

## “Coming Alive - Be Rescued”

Scripture: Jeremiah 23:5-8; Romans 8:10-11; Romans 7:15-25a

Graphics: Coming Alive, POW rescue

Big Truth: The Good News is that we are alive in Christ forevermore. Faith in the death and resurrection of Christ gives us everlasting life. Yet, our experience now is sometimes less than. The past few months have felt more like death than life. Yet, Jesus is still alive and calls us again to come alive in Him every day. Coming Alive by the Spirit in us is the call of the disciple of Jesus.

Focus phrase: Be rescued, live rescued, and join Jesus in rescuing others.

### 1. Introduction

- A. The year was 1941. Japanese military forces attacked Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, thrusting the US into World War 2. In response, hundreds of thousands of men and women offered themselves to serve our country by enlisting in the military.
- B. In the early months of 1942, thousands of those American troops were forced to surrender during the Battle of Bataan. Many of those captured were sent to the Cabanatuan Prison Camp after the Bataan Death March.
- C. The Japanese shifted most of the prisoners to other areas, leaving just over 500 American and other Allied POWs and civilians in the prison. Facing brutal conditions including disease, torture, and malnourishment, the prisoners feared they would be executed by their captors before the arrival of General Douglas MacArthur and his American forces returning to Luzon.
- D. In late January 1945, a plan was developed by Sixth Army leaders and Filipino guerrillas to send a small force to rescue the prisoners. A group of over 100 Rangers and Scouts and 200 guerrillas traveled 30 miles behind Japanese lines to reach the camp.
- E. On January 30, 1945, in a nighttime raid, under the cover of darkness and with distraction by a P-61 Black Widow night fighter, the group surprised the Japanese forces in and around the camp. After a brief fight, the Rangers, Scouts, and guerrillas escorted all 513 of the POWs back to American lines.
- F. It became known as the Raid at Cabanatuan, also known as The Great Raid. The rescue allowed the prisoners to tell of the death march and prison camp atrocities, which sparked a rush of resolve for the war against Japan. The rescuers were awarded commendations by MacArthur, and were also recognized by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.
- G. These soldiers were in terrible conditions in captivity, but then they were rescued and set free. All the while they were in captivity, they were yearning to be free. After they were rescued, they could begin to live in a state of Being Rescued for the rest of their lives.

- H. When those soldiers offered themselves, they had no idea the struggles they would face. Yet, they endured and stayed alive through it all, to be rescued and freed. And that freedom gave them another chance at coming alive again.
- I. The title of this sermon series is just that, Coming Alive. And today's message is called Be Rescued. We know that before we have Christ in our lives we are dead in sin, but God made a way for us to come alive in Jesus Christ.
- J. Last week, we were challenged to Offer Ourselves to the work of sanctification because of the free gift of everlasting life in Jesus.
- K. But, the question for us today is: **are you living in a state of being rescued?** And when I say that, I'm not just asking if you are actively in the process of being rescued from death to life...coming to Christ for the first time. But, for those who are following Jesus, are you also living a life that is a response to the rescue that Jesus has already done in your life?
- L. The Holy Spirit is present in us so that we can not only BE rescued from sin, but we can live as those who ARE rescued.
- M. Our scripture passage today from Romans 7 is one of the most perplexing portions of scripture in the all of the New Testament. But, I pray that as we unpack it, it becomes a little clearer to us. Paul is using a very specific literary tool in this passage, which will help not only explain this passage, but help us apply it to our lives.
- N. We are alive! We are Coming Alive with Christ. And after we offer ourselves to God's sanctification, through prayer and struggle, we can live rescued because (listen) WE HAVE A RESCUER named Jesus.
- O. Let's pray and then we'll dive into this next section of Romans, chapter 7, starting in verse 15.
- P. **PRAY!!!!** Grab your bible. Romans 7:15...

## 2. Scripture

### A. READ ROMANS 7:15-20

- i. If you were to be dropped onto earth from outer space and the first thing you read was this passage from Romans 7, you might think that the human race was very very confused and internally conflicted.
- ii. As it is, when we read this passage, we get the sense that Paul is writing this as a personal confession about how he wants to do the right thing, but just simply can't. Maybe that's the way you've always read this. And, you'd be in good company and because guys like St. Augustine and Martin Luther read it that way. Yet, if we read this passage in that way, we tend to lose all hope in ever being more holy or righteous.

