

Danger, Despair, Death & Deliverance

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[0:00] We're going to move on now and come to our Bible reading for this morning. You'll see that it's Psalm 107. You'll find that if you have one of our church visitors' Bibles on page 506. And it's a long psalm.

It's the psalm we sang a version of a minute ago. And a great psalm of thanksgiving to God for his great goodness. Psalm 107 then.

Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. For his steadfast love endures forever. 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.

Psalm wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to a city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them. And they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.

He led them by a straight way till they reached the city to dwell in. Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of men.

[1:10] For he satisfied the longing soul and the hungry soul he fills with good things. Some sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, prisoners in affliction and in irons.

For they had rebelled against the words of God and spurned the counsel of the Most High. So he bowed their hearts down with hard labor. They fell down with none to help.

Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death and burst their bonds apart.

Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of men. For he shatters the doors of bronze and cuts in two the bars of iron.

Some were fools through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquities suffered affliction. They loathed any kind of food, and they drew near to the gates of death. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.

[2:10] He sent out his word and healed them and delivered them from their destruction. Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of men. And let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving and tell of his deeds in songs of joy.

Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the great waters. They saw the deeds of the Lord, his wondrous works in the deep. For he commanded and raised the stormy wind which lifted up the waves of the sea.

They mounted up to heaven, they went down to the depths. Their courage melted away in their evil plight. They reeled and staggered like drunken men. They were at their wit's end. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.

He made the storm be still. The waves of the sea were hushed. Then they were glad that the waters were quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven. Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of men.

Let them extol him in the congregation of the people and praise him in the assembly of the elders. Verse 2. He turns rivers into a desert, springs of water into thirsty ground, a fruitful land to a salty waste because of the evil of its inhabitants.

[3:30] He turns a desert into pools of water and a parched land into springs of water. There he lets the hungry dwell, and they establish a city to live in.

They sow fields and plant vineyards and get a faithful yield. By his blessing, they multiply greatly. And he does not let their livestock diminish. When they are diminished and brought low through oppression, evil, and sorrow, he pours contempt on princes and makes them wander in trackless wastes.

But he raises up the needy out of affliction and makes their families like flocks. The upright see it and are glad, and all wickedness shuts its mouth.

Whoever is wise, let him attend to these things. Let them consider the steadfast love of the Lord. Amen.

May God bless to us this is word. Let's pray together. Gracious God and our loving Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word.

[4 : 42] We pray that now we might receive its truths and seek to live by it. For Jesus' name. Amen. Well, one of the books we have in stock at the minute on the bookstall is called War and Grace by Don Stevens.

And I commend this book to you. It is a story of war, of the World Wars, and God's grace at work during those same wars. And it tells the story of one Rupert, not our Rupert, but a submarine captain called Rupert Lonsdale, who was apparently a very gentle man during the Second World War.

And he was the captain of a submarine called the SEAL. And apparently the crew of the SEAL was, I quote, one of the biggest collections of scallywags that the submarine service ever put together. This gentleman and these scallywags. And on their final mission, they were sent to lay a minefield in a very dangerous arena in Europe. And his senior officer protested that it was madness. But the Admiralty sent him out, him and his men. They laid the minefield, but on the way back, they struck a mine themselves. And the ship was damaged.

[5 : 55] It sunk to the bottom of the sea, and the hull was trapped in the mud. The men tried everything they could for hours. Until the carbon dioxide level rose so high, they could barely walk or talk.

And at that point, all hope seemed lost. And so Rupert Lonsdale, who was a Christian man, gathered the crew of about 58 together. And he said, well, we can't do anything more. Now is the time to pray. Two of them refused, but 56 of these men agreed to pray. Rupert Lonsdale prayed, dear God, we have tried everything in our power to save ourselves, and we have failed. Yet, we believe that you can do things that are impossible to men. Please, O Lord, deliver us. And as he finished that prayer, an idea came into his mind.

And he tied a rope to the front of the submarine, the hull, and all the men moved into the front of the hull. They fired the engines, and the submarine came free. The men were saved.

