse 4. So, for the original readers of the Psalm, they would have immediately been reminded of Israel's experience.

In the wilderness. Remember the Exodus? They were rescued by God from slavery in Egypt. And before arriving in the Promised Land, the home that God had prepared for them, they wandered in the desert, lost, really not knowing where they were going.

For 40 years, in fact, part of that duration was their own making and their own foolishness. But they were lost. There was a time in Israel's history where they were a lost people and they were needing a way out of that situation.

They were needing rescue. And that's exactly what God gave them. In that wilderness, because he had made a covenant relationship out of his steadfast love, we saw the video earlier, just God's covenant keeping love for people who don't deserve it.

He led them out of that situation. He directed them to where they needed to be. And he provided for them along the way. Sometimes miraculously, he gave them what they needed in that journey to find a way home.

[4 : 59] Well, that's Israel in Israel's history. But that experience of Israel is also the experience of every Christian today. The Bible describes Christians as those who were once lost and are now found.

They were once people, all of us were once people without a direction in life, without purpose in life and without hope of where we're going. Listen to the words, for example, of Ephesians 2, verse 12.

It says, remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise without hope and without God in the world.

Without hope and without God in the world. That is really describing a person or a people who have no purpose in life, who are just living day to day.

But there's no eternal hope. There's no eternal vision of where they're going. They're lost. They're wandering around just as much as the Israelites are wandering in the desert. But just like God saved his covenant people then from wandering around and getting lost and dying in the desert.

[6 : 14] So he saves his covenant people today in a very similar way. Listen to the words of 1 Peter 1, verse 3. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In his great mercy, he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

And so God has done what he says in Psalm 107. He led them by a straight way to a city where they could settle.

Just like he did that in history for the nation of Israel. He has done that for believers today. He has led them through Christ by a straight way. He has given them a vision of a bigger life of eternity and shown them the way to eternity through Jesus.

He has done a rescue out of a situation of being lost and purposeless and wandering around in this life. He has given hope and a home to his people.

[7 : 19] But I want to ask you, how relieved do you feel if you're one of those people? How relieved are you now and every day that you are not wandering around aimlessly in your life without purpose and direction?

I think often as Christians we can take for granted the fact that we know where we're going. Many, many people in the world don't. How relieved and grateful are you that you've been rescued from a purposeless, wandering, pointless life?

I remember once I was hiking years ago with a group of friends. We did the Swellendam Trail. It's a five-day hike. And on the second day, it was a long hike, a number of hours.

It took most of the day. And the groups, we would kind of walk in little groups. And sometimes we would get split up and go on our own and walk and join another group. There were a few of these groups along the trail at any given time.

But I remember once on that day, I lost sight of the group that was behind me and the group in front of me. And a couple of hours passed and the trail that I was walking on thinned out more and more.

[8 : 29] It got more bushy, less distinct. And eventually I realized that I'd lost it. I didn't know where the trail was. And I spent a good time just kind of scrambling for the bushes, looking for this trail again.

And as far as I could see, there was no people around. I had got lost. I didn't know which direction to go until I saw the group that had been behind me a few hours later.

And I realized that they were on the path. And so by going to where they were, I could find the path again. And I just felt this great sense of relief. And I'll tell you, for the rest of the day, I stuck with that group.

I didn't wander off by myself again. And in the same way, that relief of having found direction after being lost should be the experience of every Christian every day.

We should be relieved that God has given us a vision and a hope of where we're going. And a direction and guidance of how we should use the time we have on earth.

[9 : 32] God has rescued us from living a pointless life. From wandering. And that is the first situation that he rescues his people out of. But there's another situation that's described here.

And that is the situation of being locked up and imprisoned. And we see that from verse 10 to 12. Some sat in darkness and in the deepest gloom, prisoners suffering in iron chains.

For they had rebelled against the words of God and despised the counsel of the Most High. So he subjected them to bitter labor. They stumbled and there was no one to help.

The experience of being imprisoned. Whereas the last trouble was having too much space and not knowing where to go. This trouble is having too little space and not being able to go anywhere.

And of course, it would have described a number of points in Israel's own history. Most distinctly, the Babylonian exile. So they had rebelled against God.

[10 : 35] They had ignored God's ways. And God then sent them into slavery in Babylon. Interestingly, he had saved them from slavery in Egypt. But what they did after that, eventually, as they, verse 11 says, they despised the counsel of the Lord.

