

RESCUE

9th April 2017

Reading: Matthew 27:32-50

A week or so ago the Herald reported on two kayakers who'd gotten into trouble in the Manakau harbour. They'd all the right gear, but because of choppy seas once overturned they couldn't get their kayak upright. The Eagle helicopter was dispatched and circled waiting for the coast guard to arrive. By this stage one kayaker managed to scramble on the upturned kayak but the other was in trouble. The helicopter pilot later reported...



"The guy who was still in the water had started to turn blue and was struggling to hold on to the kayak, so one of our rescue swimmers was sent into the water."

Jumping from the helicopter the officer managed to help the kayaker onto the kayak until the rescue boat arrived. All ended well.

Now when it comes to rescue missions last weekend alone the Herald had reports on a mountain biker, quad biker and even a tramper "skittled" by a boulder on Mt Ngauruhoe all needing rescue. In the work place someone needed emergency services when crushed by olive oil pallets. Overseas families were rescued from roof tops after cyclone Debbie flooded Queensland and rescue attempts were still going on from the dreadful mud slide in Columbia. There were more, but in just one weekend you can get impression there are a lot of people needing rescue. People seem to have a knack of getting into trouble they can't get out of, without help.

And as we come to the Passion of Jesus, with his betrayal by a friend, arrest, two trials, torture and death by the most agonising means, then the way we make sense of it all – to make sense of the cross – is to remind ourselves this is a rescue mission. A mission long planned; a rescue without other options, a rescue so desperate extreme measures were called for, a rescue perfectly executed, with 100% success.

Yet for those looking on both those who loved Jesus most and those hating him most the crucifixion looked nothing like a rescue mission - let alone a successful one. The crucifixion was complete disaster for the disciples and a complete success to those who wanted him dead. Or so everyone thought!

Now today, to understand what happened on the cross, we're going to look at three questions.

1. Do we even need rescuing?
2. Is our rescuer qualified?
3. What did it cost our rescuer?

1. Do we even need rescuing?

For two kayakers struggling in choppy seas with deteriorating weather it's obvious they needed rescuing. But what about us? Here we are in a lovely building, living in upmarket Glendowie or surrounds. Compared to many overseas we live in one of the least corrupt and most politically and economic stable countries in the world. If you told the average person in Glendowie they needed rescuing they'd look at you as if you're crazy. But though we see ourselves as OK that's not how God sees us. How then does he see you and I? Well, no matter how safe we feel God sees each one of us in desperate need of rescue. Worse than a kayaker in choppy seas, a tramper skittled by a bolder or a worker crushed by pallets. Now a helpful verse showing God's perspective is Colossians 1:13

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. Colossians 1:13–14

Clearly the Bible tells us we all need rescuing because our default setting is being prisoners to the dominion of darkness - to Satan's rule. We all remain trapped in this broken world where the devil runs amuck. For way back in the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve disobeyed God and since then Satan has delighted to make us miserable. Yes, evil is very real - both evil within and evil without -and we need rescuing.

Galatians 1:4 puts it like this

(Jesus) gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age.
Galatians 1:4

So the question, "Do we even need rescuing?" the answer is very much yes. This brings us our second question.

2. Is our rescuer qualified?

Though it's rare for a police officer onboard the Eagle helicopter to jump into the water he had the right gear and right training. He was qualified. What about Jesus? Having all of humanity imprisoned in the devil's dominion sounds an Mission Impossible. So is Jesus qualified? To answer this we'll turn to Matthew's account of the crucifixion and the moment of rescue. Matthew 27:35

Now, when it comes to the crucifixion itself Matthew is most sparing in his words.

When they had crucified him... Matthew 27:35

Five words. That's it. No mention of the nails being hammered into hands or cries of pain. Just, "When they crucified him"...

I want to work closely now at events of the crucifixion to see what happened and how Jesus is qualified. Before the nails were driven home he refused a drink of wine mixed with gall (verse 34). This was a narcotic to dull the pain. Josephus the historian records how the noble and wealthy ladies of Jerusalem regarded this as one of their good works. To go to the public place of execution and offer this anesthetic to those who were dying.

Verse 35 tells us the soldiers who crucified Jesus used lots to divide up his clothes - the normal perks of the execution squad.

Verse 36 tells us the soldiers then settled down to keep watch. This was to stop family or friends sneaking up and taking down the victim. You see, it was possible to revive someone in the early stages of crucifixion.

Now in verse 37 we come to the first qualification of Jesus.