[7 : 00] Rupert Lonsdale taught his men, and the men learned that day, that there is a God who hears the prayer of people in distress. And there is a God who is mighty to deliver those people.

Well, that's the lesson of the psalmist this morning. Psalm 107, all about the God who delivers people from their distress. And we notice in verse 1, the psalmist wants to teach us of the steadfast love of God, his covenant love.

Verse 1, give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. He begins the psalm, and in verse 43, he ends the psalm.

Whoever is wise, let him attend to these things. Let them consider the steadfast love of the Lord. So the psalm has to do with God's covenant love, his faithful, unchanging, unending love for his people.

And four times, he refers to it. Verse 8, let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love. Verse 15, let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love. Verse 21 and verse 31.

[8 : 10] The psalmist is saying, let everybody praise the Lord for his unfailing love. And that love, of course, is seen in verse 2, in saving his people.

Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble. Whom he has redeemed from their foes.

God is a God of covenant love, and he is the one who delivers those in distress. And it's often been noted that we are then given four different scenes, four different scenarios, where God's grace is at work.

The first, verse 4 to verse 9, is the image of people wandering in this desert waste. They have nowhere to live. They're hungry. They're homeless. They're lost. The sun is beating down on them. And they have nowhere to go. The second image, verse 10 to verse 22, excuse me, verse 16, is an image of people in prison, sitting in darkness in the shadow of death, prisoners in affliction and in irons.

[9 : 17] People who are enslaved and imprisoned by their sin. The third image, verse 17 to verse 22, is again people who are sinners, verse 17, fools through their sinful ways.

But this time, the image is one of sickness. Verse 18, they loathe any kind of food, and they draw near to the gates of death. And the final image, verse 23 to 32, a bit like the men in the submarine, people going down to the sea in ships, and yet there is a great storm, and it looks like their lives are in peril.

Four images. Somebody in the desert, somebody in prison, somebody who is sick, people trapped in a storm. And the common denominator is that in each of these situations, the people, like the men of HMS Seal, are in utter hopeless despair.

The people in the desert, we're told, verse 5, are fainting. They have come to the end of their strength. The people in prison, verse 12, fall down, and there is no one to help.

Completely beyond help. The people who are sick, verse 18, are about to die. They draw near to the gates of death. And the sailors, in the final picture, verse 26, their courage melted away in their evil plight.

[10 : 45] They reeled and staggered like drunken men and were at their wits' end. No one to help. No one to turn to.

Nothing that can be done. Oh, Lord, we have done everything that we can do, and we have failed. Four pictures of utter hopelessness.

And yet, into that situation, we find the same refrain coming. Verse 6, Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.

Four times that is repeated. They cried to the Lord in their trouble. He hears their prayer. He answers them. He delivers them. And he changes their despair into joy.

Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love. For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things. People in utter despair with no hope, they turn to the Lord, and everything changes.

[11 : 48] Their mourning is turned to rejoicing. And hope fills their situation once more. So perhaps this is appropriate to you this morning.

Perhaps you're here not as a Christian. But you are conscious that atheism, as John Paul Sartre said, is a long, cruel, hard business. And you've come to a point in your life where you're feeling like one of these people, in despair.

And perhaps you've come here this morning to discover if there is a God who cares. If there is a God who hears the prayers of distressed people, and who is able to answer them. Or perhaps you're a Christian.

But you're facing difficulties and circumstances that you feel are far beyond your control and beyond your power. And you're asking the question, has God abandoned me? Can I still rely on his steadfast love when I find myself in very difficult circumstances?

Well, if so, friends, I believe this psalm has something to say to you this morning. So what I want to do is look very briefly at three deliverances recorded in the psalms.

[12 : 54] The first is God delivers people from danger. The second, he delivers them from darkness and despair. And thirdly, God delivers his people from their enemies. Firstly, God delivering people from danger.

Now, some weeks ago I had the great pleasure of flying back from Budapest with Terry McCutcheon and the team where we had been ministering in Slovakia.

And we are grateful for your prayers and your interest in that mission. And we got to the airport and we were all quite happy to be going home. And there were some other people there, some men who'd been away on a lads holiday.