They didn't want to listen to God. They wanted to do things their own way. They actually wanted to break free from the commands of God and the instructions of God, even though those were the best things for them. But ironically, in wanting to break free from God, they ended up in slavery in Babylon again.

Even though they did that, though, God still rescued them. God still brought them out of exile in Babylon. Not because they deserved it, but because, we saw earlier, because of his covenant keeping steadfast love.

That's the real theme of this psalm. God's steadfast love to keep consistently rescuing his people who don't deserve it. And he brought them out of that imprisonment, out of that slavery.

But that situation in Israel's history describes the same situation for multitudes of people today. A slavery. And the more we try to break away from God's good rule in our lives, guess what?

[11 : 53] The more we enslave ourselves, the more we are enslaved to sin, the Bible says. In fact, we see that's exactly what happened right at the beginning. In Genesis chapter 3, our first human ancestors, what they did was they were in a right, good relationship with God, enjoying Him and His gifts in creation in a world that worked.

But they decided they wanted to break free of God's good rule. And so what did they do? They ended up becoming enslaved to sin and death.

This irony of our desire for sinful freedom actually making us slaves. But even then, God has been merciful to those who have been enslaved to sin.

And He has rescued His people from that slavery. Romans 8 verse 2 says this, Through Christ Jesus, the law of the spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

For God's people, they have been freed from the power and the enslavement to sin. I don't think we appreciate how much that means that as Christians, that God has actually broken the slavery to sin that we once had.

[13 : 18] How much do you feel gratitude for that each and every day? How much do you appreciate that? Because it's very easy to forget just what we've been saved from.

Ephesians 2 verse 3, this is how it describes what we've been saved from. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts.

Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. We were under the slavery of sin until we were redeemed by God from that power.

Imagine you are caught in quicksand. I've seen, I've heard stories of people who've been lost in quicksand. It must be such a freaky experience being caught in quicksand and then slowly sinking and not being able to move out of it.

And the more you try to struggle out of it, the more you're caught up in it. That's how sin works, right? The more we try to resist it with our own strength, the more actually we realize we're trapped and we can't get out of it.

[14 : 28] But then imagine you're caught in that quicksand and someone then comes along who seems to be immune from that quicksand, who's able to walk right on top of it and then reach out a hand and pull you out.

Well, that is what Jesus Christ did for his people. When he came to earth, he came to rescue us out of a situation we could not rescue ourselves. Slavery to sin, the tendency that we can't resist to obey the desires of sin.

Through the Holy Spirit and Jesus sending his Holy Spirit to us to dwell in us, he breaks us free from that imprisonment. How much do you realize that day to day and are grateful for it?

The next situation that we read in Psalm 107 that God rescues his people out of is the experience of sickness and our life ebbing away.

Look at from verse 17. Now note that the sickness that is spoken of here that God heals of those who call out to him is self-inflicted sickness.

[15 : 56] Most immediately it would have described the situations that the Israelites find themselves in a few times through their history where they rebelled against God and God sent a plague to punish and to discipline them and to get them back on track.

God sent sickness to them because of their own foolishness, because of their own rebellion. But you know what? That can still happen just as much today. Now I know sickness is not always the result of foolishness or sin.

Sometimes it is just the result of living in a broken world and sometimes God allows it even to those who have not turned against him or by no result of their own foolishness that he allows them to go through those trials.

So sickness is not always the result of sin, but sometimes it certainly is. Either it's the direct result of foolishness, bad habits, drug abuse, alcohol abuse.

It's amazing. Verse 18 really can equally describe the situation of a drug abuser. They loathed all food and drew near the gates of death.

[17 : 08] And so there are certain situations that us just being stupid or being sinful, ignoring God's guidelines for a good, healthy life has led us to sickness.

Sometimes sickness can be the divine result of sin. Even in the New Testament age, for example, in the church in Corinth, there were a number of people who were rebelling and sinning in their use of the Lord's Supper.

And we read in 1 Corinthians 11 that God sent a sickness on them to discipline them and to get them back on track. But I think there's also a sense in which we can be spiritually sick.

And I think many of us can be spiritually sick without even noticing it. But there is a great giveaway as to whether we are spiritually sick.

And it's verse 18, just as much as physical sickness causes us to loathe food and avoid what's good for us, so spiritual sickness causes us to loathe and avoid the things that we need, like spending time with the Lord in prayer and reading the Bible.

