

# To Laugh While Drowning

## Exodus 14

September 27, 2020

Peter Hiatt

*Video and audio versions available online:*

<https://relentless-love.org/sermons/to-laugh-while-drowning-2/>

*Transcript document prepared by: Heather Eades (eades.heather@gmail.com)*

*This document was prepared by Heather Eades using Peter's notes and the video version of this sermon. If you encounter any significant discrepancies or errors in this document, please let Heather know. Thank you!*

---

## Prayer

And so, Lord, we thank you that you are with us. And Father, we pray that you would help us to know it. We pray that you would help us to preach. And Father, I thank you for the offerings that are made in this plate—and thank you—I pray that you would use all of this; use us as an offering for your purposes. But right now, I pray that you would help us to offer our hearts, that you would help us to offer our body, soul, mind, and strength as a living sacrifice, or a plowed field where you are free to plant your seed that would grow into a kingdom. I pray that you would help us to preach. In Jesus's name, we pray, Father. Amen.

## Message

At the start of our message I just want to remind you that:

- You could die in a fire that started as a result of global warming...
- You could die from a gunshot wound from an overly zealous cop...
- You could die from the riots and social unrest that follow such things...
- You could die from nuclear fallout precipitated by a president that launched nuclear warheads just to guard his fragile ego.
- You could die by torture or execution at the hands of some left-wing government that outlawed the expression of your Christian faith.
- Or you could just die from COVID.

Well, think about that as you try to go to sleep tonight. You know, the harder you try to sleep, the harder it is to actually go to sleep, because it feels like you're drowning in fear, and the very last thing you can do is be still. And so, you thrash around like a drowning person looking for anything solid to hold onto. You look for security; you look for reason in a sea of chaos.

They say drowning is one of the worst ways to go. When you drown, you just can't catch your breath. All your life, you subconsciously assume that "the breath" is yours to catch; it's within your control.

After 84 years of faithfully serving the Lord, the most Christ-like man I've ever known—my dad—died of lung disease. He couldn't catch his breath; his lungs filled with fluid. Basically, he drowned. Sometimes I think of that when I'm trying to go to sleep.

Psalms 46:10 – “Be still, and know that I am God.”

Have you ever had this experience: You try to calm your heart and you look to God... and then you really start to panic, because you realize that it's God who led you to this place?

The guy on the TV said, *“Follow Jesus, and stuff will work out.”*

You followed him, but now you're drowning, and He's just watching. And then he tells you, *“Be silent... Be still.”*

About 3,500 years ago, an entire nation of slaves—none of whom had ever had swimming lessons at the community pool—an entire nation of slaves heard just that:

*“Be silent... Be still.”*

In Exodus 14, Pharaoh had just released the Israelites from slavery; they've been encamped twice on their journey to the Promised Land. But Scripture makes it really clear: They were not taking the normal route; they were taking an erratic route to the banks of the Red Sea. And it's very clear that this was no accident.

They were following this pillar of cloud and fire... It, He, whatever it was, was leading them (Remember it had been 400 years since Abraham had talked to God—400 years slavery!) and now this pillar of smoke and fire was leading them to a point where they would be completely hemmed in:

- To the north lay Egyptian fortifications.
- To the south the desert.
- To the west, Pharaoh who had changed his mind, for God had hardened his heart... so Pharaoh was now bearing down upon Israel with all the army of Egypt – 600 choice chariots.

North, south, west, and east -- directly in front of them -- the sea. For a Hebrew, the sea was the realm of chaos and hell. Sheol. Hades.

If the United States decided to declare war upon Rhode Island, their situation would be similar to that of the Israelites'.

In Exodus 14:10, it's evening (time to rest), and Israel has been commanded to camp next to the sea.