Above his head they placed the written charge against him: this is Jesus, the king of the Jews, Matthew 27:37

Probably this was hung around the victim's neck as he carried his own cross and was then hung or nailed to the cross once there. We learn from John's Gospel that it was Pilate that ordered this sign despite the Jewish leaders' objections. Pilate insisted and so the sign "Jesus, King of the Jews" was seen by onlookers as Christ died. In response, making sure the crowds wouldn't actually believe the sign, Jewish leaders mocked, saying

He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. Mt 27:42.

Yet, it is in their mocking that great truths are revealed. Jesus' qualifications are laid out. Let me explain: With the mocking voice of onlookers the Bible tells who Jesus really is. The religious leaders, the onlookers and even those nailed with side - all spoke better than they knew. Though offered in sarcasm these mockers gave Jesus titles that were deserved, accurate, the highest they could ever give him. Let's take a look at the qualifications that make Jesus an awesome rescuer...

Firstly, twice Jesus is referred to as the *King of the Jews* - verse 37 and 42. This was one of the titles of the Messiah whom the Old Testament prophecies declare would be the one to rescue God's people. As Messiah Jesus is certainly qualified to rescue.

Secondly, twice Jesus is referred to the *Son of God* - verse 39 and 43. And though the onlookers and religious leaders are being sarcastic, again they speak the truth. Where “Messiah” emphasizes the human nature of Jesus, the “Son of God” emphasizes his divine nature. Jesus is qualified to rescue because he is both human and divine.

Thirdly, twice Jesus is referred to as *saving* - verse 39 and 42. Now how did Jesus save others? Well the Greek word for “save” and “heal” are identical - it’s the context that indicates what English word we use. So when Jesus healed he also saved, when he saves he also heals. That Jesus healed and saved others, the onlookers now mock but they speak the truth more than they realise. For Jesus, both human and divine, the very Son of God, is able to rescue more than they could possibly imagine.

And so here on the voice of onlookers mocking in their ignorance we see Jesus is more than qualified to rescue, for he is...

- a. King of the Jews- fully human
- b. Son of God - fully divine
- c. Able to save - of which his healing and miracles seen in the gospels are a foretaste and his resurrection a confirmation.

3. What did it cost our rescuer?

Having looked at our need for rescue and Jesus qualifications to rescue, what did it cost him? For the brave policemen who jumped in the choppy seas he put his life in danger. Fortunately he wasn’t injured but got very cold and wet. It also cost taxpayers, for the Eagle helicopter is expensive to operate. And though noone begrudges the kayakers, especially since they had the right gear and did the right thing, their rescue cost. So, What did our rescue cost Jesus?

Well two things. First, and most obvious, it cost him his life. Verse 50

And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.
Matthew 27:50

Notice Jesus died with a loud voice, not a whimper, nor a last desperate gasp. No, he died in his time and on his terms. Though his physical suffering was grim Jesus is Lord - even in death.

Yet, it’s not the physical suffering that cost Christ the most. Not at all. There’s something that cost him more. And this deeper cost, this greater suffering, is found the only words Jesus spoke during his crucifixion - the only words Matthew records. As such they are key to learning what’s at the centre of the cross. What are these words? Verse 46

About 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?”
Matthew 27:46

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Now a number of you will know Jesus is quoting the first line in Psalm 22. And that in Jesus day’s they didn’t number the Psalms like we do today. They identified them by their first line. So Jesus is referring to the whole of Psalm 22 - which is amazing. If we had time we could go through Psalm 22 and you’d be amazed at how accurately it describes the physical suffering of Jesus. But today, just the first verse. What’s Jesus saying here? Why is this worse than his physical suffering?

Well to rescue us he had to take all our sin and brokenness on himself. He’s saying, “Look Douglas, you are under Satan’s dominion. You’re trapped by your sin. You’re broken. You can’t fix yourself. Let me take all your sin and brokenness from you”. And he does! I’m set free! But not Jesus. Because he took my sin, and yours, God had to turn his back on Jesus. God is holy. Jesus became sin. You see, instead of God turning his back on me because of my sin, he turned his back on Jesus for my sin. Jesus was abandoned by God and died alone - and it was me that put him there. No wonder Jesus cried “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” It cost Jesus what was most precious to him - his relationship with his Father. This is the great agony of the passion.

This is why Jesus is qualified to rescue, not only because he was King of the Jews, Son of Man and the one who saves - but because he chose to be rejected by his Father that you and I might be rescued.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21

Why? In the words of Jesus himself

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. John 10:10

Jesus came that we might be rescued into abundant, eternal and wonderful life.

Now I want to finish with a testimony. Someone who used to be in under the dominion of darkness, under the devil’s thumb. But now - because of the cross - he has been rescued into the abundant life Jesus promised. The testimony is that of Bear Grylls that he shares as part of Alpha. As you listen too his words notice the underlining narrative of the video images.

Play Bear Grylls video clip