



God's Rescue Plan Part 2

Last week we spent some time thinking about God's rescue plan, what we have now called Christmas. I called it a rescue plan because essentially that was what was going on. We were held captive in our sins and had no hope of release whatsoever in our own strength so someone had to do it for us, someone had to come to our rescue. As the hymn "There is a green hill far away" puts it, "There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin, He only could unlock the gate of Heaven and let us in." So Christmas isn't really all about Shopping and eating and wrapping and rushing and all the other things we so often associate with this season.

Dr. Seuss summed it up well in the closing lines of "The Grinch who stole Christmas."

"Every Who down in Who-ville, the tall and the small,
Was singing! Without any presents at all!
He HADN'T stopped Christmas from coming! IT CAME!
Somehow or other, it came just the same!
And the Grinch, with his Grinch-feet icecold in the snow,
stood puzzling and puzzling: How could it be so?
It came without ribbons! It came without tags!
It came without packages boxes, or bags!
And he puzzled and puzzled, till his puzzler was sore.
Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before!
"Maybe Christmas," he thought, "doesn't come from a store.
Maybe Christmas... perhaps... means a little bit more."

It is essentially about God breaking into human history in such a way that hardly anyone noticed. "How silently, how silently The wondrous gift is given! So God imparts to human hearts The blessings of His heaven. No ear may his His coming, But in this world of sin, Where meek souls will receive him still, The dear Christ enters in." It was like an undercover black ops mission which no one was to know about. It was stealth and silence. It wasn't announced to the world but... to shepherds. It didn't appear in the local paper but ...in the sky in the shape of a star. It wasn't as the arrival of a mighty king on a white horse but... in the form of a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger. It was so quietly done that the whole world missed it. But it had to be that way.

Last week we looked at the whole rescue plan from God's perspective. We hopefully realised that it was all because of love that Jesus came. "For God so loved the world that he gave..."

But what about us?

We know why Christmas happened, because God wanted to show His immense love for us so he bought us back from sin, he redeemed us to Himself, he rescued us from a hopeless situation.

So how should Christmas affect us as we consider what God has done for us?

Well let's start by going back quite a distance to before what we call the New Testament. The first part of God's rescue plan involved the Old Testament people of Israel. Our hymns at advent reflect this story of God's rescue plan in a wonderful way. Sometimes we are so caught up in the singing of them that the words wash over us. We often sing, "O come, O come, Emmanuel, And ransom captive Israel, That mourns in lonely exile here, Until the Son of God appear, Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel.

God set apart the Old Testament Israelites for himself. Don't for one moment think that they ever earned that position.

They didn't deserve it. But God chose them by his grace. He set them apart from all the other nations of the earth.

He gave them special laws. He entrusted them with his Word. He protected them from their enemies.

He promised that the Saviour of the nations would come from their family line. But in Isaiah's day, the Israelites weren't behaving like a people set apart for the Lord. They were joining in the rituals of pagan nations. They were ignoring God's commands, abusing God's truth, trampling on God's grace. Many supposed that because they were the physical

descendants of Abraham, they could adopt the sinful lifestyles of their unbelieving neighbours while at the same time enjoying God's favour. But through Isaiah, God announced what He was going to do. If the Israelites were going to continue to act like the pagan nations who stood against Him, then God would judge the Israelites together in the same way as He would judge the other nations. Through His perfect, righteous judgment, God would demonstrate his glory - just as he demonstrated his glory when he washed the Egyptian army away in the Red Sea.

His judgment against the people of Israel would take away any doubt in anyone's mind that the LORD is God. Even with this judgement God was prepared to demonstrate his glory in an completely different way. At the same time when he carried out His justice against the Israelites who rebelled, he would also "set a sign among them." He would hold up the banner of his grace before them. He would call sinners to turn away from their sins, to repent, and as we know, some would respond to his call. He would turn a remnant of the Jewish people away from their sin and unbelief. And from there he would do something incredible, He would divert them, reroute them to a Saviour.

In His amazing grace and unwarranted mercy He would save some sinners from an eternity separated from Him. In Isaiah's prophecy there is a picture of the Final Day, when God will bring together all the nations of the world for judgment. What some of us perhaps don't realise is that this prophecy was also fulfilled in history. God did bring judgment on Israel. They became slaves to pagan countries. Finally, the LORD allowed the Romans to destroy Jerusalem in AD70. Yet by grace, God also allowed a remnant of the Jewish people to survive. Through that remnant he provided a Saviour for the nations and a way for the Gospel to start spreading to the nations. Ok so that was then but what about us?

