

Sermon Given by

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### “Jesus rescues”

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The title for this sermon is “Jesus Rescues”; and I want to start by asking you what comes into your mind when you hear the word ‘rescue’? Is it Jesus or do other images come to mind? If, like me, you’ve recently seen the movie “Avatar” you might think of the hero of that film rescuing a load of blue people from destruction. If you asked my Aunt Susie what came into her mind when you said the word rescue she’d probably speak of the rescue that led to her picture being in the newspapers about 25 years ago. She and my uncle were living in a fairly remote part of Scotland. It was winter and there’d been some heavy snow. So when she started to go into labour pains with her fifth child, my cousin Henry a helicopter was flown in to rescue her and take her to Aberdeen Hospital. Henry’s been known ever since as the “snow baby”! I guess all sorts of different images come in to our minds when we think of the word rescue but I wonder how many of us would think of Jesus? Because his rescue was the greatest – the most wonderful rescue of all time and he achieved it through his death on the Cross. The secular world around us doesn’t get this. 10 years ago the so-called Faith Zone in the Millenium Dome said that Jesus was ‘a good man who died tragically young.’ It’s the same with Andrew Lloyd-Webbers musical “Jesus Christ Superstar”. I can remember going to watch that in London when I was recently converted aged 19 and I came out of it sad and angry because that too portrays the Cross as the tragic end to a wonderful young life. There’s no hint of Jesus being in control, there’s no hint of the resurrection. All we get are those terrible words that have stuck in my mind – I think it was from the part of Mary Magdalene – “he’s a man, he’s just a man...” And you want to cry out: “No he’s not just a man; that is a lie – He’s the King of the Universe and he’s alive!” The world around us doesn’t get the Cross – it misses the point because it wasn’t a tragic failure; it was a triumphant rescue.

The Cross is our lifeboat – it is how God rescues people. But we won’t get this, we won’t grasp that the Cross is good news of a wonderful rescue until we first understand that we need rescuing and this is a good point to re-cap on what we’ve covered so far in this series on the core gospel truths. We’ve seen how God, represented by the crown, made the world and He made us rulers of the world under him. He’s given us life and all the good things that we enjoy. But the problem is that none of us naturally acknowledge and love God. We love the good things that he gives us like health and friends and food and the beauty of creation all around us but we ignore Him the Giver of all these gifts. We put the crown on our own heads and say no thanks to God’s rule. That’s what the Bible calls sin. For sure that sin shows itself in different ways. Some will be the aggressive atheist type shaking their fist at God; most will be more British and polite, not making a big fuss of it but just getting on with living life without God; maybe coming to church now and again to pay him lip service but basically ignoring Him. We hate it when people ignore and blank us and because God is a holy and righteous God he can’t just ignore our sin. He won’t sweep our sin under the carpet. God’s punishment for sin is death and judgement. This is why we need rescuing because we’re all naturally rebels facing God’s holy anger. That, if you like, is the bad news, the painful news, the hard to accept news of Christianity. But until we grasp and accept that we will never understand the good news. The story could have ended there with us facing death and judgement but in his great love God sent his Son into the world. Jesus came to earth to be born a man and he lived a perfect life. He always loved & obeyed God. We saw

that in the reading from Mark 14 in the garden of Gethsemane where he said: *“not what I will but what you will.”* He lived a perfect life and yet on the Cross he willingly bore the punishment that I deserve to face for my rebellion against God. He was treated as if he was a sinner. And he did it so that I and any who trust in Him need not face God’s judgement but can enjoy forgiveness and friendship with God in this life and forever.

And Mark 15:25-39 confirms this so if your Bible has closed please do open it up to Mark 15 and we’re going to focus on 2 main things this passage tells us about the Cross. First, it tells us that **Jesus was Punished in our place**. The Cross wasn’t an accident – this was God’s plan to rescue his people and that rescue involved Jesus being punished for us. How was he punished? Of course he was being punished in the very act of crucifixion, one of the most agonising and torturous methods of execution that mankind has ever devised – it took him 6 hours to die. But the key thing to get is that Jesus was being punished by God. We know that firstly because of the darkness. Look down at v33: *‘At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour.’* The sixth hour is 12 noon. So at the moment when the midday sun should’ve been at it’s very brightest, darkness fell over the land until 3pm. And in the Bible darkness in the daytime is a sign of G’s judgement. It wasn’t an eclipse because the moon wouldn’t have been in the right position and anyway an eclipse only lasts for 6 minutes. This was 3 hours – this was the supernatural and it tells us that Jesus was being punished.