And they were singing, they were shouting, they were telling jokes, they were making an awful lot of noise. And as Dan McKinley and I stood in the queue for the aeroplane, this lady in front with whom we were speaking, she turned to me and she said, I really hope they're sitting far away from us on the plane.

And I thought, well, you know, it wouldn't be a bad thing. So we got on the plane. And as it turned out, this lady was in row nine and Dan and I were in row eight, right behind her. And Terry, I think, had been buying something, doing something.

[14 : 09] And he came onto the plane a little later. And he sat down and he was very excited. So he began to clap his hands and tell some jokes and sing a few songs. And as he did so, sitting by

my side, this lady turned to me and she looked through the seats on the aeroplane and said, I'm so sorry, one of them is sitting next to you.

And I just remained quiet. And we were all friends by the end of the flight. But my custom on aeroplanes is always to read the 91st Psalm.

And the reason is that Psalm speaks of God's protection of his people, how he commands his angels to guard them in all of their ways, to lift their feet so that they will not strike a stone. And that Psalm speaks of God's power, his sovereign power to save and preserve his people.

And I read it because I believe that God is sovereign over the weather, that he is sovereign over EasyJet, that he is sovereign over my life. And the God of the Bible is able to protect us in the midst of danger.

And the two stanzas, the one in the desert, the one on the ship, teach us precisely that. We have two groups of people in very different circumstances. In verses 4 to 9, we have people in the desert. [15:25] And their problem is they don't have any water. They're lost. Verse 5, they're hungry and thirsty. They have nowhere to dwell. They are in danger from the elements.

And in verse 23 to 32, we have some people, and their problem is quite different. Their problem is they have far too much water. They're in the middle of a storm. Verse 25, God raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea.

They too are in danger from the elements. And we have these two pictures of human beings at the mercy of nature. Both of them are hopeless.

And yet when they call out to God, he changes their circumstance. For those in the desert, verse 7, God leads them by a straight way till they reach a city to dwell in.

He feeds and he waters them. Verse 9, he satisfies the longing soul and the hungry soul. He fills with good things. Homeless, hungry, and helpless, the Lord takes them to a city where they can dwell and feeds them.

[16:36] Likewise, the men on the ship, tough sailors, but their courage is melted. Verse 28, they cry to the Lord in their trouble. He delivers them from all their distress. He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed.

Then they were glad that the waters were quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven. All alone on the sea, and yet God calms the storm and brings them back to the harbor.

Verse 30. People in danger from the elements whom God delivers. And I find these words so comforting.

You see, we are told in Scripture that the world has fallen. Because of the sin of mankind, the land is under a curse. That our present creation groans in the pains of childbirth.

And nature itself is hostile to humanity. We saw that with a bit of that hurricane a few weeks ago. It hit Ayrshire. We see it in the earthquakes, in the volcanoes, in the mudslides.

[17:41] All these instances where nature seems hostile to life. Because the creation is groaning. As if in the pain of childbirth under the curse of sin. And yet these two verses teach us that creation may be groaning.

But the creator has not abandoned his creation. That God is still seated upon the throne. That he is still in control. That his hand is still upon the rudder of human history.

And when we face danger from the creation. God the creator is able to save and to deliver. To transform our circumstance. And to bring us to a place of safety.

God the God of the Bible is a mighty God. Mightier than the desert sun. Mightier than the seas and the waves of the storm. A God who is able to save those in his creation.

And I think these two pictures very compelling. It tells us about the power and the authority of God. But it tells us something about our Lord Jesus Christ. You see in a few weeks we're beginning Christianity Explored.

[18:48] And it's a wonderful opportunity to sit with some people. And read the Bible. The Gospel of Mark. And learn about the Lord Jesus. But people often say, well, the Gospel of Mark.

It was written early. One of the earliest Gospels. And the picture it presents of Jesus is far less developed. Than say the Gospel of John. He's a wonder worker. A miracle worker. But of course it's not so developed and high of him.

And yet in chapter 4 of the Gospel of Mark. We read that his disciples, his friends, his fishermen. Are out on the sea in their ship.

