

God to the Rescue

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[0 : 00] This is the AM service on the 21st of December 1997. The preacher is Warwick Grant.

The sermon is entitled, God to the Rescue. As we prepare to look at the Bible, let's pray that God would help us. Lord Jesus, we thank you for the Bible.

We particularly thank you for this morning's reading. We thank you for the Apostle John, Jesus' best friend. Thank you that he wrote an account of the Lord's life. We pray that as we look at part of this this morning, you help us to understand more about Jesus and to follow him better.

And we pray that in his name. Amen. Well, let me ask you, do you really believe that human beings have walked on the moon?

It's a pretty amazing thing to believe. It's a pretty amazing thing to contemplate. That people have left this earth and have walked on another celestial body. If you do believe that, why do you believe it?

[1 : 10] I believe that people have walked on the moon. But I don't believe it because I was actually there and I saw them land and I saw Neil Armstrong come out and walk around. But I believe it because I've read about it in old newspapers and books.

And I believe that it really happened. It might surprise you to believe there are some people who think the whole thing was made up. It was a big set in some studio in Hollywood. But I believe it really happened.

Let me ask you a couple of other big questions. Do you believe that Sir Edmund Hillary was the first man to climb Mount Everest with Sherpa Tensing? Do you believe that the Titanic sunk on its maiden voyage across the Atlantic?

Do you believe that World War I actually happened? Do you believe that the Princess of Wales died in a tragic accident earlier this year? Now if I was to ask each of you those things, I'm pretty sure that you would all say yes to all of them.

Okay, what about this question? Do you believe that 2,000 years ago the God of the whole universe became a little baby? It's such a fantastic, and the word fantastic is from the word fantasy, like it's almost a fantastic thing to contemplate.

[2 : 34] It's just unbelievable that God of the whole universe that made the galaxies that are spinning out there, he became a little baby, a human being. I was talking the other day to a lady who's not a Christian, and she was just asking me some questions about Christianity, and I said that Christians remember that God became a little baby, became a human being.

And she felt that was one of the most ridiculous things you could ever believe, one of the most stupid things you could ever possibly contemplate. How could you be expected to believe that? And it is. It's ridiculous.

It's just unlikely, almost impossible. It's one of the most unbelievable things, I think. Yet I believe it did happen.

The reason I believe is that there are historical records, and the evidence is overwhelming that this incredible thing did actually occur. Let me read to you what John, Jesus' best friend, wrote towards the end of his Gospel.

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

[4 : 00] And the very last two verses of John's whole Gospel say this, and John's referring to himself here, this is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true.

But there are also many other things that Jesus did. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. The Bible accounts of Jesus' life and work are there, so that we may read them and believe that indeed he is the Son of God.

Indeed he was born 2,000 years ago as a little baby. Indeed Jesus is God. But it may interest you to realise that Jesus is referred to in other documents outside of the Bible.

There was a Jewish historian called Josephus. He had no interest in Christianity, but he recorded about Jesus. I'll just read some of what he wrote.

Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man. Remember, this isn't in the Bible. If it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as received the truth with pleasure.

[5 : 16] He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was the Christ. And when Pilate had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again on the third day, as the divine prophet had foretold these and 10,000 other wonderful things concerning him.

And the tribe of Christians so named from him are not extinct at this day. Not only does the Bible tell us about Jesus, but other historical documents tell us that Jesus was a real person.

Sure, he was a good teacher. He was a miracle worker. He was a healer. But Jesus, as well as being totally human, was totally God.

And John, in the opening verses of his gospel that Cameron read for us before, is showing us that Jesus is fully human and fully God. If you'd like to follow with me, I'm on page 862 of the Black Bibles in the seats in front of you.

Page 862. I'll read the first three verses.

[6 : 33] The expression word that we read there is not an easy one to explain.

In simple terms, it was an expression that John used for Jesus that would have been understood by both Jews and non-Jews of his time. The very words that begin the whole book echo the beginning of the Bible, don't they?

Because the first three words of the Bible are... What are the first three words of the Bible?

Someone tell me. In the beginning. And John says, In the beginning. And John tells us that before the beginning of anything, there was the Word.

There was Jesus. Before time existed, before anything happened, Christ was there. Not only was he with God, John tells us that he is God.

And when I was younger, my understanding about Jesus was false. I just thought that God created him 2,000 years ago and he was born in Bethlehem and Jesus started. But that's not right.