The second reason we know that Jesus was being punished by God is because of his cry in v34. Look down at v34: *‘And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” – which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* These are not the words of a man who knew that his mission had gone wrong. Jesus was quoting from Psalm 22 and they are the heartfelt words of pain and anguish as Jesus bore God’s wrath. They are a statement of fact. On the Cross Jesus was abandoned by God, he was totally alone. He had been betrayed by Judas, disowned by his best mate Peter, rejected by his own people and sentenced to death. He was alone and he was forsaken by God. And that’s essentially what Hell will be like. If in this life we insist in rejecting God and living apart from Him then there will come a day when he will let us have what we want. We will be cut off from God and from all good things like friendship and companionship forever.

Jesus was experiencing Hell and he did it so that we need not. **Jesus was punished in our place**. We’re all guilty. We deserve to face God’s anger and yet God, in his mercy and kindness and amazing love sent his Son to take the punishment that we deserve.

So we’ve seen then that on the Cross Jesus was punished in our place and the second thing to notice and it builds on the first is this: **Jesus was punished in our place so that we can be rescued**. Because Jesus paid the price the way is now open for us to be rescued and come into a loving relationship with God.

The thing that makes this clear is the torn curtain. I wonder if you could look down at v38 (I’ll read from the previous verse). *‘With a loud cry Jesus breathed his last. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.’* From v37, where Mark shows us Jesus crying out and then suddenly dying, there’s a scene shift across Jerusalem to the curtain in the temple. But we can only understand this scene when we understand what the curtain stood for. The curtain was a barrier because behind it stood the holy of holies, the heart of the temple where God symbolically lived. The curtain represented the massive barrier between God and man because of our rebellion against Him and then suddenly as Jesus dies on the Cross, the curtain is torn in two.

And what does this mean? It means that the way back to God is now open. It means I can know God, I can have a real relationship with the Creator of the universe because the barrier of sin has been removed. Most of you will remember 11 Nov 1989 – the day the Berlin Wall: that great symbol of the Cold War was broken down. The barrier between East and West was removed. In the same way the curtain torn in two tells us that the war between God and us is over – the barrier is down. Now there is nothing to prevent friendship between me and God. Jesus has done everything and I just need to accept that. I need to turn from my old way of life of rejecting God and I need to put my trust in Jesus. Many of us here this morning will have done that and you'll know the joy and wonder of knowing God and enjoying his friendship. You'll know his forgiveness and how wonderful that is. The author Kingsley Amis said these sad words shortly before he died. He said: "One of the great things about organised religion is that you can be forgiven your sins." Then he paused for a long time and bowed his head before he continued: "I mean, I carry my sins around with me. There's nobody to forgive them." Sad isn't it because of course there is – Christ's death makes forgiveness possible for anyone no matter how badly they have sinned. It's a wonderful thing to know God forgiveness. If we've trusted in Christ we'll also know God's amazing, life-transforming, unconditional love. The love of friends and family can be fantastic but God's love for us in Christ is a quality of love that is unique. God's love demonstrated on the Cross is perfect, constant and eternally secure. It's a love that the world cries out for.

The atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell once wrote: "The root of the matter is a very old-fashioned and simple thing; a thing so simple that I am almost ashamed to mention it for fear of the derisive smile with which cynics will greet my words. The thing we lack, and the thing I need, is love." Bertrand Russell felt a bit embarrassed to say it but he shouldn't have because we all need love. We all look for love and acceptance and applause. The top sportsman is hungry for the roar of the crowd as they score the winning goal, or take the crucial wicket or serve the ace to take the major championship or do that key run on the skeleton to win Gold for GB in the Winter Olympics. Or for the actress on the stage how amazing to have a packed theatre rising to their feet to applaud you. Or the singer or musician hearing the voices of thousands calling out "Bravo, encore, encore!" How amazing that must be – what affirmation. And deep down all of us need that love and acceptance and applause. It's not just the show-boaters, the extroverts, the insecure – we all need it. Not literal outward-applause but inner-applause - we all need to be valued, to know that we're prized, acclaimed and loved. And the person who trusts in Christ knows that inner-applause and it's an inner-applause that is constant – it's always there. Some of you I guess will have received outward applause at some point in your life - perhaps for some academic prize or achievement or for sporting success or you are or have been a performer on the stage. You know what it's like to hear people clap and call out Bravo and stand to honour you.

And if you've ever been the object of that kind of standing ovation and applause you'll know 2 things. First that it's wonderful and you really want it deeply. The other thing you'll know is that it to your shock it doesn't last. Outer applause never translates into permanent inner-applause. That is to say it never translates into an absolute certainty that you are praiseworthy and love-worthy. The applause you got on Monday fades by Wednesday. Comedians and stage actors worry if the audience will like their next performance. The star striker in the football team doesn't score for a few weeks – and he begins to wonder "will the crowd ever roar for me again?" When our security derives from what we do - our achievement - our performance, we will never be very secure. The person who comes to Christ and humbly accepts his rescue on the Cross – knows that permanent life-transforming inner-applause. It's an applause you see not based on our performance, our achievements, our goodness but on Christ's achievement – on what He's done.

The Christian, through the Cross, knows the rapturous standing applause of God. The believer knows God saying: "I love you, I value you, I prize you." Thunderous loud praise from God, that's what we all need. But how can that be – this verdict despite our performance? How do we receive this lavish praise and love from God – this standing ovation? Well we've already seen the answer to that question from Mark 15. What happened at the end of Jesus' life? What happened was this: the greatest somebody in history became a nobody. The one person whose life deserved absolute applause was mocked and jeered at and spat upon and was rejected even by God. "*my God, my God why have you forsaken me?*" Why did this happen? We've already seen why but let me put it in a different way. On the Cross Jesus Christ got the verdict our performance deserves. Deep in his heart as the darkness came over the land at the 6<sup>th</sup> hour, Jesus knew that he was cursed, cut off from God – deep in his soul he heard the voice – "depart from me you wicked sinner" so that we, when we trust in Christ and embrace him as our Rescuer, can hear deep down in our souls: "well done good and faithful servant." The point is that Jesus got the verdict that our performance deserves so that we can get the praise - the applause that his performance, his perfect sinless life deserves. And knowing for certain this verdict from God frees us from always seeking approval from others; it liberates us from insecurity. You see if you know for sure this approval from God who cares what anybody else thinks of us, who cares if somebody snubs you? It is a wonderful liberating thing to know in Christ the approval, the applause of God.

So to the believer here I want to say this: keep knowing this love deep down, this constant inner-applause and rejoice in the security that it brings because true security comes not from knowing what others think about ourselves – their approval, nor (despite what lots of modern counselling tells us) does it come from how we view ourselves. True security comes from knowing how God, our majestic Creator, our glorious eternal Lord – how He thinks of us – what his verdict is.

If you're someone though who if you're honest you haven't put your trust in Christ. You haven't received, you haven't embraced him as your Rescuer and Lord and yet you're intrigued, you'd love to know more – you'd love to get into the lifeboat and know this applause and love from God then please do come and grab me – I'd love to chat and give you a little booklet that will explain how you can take that step of coming personally to Jesus. Or email me or come round to 5 Garden Fields sometimes if that's easier. After Easter we'll be running a course for inquirers called CE – let us know if that's something you'd like to come to. If science is the big issue for you come to the Memorial Hall on Saturday and listen to Bob White speaking to the question: "Has science disproved God?" Whatever you do – keep investigating!

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Audio versions of the sermons can be freely downloaded from the All Saints Little Shelford website, <http://www.allsaintslittleshelford.org>. These are available in two formats, mp3 and wma.

(All scripture quoted is from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise stated.)