

Part 4: Jesus' Love is Greater

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I recently saw a trailer for a live recording of a concert by some famous mainstream Christian band. The clip had the voice of the lead singer talking about the wonder of Christmas, and how great Jesus is, only at the end to say, "And he came to tell each of us, every girl and boy, every man and woman that you are enough."

I found that to be an incredibly odd statement. If we are enough—then why did Jesus have to come at all? If we have the potential to make our life better on our own, if we can save ourselves on our own, if we are enough on our own—then why do we even celebrate Christmas?

John Piper, pastored for 30 years and one observation he made is that he enjoyed officiating funerals more than he did weddings. While both are beautiful—he said there's something unique about funerals. At weddings, everything has gone right. But at funerals, everything has gone wrong. To which Piper says, "the gospel is for those for whom everything has gone wrong."

That's certainly what we've been seeing in our study of Psalm 107. The Psalm is a picture of God's steadfast love. The church has often sung, "On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand." This Psalm reveals the concealed wisdom of that old hymn that it's often when everything else goes wrong that we see most clearly the steadfastness of God's love.

To show us this, we've seen four snapshot stories of God's redeeming love to those who didn't have enough. Some were lost, some were in prison, some were fools.

The grammar of this Psalm shows us that these aren't four stories in which some fall into one and some into another. Instead anyone who is "redeemed" by God, has often found themselves in any one of these stories. Yet—when things have gone wrong, and however they go wrong—God is the one who can make it right.

This Psalm is meant to do two things. First, to show us our need and our source of help. Each story includes this refrain: "Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress." And second, seeing God's love to redeem us, we see our response. Four more times we read, "Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man."

Some of us, at times, wander too far into a wilderness too vast. Some of us, at times, find ourselves behind bars too strong—trapped in our own sin. Some of us, at times, find our foolishness too practiced and wonder if we can ever be wise. And today we see the final installment—some of us come up against difficulties too great and wonder if there can be any good in it.

And that's what we will look at this morning. Our main point is this: **God uses great trials to bring us into his greater love.**

Our text today includes two main parts, the first is verses 23-32 which is the final story of redemption. The second part is verses 33 through the end where the whole of the Psalm is applied to us. And we will

walk through this in three parts. First we will see **Love Greater than the Waters**, then **Love Surer than the Shore**, and lastly, **Love Lovelier than Life**.

We begin this morning with our first point: **Love Greater than the Waters**.

Our passage today opens with this: **Psalm 107:23-24**, “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.”

The Psalmist is going to introduce us to this story of salvation on the water by showing us the sailors hope, their humiliation, and the source of their help.

This first verse reveals to us the intended hope of the sailors doesn't it. What did they hope to get when they went to sea? Our other stories of redemption begin with what seems to be more foolish or overtly sinful motivations. But we don't necessarily see that here do we?

The hope these men had when they went out was seemingly pure—they needed to do business. They were businessmen out on the sea. There's nothing morally wrong with that. Many of the disciples were fishermen spending their days out on the water.

But here's where we need to remember that not all sin is easily seen. Sin doesn't come with warning labels. One of my favorite quotes is by J.C. Ryle who says, “What did you expect? Satan to run up waving his hands in the air saying, ‘This is sin! This is sin!’” No, often times we need a more subtle awareness of our heart—and here the Bible itself begins to show us what we might miss.

Notice how it said, “they went out doing business on *the great waters*.” If you're a student of history, you'll know that generally speaking—whoever mastered the spheres of nature typically had the power and control over everything else. Think of the Space Race in the 80s and 90s—whoever could get there, whoever could master the greatness of Space would be superior. Or perhaps the skies over Eastern Europe in WWII. Whoever could master the air—they were the ones who mastered the war. But more broadly speaking, whoever mastered the waters had the upper hand. Whether it was the British Trading Company, the Spanish Armada, or King Xerxes and his forces on the water—greatness on the water was greatness in life.

And here, the pride of these men is softly alluded to. We often feel pretty good when we get to exert our superiority over something great. We set off to pass great exams, to get great jobs, to raise great families. Some of us are charged with mastering the great intricacies of the human body, or the great size of our digital world.

In our technological world—it's often easy to assume that we are greater than nature. Give us time, and we will tame everything for our own profit and praise.

That was their hope—this world is nothing compared to us. Let us ride these waves, make a profit, and live for our own greatness.

But this is where we see their **humiliation**. They saw great works out there on the sea. But whose work was it? Verse 24 tells us. It was the Lord's wondrous work. Great was their hope—but greater was the work of God. And what did God do to show his greater power?

Look at verses **25**, “For he commanded and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea.”

Again, in our technological world it’s hard to not see man as the top of the food chain. We can do a lot. One might say that human history has shown us we don’t need a God to heal us—we have medical interventions that can. We don’t need God to free us from our own isolation—we have the internet which can connect us to anyone, at any time, in 8K video.

