

The rescue mission

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[0 : 00] Thank you.

Now John's Gospel. There are many milestones in life. I hit one a few years ago. It's one I'm not proud of.

I had to buy a garden shed. Age is catching up with me. But one of the most enduring advertising campaigns in recent years has been Ron Seal.

It does exactly what it says on the tin. So if like me you have a garden shed, you want to stain it and weatherproof it, then you buy Ron Seal.

Stain and weatherproof for garden sheds. It says exactly what it does. It does exactly what it says on the tin. And so John is writing his Gospel, his good news about Jesus, some 50 years after the events.

[1 : 26] And why is he writing? Well, chapter 20 tells us that he writes so that we will know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing in him we will have life.

He writes so that we will know that Jesus is the Christ. Well, who is this Christ? Well, the whole of the Old Testament is the key.

The Old Testament tells us who the Christ is. From Genesis 3, 15, when man rebels against God, and the curse of death comes upon mankind, God immediately promises a Saviour, a Messiah, a Christ, who will rescue us from death.

And so it's no surprise that all the way through John's Gospel, he tells us over and over again that the events of Jesus' life, his miracles, his teachings, all the events that happen are what?

Are to fulfil Scripture, to fulfil the Old Testament Christ, God's promised Saviour. And so John's Gospel is rooted in this promise from the Old Testament.

[2 : 42] But here we have Jesus in this passage. He is nearing his death. He is nearing the end of his earthly life.

He's just raised Lazarus, and everyone is talking about him. It's like EastEnders, the catch. Everyone is talking about it. Well, everyone is talking about Jesus.

The crowds are talking about him. And then we have the crowd saying, is he going to come to the feast? Is he going to come? Did you hear what he did to Lazarus?

Were you there? Yeah, it was amazing. And then we have the priests and the Pharisees, and they're scheming.

They're scheming to kill Jesus. Everyone is talking about him. And so this evening, as Jesus is focused on his mission to be the Christ, to be the promised Saviour from the Old Testament, two questions arise that I want to deal with this evening.

[3 : 50] Firstly, as Jesus approaches his death, what is the point of a dead Saviour? What is the point of a dead Saviour? And secondly, what is the right response to Jesus?

What is the right response that we see here, and what is the right response for us? So firstly then, what is the point of a dead Saviour?

The Phantom of the Opera is a fantastic West End musical, and you walk in to the theatre, and the stage is black, and there's dry ice floating over the stage.

The house lights are very low. There's a huge chandelier on top of the ceiling, bigger than the chandelier that used to be here. The house lights go down. More dry ice floats across the stage.

The chandelier shakes, and then begins to slowly come down from the ceiling. And then the music kicks in. Bam! Bam-ba-ba-ba-bam!

[4 : 57] Bam-ba-ba-ba-bam! The atmosphere is set. The scene is set. No one's even walked onto the stage. No one has said anything, and yet the scene is set.

You know exactly where you are. And John does that for us here in this passage. Five times he makes reference to the Passover.

Either Passover or feast, the feast of the Passover. Five times in these 22 verses he makes reference to the Passover. What is the Passover?

Well, I have a friend who is Jewish, and I thought, well, I'll ask him. So I said, what is the Passover? And he said, that's easy. It's Moses.

It's the Exodus. It's God's rescue plan for his people. I said, well, what about the lamb? Because the lamb had to be sacrificed, and the blood put on the doorframe that protected the people from the curse of death, from the angel of death, and then was to rescue them.

[6 : 08] And he said, well, we don't sacrifice the lamb anymore, but what we have when we have the Passover feast, when we remember God's rescue, we have a lamb shank on the bone, on the table.

And that reminds us of the lamb that was sacrificed. And so John is setting a scene for us of God's rescue from the Old Testament.

And as we look on the stage, we see an Old Testament rescue scene. But it's not Moses that walks onto the stage. It's Jesus.

Jesus fulfilling the prophecy of the Messiah. Now, people's expectations for the Messiah, for the Christ, was for an all-conquering hero.

Someone who would kick out all their enemies and give them their land back again. And we have it here. When Jesus arrives in Jerusalem, what do the people do in verse 13?

[7 : 16] Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the king of Israel. And what do they do? They put palm trees down. Palm trees symbolizing the arrival of a king.

And for them, the king was the one who would kick out their enemies. But Jesus came to die. And it's all over this passage.

