

## **THE GOD WHO RESCUES**

*PSALM 107*

Well hey, good morning church!

Introduction re: sick people, the text I am going to be preaching etc. Colorado.... Ps. 107 as "the" passage of 2016 for me. etc.

How was your Christmas? Reading books over the Christmas break....

Several years ago I read what is regarded as one of the greatest, most epic, mountaineering stories of all time. It happened in the summer of 1985. Two guys — Joe Simpson and Simon Yates showed up in Peru by themselves with a minimal amount of gear, to do a light and fast climb of Siula Grande, a 20,000 ft peak in the Peruvian Andes. They summited the mountain's western face, which had never been done, and they did it in the face of high winds and blizzard conditions. But it wasn't until they began their descent that their story really started.

You see, the descent was pretty treacherous. And as they came down the ice cliffs of the mountain's North Ridge, Joe Simpson fell and shattered his right leg. So with only one good leg to get down the mountain, he'd need his climbing partner to actually lower him the 3,000 ft. off the Ridge, down to the lower glacier, and he'd need him to do that 300ft. at a time on two ropes knotted together.

But as his partner, Simon Yates, did the tedious hand over hand work of lowering him, Simpson actually fell again, and ended up dangling out of sight, over an ice cliff. Yates tried for over an hour to pull his friend back up to safe footing, but he couldn't do it. So finally, unable to hold the rope any longer and worried that both of them might end up dead at the bottom of the mountain, Yates made the only decision left: he cut the rope.

Miraculously, Simpson survived the fall of over 1000ft, but ended up at the bottom of a hundred and fifty foot crevasse. And as he sat there exhausted and on the edge of hypothermia, he slowly looked up at the steep walls of the crevasse, and down at his broken leg, and realized that climbing out was going to be impossible. He found himself alone, with no food or water, in desperate circumstances, with no hope of rescue.

Now, I'm assuming that most likely none of you here has ever quite faced the situation Joe Simpson faced at the bottom of that crevasse. Right?

But the reality is that most of us recognize in our own lives least a little bit of the exhaustion, the brokenness, the aloneness, the sheer helplessness that that moment at the bottom of the crevasse represents for us as humans. Life can sometimes feel like it's hammering us with one hardship after another. Trials and difficulties seem to come in bunches in our lives. And there are times we just feel spent, just exhausted, just done.

Maybe you walked into church this morning and you feel like you've just fallen off a cliff. You're familiar that sense of quiet, solitary desperation where you feel like you're limping through life alone. Where you look up and God even seems distant and dark. And the cause of that might be your own sin. It might be the reality of living in a broken world, where you suffer. Or, it might be a combination of both of those things. But underneath the shiny veneer of your Facebook page, or whatever image you're putting on when you show up here on Sundays, or in your community group, or in your workplace, that image that you've got life together, you know that behind that there's a trail of failure, of brokenness, of aloneness, of sin, of desperation, there's a reality of neediness that you can not rescue yourself from.

Well, if that's you this morning, there's *good news* this New Year's Day. There is good news for you on Jan. 1st, 2017. Because the story of Psalm 107, is the story of a God who delights to come near to and rescue broken and desperate, sinners and sufferers.

This theme of God's nearness to those in need, of his rescue of those who are at the end of themselves, this is the very heart of the gospel. And it's significant, in God's providence to me, that we start off the New Year here, because this is a reality that we never want to move on from. It's a theme we've seen in Mark, and if we have eyes to see, we're going to observe it increasingly across the entire story of Scripture....

So why don't you grab your Bibles and open with me to Psalm 107, and we're going to dive in and read this together.

Read entire passage. PRAY.

Let me just begin by framing for us a bit the book of Psalms. We haven't preached from this book much, if at all, certainly not recently, but you ought to find yourself regularly in the Psalms, church. I try to start my mornings in the psalms because the nature of what the psalms are does something to us - And it does something to us, not just in our heads but in our hearts.

