

The Ultimate Rescue Mission

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[0 : 00] If you can turn with me then back to Paul's letter to the Colossians chapter 1 and we're going to read from verse 9 to verse 14. Colossians chapter 1 reading from verse 9 to verse 14 and Paul says, for this reason since the day we heard about you we have not stopped praying for you.

We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way. Bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience and giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light for he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Now the verses that I wish to explore with you this evening are verse 12, that's it.

And giving joyful thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light for he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. It's those three verses that I wish to explore with you this evening. And we're going to explore them under three headings.

First heading is the darkness. First heading is the darkness. And the second heading is the light. And the third heading is the life. These are the ways that we're going to explore those verses. Now I have to say to you that from verse 9, Paul is taking a deep breath as it were, and we're confronted, we're confronted with one of his long convoluted sentences of which he has several in his letters. And you know, this sentence almost goes on to the end of verse 14. So we have to ask, what is it in that big breath of Paul's exhaling? What is it that he's actually focused on? And I want to suggest to you that you'll find that in verse 10. So that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way. That is Paul's overriding concern. Christianity is not simply about putting your hand up or signing a card or saying,

[4 : 08] I'm now born again. Christianity is about a journey. It's about growth. It's about the orientation and direction of our life. It is how we live our life. It is to do with our perspective in life. It is to do with what is driving us as individuals. And Paul says, this is what I want to drive you.

I want you as believers to live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way. And as he unpacks that for us, he says to us that one of the things that constitutes living a life worthy of the Lord is there in verse 12, giving thanks to the father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his people. But what he does is he hangs on to that statement about giving thanks to the father for he has qualified us to share in the inheritance of his people by saying, because think of this, how has he brought this qualification about, how he's brought it about, how he's brought it about, for he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness. Now, people that look at this part of Paul's letter to the Colossians, these verses that we are looking at, reckon that what Paul has in the background of his mind is the Exodus.

And that is why I read from Exodus. And you'll notice that he talks about to share in the inheritance. You'll notice that he talks about to share in the inheritance. You'll notice that he talks about being rescued. And you'll notice that he talks about being rescued from something into something else. These are all echoes of the Exodus.

Except this time, it's not rescued from a country, Egypt, or from the sea. It is rescued from the darkness.

[6 : 58] Written into the DNA of Reformed Christianity is one understanding of the work of Jesus Christ.

And it's almost exclusively the only understanding and picture and model of the work of Jesus Christ that is written into the DNA of Reformed Christians.

Of course, I'm talking about the substitutionary death of Christ. Bearing shame and scoffing rude in my place condemned he stood. But here Paul has got another picture for us to think about.

Here he's got another model for us to explore in terms of understanding the salvation of God, the redemption of God.

And he puts it this way. It's like this he says. You have been rescued from the dominion of darkness.

[8 : 10] From the tyranny. From the power. From the rain of darkness. Now I'm sure that you'll agree with me.

There's something dark within the human soul. You only need to read history just a little bit to recognize that.

Indeed, our own poet, Rabbi Burns, is an understatement in a sense. Man's inhumanity to man.

I remember when I was doing my English literature part. I majored in philosophy at university. But I did English literature for two years as well as history.

And I remember I was doing this book, Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness. And that was an interesting book. Because one of the ways that you could understand this book, not the only way, but one of the ways you could understand it, is that Conrad was exposing the darkness of the heart of Western imperial powers.

[9 : 35] As the movement of the novel was deeper and deeper into what was called uncivilized lands and people and territory, Conrad made it clear that it was our heart that was becoming blacker and blacker.

I remember a Christian that had great influence in my life. As a young Christian, I've been a Christian for about 47 years now.

I remember this person saying to me, David, what do you think? Don't you think that apart from the darkness of the human heart and the deceitfulness and the insanity of sin or this, let's call it what you like, this principle of evil, this capacity, this propensity, this flaw?

Don't you think, David, there's something else? That there is also dark spirits and dark forces and dark powers out there.

Paul, interestingly, speaks of those dark powers in this letter. And it's interesting that he uses this metaphor and this concept to say what we are liberated and rescued from.

[11 : 18] It's not just, you know, a B or C life as opposed to an A plus life.

It's not just secularism or some sort of hedonistic life. No, no, says Paul, it's much more potent than that.

It's the darkness. And it's the grip of that darkness that it has on the minds of men and women and boys and girls.

Jesus made a chilling statement at one time, didn't he, when he said that people love darkness rather than light.

And the apostle also, didn't he, said something about the darkness in the letter to the Ephesians. He says in chapter 6, I think it was.

[12 : 45] He says in chapter 6 of Ephesians, verse 12, Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Jesus said that he is the light.

And this exodus that he's calling us to take part in is an exodus out of darkness.

And please remember this. The darkness does not present itself as darkness. It presents itself as an angel of light. It comes across with fine sounding arguments.

It comes across with plausible propositions. It has almost as a sound of truth.

[14 : 12] For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness. Paul can talk about the darkness of the power of sin. In his letter to the Romans, you'll probably remember, I think it's around chapter 6 and 7, Paul talks about sin like some force within him, operating within him, making him almost do things that he cannot do, that he does not want to do.