Death. From chapter 10, we have Jesus describing himself as the good shepherd who lays down his life. We then have the raising of Lazarus, Lazarus who had died.

We then have Mary anointing Jesus with this expensive perfume. Why? In verse 7, to prepare Jesus for his burial.

We have the Pharisees and the chief priests trying to kill Jesus. There is death all over this passage. Jesus came to die.

[8 : 20] In 1940, May, Germany invaded France and they did it so quickly that the British and the French troops ended up being trapped in the coastal port of Dunkirk.

Over 400,000 Allied troops trapped in Dunkirk waiting to be rescued from the sea. And one of those was Captain John Todd of the Royal Artillery.

And he wrote this in his diary on the 30th of May. As dawn broke and the army looked out to sea for rescue, he writes this in his diary.

No ships in sight. Something must have gone wrong. Something must have gone wrong. And when those disciples who were still there for the crucifixion and the followers of Jesus looked upon him on the cross with nails through his hands and nails through his feet as he died in pain and agony, this was their saviour.

Something must have gone wrong. Imagine a classroom scene and you ask the question, what is the point of a dead saviour?

[9 : 43] Silence. Nothing. You see, there is no point of a dead saviour. A dead saviour can do nothing. But John in his gospel in chapter 1, twice in chapter 1, he has John the Baptist heralding Jesus as, behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Behold, the Lamb of God. And we ask the question to the classroom again, what is the point of a dead lamb?

What is the point of a dead lamb? A hand goes up. Moses, what is the point of a dead lamb? It's God's rescue.

It's God's rescue from death, but not just God's rescue from death. It's God's rescue to the place where God wants his people to be.

And for Moses and the people, that was the land. Now the disciples, they understand this in verse 16. His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him.

[11 : 08] They understand when they compared what had been written in the Old Testament with what had been done. Because Jesus did exactly what it said on the tin.

He was the Christ. He was the Messiah. He is the promised saviour who came to die, to set us free, to take away death, and to take us to the place where God wants us to be.

You, me, the whole world, in heaven with him. That is where God wants us to be. Jesus is the Christ.

There will be no other like him. What is the point of a dead saviour? Secondly then, having established that Jesus is the Christ, what is the right response to him?

And here in this passage we have real people. If you happen to have been born 2,000 years ago and had a little apartment in Jerusalem, this could have been you. These were real people with real reactions to the events of the day, almost like a soap opera.

[12 : 26] News of Lazarus had seeped through and people were coming out to find Jesus. Will he come to Jerusalem? Is he going to come? Is he going to risk coming along?

people wanted to see Jesus. But there is belief. In chapter 11, verse 45, many of the Jews who had seen Lazarus being raised, they believed in Jesus.

They believed because of what they had seen. And then we have again, in chapter 12, verse 17, the crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead, continued to bear witness.

They continued to bear witness. They had simple belief, but friends, simple belief is still belief. If you are a new Christian, or if you are thinking about what it means to follow Jesus, but you're looking ahead and thinking, well, it's going to take me years to learn what it's like to follow Jesus.

Look at these people here. Most of them had never even met Jesus, but just by hearing what he had done, they believed. Simple belief is still belief. But their expectation is of a king.

[13 : 56] They haven't fully comprehended yet who Jesus really is. Their expectation is for a conquering hero. Now, God, he doesn't always do things the way that we would like him to do.

You want this to happen in your life, but this happens. You want this job, but God's plan is for something else. And often, initially, it's not always what we would like.

God doesn't always do things to our plan, but he does things to his plan, and his plan is perfect. And Jesus is sticking to the plan. He is sticking to the mission.

And hence, we have chapter 12, verse 15. Jesus is not riding in on a war horse, all conquering. He says, this is, fear not, daughter of Zion, behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt.

That is what the Old Testament said the Christ had to be. And Jesus was doing it. So the crowd has some belief.

[15 : 10] So why don't the disciples understand, in verse 16, they don't understand these things at first. What is their problem? And you're thinking, come on guys, you spent three years with Jesus, you've seen all of the miracles, you've had them explained to you, you've heard his teaching, you've had three years, you've eaten with him, you've walked with him, you've seen, you've heard everything, but still you don't understand.

Why? Why don't they understand? Well, they don't understand because they've spent three years with Jesus, and he has been teaching them the full mission, the full rescue plan.

