

Sinful Fools and the Saving Word of God

Jonathan White | Psalm 107:17-22

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There is a character in a famous novel named Ignatius who is depicted as a well-educated but deeply self-righteous philosophizer. He fancies himself an author, though in actuality, he only produces about a single page of writing per month. Ignatius is a lazy and greedy 30-something who lives at home with his mom. When questioned about how he helps his mom around the home, he replies, “I dust a bit... In addition, I am at the moment writing a lengthy indictment against our century. When my brain begins to reel from my literary labors, I make an occasional cheese dip.”

Even as his mom coerces him into getting two different jobs, he self-sabotages both. In all of his folly, the worst of his traits are his laziness, pride and sense of self-importance. It is self-evident that this character is a fool.

For many of us, it’s hard to see ourselves as fools. We like to think that we are informed and cultured, wise and sensible... But I hope to convince you today that nothing comes more naturally to humans than folly, and that folly or foolishness leads to suffering.

If you’re just now joining us, the past few weeks, we’ve been working our way through Psalm 107. This psalm highlights 4 different categories of the redeemed people of God, what He has redeemed them from, and what he has redeemed them for. Today’s passage focusses on the fool.

And our text today offers us really good news, which we’ll see in our main point: **Jesus came to save foolish sinners!** We’ll consider 3 points from the passage: **The fool who suffers, the Word that delivers, and the joy that spreads.**

So our first point is: **the fool who suffers.**

Read verse **17** with me again:

“Some were fools through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquities suffered affliction.”

I wonder if a specific person or character comes to mind when you hear the word “fool”. Many of us assume that the fool is innocent and naïve, though perhaps a bit clumsy or awkward. A foolish person in a book or movie is often viewed like a labrador that has haphazardly gotten into something it shouldn’t have. We think of characters who are sort of lovable buffoons who try really hard... but they just don’t know any better. They might suffer for their foolishness, but it’s not really their fault.

But biblically speaking, the fool is purposefully and decisively rebellious. Look at what the psalmist says makes the fool a fool – they were fools **THROUGH** their sinful ways.

The chief sin of the fool is his pride. Jonny talked about pride more extensively last week so I won’t belabor the point here other than to point out that the Bible says that the fool is described as a prideful, functional atheist.

Psalm 14:1-3 says:

“The fool says in his heart, ‘there is no God.’ They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is none who does good. The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.”

The beginning of foolishness is a rejection of God. Despite what he might profess, by his pursuit of sin, the fool reveals that his heart has no regard for God and his word. This is what leads John Piper to say that “to act foolishly is to sin and to sin is to act foolishly.”

The fool is the main antagonist in the book of Proverbs. I won’t list all of the references for the sake of clarity (they are in the manuscript), but I want to walk through just a few of the descriptions of the fool in Proverbs to help us get a grasp on what this person might look like.

The fool in Proverbs is not a learner, but despises wisdom and instruction (1:7). The fool loves to talk but hates to listen (18:2). The fool isolates him or herself and trusts in their own mind (28:26). The fool starts fights with his words (18:6). Fools are quick tempered and instead of exalting God, exalt foolishness (14:29). He or she is easily upset, vexed by things they should be able to let go (12:16). The fool loves to argue (20:3).

The fool is gullible and ungrounded, he believes everything he hears (14:15). The fool despises and ignores their parents (15:20). The fool gives full vent to his spirit – making room for slander and gossip (29:11).

The fool is reckless and careless, he throws caution to the wind (14:16). Fools lack good sense and despise wisdom when they hear it from others (23:9). Fools drag others down, causing those around them to suffer (13:20).

One type of fool, the sluggard, turns like a hinge on his bed (26:14). He refuses to work and ends up in poverty (10:4). The sluggard makes excuses for why he can’t keep his word (22:13). He’s so lazy, he can’t even feed himself because it wears him out to raise his hand from his plate to his face (26:15).

Fools find joy in their foolishness (15:21). Fools make light of sin, treating it like a joke (10:23). Not only that, the fool doesn’t even believe they’re guilty of sin (14:9). Fools are dishonest and dismissive when caught in their deceit (26:18-19). And finally, fools keep returning to the same sin, like a dog returns to it’s vomit (26:11).

I wonder if you can identify yourself in any of the attributes or activities of the fool? Are there certain sins that you have made peace with, that you keep returning to, time and time again?

Maybe it’s pornography, and you go back to it in an attempt to control something in your life? It feels like an outlet for pleasure or relief that you can’t find anywhere else, but as soon as you close the browser, your stomach sinks. Deep down, you know how utterly unsatisfying it is.

Maybe it’s a refusal to listen to the advice of voices you should trust in the church, opting instead to continue to make your own way, figure it out on your own, even though you know that has never worked in the past...