And he talks about that, doesn't he, in chapter 7, the good that I would, I do not, and that which I would not, I do. Oh, wretched man who can deliver me.

And he thanks God that there is one, and his name is Jesus Christ. And if you're still in that darkness tonight, there is one that can liberate you and emancipate you, and take you in an exodus out of that darkness into the glorious light and life of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And that brings me to my second point, the light.

The light. Paul had said, giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.

[15:57] And in the, in verse 13, he calls that kingdom of light the kingdom of the Son he loves.

the kingdom of the Son he loves. And can I just remind you that this kingdom is invincible.

This kingdom is indestructible. Listen to what the writer of the Hebrews says. One of my favorite verses, indeed, in this letter to the Hebrews.

I'll read a verse before it, verse 27 of chapter 12. The verse that I'm concerned with is the following verse, verse 28, but just to get a flavor of the mood here.

The words once more indicate the removing of what can be shaken that has created things.

[17:08] so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we believers and we Christians are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful and so worship God acceptably with reverence and fear for our God is a consuming fire.

God He has brought us into the kingdom of His dear Son.

If you're a Christian tonight, rejoice. If you're a Christian tonight, you've got a great future. every power and empire may rise, but they will also fall.

And that is the history of all the great empires. And even in our own time, we've seen the collapse of the Soviet Union.

we now see the rise of China. We're seeing, I would say, perhaps, I don't know the word to use, some sort of tottering of the great United States of America.

[18:50] But this is a kingdom of His dear Son that is a kingdom that cannot be shaken and that cannot be removed.

And notice how Paul puts this, that He's rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves. I love that phrase.

It's the kingdom of the Son He loves. Here is God's darling. Here is the one that He has looked upon.

For if I could say this reverently and I mean that, God is no navel gazer. He's been looking on the beloved Son with exquisite love for all eternity.

And He's also been looking on this Son of His that was willing to part with all His prerogatives of deity to lay them aside like taking a cloak off and leaving them lying there and becoming one of us.

[20:26] As Paul puts it, Paul wants to stretch his language as far as he possibly can. and he said he was made in the likeness of sinful flesh.

He says he was made sin for us. Him who knew no sin. This is the Son He loves.

This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. I have a kingdom for Him. A kingdom that knows no end.

And one day those of us who have been brought into that kingdom think of this. We'll look upon the face of Jesus Christ.

For He has taken His resurrected body into glory wherever that might be. We shall see Him said the apostle.

[21:41] I wonder if you made your exodus not only out of the darkness but into the kingdom of Jesus Christ. And the wonder is this.

you don't need to go through any great bureaucracy. You don't need to have a visa.

You don't need to have some pass. All you need to do is ask can I come in? I want you as my king.

I want you as my king. I want you as a man. I want to go through the darkness. There's the darkness and there's the light and there's the life.

Paul is remember let's remind ourselves Paul is using this reminder reminder of our great redemption as an incentive to live that life that is worthy of the Lord.

[23:01] God. And before I leave this and finish with the third point note that he mentions this word redemption and what Paul has in mind when he's mentioning that word is the great price of our exodus and our redemption.

He suffered outer darkness for you and me. He suffered the excruciating silence of God.

Paul says giving joyful thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.

Now I want you to notice that the subject here is the Father. Jesus Christ doesn't come into the picture in a way until verse 14 where it says in whom we have redemption the forgiveness of sins. And I mention that because we must never forget that God the Father is no bystander. God the Father is no spectator.

[24 : 57] God the Father is intimately involved in our redemption. Look what Paul is saying.

Giving joyful thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance.

How shall I put this? The idea, the seed, the plan, the first hint as it were of this eternal plan of redemption was the Father's.

And in concert and in communion with the Son whom he loves he said together we will redeem them.

Together we will liberate them. Together we will give them hope. God was involved at every single inch of the process of redemption in history.

[26 : 45] Remember how Jesus could put it, I do not speak my words, I speak the words of the Father. Remember how Jesus could put it, these are not the works that I do, it's the Father's works that I do.

And then there was that dissonance and that disruption within God as the pinnacle of that salvation was articulated in that cry of abandonment and forsakenness.

Paul says, you know, living a life worthy of your Lord is a life that never forgets to give joyful thanks to the Father.

It's a life that never forgets for a moment the inheritance that we have. What an inheritance it is that we will see face to face Jesus Christ, that we will have a more intimate relationship with the eternal God, that we will have bodies that are resurrection bodies like the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, that no more will we be persecuted, so to speak, by that body of death that Paul talks about that we drag around with us, and there will be no more weeping and no more sorrow and no more tears for God will wipe them all away.

unbelievable, I know, but that's what our Lord says, and this is your inheritance, and this inheritance may well involve, and will involve, I should say, a new heavens and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness, righteousness, and that could very well mean that there will be culture, and that there will be a new existence for the people of God.

[29 : 37] this is what Paul is seeking to bring before those Colossians whom he feels are in danger of selling all this down the river.

I close then by asking you, do you have a share in this inheritance?

have you made your exodus? Have you come to Christ? May the Lord bless these thoughts to every one of us for his glory and for our good.

Amen.