Over the summer, in our habits of grace series, we talked about this reality that we're not just brains on a stick. As humans we're more than just the sum of our cognitive processes. And so when God shapes and transforms us, he doesn't just do it through our minds, he changes us in a holistic way - aiming at the center of who we are - what we love, what we value, what we worship.

This is why art, and beauty, and poetry and story have such formative value. These things affect us in a way that just simple propositional truth can't. For example, it's one thing if I just say to you - God is sovereign in salvation. You understand that, you might get something about what that means, but it doesn't necessarily capture your heart. Just giving mental assent to the truth doesn't change you.

But here's what the Psalms do. They don't just tell us God saves, they show us. And they do that through poetry and through story and through beauty. And what happens is that we see the reality the God who rescues in all of his beauty - and *that* starts to shape and transform us.

And that is what this psalm is doing this morning. You see the theme of the psalm is not something you haven't heard before - God rescues, has rescued, is rescuing, sinners and suffers - but what the psalmist wants to do press that reality in on you in a way that you see its glory and its beauty and it changes you. Are you tracking with me?

Well, that's enough by way of introduction. Let's dive into the psalm. And we're going to unpack the text this way this morning - This Psalm is all about the God who rescues, and we're going to see four things in the psalm - we're going to see *Who* God rescues, *When* God Rescues, *How* God rescues, and finally we'll see the response of the rescued. Alright? Repeat. You ready? Let's jump in.

## 1. **Who** God Rescues

Psalm 107 is framed around four stories, four parallel poetic narratives about four different groups of people. And the structure and parallelism of these stories are at the heart of what the text wants to say to us. And in his artistic way, the psalmist uses the four points of the compass to introduce these people to us. Look at v. 3 - these are the people who have been gathered in from the lands, "from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south." Four directions, four stories. And what ties these four stories, these four people together is that God has redeemed them, he has delivered them in their trouble. He has helped them at their point of deepest need. God has rescued them. Let's look at who they are.

### a.) The Desperate Wanderers.

v. 4 - "Some wandered in desert wastes..." the psalmist begins. "Finding no way to a city to dwell in."

The desert isn't a hospitable place for life, is it? How many of you were born and raised on the west coast? I grew up on the upper side of a street that ran right along the south coast of British Columbia, and so I've been around water my entire life. Cities on the coast spring up everywhere because there is water everywhere. But that isn't the way it is in inland areas, is it? Whether it's places like New Mexico or Nevada or ancient Israel, development and settlement and civilization happens where there are sources of water.

And so for the person wandering in the desert not only is there not the water to sustain life for them, the Psalmist is also pointing us to the reality that the wanderer has no home, and so there is no comfort, no community to be a part of, no sense of a people for them, no sense of belonging. On Maslow's hierarchy of needs, they are at the bottom, just trying to meet their physical needs. Life is about getting through today.

Think back to the story of God's people in the OT — for them, the wasteland, the desert represented life apart from God. From Adam and Eve's fall and their banishment from the Garden, to move east, which geographically was to move toward the desert, was to move away from the presence of

God. This concept saturates the imagery of the Old Testament. The temple and the tabernacle were positioned with the door on the east side as a picture of the temple that was the Garden, so you'd enter the presence of God heading west, but to go east was to leave God's presence. Exile, life away from the land and the home that God had prepared for his people, was to the east. So this picture of life on the east side, in the desert as this wanderer is experiencing, is a picture of exile, of life away from the presence and goodness of God. And what's the result of living in the desert, living outside of community, and outside of belonging, and outside of the presence of God? v. 5 These desperate wanderers are hungry and thirsty,, their soul faints within them.

#### b.) The Rebellious Prisoners

v. 10 - "Some sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, prisoners in affliction and in irons."