And there is a great storm. And these men, brave fishermen who spend their entire lives at sea. Well, their courage melts. And they're reeling and staggering around. And then Peter cries out, verse 38 of Mark chapter 4, to the Lord. Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing? And Jesus awakes.

[19 : 46] And he rebukes in the wind. And he says to the sea, peace be still. And the wind ceased. And there was a great calm. They cried to the Lord in their trouble.

He delivered them from their distress. He made the storm be still. And they said to each other, who is this? And then a few chapters later, they go to a desert place.

To a desolate place. And there they find 5,000 people. Who have nothing to eat. Hungry and thirsty. Their soul fainting within them. And once more, the disciples recognize their own hopelessness.

And they come up to him in verse 35 of Mark chapter 6. And they say, this is a desolate place. And the hour is now late. Send these people away so they can buy themselves something to eat.

And Jesus says to them, will you give them something to eat? And they say, we have nothing. You know, we have five loaves and two fishes. It is beyond our power to do anything.

[20 : 48] And Jesus, of course, takes what they have. And he blesses it. And he divides it. And the people eat. In verse 42, we're told, all ate and were satisfied.

He satisfies the longing soul. And the hungry soul he fills with good things. What exactly is Mark, in his early gospel, teaching us about the Lord Jesus Christ?

As we read Psalm 107, about the creator. Who can feed the hungry in a desolate place and who can calm the storms of the sea.

We realize that Mark, in his gospel, is teaching us that our Lord Jesus Christ is the one through whom creation was made. And the creator is coming to his world in order to redeem it and to save it.

That he is mighty to save and to deliver those in distress. So, friends, when we are in danger, let's have confidence to pray to God.

[21 : 51] Whether we're on a flight with Terry McCutcheon. Whether we are going to a place, a country, a land that we know is dangerous. Whether we are visiting people who are hostile to the gospel. Or whether we are praying for missionaries like our brother Imran in Pakistan, daily facing danger.

Let us have confidence in the God of scripture. Let us thank him for his steadfast love. And for the power which he has to deliver his people from harm.

But, let us not make the mistake of assuming that as Christians we will never face difficulty. Some people fall into that error. The atheist, Ludovic Kennedy, very prominent atheist.

And one of the reasons he gives for his atheism was that his father was in the Navy. And his father would often sing the great naval hymn. Eternal father strong to save whose arm hath bound the restless wave.

And I believe his father trusted that God would save him. And yet one night his ship was sunk. Ludovic Kennedy lost his father. And he thought the God of the Bible was unable to help him.

[23 : 03] Rupert Lonsdale, in fact, he was saved on this occasion. But later in his life he was widowed three times. God is able to save. But sometimes in his wisdom and in his providence the ship does sink.

And the reason is our final deliverance from this creation which is groaning, which is under the curse of sin, must await a future time.

The Bible tells us that one day there will be a new heavens and a new earth. The creation will be renewed and perfected. But that is not necessarily today. That awaits the day of the Lord in the future.

And in this psalm we have a wonderful picture of people in verse 3 being gathered in from the lands, from the east, the west, the north, the south. People who are protected from the sun, whose hunger and thirst is dealt with.

People brought out of darkness and brought out of death. People brought out of the storms of the waves upon the sea and brought to a city where they can dwell.

[24 : 07] And we're told in Revelation that this is, I suppose, a little picture of the new heavens and new earth. A great multitude gathered in from the lands, from every tribe and every tongue and every nation, east, west, north and south.

People, we are told, who will be before the throne of God, will serve him day and night in his temple. People who shall hunger no more, nor thirst any more. The sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.

People who will be led to a city in which they can dwell, the new Jerusalem, where darkness and death will be no more. Where tears will be wiped from their eyes and there will be no more sea. As Christians, we await a final deliverance from this created world into a new heavens and a new earth. A deliverance from sin and death forever.

Let's give thanks to God, therefore, for his steadfast love. When he delivers us now, and for that full and final deliverance which is to come. Secondly, he delivers us from darkness and death.