**When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they feared greatly. And the people of Israel cried out to the Lord. <sup>11</sup> They said to Moses, “Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? <sup>12</sup> Is not this what we said to you in Egypt: ‘Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.” <sup>13</sup> And Moses said to the people, “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again [literally, “will not see again until eternity (*olam*)”]. <sup>14</sup> The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent [‘to be still’ RSV, NRSV]”**

*“You have only to be still.”*

So, this entire nation cries out to Moses:

*“Did you and your God run out of graves in Egypt? Is that the problem?”*

*“We thought you would save our lives; but you’re like a life-guard who leads people to the water, just so he can watch them drown!”*

*“Slavery is better than this!”*

And can you imagine how Moses felt? It’s one thing to mess up your own life, but to drown an entire nation...<sup>i</sup> He’s got to be wondering, “What am I doing? Did I get something wrong? What is God doing?”

God could have told Moses just what He was going to do, but no... it appears that He did not. Moses and the Israelites had received no explanation. They could see God (or the Angel of God) right there in a pillar of fire, and yet He just watched – at arm’s length – as they prepared to drown.

In the words of Kierkegaard, they had no “objective truth,” like a policy manual or a map– only this “subjective encounter” on that deep sea of chaos and despair<sup>iii</sup>... just a divine “trust me”... a word ... “Fear not, stand firm, see the salvation of the Lord. He will fight for you and you have only to be still.”

Be still. ...Yeah right!

When they received that word, the breath of God that hovered over the face of the waters in Genesis 1 had not yet begun to blow on the Red Sea. And they had not yet heard of Jesus: the One who slept on the sea, calmed the sea, and walked on the sea. They had just recently learned the name *Yahweh*, but not *Yeshua*, that is Jesus. Sure, Easter was on its way, but all they knew was a not-so-good Friday.

And they had followed Him ... to this.

Ever been there? With Job on the ash heap...? With Moses by the sea...? With Mary and John at the foot of the tree, on Mt. Calvary?

They had followed him... You’ve followed Him ... to this?

[Peter motions to the cross]

I followed Him to seminary ... at least, as best as I knew how. In order to be ordained as a pastor, the Presbyterian Church required that I take the MMPI: Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory. I took the test in our apartment late one night, exhausted, and in a foul mood.

It had questions like:

- “Do you like fire?”
- “Do you believe there are people out to get you?”
- “Do you believe there’s a devil that hates your soul?”

“Yep, yep, yep...” I answered.

I remember thinking, *"Dang, if anyone took this test seriously, they would think I was crazy!"*

After Christmas break, I went in to see the young psych grad in charge of the test who would be sending the results to the Presbytery. She interviewed me for a few minutes, then stopped and asked, *"Peter, are you an alcoholic?"*

I said, *"I don't think so."*

*"Peter, do you beat your wife?"*

I said, *"No! (Well, maybe at Backgammon...)"*

*"Peter, there must be some way you handle your anger. Do you like violent sports?"*

Being an idiot and thinking of football and backpacking with my friends, I leaned back and said, *"Oh yeah! In fact, the more cuts and bruises I get, the better I feel..."*

At that, she stopped, leaned forward, and said, *"Peter, listen closely--you have a serious personality disorder. I don't know exactly what it is, but trust me; you have it. And if you don't undergo extensive psychotherapy, your marriage will fail within a year, and your ministry will be a disaster."*

When I expressed fear at this, she said, *"See? You're paranoid."* And when I tried to be calm, she said, *"See? You're passive-aggressive!"*

She said I could not trust myself, or even the opinions of those close to me, for my very perception of reality was fundamentally flawed. And she was sending this report to the Presbytery, the governing body of my denomination.

I had no place to look but up, so I looked to God and cried out: *"Have you led me to seminary just to watch me drown? Did I spend all that money and go to all that work, just to tell my father-in-law I have no way to support his daughter? What's the plan? It looks like you're trying to kill me!"*

And I think I heard this answer: *"Yep. That's right, Peter. I'm trying to kill that prideful, old, independent and lonely you. So, fear not... Stand firm. See the Salvation of the Lord. I will fight for you, and you have only to be still."*

A friend paid for me to be re-tested by a more reputable psychiatrist. He declared that the first test was a misdiagnosis.