Where the desperate wanderers at least had their freedom, these rebellious prisoners are in a box. They are stuck in darkness and under the oppressive shadow of death. There is a picture we get here of deep brokenness and depression- not necessarily depression in a clinical sense - but these prisoners are imprisoned and afflicted by despondency.

It reminds me of the scene in the Pilgrim's Progress, where Christian and Hopeful, these two traveling companions, veer off the path they're on to the Celestial City, and they are captured by the Giant Despair and thrown into the Dungeon of Doubting Castle. And there they wallow in despondency, Christian even considers taking his own life just to free himself from his hopelessness. That's the picture we have here in v. 10.

And for the rebellious prisoner, their imprisonment is self-inflicted, v. 11, "for they had rebelled against the words of God, and spurned the counsel of the Most High." It's their own foolishness and sin that have gotten them into this mess. And sin becomes a hard a brutal taskmaster, doesn't it? Because God will allow us to go ahead and run after sin, and pursue that thing we think we want, and will let sin run our lives until our hearts are bowed down and there is nothing within our sinful prison that we can look to any more for help.

#### c.) The Foolish Addicts

v. 17 - "Some were fools through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquities suffered affliction."

When you look at the book of Proverbs, which is all about wisdom, the essence of foolishness is a refusal to follow God's ways and know his heart. And so for the foolish addict, their head long pursuit of sin has made them stupid.

And instead of the satisfaction and gratification they thought their sin would bring them, look what they get, v. 18 - "they loathed any kind of food, and they drew near the gates of death."

Increasingly in the America, and in the Northwest in particular, the Meth use is a major social issue that we're dealing with. And some of you have known people addicted to Meth, or been involved with helping people who are dealing with Meth addiction. And if you don't know about meth, why it's so appealing as a drug is that it triggers the release of dopamine which is the main contributor in the brain to pleasure and euphoria. And so meth users experience these incredible highs of euphoria and sensual pleasure and happiness. And so the urge to stay high gets higher because the normal life starts to feel so low. But all the while as meth is triggering this false sense of pleasure for the user, the objective reality is that it's destroying them.

There is one guy in particular that I've spent a fair amount of time with who's life has been destroyed by Meth. Some of you have prayed for him. This guy was a union machinist and owned his own house and was doing well, he ended up homeless living under a bridge, and it's only by God's mercy and patience in his life that he isn't dead. And over the past several years, as I've spent time with this guy addicted to this drug, the more I realized that meth is the exact picture of sin in all of our lives. It's what sin does in my life. What we think will give us pleasure and satisfaction gives us just enough to hook us, but all the while is actually destroying m.

And that's the foolish addict. Deceived by sin they became fools and suffer the affliction of their own stupidity.

#### d.) The Fearful Sufferer

v. 23 - "Some went down to the sea in ships...."

The psalmist's description of this group goes on longer than the others, but essentially as they are on the waters, doing business, doing what they do in the midst of everyday life, life hits them in the form of a storm. There's no indication of sin, there's no sense of any rebellion on their part, there's nothing that would cause them to deserve this hardship, but they end up right in the middle of it. v. 26 - "They mounted up to the heaven, they went down to the depths, their courage melted away in their evil plight."

And so their need stems from the simple fact that they live in a world that's been affected on every level by the curse. And life hits us like that sometimes doesn't it?

Life hammers at us in ways that our courages begin to melt away. That our personal emotional resources aren't enough to carry us any longer. There are some of you that look back on 2016 as one of the hardest years you have ever been through. I know because I know your stories. Sickness, and financial struggle, and relational strain, and vocational hardship, and disease, and even death have hit you one after another. Through no fault of your own, life in a broken world has hammered you. And at the beginning of a New Year, all of us want to look ahead with hope and expectancy for the year ahead, but for some of you, that steady train of hardship and trial will come at you this next year. And you will end

up at your wit's end, through no sin of your own, spent of the emotional and physical resources you thought you had. And in that place you will be in desperate need of God's rescue.