[18 : 16] Even though we know we need those things, we tend not to want to do those things. Well, that's a great sign of spiritual sickness. And so there's various ways that we can be sick, not just purely physically, but mentally and spiritually as well.

But, verse 20, For those who call out to the Lord for His redeemed, He sent forth His word and He healed them. He heals. God heals.

God often heals our bodies from sicknesses that we have when we call out to Him. Either He does it naturally through means of the immune system He gave us, or the medical science He allowed us to discover, or He does it supernaturally.

There are many times that God will heal His people when they call out to Him. But even more importantly, in some sense, is His ability to heal us spiritually, to heal our soul and to heal our mind.

And look how He does that. Verse 20, He sent forth His word and healed them. God's word heals His people when they open it and take it on board and have it declared to them and let it sink in.

[19 : 32] It heals us in ways that we can't even know. How much do you appreciate and realize the healing effect of God's word in your life?

And how through it God heals you in so many ways that you might not even realize. And often prevents situations where He needs to discipline you. How much do you appreciate the healing power of God's word in your life?

And how through it He rescues you from so much trouble and spiritual sickness that you could have been in. That's the third trouble that people find themselves in.

The foolishness and sickness. But there's a fourth trouble that we learn about in Psalm 107. And that is the situation of feeling overwhelmed by external forces.

And so where the previous trouble was internal threats of our own foolishness and sin and sickness. This one now from verse 23 is talking about external threats that overwhelm us and overpower us.

[20 : 37] Listen to these words from verse 23. Others went out on the sea in ships. They were merchants in the mighty waters. They saw the works of the Lord, His wonderful deeds in the deep.

For He spoke and stood up a tempest and lifted high the waves. They mounted up the heavens and went down to the depths. In their peril their courage melted away.

They reeled and staggered like drunken men. They were at their wit's end. Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble. And He brought them out of their distress.

He stilled the storm to a whisper. The waves of the sea were hushed. They were glad when it grew calm. And He guided them to their desired haven. I think we can all relate to the situation of feeling overwhelmed, can't we?

I think, how often do you feel at your wit's end, as it says here, in a situation where no amount of thinking can solve it?

[21 : 39] I think we all experience that to a greater or lesser degree, especially in our overwhelming world today with so many things that are beyond our control. Now, this could actually be a reference to Jonah's experience or more likely the sailors that were Jonah's, who took Jonah away when he was trying to run away from the Lord.

Remember the book of Jonah? What they did, they were pagan sailors, and yet they cried out to the Lord. They even used the name of the Israelite God. They weren't just crying out to any God that they could think of.

They were crying out to the God of Israel, Yahweh. And He did exactly what He said in the psalm. He stilled the storm to a whisper. The waves of the sea were hushed. He led them out of trouble because they cried out to Him, even though they weren't even Israelites.

And so it could be a reference to that. But I think it's talking not just about sailors and ships. I think it's talking more generally to anybody who's going about life and doing business and making plans and forgetting that, as one commentator put it, we only live on this earth by permission, not by merit of our skill or training or education or abilities.

That's really what God uses, things like storms and chaotic situations, to remind us of. That we are living here by permission.

[23 : 04] God uses situations here in this psalm, this situation of the storm, to remind these people of how powerless they actually are. Another translation of verse 27 said, their skill was useless.

That's another translation of they were at their wit's end. Their skill was useless. They realized that all the abilities and skills they had counted for nothing when God put them in a situation that was beyond them.

And there are situations in our lives where our skills and abilities and all our training and experience count for very little. I'm sure you can think of many. Whether it's sickness.

I mean, right now we're in a pandemic where all of our hundreds of years of medical science and research and technology can do nothing so far. For a whole year we've been through it where we couldn't do anything about this microscopic virus.

God sent us, and yes, God was in control of the pandemic. And he sent us a situation that we could not control like he does every year in different ways in our lives and more generally in the world, to remind us that we live here by permission and that we are not in control of our lives.

[24 : 17] And we need situations like that, whether it's a sickness, whether it's an overwhelming situation at work, whether it's a relationship problem that we just have no way out of.

We need situations like that because we don't pray if we don't have situations like that in our lives. You see, prayer is an admission that we are dependent beings, creatures who are not made to be independent of our Creator.

Prayer is an admission that we can't control our lives. But how often do you feel that smallness and that dependency on God?