The whole thing is funny... now; but I wasn't laughing at the time.

The psychiatrist said the first test was a misdiagnosis, but I'm pretty sure that the experience was a perfect prescription, for I tend to believe I'm my own savior. And that makes me neurotic as hell, and a terrible pastor and husband to boot. *"My own savior..."* And God showed me that only He is sufficient for that role.

Well, when you get through something like that, it's easy to think, *"Great! I'm done with that lesson! Now you can bless me, God."*

But maybe that lesson is the only lesson, and that wasn't simply the end; it was also the beginning... my baptism, if you will.

Twelve years ago, I felt pinned against the banks of the Red Sea once again. But now I wasn't alone; people were following me—I mean, it's one thing to mess up your own life, but to mess up everyone else's life?--some of you, even. And I was terrified.

For almost twenty years, I had been a pastor and watched a church grow from a small group to a few thousand, published books, built a building...all by testifying to "*God is Salvation*;" in a word *Yeshua*, which comes from *Yahweh* and *Yasha*: *Yehoshua* or Joshua. In English, we pronounce the name "Jesus."

There are some who say, "*God is Salvation*," but I think they mean by that, "*God is Salvation*" and well, just the opposite, "*God is not Salvation*." Or, they mean by that, "*God is Salvation when we want him to be*," or in other words, "*We are salvation*."

Some people say, "*God is Salvation*" or "*God saves, but we have free will*." And by that, they mean that God is like a lifeguard who swims up to drowning people flailing about in a panic and says, "*Do you want to be saved?*" And if they do not respond in the proper way, he just watches them drown because he respects their "free will."

If you're into theology, those folks are usually called *Arminian*<sup>iv</sup>.

I was a lifeguard in high school, but if I'd been a lifeguard like that, I'd now be in prison. "*But Your Honor, I had to let Mikey drown, for he never truly wanted to be saved!*"

Other people say, "'*God is salvation*' and '*God saves*,' and the very thing that he saves us from is our "bad will," that is, our sin. We're drowning in bad will, and God saves us from our bad will by giving us his good, free will; his *righteousness*—That's not our choice, but his choice due to no merit of our own."

I think that's right. But then they say: "And God proves this fact by only saving some and damning all the rest."

That would mean that God is like a lifeguard that randomly picks which kids he will save when they come to the pool in the morning. And at the end of the day, he expects the ones that he saved to be eternally grateful because he decided to save them, but not save the other children that he watched drown in the pool or tortured forever without end.

If you're into theology, these folks are often called *Calvinists*<sup>v</sup>.

But If I had been a lifeguard like that, I'd definitely be in prison. "*But Your Honor, I couldn't save Mikey because well, Susie needs to know that I saved her due to no merit of her own, and be grateful. Mikey needs to be grateful.*"

Twelve years ago, I thought God had called me to testify to "*God is Salvation*"— that's just who he is. And according to Scripture, he saves all. All drown and all are saved due to no merit of their own.<sup>vi</sup>

"...All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and (that same all) are justified by his grace as a gift" · Romans 3:23-24.

I felt called to testify... and never before had I felt so clearly led by that pillar of fire and smoke.

And yet... I found myself at the edge of the sea.

They said, “Confess that *God can’t save some* and that *God doesn’t want to save some* or you won’t be saved; you’ll lose everything that you’ve worked for, Peter.”

I cried out to God: “*Have you led me all the way to this point just to watch me drown? Just so I can tell my father-in-law I have no way to support his daughter... or his grandchildren?*”

Well, as you know, that was the beginning of the Sanctuary, which is us. And for twelve years now, God has done all sorts of little things and pretty big things to guide the way—I could tell a lot of stories, but at times, it’s really been like a pillar of fire leading the way—and I think we’ve followed.