Maybe you are so captivated by entertainment and leisure that you can hardly sit through another minute at your desk at work because you live for the comfort of your couch in front of the tv? Maybe you respond defensively or dismissively when someone confronts you for your sin, seeking self-validation that you're not as bad as they think you are.

Or I wonder if you're like me, where for so much of my early life I saw foolishness in others while maintaining a sense of self-righteous, moral superiority? But with one honest look at God's holiness, and the perfect standard of his word, I know myself to be a fool.

And my plight is no different than our characters in these first few verses, who are suffering on account of their sin. Now, before we talk about this suffering, it is important to draw a distinction here: not all suffering is because of our sin, but we all suffer because of our sin.

In other words, if you have a terrible disease, it is not necessarily because of your sin that you are afflicted. But the fool in our text suffers for his sin, because all sin is foolishness... sin makes us stupid. While deeply interconnected, sin and foolishness are not exactly the same. Foolishness in the Bible really highlights the idea of the stupidity of sin.

Sin lulls us into a stupor, where we become like the walking dead – mindlessly following the deadly desires of our hearts. And while it always promises us something, it always fails to deliver on those promises.

The promise of closeness with a friend by gossiping about another friend is short lived when you realize that that friend is now talking behind your back. The promise of intimacy by playing house with your significant other or sleeping with someone who is not your spouse is disappointed when you realize that true intimacy is built on the trust and rugged commitment that mirrors the gospel in a way that only biblical marriage can.

Kids in here, do you know the feeling of losing control of your emotions when your sibling takes something from you or breaks your favorite toy? And I'm sure you've experienced the feeling when your heart promises happiness if you bop them on the nose and take your toy back? But you know that your anger never actually produces what you want, and it usually leads to consequences for you.

In our passage, these fools who have gone astray have been in exile, their sin did not yield the results they hoped and now they're suffering for it. Look at **verse 18** with me:

“they loathed any kind of food and they drew near to the gates of death.”

Wholistically speaking, the theme of food in scripture is often tied to God's promises and provision. He promises to bless and provide for his people – from the lush garden, which was rejected because of sin and a desire to rule themselves... To manna in the desert, which was despised because of foolish hard heartedness... To Jesus offering up his body and blood as spiritual food, to be received in repentance and faith by all who know their need... To the wedding feast of the lamb, where all redeemed by Christ enjoy eternal union with Christ and one another forever and ever...

In all of scripture, we're supposed to see food as not just necessary for survival. But in every bite, every taste on our tongues, to be reminded of God's gracious and constant provision for his people. And here in our passage, God has been gracious to provide food for them in their wandering, but they

loathed it. Food lost its taste. Their physical bodies wasted away as a result. Sin sucks the life out of us and causes us to suffer. Perhaps you have felt this way. So low, so weary from your sin, so hopeless, that you feel as though you're knocking on death's door.

And this is not an unfounded or irrational feeling. Our sin does actually lead to death. **Romans 6:23** tells us the wages of sin is death. Our sin leads to not just temporary, physical suffering and death, but eternal suffering and death in hell. And it is deserved, because we are all fools and we have all rejected the God who created us to live in right relationship to him.

There's another way in which a Christian might suffer though. It is extremely rare for me to lack an appetite. Most people with high grocery bills have teenage boys, but not in the white house.

But I can recall a time when I had foolishly tried to conceal my sin out of embarrassment and guilt. I felt sick to my stomach, I struggled to eat, I went to bed early. I was miserable at the time, but I now praise God for his mercy toward me in allowing me to suffer. My momentary suffering served as a warning beacon to call me to repentance. And if you are suffering today because of the foolishness of your sin, let it serve as a wake up call to flee from the greater suffering to come!

So believers, I'm not just talking to the non-Christians in the room! The unaddressed sin in your heart is foolish. The thing you're too embarrassed to talk about with a pastor or a trusted friend, it will lead to your suffering! Our passage calls you this morning to wake up to your foolishness and respond accordingly.

But what hope is there for fools like us, who suffer because of our sin? What hope can a fool possibly find? If wisdom is the opposite of foolishness, then hear the words of Paul writing to Timothy, who says that the word of God is "able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15b).

And that leads us to our second point: **the Word that delivers (19-20).**

Read verses **19-20** with me again.

"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."

I want to draw your attention to the state of the fools as things begin to turn in our passage. When is it that they cry to the Lord? Is it after they have read several self-help books and turned things around? No, it is **IN** their trouble. Not after they've gotten their act together, but in the midst of the mess they've made by their sin, they cry out to God.

Often in gospel conversations with people, I ask if there is anything in the way of them trusting Jesus with their life and coming to him in repentance and faith... And a common answer is that they need to get their life in order first. Perhaps you mistakenly believe that in order to approach a holy God, you must first do better, quit that nasty habit, attend church more regularly, or something else. But in our passage, the only way to come to God is **IN** our trouble. In fact, it's a requirement that we come to him in our trouble, humbly acknowledging our need.