But consider this: The bomb dropped on Nagasaki was at that moment in time the most powerful force humanity was capable of creating. Man levelled a city and brought a nation to their knees. The unit scientist use to measure the force of events like that is “tons of TNT.” A modern hand grenade in the U.S. military is estimated to contain a little over 100 tons of TNT force. The bomb dropped on Nagasaki though, released the force of 23,000 tons of TNT.

However, in 2024 a tsunami devastated the costal nations in the Indian Ocean. The wave was tracked in certain regions with a speed exceeding 500 miles and hour. And when it struck land, it did so with the force of one billion tons of TNT. Man is strong. The sea is great. God is greater.

With all our technology we can feel foolishly self-impressed, but with his voice he raises waves which make our strongest powers seem like nothing more than a pop-rock.

And when we come face to face with that—it changes us. Notice the once self-assured sailors: **Psalm 107:26-27**, “They mounted up to heave; 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 wits end.”

The boxer, Mike Tyson famously said, “Everyone has a plan until they are punched in the face.”

That’s what’s happening here! The Psalmist says they were at their wits end. That word implies not that they were empty of knowledge, but that all of their knowledge had reached its end. All of their training for the sea, all of the past storms the navigated by their own wisdom, all of the engineering knowledge to piece their boat together—none of it was sufficient to help them. Their need was bigger than they could have ever imagined.

If you haven’t yet had a moment like this—I would warn you that at some point it will happen. The world will humble you. Or, more biblically, God will humble you. At some point your strength, your planning, and your knowledge will run into a wall and that wall will be called, “Not God.”

But God is not a petulant ruler! He doesn’t flex on us because he’s petty and rude. This is a song about God’s love and here we see that God’s love will humble us and bring us to the edge of our self-fascination so that we might find the beginning of divine contemplation.

You see it’s so easy for us to turn to our own power. We amass wealth to bolster our strength. We study to inflate our wisdom. We recreate to assure of joy. And we plan endlessly to soothe our anxiety. But none of those things are strong enough when you’re face to face with the great works of God.

When you are at your wits end in this regard you’ve got two options. Either learn to curse like a sailor in vain hope, or learn to pray like one with confident hope. The end of ourselves often brings us to the beginning of God.

And that's where we find good news. That's where we find our *help*.

Psalm 107:28-29, "Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble and he delivered them from their distress. He made the storm to be still and the waves of the sea were hushed."

When waves seem high in life, our only hope is the one higher than the waves. They cried to that God—and he delivered them. Note how powerful God's deliverance was! Look at how the Psalmist described it in verse 29, "the waves of the sea were hushed."

I wonder if you've ever been shushed before? If you have, you know how humiliating it can feel. Nothing shows who's in charge like someone who stands amidst the chaos and brings everything to halt by simply going: "Shhhhhh." But that's what God does. More importantly, that's what a *great* God does for those who are face to face with problems greater than themselves.

This leads us to our second point (very short) this morning: **Love Surer than the Shore**.

Notice the effect this experience at sea had on these men: **Psalm 107:30-32**, "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! Let them extol him in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders."

Have you ever seen a movie or a cartoon where after surviving a storm at sea the character begins to kiss the ground as soon as he gets to dry land? Well, notice how that's not what happens here. It is.

Just as foolish as it was for them to find profit on the great waters—so too would it have been foolish for them to find safety on the shore. But when they get to the shore—they finally get what they wanted. It says they were brought by God to their desired haven. But where is that haven? It is in their praise of their great God.

Wherever God is praised—there is our certain hope.

I want to point out two things here. First, notice how they went from the business of great profit to the business of great praise. Here we see how a realization of God's love for us changes our priorities. I don't imagine these men stopped being sailors—but what we see here is that they didn't chase great profits on the seas as their primary end. Their primary end, the reason they went to work, they pursued their studies, they raised their families was so that they might praise God. That's the end for which every area of our life is meant.

But second, notice how they didn't praise God in private, but instead in public with the rest of the redeemed: in the congregation of the people. That's why we so frequently gather together every Lord's day—and why we will continue to do so till Jesus returns.

We gather because God is glorious and deserves our worship. We gather because God is great and demands us to do so. And we gather because God is good and desires what is best for us. You see it's the practice of worshipping together that keeps us from forgetting our true hope and true joy.

In this way the church is like the salty old sea-side saloon we see in movies where we come together and trade stories of life on the sea, and how God is faithful to bring us back.

It's this needed reminder which shapes the whole scope of the Psalm itself. And this is why it concludes the way it does. And here we see our last point this morning: **Love Lovelier than Life.**

So far, we've seen a pattern repeated four times right? God's people run off—they cry out to God in their distress, and he bring them safely home.

But notice how that pattern changes in these closing verses. What we see is that sometimes God takes those who are seemingly safe, and he places them into difficult situations.