But I still find myself hemmed in at the edge of chaos, and it often feels like God is just watching me, and sometimes watching us... drown.

I feel hemmed in by conservative Christians (both Arminian and Calvinist) who hate that idea that God in Christ Jesus saves *all of us* from our sins.

And hemmed in by liberals who hate the idea that *we all actually need saving*—not just from bad social policy, but our own wretched sins.

Sometimes I wonder if we’re gonna make it...and then COVID happens, shut-downs happen, racial injustice, riots, and political idolatry in every direction... It all happens, and I wonder if we should just quit.

I preach, “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord.” But inside I’m crying, “*What are you doing God? Are you just watching us drown?*”

That’s my story, and for many of you, *our* story; but we all have stories.

- Why does God lead us to the edge of chaos and just watch us drown?
- If God is salvation, why does he sometimes seem to... not save?
- What kind of Lifeguard just watches people drown?

Well maybe, actually, a pretty good one.

As I mentioned, I was a lifeguard. And in lifeguard training, they taught us that people in a panic are incredibly difficult to save because they are so desperately trying to save themselves.



Several years ago, I took my kids—my disciples—on a banana boat ride pulled by a speedboat in the Sea of Cortez. Becky, second from the left, in about sixth grade at the time, was absolutely terrified of sharks.

When the banana boat flipped over, Becky literally tried to stand on my head. And I thought we were both going to drown, so I began to just scream in her face: “*Stop it! Stop it! Stop it!*”

*Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of your dad; your dad will swim for you, and you have only to be still!*

Becky was a 70-pound sixth grader with a lifejacket, but in lifeguard training they taught us that a large and panicked person can easily drown you both. So, to save a large, panicked person, desperately trying to save themselves, it’s imperative that you swim out to that person and stop, just out of arm’s length, and let them drown awhile—let them wear themselves out until they have no choice but to trust; let them come to the end of their strength, so that when they do, you can save them with your strength.

Well, God has more than enough strength to overpower any one of us anytime he’d like. But maybe he’s saving us from far more than drowning in water. Maybe he’s saving us from drowning in shame, fear, anxiety, and sin, which are all reliance on our own strength, and can all be traced back to a lie told by a snake to convince each one of us that *we must be our own salvation*.<sup>vii</sup>

[Image: Exodus 14:13-15:2 on screen.]

Well, Moses cries out to all of Israel, drowning in fear at the edge of chaos:

**“Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation (Yashuwah—passive participle of Yasha) of (Yahweh) the Lord, which he will work for you today. ...The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent, [to be still].”**

I believe that was God’s Word to Israel through Moses, the prophet.

But then, Exodus 14:15, the Lord says to Moses, “Why do you cry to me?”

You know I preach this stuff, and then, cry to God, “*What are you doing? Can I quit? Should we stop, because I don’t understand... and I’m scared.*”

God says to Moses, “Why do you cry to me? Tell the people to go forward.”

So, resting in God, being silent and being still, doesn't mean that you simply do nothing; I think it means you do everything... but you do it in a new way. You do it with faith that "*God is Salvation*"—*Yashuwah*, like *Yehoshua*, which becomes a name pronounced *Yeshua* in Aramaic, and in English—"Jesus."

He's not a plan you can comprehend; he's a person you must trust.<sup>viii</sup>

**"..See the *Yashuwah of Yahweh*"... "Tell the people<sup>ix</sup> to go forward. <sup>16</sup>Lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the people of Israel may go through the sea on dry ground. <sup>17</sup>And I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen. <sup>18</sup>And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen."**

**<sup>19</sup> Then the angel of God...**

[The Angel of God, Messenger of Yahweh, is this fascinating Old Testament figure who is like fully man and fully God... In the old testament, they don't know his name—but you do.]