[25 : 19] One of the blessings of going to Slovakia was just to meet some of the Christians there. And on the final Sunday, just as we were leaving, we were saying our farewells.

And this middle-aged man came up to me and shared his testimony. He showed me her Bible. And his grandmother had given him this Bible, I think on the 26th of August, 1979.

And she'd dated it, and she'd written a little message saying, you know, my grandson, I hope that you read this book and you follow the Lord and so on. Grandmother's heart for her grandson.

But this young man hadn't read the Bible. He hadn't obeyed the Lord Jesus Christ. He'd gone his own way. And for some reason, he ended up in Alaska.

And he'd come to know, I believe, some Christians. He'd heard the gospel again. And on the 26th of August, 1992, precisely 13 years later to the day, he'd become a Christian.

[26 : 23] And on that date, which he'd written in the Bible as well, there was a short paragraph where he'd given his testimony. How wonderful that the Lord should have answered his grandmother's prayers long after she was in glory.

What rejoicing there will be when she is reunited to him. And what rejoicing there was in heaven when he repented. You see, the Lord is very patient and very gracious to those who turn away from him.

And the gate is left open for the prodigal to return. Verse 10. We're told that some people are sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death. That they are prisoners in affliction and in irons.

For they had rebelled against the words of God and spurned the counsel of the Most High. These people knew God.

They had turned away from him, from his laws, thinking they would find themselves a greater freedom. But instead, they become prisoners. They are afflicted.

[27 : 27] They are in iron. Their hearts are bowed down. They fall with none to help. The shadow of death cast over their lives. Now, we don't know exactly when this psalm was written.

But it does seem likely that it was written after the exile. Psalm 106 is a psalm about the faithfulness of God and the unfaithfulness of his people. And that psalm recounts the history of Israel and ends by speaking about God sending them into exile.

He'd promised that if they sinned, if they worshipped other gods, if they turned away from him, he would send them out of the land of promise. And they would dwell as slaves in a foreign country.

And Psalm 106 tells us that story.

In verse 40, just look across the page, the anger of the Lord was kindled against his people. He abhorred his heritage and he gave them into the hand of the nations so that those who hated them ruled over them.

The Israelites were in darkness and the shadow of death prisoners in a foreign land. And yet that psalm ends with a prayer. 106 verse 47.

[28 : 37] Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the nations that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise. The Israelites in the exile in Babylon cry out, gather us from the nations, Lord.

Psalm 107, therefore, beginning a new book of the Psalms, begins by thanking God for his steadfast love. For the people, verse 3, he has gathered in from the lands, from the east and the west and the north and the south.

It is possible, therefore, that Psalm 107 is an answer to that prayer. That God has gathered them and has delivered them. And they are back in the land. So the Israelites knew what it meant to rebel against the words of God.

And they forfeited this wonderful land he'd given them. They forfeited the presence of God in their midst and their temple. They'd forfeited the blessing he promised to pour out among them. And

instead they ended up as strangers and exiles.

Prisoners in a place not their own. But he'd offered them repentance. And in verse 12, so great is their misery, they call out to God.

[29 : 52] And he delivers them, bringing them from darkness and the shadow of death and bursting their bonds apart. There was grace and there was repentance for the people in exile.

And God brought them back into the land, repairing the relationship which they had broken. So it's a picture of Israel. But in another sense, it's a picture of each one of us.

It's a picture of every human being. The Bible tells us that we all have some knowledge of God.

That his eternal power and his divine nature are clearly seen from the creation around us.

And yet because of our sinful ways, we turn aside from that knowledge. Choosing to worship and serve created things instead of the creator. We turn aside from the Most High and his counsel.

To follow our own ways. To follow our own ways. To follow our own ways. Or the counsel of those around us. We trade heaven for earth. We trade the light of the world for the darkness of sin.

[30 : 52] We trade the freedom of the children of God for the slavery and the bondage of sin. We trade eternal life for eternal death. We trade the healing God promises us for the affliction sin and sinful ways bring upon ourself.

We turn aside from serving him whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light. To Satan. That most vicious taskmaster. Who pays us the wages of sin which are death.