And so we have these four stories - the desperate wanderers, the rebellious prisoners, the foolish addicts, and the fearful sufferers. But I want you to notice something that the psalmist is saying. Look back at the verse 2-3 again. "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."

We've already said that the psalmist is using this poetic language of east and west and north and south to introduce these stories, but there's more going on here. There's a deeper purpose. And it's to show us that these stories? are the story of humanity - these stories together tell the story of broken image-bearers in need of rescue from every corner of God's creation.

And the truth that we'd rather not admit, is that the wanderer and the prisoner and the addict and the sufferer are not just some hypothetical people out there somewhere that need Jesus, they are us! These are our stories. And I don't just mean that in the past tense. More than we'd like each other to know, these stories picture our present weakness, our daily need, our ongoing struggles, our utter inability to do life on our own. And so if you've come here this morning feeling defeated, feeling exhausted, worn out and barely hanging on? Hear this - you are exactly the kind of person that God rescues.

So we've seen who God rescues, but there is a catalytic moment here on which these stories turn, there a moment at which God acts, where God does his rescuing work - and the psalmist repeats it four times, each time as the focal point of the individual stanza of the psalm so we don't miss it - here it is in verse 6, 13, 19, and 28...

You see the wanderer and the prisoner and the addict and the sufferer - they've all come to the end of themselves. They realize that they are at a place that they can't deliver themselves from. For the wanderer their soul faints within them, for the prisoner there is no one to help, for the addict they've drawn near the gates of death, and for the sufferer they are at their wits end. All their wisdom and their experience and their human capacity has been spent and they still haven't been able to save themselves.... and so what do they do?

"Then... they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress."

And the point the psalmist is making is that it's not so much about how they cried, or what they cried? It's simply that they cried. This is not about their faith, but about their desperation. That they cried to the Lord means they recognized they had nowhere else to turn, no other way to get themselves out of their mess, no other way of self-salvation.

But you know our prideful selves revolt against getting here. We try all kinds of other ways to rationalize keeping things up on our own, to protect ourselves from coming to the place where we have

to admit to being the needy people we are. Life in Western Washington is pretty good, isn't it? The South Sound is growing and thriving, our economy compared to the rest of the country is booming, in the Northwest we eat healthy, and live healthy. The Seattle area is consistently ranked as one of the best places in the U.S. to live. So what is all this about need right?

And so Summit, here's what we can do that I am desperately afraid of for myself, and for you — we can show up at church and we can just add a little Jesus to enhance our already pretty good life - when what God wants is the utter collapse of your self-sufficiency, the recognition that all of your best efforts to save yourself have failed, and that what you need is him. And this isn't just about becoming a Christian, this is what it means daily to be a Christian. Because it's when we're in that place of need that God comes close. God is happy to stay far away from those who think they have it together, it's those who own the mess their in, who understand their utter desperation, it's those people in those moments that God rescues.

The psalmist shows us that in a series of poetic parallels starting in v. 33. Look at it with me.

The psalmist says this: vv. 33-34

So God takes all of these wonderful, glorious, fruitful things and turns them into a wasteland why? Because of the evil of its inhabitants.

But then v. 35 - he also does the opposite. "He turns a desert into pools of water, a parched land into springs of water..." And if we're following the poetic parallel, the logical next step if God does the opposite because of the evil of the inhabitants, is that God would act for good in this way because of the righteousness of the inhabitants right? God would do this because people are so godly, and they've got it together, and they are on top of life - but no, what does it say? After God does this, "there he lets the *hungry* dwell,"

It's the *hungry* that God wants. It's the wanderers and the prisoners and the addicts and the sufferers who are at the end of themselves that he rescues.