**<sup>19</sup> Then the angel of God who was going before the host of Israel moved and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them, <sup>20</sup> coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel. And there was the cloud and the darkness. And it lit up the night without one coming near the other all night.**

**<sup>21</sup> Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind [Ruach: Breath, Spirit or Wind] all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. <sup>22</sup> And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. <sup>23</sup> The Egyptians pursued and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen...**

**Verse 30 · Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. <sup>31</sup> Israel saw the great power that the LORD used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.**

**15 Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the LORD, saying,**

**"I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously;  
the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.**

**<sup>2</sup> The LORD [YAHWEH] is my strength and my song,  
and he has become my [*Yashuwah*] salvation;**

*Yashuwah, Yehoshua, Yeshua*; it all means "Jesus." They sang, "*Yahweh* has become my *Yeshua*."

Can you imagine how they felt as the sun came up? Aftr 400 years of being slaves in Egypt? Can you imagine how they laughed... and how they sang?



You know, they could've laughed and sang just as loud on the Western bank of the Red Sea as they did on the Eastern bank, *if they'd only had faith in Yeshua, "the Lord is Salvation."*

Now you may say, "OK... nice story... but..."

- What about *the Egyptians* that drown in the sea?
- What about *the Israelites*? They all die in the desert except Joshua and Caleb?

(Some even sink alive into *Sheol*—that's "hell" in the King James. Numbers 16:32 "*The earth swallowed them.*" It's the same exact phrase as that used of the Egyptians in Exodus 15:12, "*The earth swallowed them.*")

So you may wonder:

- What about *the Egyptians*?
- What about *the Israelites* that die in the dessert?
- What about you, *Peter*? —One day you'll die.
- What about *the church*? —One day it will disband.
- What about *your dad*? —You yourself said that he could not catch his breath and drowned from all the fluid in his lungs...

Yep... that's all true.

But, for some reason, we think that's the end of the line for my dad, for us, the Israelites, and definitely the Egyptians.

Check out Isaiah 19:21-25 · "And the Lord will make himself known to the Egyptians, and the Egyptians will know the Lord in that day and worship with sacrifice and offering, and they will make vows to the Lord and perform them..."

<sup>24</sup>"In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, <sup>25</sup>whom the Lord of hosts has blessed, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance."

Now some argue, "That's some other Egypt in the future!" But the prophets are clear that one day, every knee will bow and every tongue will give praise.

What about the Israelites? Did you know that already by Exodus 14<sup>x</sup>, God has reminded Israel of his unconditional promise to Abraham to bring them into the Promised Land five times— yet all of them, including Moses, die in the wilderness? All of them... except Yehoshua (Joshua) and Caleb, which means "dog"—All except Yeshua and his dog.

So, did God keep his promise? Well, check out Ezekiel 37:11-14: "Then he said to me, 'Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. [*Whole house of Israel*— That would include names like Judas and Karl Marx].

"Behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.' [They, the dead, think they're in hades... because they are.]

<sup>12</sup>"Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. <sup>13</sup>And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my

people. <sup>14</sup> And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the Lord.”

Jesus is the “Son of Man,” he is the Angel of Yahweh, the Promised Seed of Abraham, and the Word that God speaks into chaos creating all things; He is the judgment of God.

At the end of the Sixth Day, he hung on a tree in a garden on a mountain from which he descended into the depths of the earth, the belly of *sheol*, and led a host of captives free.

God is leading us all to the edge of chaos at the foot of that tree. He’s leading us to a place where any illusion that we could create ourselves, save ourselves, or redeem ourselves, is utterly shattered upon the reality of the One who is our Creator, Savior, and Redeemer.

It’s the place where each of us loses his life and finds it.  
It’s the place we die with him and rise with him.

He’s saving us from far more than Egyptians, or drowning in a swimming pool, or Democrats, Republicans, Antifa, Fascists, or COVID.

Which may lead you to these questions: *Then, why the episode at the Red Sea? Why these brushes with death along the way?*

Well, in 1 Corinthians 10:2, writing to Gentile Christians, Paul writes: “Our fathers...all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and the sea.”  
Baptized.