So it's here that we see a snapshot of true repentance. Anyone who comes to God in repentance and faith does so completely and entirely empty handed. Like a crew on a sinking ship, we send out the distress signal, knowing that we can't find it in ourselves to muster up the wisdom needed to live a life that truly honors God. We know there is nothing we can do to rescue ourselves from our distress and destruction. One theologian says, "whatever be a man's trouble, there is but one way out of it – to cry to God."

We come to God rightly only when we acknowledge that he is too holy and we are too sinful to be made right with him on our own. We come to God rightly when we cry out with Paul, "wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:24-25a). In our passage, the only thing that brings healing to the sin-sick soul of the fool is God's eternal word, sent to deliver those who cry out to him. What is this eternal word? Or better yet, who is this eternal word?

Listen to **John 1:1 and 14:**

"In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was God..."

"And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

We understand from John 1 that the word that delivers in Psalm 107 is the same word that delivers us – the person we celebrate this advent season. He is God's eternal word, Jesus Christ the 2nd person of the trinity, the son of God, who became flesh and dwelt among us! God's eternal word has been sent to sin-sick fools in the person of Jesus Christ, to heal and deliver us! How exactly does he do that?

Rather than inflicting on us the suffering we deserve, he himself suffered in our place. Jesus delivers us from distress and destruction by enduring in his own flesh distress and destruction.

Isaiah 53:5 says:

"He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities, upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed."

If you have ever doubted the steadfast love of God, look no further than the incarnation, and the cross of Jesus Christ, where the word made flesh was sent to die for foolish sinners like you and me! God sent his Word to us that today, we might find deliverance from our sin and hope of eternal life. And one day, all who have trusted in him will be delivered from every physical ache and pain and every disease, self-inflicted or otherwise. One day, every remaining sting of sin will be soothed, and every eye will be made dry from tearful sorrow removed!

So have you trusted this sent word of God? Have you cried out to God, placing all of your trust in him to solve your greatest problem? If you're not a Christian in here today, maybe you're feeling a little self-conscious about the time of year that you showed up to church. It would be too cliché to believe in Jesus at Christmas. Today, while it is still called today, trust him with your life! Through his death and resurrection, you can be freed from your sin and delivered from your suffering!

Believer, do you persist in calling out to him even as your flesh continues to call to you to embrace the foolishness of sin? Kids in here, have you called out to Jesus to save you from your sin? Growing up at Sovereign Hope Church and memorizing bible verses in class isn't enough - you cannot be saved from your sin if you don't call on him in repentance and faith!

Trust him in the trouble of your sin – knowing he loves you more than you could imagine and is strong enough to save even the most disobedient, foolish one of you! I was that kid and he saved me.

But this passage made me ask myself – do I look to other sources to deliver me from my trouble? When I am feeling down, when I feel embarrassed by the ways I'm not yet as sanctified as I want to be, where do I turn for relief? Where do you go in your trouble? A spouse won't save you, a picture perfect family won't save you, obedient and happy children won't save you, a career change or a pay raise won't save you, perfect health won't save you, a life of leisure and adventure, a padded 401k... all of it will fall woefully short of delivering you from the trouble of your sin, but Jesus was sent for this very purpose.

And this sent Word will hold us fast. The recurring, resounding theme of Psalm 107 is the steadfast love of the Lord. I love where steadfastness has already shown up in the book of psalms. Look at **Psalm 50:15**, where God speaks to his people and says

“...call upon me in the day of trouble; I WILL deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”

And even though we tell people we'll do something but often fail to keep our word... God always keeps his promises! Before our text, he had already promised to deliver them when they call on him, and in our text, he has done it! And in this psalm, the redeemed are not left in the dark as to how they should respond. And that leads us to our last point this morning: **The joy that spreads (21-22)**.

Read verses **21-22** with me again:

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!

The healing that these fools received necessitates their glorifying God, thanking him for his wondrous works! But notice how the thankfulness expressed to God does not end in private. They are to tell of his deeds in songs of joy!

It is nearly impossible to not talk about what you truly love. If you've had an incredible experience in a national park, beholding the beauty of a perfect day in glacier... you're going to talk about it. I get excited about dumb things. If you know me, you know this is true. I just recently replaced all the weights in my garage gym with cast iron plates because they clang and look cool and I like them. I immediately told 3-4 people and now I'm telling all of you. And this has no bearing whatsoever on eternity. It's just a silly thing I'm excited about.

Whether it's home gym equipment, raw milk, or significant relationships in our life, we talk about what we value. A friend of mine often says “there is no glorification without proclamation”.