These two stanzas in verse 10 and verse 22 are a picture of people. Who have either some knowledge of God or have been brought up.

In a home where they know the Lord and who have turned aside from him. And who have discovered in the long run nothing but misery and affliction and the shadow of death. Darkness over their lives.

And yet the Bible says. For people like that there is hope. And if that description fits you today then verse 13 is an encouragement.

[31 : 58] They cried to the Lord in their trouble and he delivered them from their distress. He brought them out of darkness in the shadow of death. Bursting their bonds apart. Verse 16. For he shatters the doors of bronze and cuts into the bars of iron.

That is you friend. If you are here today enslaved by sin. Enslaved by addiction. Or habits. Things that you just cannot change.

And you're conscious that you are sitting in darkness. Then there is one today. Who promises release for the captives in prison. There was one at whose birth it was announced that the people dwelling in darkness and in the shadow of death.

On them a great light has shone. That the Lord Jesus Christ offers. To break the bonds of sin and of death. To free you from Satan the cruel taskmaster.

And to bring you instead into his kingdom. Out of the dominion of darkness. Into his wonderful kingdom of light. Charles Wesley sang these famous words.

[33 : 01] Two days after he was converted. Long my imprisoned spirit lay. Fast bound in sin and nature's night. Thine eye diffused the quickening ray. I woke the dungeon flamed with light.

My chains fell off. My heart was free. I rose went forth and followed thee. The Lord Jesus Christ shines light into our dungeon.

And he says all who follow him. Their chains will be taken off. Their hearts will be set free. And they will come to know that wonderful liberty. Of the children of God.

The Lord is able to deliver from danger. And he is able to deliver from darkness. And death. And finally the Lord is able to deliver us from our enemies.

Verses 33 to 43. I always love to hear stories of just the Lord turning the situation around. You've probably heard of the atheist bus.

[34 : 03] A couple of years ago now the bus that had a banner saying there probably is no God. So don't worry. Just enjoy your life. Well in Germany they had their own variation on that.

The bus companies weren't allowed to put it on public buses. And so a group of German atheists hired a bus. And they had a banner which was very precise in its wording.

It said something like. It's almost certain there is no God. Brackets with a certainty of almost zero.

Close brackets. A faithful. A fulfilled life needs no faith.

Effectively saying you don't need God. Get on with your life. And they drove this bus around

Germany. And I suppose the point was. People would look at it. They would turn away from God.

They'd stop thinking about him. Stop speaking about him. And their little atheist cause would spread. But some German Christians were. Shall we say shrewd. And they had a bus of their own. [35 : 03] And they put on the side of their bus. But what if there is? And wherever the atheist bus went. The Christian bus drove behind it. And the German press had a field day.

Of picturing these two buses side by side. In all the major German cities. And the net result was. Everybody in Germany. Was asking the question. What if there is? What if there is a God? And the gospel was very much back on the agenda. Well in these final verses. We see how God turns the tables. We're told how he brought his people.

Out of a desert waste. And in verse 33. We're told of what happens to those who continue to reject him. 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. Verse 35 to 38.

[36 : 03] Again he speaks of the righteous. He turns the 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 a fruitful yield. By his blessing they multiply greatly. And he does not let their livestock diminish. So we see the wicked.

Grow from a fertile land. Into a desert. Their springs are turned into thirsty ground. Because of their evil. And yet for the righteous their desert is turned into pools of water.

Their parched land into springs of water. And there they are hung. They are fed. They are watered. And they enjoy God's blessing. The same is true in verse 39 to 42.

When they, the people of God, are diminished and brought low. Through oppression, evil and sorrow. He pours contempt on princes. And makes them wander in trackless wastes.

[36 : 57] But he raises up the needy out of affliction. And makes their families like flocks. They upright see it and are glad. And all wickedness shuts its mouth.

Again, the people of God are diminished. They are brought low. They are small in number. Their influence is weak. And yet, verse 40. God pours contempt on princes. And he makes them wander in trackless wastes.

He brought his people out of those trackless wastes. And he puts the oppressing princes back. So two pictures of God turning the tables. The wicked who are prospering now ultimately will fail.