In Ephesians 4:5, he tells us there is one baptism.

In Romans 6:4 and Colossian 2:12, he tells us that we were buried with Christ in baptism.

Jesus didn’t die so you wouldn’t have to; he came to help you die, so you could rise from the dead with him.

The Israelites wanted God to save their bodies from death, but Paul cries out: “Who will save me... from this body... of death?”<sup>xi</sup>

In 1 Corinthians 12:13 he writes, “In one Spirit we were all baptized into one Body.” That’s our body—Christ’s Body.

In seminary, I cried out: “Why did you lead me to seminary—just to watch me drown? Are you trying to kill me?”

And I think he answered: *Of course! What part of ‘pick up your cross and follow’ did you not understand... Peter?*

- “I’m trying to kill that prideful self-centered, lonely, old you, that I might raise you to unspeakable joy in the dance of Love that is my very Life.
- “I’m saving you from your lonely, old self and making you my body and bride.”

- “The Journey to the edge of the Red Sea, the times when you feel as if you’ve utterly lost control... it’s all dress rehearsal for the day you finally lose the illusion that you think is yourself, and then find yourself in me.”
- “Every trial is a dress rehearsal for death and resurrection.”

Paul writes something really fascinating in 1 Timothy 4:9-10 · “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.”

I think that means *he’s the savior of all people... all the time. So,*

- If you’re in darkness but see a light... that’s Jesus; he is “the Light.”
- If you’re lost and find the way... that’s Jesus; he is “the Way” that finds you.
- If you’re deceived, but then you see the Truth... that’s Jesus; “the Truth.”
- Any time you experience life, you experience “the Life” ... who is Jesus.
- He just saved you from darkness, death, lies, and the land of the lost.

Psalm 145:14 “The Lord upholds all who are falling  
And raises up all who are bowed down.” ...*All.*

The Lord does all of this with his Word, which he speaks into chaos creating and sustaining all things, including every molecule in your body.

What if you suddenly realized that every molecule in your body, every breath in your lungs, only existed because someone constantly willed it to exist? What would you do in that person’s presence? Would you rest, would you go for a walk with them in a garden in the cool of the day, or cower in fear?<sup>xii</sup>

“He’s the savior of all people... especially those who believe.” For you see, we especially need to be saved from not believing. God is Good, God is Salvation.

You see, there’s a gift that God imparts at the banks of the Red Sea and then at the tree. God saves us constantly, but it’s at the Red Sea and then at the tree that we see our Salvation, and we begin to trust our Salvation—we trust “God is Salvation;” in a word, “Jesus.”

People ask, “Do I need faith to be saved?”

Well, not only do you need faith to be saved; salvation *is* faith.

If you believe that you are a self-made man, your own salvation, and you get what you deserve, then you certainly will not enjoy the presence of your Creator, the touch of your Savior, and the Divine Judgment of Grace—you will hide in outer darkness, or perhaps even, burst into flames in his presence.

- Salvation is Faith: Faith is what “the adam” lacked in the Garden, before the fall, when God said, *It’s not good that the adam is alone*—Adam lacked faith in Love, faith in God who is Love.
- Love is losing yourself and finding yourself in another; Love is Life. You cannot live unless you’re willing to die to yourself—that is, your ego.

Well, as I was saying, the Israelites could've laughed and sang just as loud on the Eastern bank of the Red Sea as they did on the Western bank, if they had had faith in *Yeshua*, "The Lord is Salvation."

They could've laughed...

- Just as I could've laughed when the psyche student read the results of my MMPI and prepared to send them to the Presbytery.
- Just like I could've spent the last twelve years laughing, rather than worrying.
- Just as Paul and Silas laughed and sang chained in stocks in the Philippian jail.
- Just as, (Psalm 2:4), he who sits in the heavens laughs...

Laughter is a fascinating thing, and when we really laugh—deep wholesome belly laughs—what is it that we are laughing at? Isn't it the human ego, and most of all *our own ego*—the utterly ridiculous idea that we are each our own creator, savior, and redeemer?