- iii. The problem is, Paul stated in the earlier parts of the letter to the Romans that Christ has made a way for us to HAVE the righteousness of God. We CAN be holy. We CAN make godly decisions. We are saved and being sanctified.
- iv. So what's the deal that now, Paul says he tries but can't?
- v. Well, the answer is because Paul is NOT talking about himself here. In fact, Paul is not talking about anyone who is a follower of Jesus.
- vi. Paul, here, is using a very common rhetorical device called *speech in character* or *impersonation*. Basically, Paul, using the term "I" here, is actually impersonating someone who doesn't yet know Christ. He's speaking from the perspective of someone who may be on the VERGE of coming to faith, but who is not yet there.
- vii. If we read this section with THAT in mind, what seems completely baffling for Paul to write about himself becomes clearer.
- viii. You may be asking what evidence we have that points to this use of impersonation. Well, back in chapter 5, Paul makes a very clear distinction between those who are 'in Adam' and those who are 'in Christ'. Those who are 'in Adam', who are still under the Jewish Law or no law at all, are slaves to the Jewish Law, and thus slaves to sin, because the Law only identifies and magnifies sin. The Law doesn't rescue people from sin.
- ix. But those who are 'in Christ' have been set free from the Jewish Law, which didn't do anything to rescue people from sin. When we are set free from the Law, we are then free to choose the good God wants for our lives.
- x. Paul, now in chapter 7, is further explaining to the Romans church what it was like before they knew Christ. He's explaining what those around them still experience, because they aren't free in Christ.
- xi. His readers, and we, are therefore reminded of the differences of our everyday experiences from those who are still 'in Adam'.
- xii. So Paul uses this **impersonation** to make his point, which is: those who don't have Jesus in their lives - or before you knew Jesus as Lord and Savior - are aware, by God's divine design, that you want to do good, but find yourself a slave to sin and unable to do it. In fact, it's so bad that those who are 'in Adam' find themselves saying, "Welp, I want to do the right things, but every time I find that I engage in sin. So it must be that I'm just a hopeless sinner and the sin wins, so it's not my fault."
- xiii. Now, Paul wasn't saying that the people of the church weren't sinners after they started following Jesus. He also wasn't saying that they were perfect. What he was telling them, by way of this *speech in character* as someone who **didn't** know Jesus, was that NOW, because of Jesus, they were not

ruled by sin...they were empowered by the Holy Spirit, and, as we read this next section, they have been rescued.

### **B. READ ROMANS 7:21-25a**

- i. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement in the 1700s, wrote that the person Paul was impersonating in this passage seemed to be someone who was on the VERY VERGE of accepting Christ as Lord and Savior.
- ii. And you can almost FEEL it in Paul's words. This person is aware of sin. This person is drawn to do the right thing. This person knows that when they TRY to do the right thing, then evil is lurking and trying to prevent it.
- iii. This person also is aware of the battle between good and evil that is going on inside of them...in their mind and heart.
- iv. All of that leads this person to declare with great frustration, "Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"
- v. And that, right there, is a person who is ready to turn their life over to Christ, rejecting the way of Adam, the way of the Jewish Law, away from legalism or cultural religion, away from Vegas, out of the grave, and head-on, full-steam into a living transforming relationship with Jesus Christ.
- vi. Paul ends with, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

### **3. Application**

- A. Living in a state of rescue every day often takes reminders of what it was like before you got rescued. It often takes having our eyes open to see those who are not walking with Christ and remembering that we were once in that boat.
- B. And, if you're anything like me, a daily reminder that, "There but for the grace of God, go I." Maybe you've heard that phrase or used it...
- C. So, this passage does two things in our lives.
  - i. First, we, as believers, are reminded that we don't have to do what the sin nature in us is trying to get us to do! And,
  - ii. Two, when we see that someone else we know is doing and saying the things that Paul is personifying in this passage, it's time for us to act!
- D. Let's look at #1 - the reminder that we have the power to overcome sin.
  - i. The longer you're a follower of Jesus, and the more that you're around the church or church people, you begin to see more and more what God expects of you as far as your decisions and thoughts and heart focus.
  - ii. Now, sometimes, you learn something about God's character, like forgiveness, and you sort of ignore that in your own life because you got hit pretty hard at some point and are still deeply wounded.