Sadly, you and I have often acted like the Old Testament Israelites. We've put God's patience to the test. We've ignored God's clear directions to us. We've been careless in our worship – both public and private. At times, we've been tempted to consider membership of a congregation as our ticket to heaven. We might not physically bow down to images made out of wood or stone, but I wonder how often we have set our hearts on belongings and people, instead of on Jesus, the one who gave up everything to come and rescue us?

This is what the bible calls idolatry. We are actually guilty of the same sins that brought God's judgment on the Israelites of the Old Testament. And yet amazingly, God still holds up the banner of His grace. He calls us to a life of repentance. So, friends, I believe that Christmas calls for us to admit where we are going wrong, and to stop covering up our guilt. Let's turn from our sin and return to the Saviour God sent for us through his Old Testament people. Let's look again to Jesus, because he alone lived for us the right life that God's law demands. And on the cross he took for us the punishment that we deserve. Let's look to Jesus, because he alone has dealt with our sin. He has removed our guilt. Through him, and him alone, everything is now right between you and your God. He saves sinners like us from this everlasting separation.

Then why should men on earth be sad, Since our Redeemer made us glad:
Then why should we on earth be sad, Since our Redeemer made us glad:
When from our sin He set us free, All for to gain our liberty.
When sin departs before Your grace, Then life and health come in its place;
When sin departs before Your grace, Then life and health come in its place;
Angels and men with joy may sing, All for to see the newborn King.

God created the world, with all its beauty, for people like you to enjoy. He also created men and women so they could share in a loving relationship with Him. Ever since God formed you in your mother's womb, He has known all about you and everything about you. God has even counted the number of hairs on your head. He also knows when you get up and when you sit down. Sadly, men and women still turn away from Him and most deliberately choose not to know God – their loving Creator. The Bible says that the evidence of God's eternal power and divine nature may be plainly seen in the wonders of creation. God has also given each person a conscience that speaks to them of right and wrong. You are responsible for your own actions and the choices you make as you go through life. When you have lied, stole, cheated, or deceived others, the person you offended the most by these actions was GOD Himself. Wonderfully, hundreds of years before He was born into this world, many prophets wrote about His coming, God's rescue plan. These prophecies telling of Jesus' coming are all in the Bible. Jesus' coming to Earth from Heaven was according to God's rescue plan for all mankind. Jesus Christ of Nazareth was sent by God the Father, out of love, into the world on a mission to rescue men and women. In obedience to God's plan Jesus lived a sinless life, yet He willingly gave up His life and died on a cross to rescue you and me. By his death and resurrection three days later, Jesus broke the power of sin and death. After He rose from the dead, Jesus was seen alive again by hundreds of people. By His death on a cross, Jesus paid the price for your sin and mine.

The Bible says: "But God shows his love for us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."
Jesus gave himself up as a sacrifice on our behalf by taking upon himself God's punishment that our sins deserve.
Jesus is now alive for evermore and sits at the right hand of God the Father in Heaven, in a place of glory and honour.
Good Christian men, rejoice, with heart and soul and voice;
Now ye need not fear the grave: Peace! Peace! Jesus Christ was born to save!
Calls you one and calls you all, to gain His everlasting hall.
Christ was born to save! Christ was born to save!
But there remains a choice for each one of us. Christmas is a time of giving and receiving because of what was given to us that first Christmas, We would never ever open a gift on Christmas morning and after seeing what it is, hand it back to the giver and say, "you know what, I don't want it, I'm not interested."
Yet at Christmas every year many turn down God's greatest gift to us.

Let's go back to the miners in Chile - they waited and waited for that rescue so much so that when it arrived, each one of them of accepted the opportunity to be saved from that deep underground prison that had lightbulbs which mimicked daylight but which was never as good as the real thing. It reminds me of John's words in the first chapter of his gospel:

5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him.

And in Isaiah's words of prophecy many centuries ago,

2 The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

Even as I have been preaching this morning the Holy Spirit of God has been giving some of you fresh understanding of what this rescue plan means to you. The light has gone on and God has given you understanding.

So, friends you need to respond to this understanding, you need to acknowledge what God did for you that first Christmas and turn to him in love accepting the offer of Salvation. This could change Christmas for you for ever. What can I give Him, Poor as I am? If I were a shepherd I would bring a lamb, If I were a wise man, I would do my part, Yet what I can I give Him, Give my heart.