The summer I worked as a lifeguard, I only saved one person, but I saved him quite a bit. His name was Michael.

Michael was 5 years old, without an ounce of fat on his body. Michael absolutely loved the water, but he couldn't swim. Routinely, he'd get this wild look in his eyes, and just run off and jump into the pool. Shallow end or deep end, it didn't matter; he'd drown in either one.

And so routinely, I'd save him. But what always amazed me was that as I swam to him ... or walked to him in the shallow end ... even as he'd be thrashing about and gasping for air, his eyes would be wide open in wonder and delight and looking for me; and Michael would be laughing...

I'd pull him out and give him these little talks:

*"Michael, don't drown. Michael, you could die... you could die!"*

I remember him looking up and saying,

*"Does that mean that I can't swim anymore?"*

I'd try to get mad at Michael, but I just couldn't... because he'd look at me with those big bright eyes, as if to say, *"But Peter, why should I be afraid? Whenever I start drowning, you swim for me, and I have only to be still."*

He would laugh while drowning, because he knew I was his savior. Michael was my favorite. He was my champion because he knew that I was his champion. He laughed while drowning, and that laughter was faith. And faith is more precious than gold.

Of course, faith in me is misplaced trust; but faith in Jesus is never misplaced.

He'll take you to the edge many times on your trip through this wilderness of a world, just to show you that *he is salvation*.

But one day you really won't be able to catch your breath. That's the day that your old body will die, but you will come to a startling realization: All this time that you've been trying to catch your breath, the Breath of God has been catching you. And then, I believe, you will begin to laugh, like you've never ever laughed before.

If you try to hold your breath in fear, then you might get trapped in outer darkness for a time. I do believe there's a place called "Hades." But if you surrender your breath, saying, "Into your hands I commit my spirit, my *Ruach*, my breath," I suspect your next breath will be laughter, and Hades will not be able to contain that laughter. It's the laughter of Paradise.

You will laugh... and you can begin to laugh right now.

A few months before my father died, he called me... laughing. With the little breath he had, he was laughing. He said, "*Peter, Jared just called.*" (Jared is my nephew, and was four years old at the time.)

He said, "*Peter, Jared just called and said, 'Poppy could I come over to your house for ice cream, one more time before you die?'*"

And of course, without skipping a beat my Dad had said, "Well, of course Jared! Come on over!"

You see, my dad wasn't going to let the fear of death spoil his ice cream or Jared's ice cream.

People have been asking:

*Peter, over 200,000 people have died from COVID. People are dying from gunshots, race riots, and fires. We might die... So, what does it all mean?*

Well, I suppose it all means: We're all gonna die...

*Well, do you think Jesus is coming?*

I'm sure Jesus is coming; he comes for each of us when we die.

*Well, what should we do?*

"Fear not, stand firm, and see the Salvation of the Lord. He will fight for you and you have only to be still."

*OK... but practically what should I do?*

- Wear a mask, practice physical distancing if you think that's appropriate,
- But, *don't* let fear spoil the ice cream.
- Don't let fear keep you from walking in the way of Love.<sup>xiii</sup>
- Don't let fear keep you from following the pillar of fire and smoke, even if He leads you to the Gates of Hell—for the gates of Hell will not prevail against Our Lord and His Church

And if you really want to change the world, just laugh while drowning. People will notice...<sup>xiv</sup>

Just laugh while drowning.

*And how do I do that?*

## Communion

Well, on the night that Jesus was betrayed, he took bread and broke it saying, "This is my body given to you. Take and it. Do it in remembrance of me." And he took the cup saying, "This is the covenant in my blood. The life is in the blood. Drink of it all of you."

So how can you laugh while drowning? Because “the Resurrection and the Life” is inside of you. Amen.

