

The Rescue Mission

1 Timothy 1:15

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As I was sitting there listening to the beautiful strains of the music that we all enjoy, I was reminded that we're all here tonight because we love the Christmas season, we enjoy celebrating it. But the question is, what exactly is it that we're celebrating in this season? Well certainly we're celebrating that Jesus came. We're also celebrating how He came. I mean, it's truly remarkable, isn't it, that the eternal second person of the Trinity, that He continued to be all that He had been, and that is God, but He also became fully human? Through a miraculous act of God the eternal Son of God became a tiny human embryo in the womb of a teenaged first century virgin named Mary. That's remarkable.

But as wonderful as the fact that Jesus came is and how He came, that's not what Christmas is primarily about. Christmas is really primarily about why He came. The Apostle Paul, in his first letter to his young protege Timothy, explained it like this, he says, Timothy, "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving your full acceptance." In other words, here's a concise statement, Timothy, of something that is crucial to our faith. It deserves that you completely accept it with all of your heart. And then this is what he says, "that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am the foremost of all." The Apostle Paul, who ended up giving his life for this faith that we hold so dear, said, "Jesus came into the world to save sinners," to rescue sinners.

We understand rescue, as a senior in high school I nearly drowned in a rain swollen river. I wouldn't be here tonight except there was someone there to rescue me. Perhaps in your own life there was a moment when you were in life-threatening danger and someone intervened. That's what the Apostle Paul says, he says, Jesus came to the earth on a rescue mission.

Now, in that statement that Paul makes, this "trustworthy statement that is deserving of our acceptance," there's several implications I just want you to think about with me for a moment. "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." The first implication that's in that statement is that each of us needs to be rescued. We're not always aware of that. In fact, there's a world full of people who aren't aware of that at all. And yet that's the reality. Whom exactly needs to

be rescued? Paul says, “sinners.” The Greek word simply speaks of a person who fails to live up to God’s requirements, God’s laws, God’s moral standards.

Let me ask you, would you consider yourself to be a sinner? Let me give you a little quiz. This isn’t my quiz. This is right out of the Bible. Ask yourself, have you ever loved anything more than God? Have you ever failed to worship God in the way He prescribes? Have you ever used God’s name in a disrespectful way? Have you ever neglected together, on the day God has set aside, to worship with others because He’s worthy of it? Have you ever been disrespectful to your parents or to those who are in authority over you? Have you ever been angry with someone in your heart and perhaps even acted violently toward them? Have you ever been involved in sex, either in your mind or with your body, with someone other than your spouse? Have you ever taken something that wasn’t yours? Have you ever lied or intentionally misrepresented the truth in order to deceive? Have you ever wanted something that God had not seen fit to give you? Have you ever desired or coveted something? You recognize those, those are the Ten Commandments. Those are the summary outline of God’s requirements of man. If you have broken one of those commands, then in God’s sight you have sinned.

The truth is, the reality is, that all of us have broken all of those commands and we haven’t just done so once or twice, but we’ve done so again and again and again. So our problem isn’t that we are essentially good people who sometimes do bad things. Our problem is that we are bad, that we have chosen to rebel against God, that we are “sinners,” as Paul says. It’s who we are. We are sinners who need to be rescued. But rescued from what? We talk about being saved or salvation or being rescued. But the question is, rescued from what? Here’s how Paul puts it in another letter, he says, “Jesus rescues us from the wrath that’s coming.”

You see, we don’t need to be rescued just from the mess that our sins make in our lives, although certainly that’s true. We need to be rescued from what our sins earn before the justice of God. That’s what the Bible calls “the wrath to come.” It’s that future display of God’s intense anger against our willful rebellion. “It’s coming,” Jesus said. We may not feel like it’s coming. Everything may be fine. We may be celebrating life like they were on the Titanic just before it hit the iceberg. But it’s coming. Each of us needs to be rescued.

But there's a second implication in Paul's statement. Not only does each of us need to be rescued, but Jesus is the only one who can rescue us. We can't rescue ourselves. Sadly, there are people who begin to understand just how desperate their situation before God really is, but they think that they need to do something, that they need to solve their problem. Tragically, the world is filled with such people. People who try to clean up their act, who try to become a better person, who try to become more religious, go to church more often, do good things, try to outweigh all those bad things with some good things. It's the path of self-help or self-rescue.

But think about this for a moment. If an all-wise God determined that He needed to send His Son to rescue us, then what are the odds that you can rescue yourself? None at all. Not only can we not rescue ourselves, but there's no one else that can rescue us, either. Jesus, Paul says, is the only one who can. He is the exclusive Savior in an inclusive age. There aren't many different ways to God. There's only one way to God, and that's through Jesus Christ. It's what the apostles taught. Peter said, "there is salvation in no one else but Jesus, for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved." No other name, no other way. It's what Jesus claimed. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." Jesus is the only one who can rescue you and me from the coming wrath that our sins against God deserve.