I think less and less in a world that values independence and values strength and empowerment and ability and skills. I think we don't want to feel small and dependent, and so that's why God will send situations that make us feel small and dependent and drive us to prayer again.

This coronavirus is a reminder that all of our safety and success and plans are so fragile because we still only live in this world by permission, and we are only safe and successful if God allows us to be.

[25 : 29] And this psalm reminds us of that in this section, and it gets God's people to consider the ways that God has answered our prayers when we were powerless, and how He has kept us safe when we couldn't keep ourselves safe, and how He has, like in this psalm, moved His redeemed people from a situation of chaos out of control to a situation of peace, and how He has caused them to give Him thanks because of that.

They were glad when it grew calm. Let them give thanks to the Lord for His unfailing love. Thankfulness is very rare when we think we're in control of our lives.

And so, those are the situations, those are the troubles that we find ourselves in, and how consistently this psalm reminds us and makes us reflect on how God consistently rescues His redeemed people from their troubles because of His unfailing, steadfast love.

And that love that causes God to change the situations of His people is like a law of nature in itself. It's so reliable and so consistent throughout history, and that's what the psalm is here to convince us of.

And He is so consistent at doing that throughout history that it's as sure as the sun is sure to rise in the morning. And so, His redeemed must learn to rest in that assurance.

[27 : 03] That's what the psalm is trying to inspire His redeemed people of every age to do, to rest in the assurance of His consistent, steadfast love. You know, you don't sit up at night worrying if the sun is going to rise the next morning.

Hey, boys and girls, do you sit up in your beds going, is the sun really going to rise? It's so dark, I don't know if the sun is going to rise. No, of course you don't, because you know it's consistent. It's a law of nature, the sun rises every morning.

Even though you don't see it at the time in the middle of the night, you know it's going to rise the next morning, and you can go to sleep peaceful in that fact. In the same way, God's redeemed people needn't stress about whether God will come through for them.

Even if they can't see it right now, it's such a consistent law of nature, as sure as the sun will rise, that we can go to sleep peacefully at night. But, this is vital. Before we finish, we need to understand the continual refrain in the psalm, is that only happens, God only rescues His people and turns their situations around for their good when they call out to Him, and not before.

It's a refrain that is repeated in the psalm, and that changed the situation. At every time, the situation was only changed when, verse 6, they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them from their distress.

[28 : 27] Verse 13, while they were subjected to bitter labor, they were imprisoned, but then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them from their distress. Verse 18 and 19, they loathed all food, they drew near the gates of death, but then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them from their distress.

They were in a storm, they staggered, they were at their wits' end, their skill counted for nothing. Verse 28, then, I think you get the point, they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and He brought them out of their distress.

That is the repeated line in the psalm, and it is there to convince us that God's rescue out of the big situations, the small situations, only ever happens in response to prayer.

And that is something we need a big reminder of, because I think today, Christians are probably the worst at praying, in my experience, in all of history. I think it's because we live in such a passive age, where we are so used to observing and watching and not being involved.

We sit and watch screens, we watch movies, we see the stories of other people play out, and we don't have a role to play. We're so used to just sitting passively, and then that carries over into our spiritual life, that passivity of just learning about God, and observing and reading the Bible, but our prayer lives don't seem to match that.

[29 : 44] And then we wonder, why God doesn't seem to be doing anything? Well, it's because of what James 4 says, you do not have because you do not ask. I mean, look at the psalm.

In these troubles that God's people were in, he could have rescued them at any point. He could have even prevented the trouble from happening in the first place, but he didn't. He waits for them to pray, and it's only then that the situation changes.

Prayer is a necessary means that God has chosen to rescue his people, both from sin and death, as well as from the day-to-day troubles we find ourselves in.

But there's a problem, and the problem is that we keep repeating, we keep repeatedly going back into those troubles, even when we do pray, right? That's the human tendency, that despite praying, and even if God rescues us out of those troubles, we keep getting back into situations that require further rescue.

Don't we? And that's the experience of Israel, throughout the history of Israel. We read they were rescued by God, but then they eventually got back into a situation where they needed rescue again.

[30 : 54] There's this continual cycle that needs to be broken. And that's why this psalm cannot be fully understood and appreciated, unless we see it through the lens of the gospel of Jesus Christ, because he came to break that cycle.

He came to fulfill the psalm more than anything could fulfill it. You see, Jesus is the one who came to embody God's steadfast love, and to provide the ultimate rescue out of all of these situations.