And the righteous who perhaps are suffering now, who are in need now, who are being oppressed now, will ultimately be restored and enjoy the blessing of God.

And really, this, Sam, strikes a note which has sounded all the way through scripture. And answers the question that so many people are asking. I was at a wedding in London.

[38 : 03] And it was a wedding of a Scottish man and a Chinese lady. It was a lovely sort of mixed cultural event. And I was sitting at a table with a Chinese academic. And we were just talking about, you know, small talk and the menu and the color of the tablecloth and so on.

But at the end of the meal, this lady, I told her I worked for a church. She said to me, well, the reason I don't believe is because wicked people always seem to do well and good people always seem to suffer.

And I discovered then a very helpful technique. In fact, for personal evangelism, I had with me an iPod touch that Helen had won in a competition.

And on that, I had a Bible. And so I looked up a psalm, Psalm 73, and I showed it to her. And nobody was any the wiser that we were beginning a little Bible study.

It just looked like I was showing her a photograph. So if you have an iPhone, please make use of it in such a fashion. But essentially, the message of that psalm, the message of so many portions of Scripture, from Job to the book of Revelation, is that the wicked might prosper and flourish now, and we might be tempted to be envious of them, but their end is a hopeless one.

[39 : 18] They might be enjoying rivers and springs now, but their end is a desert, a salty waste. The people of God might be suffering now. We might be small.

We might be marginalized. We might be in need. We might be persecuted. But our end is a glorious one, that we will dwell in a city that we will be satisfied, we will be blessed, and we will know the Lord face to face.

He will vindicate us. So the Bible holds these two ideas together. There is salvation. God saves his people by grace. But there is judgment.

For those who refuse that grace. For those who rebel against the words of God and spurn the counsel of the Most High. That is our present experience.

And in fact, that was Paul's present experience. In 2 Corinthians, he describes how he had been fighting wild beasts. Not literally, but in terms of the opposition and the persecution and the ridicule he'd suffered at the hands of men.

[40 : 25] And Paul, writing in 2 Corinthians, says this, We were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death.

Despair and the sentence of death. But, that was to make us rely not on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead.

He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf.

You see the pattern? A Christian in a position of despair, of danger, feeling the sentence of death. They come to the end of their own resources, their own wisdom, their own power.

And they call on God. This was so that we would not rely on ourselves, but rely on God. They cry out to the Lord, and he delivers them.

[41 : 32] And they give him thanks. So, we're promised that one day we will be vindicated on that last day. But, in the meantime, we may face difficulty now.

And when that happens, like the Apostle Paul, we must cast ourselves wholly into the care of our loving Heavenly Father. Relying not on ourselves, but relying on him. Like Rupert Lonsdale saying, Lord, we can do no more.

And into your hands we commit ourselves. God is the God who rescues from danger. So, let us have confidence when we pray to him.

He is the God who rescues us from darkness and the shadow of death. So, let us come humbly before him, repenting of our sin. And asking to be set free from that which enslaves us.

He is the God who saves us from our enemies. One day, we will be set free completely. But God is patient. Not wishing that any be destroyed, but they all come to repentance.

[42 : 37] And so, he postpones that day of judgment. That our enemies might become our friends. And those who are hostile to him might be reconciled to him. By the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That they too may be brought from their bonds and their captivity to sin. And come to serve him. Give thanks to the Lord for he is good.

His steadfast love endures forever. Let's pray. Father, we thank you that you are so good.

That your love endures forever. It is an everlasting love. We thank you, Lord, that in your great power you can deliver us. From darkness. From sin. From death.

And bring us into your family. So, Lord, we just pray that this week you will help us to commit our way to you. Not to rely upon ourselves, but to rely on you.

[43 : 39] And to have great thanks in our heart for all the past deliverances you have worked for us. And for that wonderful hope you have given us. When we will be delivered from this present age.

And brought into a new world. To dwell with you. And to give thanks to you forever. We thank you for these words of scripture. And pray, Lord, that you will give us encouragement and endurance through it this week.

And this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.