Psalm 107:33-42, "He turns rivers into a desert, springs of water into thirsty ground, a fruitful land into a salty waste because of the evil of its inhabitants. He turns a desert into pools of water, a parched land into springs of water. And there he lets the hungry dwell, and they establish a city to live in; they sow fields and plant vineyards and get fruitful yield. By his blessing they multiply greatly, and he does not let their livestock diminish." That sounds good but look, "When they are diminished and brought low through oppression, evil and sorrow, he pours contempt on princes and makes them wander in trackless wastes." Weren't we just delivered from wandering? "But he raises up the needy out of affliction and makes their families like the flocks. The upright see it and are glad and all wickedness shuts its mouth."

So what in the world is happening here? Is God like the weather in Montana—always changing and never reliable? Are we to have a sort of paranoia of God based off our experiences? If things are bad—does it mean God doesn't love me? If things are good—does it mean God loves me?

I often say that Malachi 1 includes the world's best sermon with the world's worst response. What is the sermon God preaches in **Malachi 1:2**, "'I have loved you,' says the Lord." It doesn't get much better than that! Isn't that the message everyone wants to hear? God loves you!

But look at their response, **Mal. 1:2b**, "But you say, 'How have you loved us?'"

And there it is—the age old problem—how do we know God loves us? Some of us might be trying to do everything right and yet life is hard and we say, "How have you loved us?" For some of us, things might be going exactly how we desired life to be and you might say, "Man, how he loves me!"

But how do we know God loves us? Where do we look? Do we look at life and our surroundings? Do we see how easy or difficult things are? Do we examine our health and our happiness?

Well, that's the whole point of the Psalm isn't it? "Whoever is wise," it concludes, "let them consider the steadfast love of the Lord." We need wisdom to know God's love for us. That is to say we need to see our world from God's perspective.

Why is life sometimes hard? The Bible, and this Psalm gives us that sometimes it's because of our own sin. Sometimes we sinfully make decisions with consequences that add up. Why are you anxious? Well, is it because you've been trying to hide inappropriate behavior at work for years? Why do you not have any friends? Well, is it because you're generally angry, arrogant, and selfish? Why are you sick all the time? Well, are you a glutton for comfort and sloth and don't take responsibility for what you eat or your

body? Sometimes life is hard because of our sin, and when God brings us into those trials—it's meant to show us his kind discipline to reveal to us the danger in which we are living.

But life is not only hard because of some sin you're committing. As Jonathan mentioned last week, sometimes life is hard because this world is broken with sin. I'm often anxious and after I check my heart for sin first, I can come to the conclusion it's because I've got a broken body because sin has broken even our health. Why do I not have friends? Maybe it's because the people around you are preoccupied with unhelpful things, or they don't like you because of your attempts to share the gospel with them. Why are you sick? Maybe it's for the purpose of showing others the glory of God as you love him in the midst of it.

But that's exactly the point—the human cause of difficulty is sometimes this and sometimes that. But from God's perspective all difficulty is because of his love for us.

You see Israel was brought through the waters of Egypt safe to the shore. They were at peace, but they forgot God and worshipped idols. So God brought hardship, and other nations to oppress them. This was so that they might again do what they did in the first place, "cry out to the Lord in their trouble."

Notice how it is God who caused all these inversions—he made fruitful land a waste—he made them wander. Why? So that they might see their need.

Proverbs tells us this: **Proverbs 30:7-9**, "Two things I ask you; deny them not to me before I die: Remove from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you, and say, 'Who is the Lord?' or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God"

In other words we can see God's love when we look out and see God's kindness of challenging our false comforts and idols. Suffering exposes the falsehood of sin. It shows us how fickle the world is—and how faithful God is. Sometimes he does this because we are in sin in order to call us home—but sometimes he does this to further encourage us to avoid sin.

This kind of great and sovereign power might be offensive to you. But notice how the Psalmist assumes that: **Psalms 107:42**, "The upright see it and are glad, and all wickedness shuts its mouth."

This hard truth will in the end silence the wicked when they stand face to face with God—and they will see all the times in which they constantly refused God's kind discipline of them. But the upright see it and are glad.

What do the upright see that the wicked don't? We see that he not only calms the storms—but he creates them. And we also know that when God came to earth, when Jesus came fully God and fully man, he entered into this mess. And do you remember where Jesus was when he calmed the storm in Luke 8? He was in the boat. In the boat with us.

We needed God to come and enter into our reality and show us his greatness in the flesh. He came down in baby-talk to us to show us that he is always able and willing to save those who find themselves too far gone.

He went to the cross in obedience because we always wander off in sinful disobedience. He died for our sins. But on that cross, in that great trail which Jesus himself endured—what do we see? The love of God. The safest we can ever find ourselves is wherever we are with God.

Sometimes that's in difficult places. Sometimes it's not. But notice how it is God who is the source of all that is good—not anything of our own. It is he who blesses and multiplies. It is he who answers the needy. It is he who watches over us like a flock, leading us back to the tender pastures of his mercy.

That's why we conclude saying, **Psalm 107:43**, "Whoever is wise, let him attend to these things, let them consider the steadfast love of the Lord."

Would you be wise to this end this morning? Would you see God as good and steadfastly loving because you see that you are redeemed by him? And having seen that, would you join us in praising God and telling others of this great and steadfast love.