[7 : 53] He has always existed. He has always been around. Our church is named after the Holy Trinity, Holy Trinity Church. The Father, the Son and the Spirit. And the three of them have always existed.

They never had a beginning. You can go right back through time and they never had a beginning. They've always been there. Try and get your mind around that. In fact, Jesus was involved in the creation of the whole universe.

In verse 3, all things came into being through him and without him not one thing came into being.

Two of the great themes in John's Gospel are that of light and life.

And in verses 4 and 5, John introduces these ideas. Christians have found that a relationship with Jesus gives them guidance and direction and illumination for their lives.

And let's face it, in our world, people are looking for guidance and direction. As we saw in the drama, Cullshaw, the rebellious student, although he had Fletcher's interest at heart, I think, he had a relationship with Jesus who guided him in his life.

[9 : 19] And there are millions of Christians throughout the centuries who can testify to Christ's guidance in their lives. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.

There are enemies of the Christian faith who have sought to extinguish the light of Christ. Christians have always been persecuted to one degree in another. Maybe if you're a Christian in the workplace, someone ribs you because you're a Christian.

If you're in a Middle Eastern country, your life could be in danger because you're a Christian. But Jesus is the only true light, the only one that can give us real guidance and real direction.

Evil things have never overcome Jesus. We know from the Easter story that death itself could not hold him down. Jesus rose from the dead, never to die again, showing he had power over sin and death and anything that is bad.

I don't know if you were here two years ago, but we did a drama at the midnight service on Christmas Eve and we extinguished all the lights in the church and even the security lights we turned off. So the whole place was in darkness and we had one solitary candle on the communion table, one little candle, and it lit up the whole of this area.

[10:38] You can have as much darkness as you like, but it won't prevent one candle from shining. And it's like that with Jesus. Nothing will overcome his light. His light will always shine.

In verses 6 to 8 we read that there was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light so that all might believe through him.

He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. Well, that John referred to in this passage is not John the author of the gospel, but this is John the Baptist who was a distant cousin, we believe, of Jesus.

And he was uncompromising in his role as a prophet. Indeed, Jesus said this of John the Baptist, and this is from Matthew's gospel. Listen to this.

Truly I tell you, among those born of women, no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist. High praise indeed from the Lord himself.

[11:41] And John the Baptist was Jesus' forerunner. He came to point people to Jesus. In verse 10 we read that he, that's Jesus, was in the world, and the world came into being through him.

Yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. So even though Jesus came to the world that he had made, and the people that he had made, he was rejected, and despised, and killed.

And he came to help us. He came to teach us about God. to usher in his kingdom, to heal the sick, to raise the dead, to do all those things. But ultimately, why did he come?

And the answer is in verses 12 and 13. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born not of blood, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God.

As Ian was highlighting for us before, the sending of Jesus to earth was God's rescue mission for the world. Even though God made everything and everyone, many still reject him.

[13:03] Now, I don't know about you, but if you were God, and you'd made the world and everyone in it, and people rejected you, I think the normal human response would be to say, well, blow you. I'm not going to have any more to do with you.

But God didn't do that. He came after us. Remember the story of the waiting father with the prodigal son. He always looked, waiting for his son to return.

And one day he did. And he ran out with his arms outstretched to embrace him. And God does that with us. He waits for us to turn back to him. And that way back is through Jesus.

And through Jesus alone. If we put our faith and trust in him, we become God's children. Isn't that a great thing to know that you're a child of God if you trust in Jesus?

The Bible describes us as God's enemies if we seek to live our lives without him. But if we trust and follow Jesus, not only do we cease to be his enemy, we become his children.

[14:07] Adoptive children, so to speak. Verse 14. And the word became flesh and lived among us.

And we have seen his glory, the glory as of our father's only son, full of grace and truth. The word became flesh.

Christ, who had always existed before the universe was made, became a baby. Are there any babies in the congregation? No?

I can remember when I first held my first God child and he was born one month premature. And I remember his head was here and his feet were here. He was like that long.

And I couldn't help but think, isn't it amazing, the God of the whole universe became one of these? That's fantastic. Isn't that incredible? But that is the extent to which God was willing to stoop to rescue us.

[15:09] And what was it that God was rescuing us from? Well, this is hinted at in verse 17. The law indeed was given through Moses.

Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. Now, the reference here to Moses reminds us that it was to Moses that God revealed his law.