They've been getting everything. And here, the rescue plan is not complete. It's still to be completed. Jesus will die, but he will be resurrected.

And only when Jesus has fulfilled the full prophecy of the Christ, of the Saviour, do they understand. And what happens to them once they understand?

After the teaching has sunk in and transforms their lives? they establish the church. They teach, they disciple, they go out at risk of their own lives to spread the good news.

[16 : 42] And we sit here today as testimony to what they did. We follow the apostles' teaching, these disciples, what they learned from Jesus, what they understood.

They passed down. They taught. So these people in the crowd who had a simple belief, they needed to be taught. And these disciples were the people who did that.

And if you've maybe been a Christian for, I don't know, 40, 50, 60 years, and you're thinking, what can I give to the church? Well, you have 40 or 50 or 60, 70 years of walking faithfully with Jesus, of following faithfully the teaching.

teaching. And that is an incredible encouragement to younger people. I know myself, just from spending time with older people in this congregation, just what an encouragement and what an example that is.

So keep on going. Keep on turning up. Because in that, you are showing that you are faithful to the sound teaching. But the Pharisees and the chief priests, I mean, they are all over the place here.

[18 : 07] They're interested in only themselves. In 1148, they're worried that if they let Jesus go on like this, then the Romans will come and take away both the place and the nation.

They have a problem with Lazarus. People are turning to Jesus because of Lazarus. So they think, let's kill Lazarus and stop people going to Jesus.

They don't realise that Jesus has just raised Lazarus from the dead. They're planning to kill him. They don't seem to get it that Jesus could just simply raise him back to life again. They see Jesus as a threat.

Can you imagine taking the Pharisees to Kelvin Grove art galleries and the beautiful artwork and all the sculptures on show and they see the stone stairs and they say, that's a health and safety risk.

And they see the beautiful windows and they see, I wonder who washes them. And they feel the temperature and they say, I wonder how the air conditioning works.

[19 : 14] You see, they are missing the point. They just don't get it. Here is the son of God, the Messiah, raising the dead. And all they can see is problems with their own status.

and if following Jesus won't be good for your prestige in life, and if you are thinking of yourself and what it might mean for you to follow Jesus, you may lose friends, you may fall out with family, you may miss out on a promotion at work.

In some places in the world, following Jesus may mean you will be killed. Still, you need to put that aside and focus on the person of Jesus because you need a saviour.

You need to repent and turn to him. But ironically, the Pharisees, they actually hit on the mission of Jesus.

In verse 19, chapter 12, so the Pharisees said to one another, you see that you're gaining nothing. Look, the whole world has gone after him.

[20 : 32] That is the rescue mission of Jesus, that the whole world will go after him. But they just don't get it.

They have missed the point, haven't they? They should be worshipping Jesus. And they are worshipping literally at the feet of Jesus.

Putting this ointment that would have cost a year's wages and pouring it on the feet of Jesus. Wiping his feet with her hair. An act of humiliation for her.

But she doesn't care. She doesn't care who is looking on, who says anything. She just comes to Jesus, recognises who he is and worships at his feet.

And that is us tonight. We don't care what the world thinks of us. We have come to worship at the feet of Jesus. Jesus. And Judas' response is like someone breaking into your car.

[21 : 44] Hey! What do you think you're doing? Stop it! As Mary pours this ointment over her feet. But he's a thief. He's not thinking of worshipping Jesus.

He is only thinking of his own financial gain. And Jesus' response to Judas, leave her alone.

What a saviour. Leave her alone. Friends, on judgment day, when we stand before God, each of us, Satan will be screaming, give her to me.

give him to me. Give Brian to me. Each one of you, Satan will be screaming at God, give them to me.

Because Satan promises eternal death. Jesus promises eternal life for all who believe in him.

[22 : 54] And Jesus will say to Satan, leave her alone. Leave him alone. He is mine. She is mine.

And they will be with me forever. Friends, hallelujah. What a saviour. What a rescuer. Let's pray.

Lord, we come before you tonight as people, just ordinary people, living in this world. But Lord, we thank you that you sent Jesus to die for us, that you rose him from the grave, so that we might have that free gift of eternal life.

And Lord, as you offer that to us tonight, we pray that we would hold on to that and hold on to that assurance that you have rescued us and that you will take us to the place that you want us to be, in heaven with you.

Amen. Amen.