But how exactly did Jesus accomplish our rescue? He did so by becoming our substitute and by suffering what our sins deserved in His own body on the cross. Here's how Paul puts it in Romans. He says, "God publicly displayed Jesus on the cross as a propitiation." That word simply means a satisfaction of His wrath. God displayed Jesus on the cross to satisfy His wrath against the sins of everyone who would ever believe in Jesus. That's why He came. And we know that He accepted that sacrifice, that substitution, because He raised Him from the dead on the third day. So each of us needs to be rescued. Jesus is the only one who can rescue us.

There's a third implication in that statement that I want you to see, and it's this, we can only be rescued on God's terms. You see, the tragic reality that the Bible talks about, Jesus Himself talked about when He was here, is that most of the people on this planet will never be rescued from the penalty of their sin, from the wrath that's coming. In fact, there are many people in

this room tonight who, according to Jesus Himself, will not be rescued from that wrath that is to come. Why? It's because they won't seek rescue on God's terms.

Well, what are God's terms? Here they are. If you want to be rescued from God's coming wrath against your sin, then first of all, you must acknowledge that you are a sinner in need of rescue. Jesus put it this way when He was here on Earth, He said, "I did not come to rescue those who are righteous, or who think they are righteous, but only those who know they are sinners." It's the only way you can be rescued is when you know you need to be rescued. That's why Paul said, I need rescue; he said, "I was and am the worst of sinners."

You must, secondly, reject all of your own efforts at self-rescue. You see, we tend to think that we just need a little help. If you're going to truly be rescued by Jesus, you've got to give up any thought that you have any contribution whatsoever to your rescue. Here's how the Bible puts it, "God rescues us, not on the basis of deeds which we do, but according to His mercy, by His grace." It's all God. It's none of us.

There's another part of the terms God demands of us if we're going to be rescued. We must be willing to give up all the sin that has made us sinners in His sight. The Bible calls that repentance. Repentance is simply the willingness to leave your sin and to turn to God. It's absolutely essential if you're going to be rescued. You see, you have to choose, you can have your sin or you can have rescue from your sin, but you can't have both at the same time. Jesus said, "Unless you repent, you will perish in your sins."

There's one final thing you have to do. In addition to repentance, there has to be faith. You must put your hope in Jesus as your only source of rescue. As I said, the Bible calls that faith. You must put your confidence in Him alone as the only way of being right with God, in His perfect life, in His substitutionary death, as your only hope. And then you must ask Him, you must ask Him to forgive your sin and to be your substitute, in your place suffer the wrath of God.

Here's the really good news. If you come to God on His terms, repenting of your sins and believing in Jesus, then He will rescue you. We have it on the authority of the Scripture. It doesn't matter what you've done. It doesn't matter who you've become. If you'll come to God

on His terms, He will rescue you from the wrath that's to come. I mean, Paul himself called himself the worst of sinners. Why did he say that? Well, just a few verses before he documents what he lived like before. Yes, he was a Pharisee. Yes, he was religious. But he says, "I was a blasphemer of the true God. I blasphemed Jesus Christ and I caused others do the same." He said, "I murdered countless innocent people because they followed Jesus. I tortured them and tried to get them to reject their faith." He says, "I was and am the worst of sinners."

Have you ever asked yourself, why did God save Paul? Paul tells us in the very next verse. This is what he says, "for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the worst, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life." You know what Paul is saying? He's saying, I was the worst, but God saved me. And here's the point. God will save anyone who will come on His terms. He will save you. He will rescue you.

So this Christmas, let me challenge you. As you celebrate our Lord and the Christmas season, certainly celebrate that He came. That's a wonderful reality. Celebrate how He came, in the miraculous conception and birth. But mostly celebrate why He came. "This is a trustworthy statement and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost of all." Let's pray together.

Father, we thank You for our Lord Jesus Christ. We thank You that He came. We thank You for the miracle of the virgin conception and birth. But Father, we thank You most of all for why He came, to rescue sinners, such as we are. We bless You, O God, for Your grace, that You loved us enough to initiate our rescue.

Father, for those of us who know Christ, may we celebrate that reality through this Christmas season. And Father, for those here tonight who may not have yet repented of their sins and believed in Jesus, may they contemplate why He came, to save, to rescue sinners, and may they come to know Him even in this Christmas season, even tonight, before they pillow their heads. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.