Moses received the Ten Commandments from God. And these commandments show the perfect standards of holiness that God requires of his people. Now, we all know that none of us live up to those standards.

We all fall short of them. As a verse in the New Testament reminds us, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. But the great thing about God's laws is that they drive us back to Jesus.

They show us we need his forgiveness. We can't go on without him. They show us that we all fall beneath God's standards of perfection. And they drive us back to the cross, back to Jesus.

[16:09] We will receive forgiveness and eternal life. So, while the law was given to Moses in the commandments, verse 17 reminds us that grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Well, the word grace is one that we don't often use, unless you have a sister-in-law whose name happens to be grace. Or it's a prayer you say before meals.

But it means unmerited favour. Unmerited favour. If I was to say to each of you, look, I've got a Porsche, a black Porsche for each of you. It's in the car park.

Come and get the keys from me later and it's yours. That would be an act of grace. And it's not going to happen. But God loves us so much, not because we deserve his love, but because he just loves us.

That's one of the characteristics of God. In John's epistle, he describes, he defines God in terms of love. God is love. That's what God's like. He's a just God, but he's a loving God.

[17:09] He's a gracious God. A God full of grace. And the ultimate act of God's grace was that he allowed his son to be put to death on a cross. And as many of you know, Jesus on that cross was taking the punishment for your sins and my sins, if you let him.

Taking the punishment for the sins of the whole world. That was God's way of saving us from the consequences of our own wrongdoings. On that good Friday when Jesus died, he was taking the punishment of those who put their trust in him.

The law indeed was given through Moses. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. And verse 16 underlines this for us. From his fullness, we have all received grace upon grace.

John is saying, look, God's just lavishing his grace on us and his love. We don't deserve it, but he just gives it to us. And it's for us to accept or reject. Well, the final verse, verse 18.

No one has ever seen God. It is God, the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known. One of Jesus' disciples, a guy called Philip, once said to Jesus, just show us the Father and then we'll be satisfied.

[18:32] Show us the Father and then we'll be satisfied. And Jesus basically said, you've been with me this long? He who has seen me has seen the Father.

So, if you look at Jesus, you can see what God's like. If you don't know what God's like, look at Jesus. Read the stories about Jesus in the Bible. That's the best way to understand about God.

Yes, Jesus is God's rescue mission to us. God didn't send us a telegram, didn't send us a fax, didn't send us a letter, didn't ring us up. He actually came. He came as a baby and he became one of us.

Well, just as we finish, let me just read to you what I think is my favourite verse in the whole Bible.

This is from John chapter 6 and if you want to see it, it's verse 66.

Some of Jesus' disciples, not the twelve apostles, but some of Jesus' disciples, his other followers, had abandoned him and had left to go their own way. And Jesus turned to the twelve apostles and said to them, do you also wish to go away?

[19:46] And Simon Peter answered Jesus and said, Lord, to whom do we go? You have the words of eternal life.

We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God. There's no one else who can rescue you. You can't rescue yourself.

You have to place your hand in the hand of Jesus and let him pull you out of the consequences of our own wrongdoing and sin. As Ian was saying, it's as if we're drowning and God stretches out our hand to rescue us and pull us out.

Grab hold of that hand. Let God rescue you. I know there are some people who are here this morning who understand about God's love, but they haven't taken that final step of saying, I'm going to grab onto that hand.

There are some of you who I know think you've got to try and rescue yourself. Well, you can't. Someone drowning can't rescue themselves. We all need Jesus. We all need Jesus.

[20 : 53] Let God rescue you and let yourself experience the amazing life and forgiveness and love and purpose and direction and meaning that Jesus wants to give you.

I'm going to conclude by reading the words of a song. It's a song that we sometimes sing in church and the words will be on the overhead if you'd like to just look at them with me. You rescued me and picked me up.

A living hope of grace revealed. A life transformed in righteousness. O Lord, you have rescued me. Forgiving me, you healed my heart and set me free from sin and death.

You brought me life. You've made me whole. O Lord, you have rescued me and you loved me before I knew you and you knew me for all time.

I've been created in your image, O Lord, and you bought me and you sought me and your blood poured out for me a new creation in your image, O Lord. You rescued me.

[21 : 59] You rescued me. I hope you can say that this Christmas, that you give yourself the Christmas present of Jesus rescuing of you his forgiveness and love.

The best Christmas present ever given to anyone. you to do you