## Benediction

So, Father, we thank you for showing us Yeshua, your Salvation, our Lord Jesus, and that we are sons and daughters. So Father, I pray that you would forgive us for our fear. I thank you that you not only forgive us for our fear but that you save us from our fear in which we drown. And so now Lord God, I pray that you would remind us to laugh, like Isaac, the son of Abraham whose name means “laughter.” I thank you, Lord God, that you sit in heavens and you laugh our silly egos to scorn. You laugh everything that would raise its proud head against you to scorn—not because you hate but because you are Love. And so, Father, we pray that you would rise through the power of your Holy Spirit, that Jesus, you would rise within us as Faith, Hope, and Love, and that you would be glorified in us, your people, your Church. In Jesus’s name, Amen.

## Endnotes

---

<sup>i</sup> Imagine how Jesus felt, calling his disciples, knowing that they would all be tortured, and all be martyred, except for John who would be exiled to a desert island. He wasn’t joking when he said, “to be my disciple, you must pick up a cross.” That was not just a metaphor.

<sup>iii</sup> Soren Kierkegaard taught that it’s through despair on that terrible sea that we come to the point of total submission and transforming salvation. I think Paul put it this way. *“When I’m weak then I’m strong. It’s no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”* It’s in the crisis of our lives we have the longest quiet times. When crisis hit, you pray well. It’s in the scariest movies that Susan hugs me the tightest.

<sup>iv</sup> After Jacobus Arminius, the Dutch theologian (1560-1609)

<sup>v</sup> After John Calvin, the French (and Swiss) theologian (1509-1564)

<sup>vi</sup> You see it’s not that some are damned, and some are saved. All are damned and all are saved. Romans 3:22-25 “For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and [all] are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.” The “all” that sin are the very same people that are justified. This is true grammatically and is theologically consistent with the rest of the book of Romans.

<sup>vii</sup> This observation brings new meaning to old texts that have made expositors scratch their heads—texts like 1 Corinthians 5:4-5: “When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.” “Delivering to Satan” is letting someone drown for a time, that they might be saved in the End—the edge of eternity, the day of the Lord; Jesus is the End.

<sup>viii</sup> John Cavanaugh is a brilliant ethicist, that is one who studies the knowledge of good and evil. Once he traveled to Calcutta and petitioned Mother Teresa saying, “Pray that I have clarity.”

She answered, “No, I will not do that.”

When he asked why, she said, “Clarity is the last thing you are clinging to and must let go of.”

---

Cavanaugh commented that he thought she always had the clarity that he longed for.

Mother Theresa laughed and said, "I have never had clarity. What I have always had is trust. So I will pray that you trust God."

That's called faith.

*Ruthless Trust* by Manning

<sup>ix</sup> "The People" are the "Israel of God," the chosen, the people called out to be a witness, the ecclesia, in Greek; They are the church... that'd be us!

<sup>x</sup> Exodus 3:17, 6:8, 12:25, 13:5, and 13:11

<sup>xi</sup> For some reason we think that we die when our body dies, so God is all about saving our bodies, but according to St. Paul God doesn't want to save our bodies, but save us from our bodies—Romans 7:24 "who will deliver me from this body of death."

<sup>xii</sup> Put the world's greatest philosopher on a plank that is wider than need be: if there is a precipice below, although his reason may convince him that he is safe, his imagination will prevail. Many could not even stand the thought of it without going pale and breaking into sweat.

Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd, 1966), pp. 39-40

"Faith is sanctified imagination." – H. W. Beecher

<sup>xiii</sup> Never put "safety first," for people who put safety first, have a very difficult time picking up a cross. It's out of an "abundance of caution that people go to "hell." The only place safe from the danger of Love is hell. And even then, Love descends into hell in the hope that you would lose your life and find it in him.

<sup>xiv</sup> Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,<sup>28</sup> and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear omen to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.<sup>29</sup> For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake,<sup>30</sup> engaged in the same conflict which you saw and now hear to be mine. – Philippians 1:27-30 RSV