For the lost, those who are away with, those who are wandering with no set destination, Jesus comes and calls himself the way, for the lost and the truth and the life.

For those who are imprisoned in darkness, he calls himself the light of the world. For those who are foolish and sick, he is the word that God sends to heal us.

From all our diseases. And for those overwhelmed by the storms of life, well, remember what he did when his disciples were literally in that situation that the psalm describes on the Sea of Galilee?

[32 : 12] In a storm where no amount of their skill could save them? We can read that in Mark 4. We read it earlier. What did Jesus do? Only when they called out to him, he did exactly what the psalm says God does for those who call out to him.

In verse 29, he stilled the storm to a whisper. The waves of the sea were hushed. You see, that miracle of Jesus calming the storm, it wasn't just Jesus showing off and doing magic tricks.

It was proof of the psalm. That miracle when Jesus calmed that storm was proof that the psalm is true. But it was more than that. It was showing us that it's through Jesus Christ that God has chosen to rescue from all trouble all those who call out to him in faith.

God fulfills this psalm ultimately through his son Jesus Christ. And so we need to call out to him in faith. If you have not done so, you need to call out to Jesus because he is the means.

No one else. He is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by him. No one can be rescued out of the troubles of life but by him. And if you are one of his redeemed and you have called out to him in faith, then I guess what I want to ask you this morning is do you feel rescued?

[33 : 37] Do you feel redeemed every day? Do you truly appreciate, as you read this psalm, do you appreciate the multitude of ways that Jesus has saved you?

Not just from sin and death and wrath and judgment but in so many ways, saving you from wandering aimlessly in life, saving you from the power of sin imprisoning you, saving you from being overwhelmed by the storms of life.

Do you take on board and realize and appreciate the ways, the multitude of ways Jesus has saved you and saves you and rescues you every day?

Because that feeling of being rescued that I spoke about earlier, that should be the daily experience of the redeemed. And if it's not, if maybe you've lost sight of the way that God has saved you and the amazingness of that and you don't feel rescued, you don't feel that gratitude, then I encourage you to read this psalm, meditate on it, use this psalm to think of the multitude of ways that God rescues you if you are his redeemed.

And then when you get that again, when you're reminded of and you feel that gratitude and that relief for the rescue that God provides you in the gospel, well then the right response, as the psalm says, to that feeling is to tell others about it.

[35 : 04] Look at verse 22 of Psalm 107. Let them sacrifice, thank offerings, and tell of his works with songs of joy. That's the response to feeling the rescue that God gives us.

Verse 32. Let them exalt him in the assembly of the people and praise him in the council of the elders. And so, the response to feeling the rescue of God that this psalm should inspire is to tell other people about it, to tell your fellow Christians, to tell your brothers and sisters, to share with them the ways that God is rescuing you out of situations in your life now.

To share that because it's hugely encouraging and to praise God in the assembly of others. To come, that's why Christians want to come together and praise because it's a way they remind each other of the great rescue that God has done.

And when we do come together and sing again when we're allowed to, when it's safe, I don't want to see people who are just singing because their words on the screen. That singing should come from a deep sense of gratitude for God's rescue of us.

But not only are we to tell those in the congregation to tell other Christians, we are to tell those who are looking for rescue still and who are so overwhelmed with life, we are to tell them where that rescue can be found.

[36 : 21] That is our job as God's redeemed people. Not to keep our feelings about God's rescue for us to ourselves, but to share the way, the truth, and the life with those who are looking so desperately for a way out of trouble.

my favorite verse in the psalm, which I'll close with, is actually verse 2, but in the ESV. And this is the challenge I want to leave with you if you're one of God's redeemed.

It says, Let the redeemed of the Lord say so. Let's pray. Yes, Lord, we thank you for this psalm and your word.

We thank you that you have chronicled and catalogued a list of ways that you redeem your people, you rescue your people out of trouble. Help us, Lord, to realize the importance of prayer in you rescuing us.

Help us to realize that you've given us an active role to play and help us to be people of prayer and to, as your people throughout history have done, to call out to you and to know to rest in the assurance of your steadfast love to answer us and to change our situations as you see fit for our good, ultimately.

[37 : 35] And Lord, we pray that you would help us, help us as the redeemed of the Lord to say so. Help us to publish and publicize and praise your name and your rescue as much as we can to the world around us.

And we pray this all in Jesus' name. Amen.