- iii. Or you read a parable of Jesus when he says things like, "...when someone strikes you, make sure you turn and offer them your second cheek so they can decide if they want to strike you again."
  - iv. Those things are hard...and so, in some real ways, you KNOW what is expected, but you don't DO it because there's something else at play.
  - v. Paul is not only describing the experience of those who don't yet know Christ, but I also think he's reminding us that every day is an opportunity to be rescued.
  - vi. You and I, because we're merely human, and for this temporal life, are caught in this mortal body with all of its tendency to fail, be selfish, prideful, focused on what I want first, we definitely DO the things we KNOW in our heads that God doesn't want us to do.
  - vii. We have to be very careful that we don't engage in sin, justify it by saying things like, "The devil made me do it!" and then simply say, "There's nothing I can do about it."
  - viii. That's garbage, says, Paul. That's what people say when they are in the grave! He says, "Because you are trapped in this body, and EVEN THOUGH you do sinful things, you KNOW you have a Rescuer."
  - ix. Be Rescued! Be sanctified! Jesus sees you. He's trying to sanctify you so that the sin doesn't keep happening, and you have an important role to play.
  - x. BE RESCUED! Get out of the prison camp. Leave Vegas. Come up OUT of the GRAVE! RUN out of the GRAVE again today!
  - xi. Jesus reaches down, every time, and offers you His hand, to pull you up out of the grave, again, to remind you that you've been rescued, once for all.
- E. The second thing this passage does in our lives is to make us AWARE of when someone else is on the VERGE of salvation.
- i. We all know people who do what they want, don't care about it, freely engage in all forms of sin, and don't want to change. And, church, you KNOW that we can't expect those who don't follow Jesus to follow what Jesus said, right? Those people are not who Paul is describing here.
  - ii. The people Paul is describing are those who hear the Holy Spirit wooing them and are trying to listen and respond, but aren't sure how. John Wesley would say that they are experiencing **prevenient grace** as God is gentling pulling them toward Him...knocking on that door to their heart.
  - iii. Your job is to build a relationship with that person, listen for the desire to be changed, and then invite them to meet The Rescuer, Jesus.

- iv. And what you say (because I know that's our main question) is simply that you were where they are and Jesus rescued you. AND, you no longer are led by sin and death, but by freedom and life.
- v. The one caution here is that he/she has to see INYOU the fact that you are NOT ruled by sin...so that they can see a difference in your life.
- vi. The person that cries out with the question of Paul, "Who will save me from this body of death?" is ready to see and hear what you've got!
- vii. You know the answer, disciple! It's Jesus Christ, the One Man who died Once for All...and for that person and for you and for me.

F. Be Rescued! LIVE rescued!

- i. Living Rescued brings FREEDOM for today, because you are free!
- ii. Living Rescued brings JOY, even in today's despair!
- iii. Living Rescued makes you GRATEFUL. Paul declares, "Thanks be to GOD through Jesus Christ our Lord!"
- iv. Living Rescued POINTS you in the right DIRECTION! To the future! To the everlasting future!

G. And Living Rescued gives you a mission to point others to the Rescuer!

#### 4. Conclusion

- A. The AP article from February 1945 read like this, in part: "SIXTH RANGER BATTALION CAMP, LUZON - There is a long, dusty, twisting land near here which should become a war monument, for today it bridged two worlds. It leads across the plain toward the death camp where 513 prisoners of war were rescued by American Rangers and Filipino guerrillas. There were also those who limped from beri-beri, legs scored by tropical ulcers and other diseases, and of course, there were those who looked up helplessly from litters. They tried proudly to be soldiers, carrying themselves as erect as possible. Many saluted, promptly and stayed at attention when talking to officers. One man who did this crept into a truck and sank back exhausted a minute later."
- B. Yet, they were rescued...they were free, joyful, thankful, and were headed home. Even though they were wounded and weak because of their time in prison, they were rescued.
- C. We have been rescued. We sometimes forget that. We sometimes reject that. Living in a state of rescue means we're not done and God is not done with any of us. We are coming alive!
- D. Be Rescued, church...Live rescued, church! And then join Jesus in rescuing others by pointing them to the hand of the Rescuer who rescued you!
- E. Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! Let's PRAY!