As in, God does not receive the glory he deserves for his wondrous works toward us in the gospel when we don't tell others about what he's done in our lives! To glorify God, which we believe is the chief end

of mankind, is to show and tell! I think there are two groups of people we are to tell of his deeds: **the lost and one another.**

First, we tell of his deeds in evangelism, or speaking the gospel clearly to others who don't yet know Jesus. For those of you who don't know me, I get the privilege of being the director of our campus ministry, GCF. You might find it surprising to hear me say that evangelism on campus is easy – in a university setting, at least in theory, everyone is there to learn something. College students are grappling with big ideas about themselves and the world, what they believe about faith, if there is a God what might he be like.

But boy, is evangelism hard in my neighborhood and out in the community! It's even harder when it comes to having those awkward conversations with your atheist uncle over Christmas dinner! Some of you might be better than me at it, but I struggle to tell of God's deeds at all, much less, tell of his deeds with joy!

As I was studying this text, I was struck by the language of offering sacrifices of thanksgiving. A sacrifice is not free. It is costly and precious, it involves giving something up. In evangelism, that may be a willingness to give up everything from social status, to your own pride, to your precious time. Generally, if I'm really sharing the gospel with someone, I'm looking at at least an hour of my day.

But is that cost really too great? Is it not worth the sacrifice of sounding like an idiot to your coworker or your cousin for the sake of their eternal salvation? While evangelism will cost you, don't you want others to know the joy that you have found in the gospel? To become wise for salvation and to be delivered from the foolishness of sin?

If this sounds too difficult to bear, it's because on our own, it is! But the good news is that we don't sacrifice anything that wasn't first given to us. There is nothing we give up that hasn't already been given to us by God. And even more so, when we look at what Jesus came to do! Jesus sacrificed more than you or I ever could, by condescending to human flesh, becoming a man, laying aside the rights and privileges of the fullness of his divine power, living and suffering as one of us without sin, culminating in his humiliating death on the cross, for you!

So because of his sacrifice, let us respond with sacrifices of thanksgiving to him as we go and tell of his deeds to the foolish world around us, who will otherwise die in the misery of their sin with no hope.

If you're not a Christian and you're here with us today, thanks so much for joining us. We hope you've heard that we don't think we are morally superior to you. We hope you've heard that we ourselves are fools who needed to be rescued! I'd encourage you to talk to whoever brought or invited you here. Ask them to tell you about the wondrous works that God has done in their life! Let them practice what this passage prescribes.

If you are a Christian, be prepared to respond! While you have absolutely everything you need to share the gospel because you have been saved by the gospel, sometimes we just lack the right tools for the job. I want to offer a few practical tips:

Memorize scripture. The person of the word of God, revealed in the pages of the word of God is what saves sinners. It's not you. So the best evangelistic tool we have is the Bible. Memorize the sovereign hope one-liner: the gospel is the good news that Jesus did everything required to save sinners and restore us back to God. But then you want to be able to explain it.

The best way to do that is to get a grasp on the outline of the gospel. Sometimes it feels like there's so much you would need to say to a person. How in the world could I condense all of what I believe into a conversation over a lunch break? You can't!! So it's helpful to have clarity on the main things.

A helpful framework comes from Greg Gilbert's book: what is the gospel? He uses the categories of God, Man/sin, Christ, and response as the four big ideas or main points. If you can communicate the holiness and justice of God, that each of us have sinned and will stand before God in judgement, that Jesus came to be our substitute, and that the gospel demands a response of repentance and faith... You will be better equipped to help someone understand the good news!

If you don't know how to start those conversations or to go about doing that, I'd love to talk with you. My wife would love to talk to you. Any of your pastors would love to talk with you.

Secondly, we ought to tell of his deeds to **one another**.

Of all the sins Israel committed in the Old Testament, you might find it odd to hear that forgetfulness was one of the worst. As God delivered and provided for his people time and time again, he often told them to remember his steadfast love, to teach and train their children, to encourage and remind one another of all that he had done for them, and yet they forgot, being constantly drawn away by false hopes and false gods.

This side of the cross... How do we do at this? When you get together with other Christians, does anything look distinct from the world? Do you share how God is growing you, what you're learning from his word, and ask the same of them? Do you tell of his deeds in songs of joy together? I confess that it is far too easy for me to hang out with other believers and fixate on things that won't last. I think that's really easy to do even with what we celebrate this week.

So finally, this Christmas, enjoy giving and receiving gifts – but as you do, remember and talk about how God has lavishly given to us! No present produces wisdom for salvation, so with every shiny new thing, talk about the brighter, more satisfying, unbreakable gift behind it! You and your children and everyone you encounter this week needs this good news.

This Christmas, give away and celebrate the only gift that lasts: the knowledge of the steadfast love of the Lord in the gospel!