3. Well, how does God do this?

Well, if you know the story of Joe Simpson and Simon Yates, you'll know that it doesn't end at the bottom of that crevasse. Unable to climb up and out of the crevasse by himself, Simpson burrows deeper and actually finds a stream and tunnel that lead to the glacier and he drags himself out on all fours through the crevasse, up a snow slope, and down to base camp. And through it all, you find out in the end, not once does he even consider the hand of God in his rescue.

But the rescue of Psalm 107 and the rescue that the whole Bible points to, it doesn't happen without God acting does it? We are unable to pull ourselves out, not just because we're crippled, but because we're dead.

You know, if the lyrics of this song center on God's act of rescue, then the melody that carries the song along is the steadfast love of the Lord. We know that because it's what bookends the entire psalm. v. 1/43.

God's steadfast love is his *hesed*, his covenant faithfulness, it's his loving and patient commitment to do for his people what he has promised to do. This is the engine that drives his rescue. But if we know God's Old Testament people, the people that read, and studied, and worshipped to this psalm, and we know the law, the covenant God made with them through Moses - we can't help but ask the question, how can God be both faithful to his covenant and rescue broken, rebellious sinners who have violated that covenant? How can a righteous God come near to and rescue unrighteous people? We see this paradox especially in the story of the rebellious prisoner, because it's God's prison that he is in. How can God rescue him from the prison cell he has chained him in?

Well, the answer comes in the New Testament 1 John 4:9 - "In this the love of God was made manifest among us" Here's how God's *hesed*, God's steadfast love showed itself he's saying, "God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him."

In Jesus, God has shown his steadfast love to wanderers, and prisoners, and addicts and sufferers - by becoming one of them. At the cross, as we've actually seen over and over in the gospel of Mark, Jesus experienced exile, he experience the desert to rescue desperate wanderers. At the cross, Jesus willingly put himself under darkness and the shadow of death to set the prisoner free. At the cross, Jesus didn't just come near the gates of death, but went through them to save foolish addicts like us. And at the cross, Jesus went into the very teeth of the storm to redeem fearful sufferers.

You see, this is the truth of the gospel church - that at the cross Jesus entered into these stories that he might free us from them. "For our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Through Jesus, God hasn't just come halfway and waited for us to come the other half. He meets us at the place of our deepest need and rescues us.

And so as we depend on Jesus daily, and recognize our need for him, and believe the gospel, we live on the backside of these four stanzas.

The wanderer God's given a city to dwell in - a place of belonging — right now in the church, Christ's body, but one day in a fuller way in a new heaven and new earth.

The prisoner he's brought out darkness and the shadow of death and burst apart their bonds.

The foolish addict who scorned God's word, he's now healed by that same word.

And the fearful sufferer he's given safe haven from the storm.

*Through Jesus, God has rescued us.*

Well, what do we do with this, church? Do we just look at this?



There's a response that the psalmist calls for, and it's this, v. 43: "Whoever is wise, let him attend to these things; let them consider the steadfast love of the Lord."

You know, where the steadfast love of the Lord should be our song, Summit, but so often the gospel becomes just white noise around us. Our spiritual compasses get wonky easily, and we need to reorient ourselves regularly to true gospel north. We need to shape the rhythms of our life around what individually and as a community allow us to consider, think on, rehearse, practice, meditate on the gospel realities of God's decisive and ongoing rescue project in our lives.

Individually - habits of Grace

Corporately - the heart of true gospel community. Remind one another of brokenness and rescue.

What it means for us to be a gospel-centered community for us.

I need to be able to say out loud to you and you need to be about to say out loud to me that we're broken and need Jesus. Will you remind me today of my need - will you remind me that all I need to bring is my nothing.

Remind one another that our brokenness, need goes deeper than we imagined, but that the realities of Jesus' rescue of us are wider and deeper and more pervasive than we've ever known. We forget this.

Transition to the table.

Come to this table on even ground. No one with more spiritual merit points.

*Be a community of broken and needy sinners and sufferers who know their need for Jesus.*

Table is a reminder of this to our own hearts and to one another.