

UNEDITED DRAFT

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

INTRO: Today I want to tell you about the greatest rescue story ever told. But what's unique about this rescue story is that it is also *your* rescue story.

Everybody loves to hear a good rescue story. Almost every movie has an element of danger and rescue. In fact, you could make that the subtitle of almost every movie, couldn't you? Star Wars: Danger and Rescue. Jurassic World – danger and rescue. Avengers: Danger and Rescue. Inside Out: Danger and rescue. Hunger Games – danger and rescue. The Martian: Danger and Rescue. Even Pitch Perfect 2: Danger and Rescue... it works! That's pretty much what it's about. We love these stories.

Now, to have a danger and rescue story. There are four essential elements:

- 1) There must be someone in danger.
- 2) There must be a knowledge of the hopelessness of the danger one is in or rescue will be refused and the person will simply try to save themselves.
- 3) There must be someone willing *and able* to rescue.
- 4) There must be rescue equipment.

Imagine a person floating down a river on a hot summer day. The person doesn't know it, but up ahead is a waterfall with rocks below meaning certain death. There's our dangerous situation. However, the person is unaware so there can be no rescue yet. All of a sudden a person on shore screams out to the person, "50 feet ahead is a 100 foot waterfall with jagged rocks below! 20 people have already gone over the falls today and are dead! You have just entered a current that will prevent you from swimming to shore in time." Now the person knows of the danger and their own inability rescue themselves. (3) The person on shore shouts, "Since I've arrived, I have rescued every person I've warned and I will save you too! We have the person who is willing and able to rescue. But with no rescue equipment, there will still be no rescue. (4) He throws out a life preserver tied to a rope. "Grab on and I'll pull you to safety" Ah, the equipment is in place as well. The man is pulled to safety!

So with that in mind, let's listen with great interest to the greatest danger and rescue story ever told... and whether you recognize it or not... it's YOUR story.

Titus 3:3-7 At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.

***1) So I said the first thing I said we need for there to be a rescue is someone in danger. I said this was your story. You are the one in danger! Paul reminds Titus of their condition before they were rescued and it was a dangerous situation. And what he describe is your condition as well apart from God's rescue. We were *foolish*. (Ignorant of God's will and way.) *Disobedient*: living contrary to the will of the almighty God. (Which is foolish... these are all tied together. *Deceived*: *Enslaved*. *Living in malice*. *Envy* *Being hated and hating others*.

Extremely dangerous! And the Bible is filled with similar warnings about our extremely dangerous spiritual condition.

- Romans 8:7 “The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so.”
- Colossians 1:21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.
- Colossians 3:5-7 What... belongs to your earthly nature [is]: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.
- John 8:34 Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.”
- 2 Tim 3:2-5 People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, 4 treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power.
- Ephesians 2:1-3 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.
- 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God?
- Revelation 6:16-17 They called to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?”

When we start to come to grips with just how dangerous our spiritual condition is... when a person senses God’s hand is already in the process of coming down on them... we must also understand that we are unable to rescue ourselves.

***2) There must be a knowledge of the hopelessness of the danger one is in or rescue will be refused and the person will simply try to save themselves.

He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done.

So before we get to the dramatic rescue, we need to understand that we cannot rescue ourselves. The situation is far beyond our control. We can’t try harder, do more good, do more right and thereby rescue ourselves from the impending wrath of God.

First of all, the damage has already been done. We’ve already been disobedient which means we were already accountable before God for our wickedness and rebellion. We can’t go back in time and undo the crimes we’ve already done.

Second, it’s even impossible for us to be perfect and holy from here on out. Even with our best efforts, we would still say words we regret. We would still sometimes fail to put God first in our hearts and lives. We would still struggle with our sinful pride. We would still have moments of doubt in God’s power and mercy. We would still be dissatisfied with our possessions and position in life. We haven’t been perfect. And we won’t be perfect. **WE CAN’T FIX THIS.**

We are in dire need of rescue! The situation is critical! The stakes couldn't be higher! The eternal life of your soul is on the line. If you are not rescued, it means certain, eternal punishment in hell. Who will save us from this body of death!?

Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.
But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.

“Epiphany” means “to make manifest; to reveal; to make evident.” We celebrate the events in Jesus’ life when it became evident that he was not just a man... not just some rabbi or religious guru, but rather he is the rescuer, the Savior, the Christ. If we had a had a church service this past Wednesday on the day of Epiphany, we would have looked at the story of the wisemen coming to worship and give gifts to Christ the baby king – one of the first times it became evident that this was the Savior and he was the Savior of all nations.

Today in our Gospel lesson we heard about the baptism of our Lord. His baptism wasn't for the forgiveness of his sins, but because he was our substitute and under our sins. We need baptism, and so our Substitute needed baptism on our behalf. And at that baptism, Jesus was set apart for his work as rescuer by the Father in heaven who declared, “This is my Son whom I love, with him I am well pleased!” The Spirit descended upon him, gifting him with all that would be needed to be our Substitute and Savior. What we witness is the dramatic launch of the great rescue operation that would save us from the enormous danger of our overlord Satan, and from the wickedness and rebellion of Sin, and the consequence and punishment of Death. With Jesus’ baptism, the game is on in the highest –stakes rescue operation of time and eternity!

So why does God do this? In human rescue operations, the reason is often in the person being rescued. The person being rescued is important. Or the person rescued is worthy in some way. But the reason for God's rescue has nothing to do with us, for there is nothing in us worthy of his rescue. But here is what the text says: *Kindness* of God. *Love* of God: same word from which we get “philanthropy... love of man.” God has a love or affection for us which moved him to rescue us. *Mercy*: means he saw our helpless condition and was moved to help. Later we'll also see that he declares us not-guilty by his *grace*: This word means he gives us the opposite of what we deserve. God rescues us because of what is in him, not because of what is in us.

Who saves us? “But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

We don't save ourselves. But rather the text says “God saved us... by the Holy Spirit... through Jesus Christ.” God saves us by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, delivered into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ God's own Son rescues us from our helpless condition. He did so at great personal cost. Jesus had to put himself in harm's way. He himself lived out his life perfect and blameless despite the endless temptations. He should have been in no danger with his heavenly Father. But his perfect life counted for us. And he took responsibility for every one of our sins – crimes that should have put us in imminent danger of God's eternal wrath and punishment. The righteous fist of God was coming down on us – when it was diverted and instead came down full force on Jesus. The physical suffering of Jesus was horrible. The spiritual

suffering of Jesus is incomprehensible for us – separated from his Father with whom he had enjoyed close fellowship for all eternity. He died there on the cross because our sins deserved it.

And he did it. He completed the rescue mission. He declared from the cross “It is finished!” And his resurrection on the third day guarantees it. In Christ, you are rescued from sin, guilt, and death. The danger is gone!

4) But what is the rescue equipment here? It is the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. God pours out his grace and pulls us to himself using some equipment. It is Holy Word. And it is Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. When the good news of Jesus is proclaimed, the life preserver is cast out to the person in grave danger! The Holy Spirit uses that good news to create faith in a person’s heart which is a person’s connection to Christ who saves them! Baptism does the exact same thing the Word does. When a person is baptized, the life preserver is thrown out to them. The Holy Spirit works through baptism to create that connection to the Lord Jesus, and Christ rescues them. Without the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, there is no rescue equipment! Here is the one in danger. There is the rescuer. But with no Gospel, there is still no rescue. **He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior.**

But when a person receives the Gospel in Word and Baptism, they are justified by God’s grace. Justified is a legal term meaning, “To be declared not guilty.” With guilt removed and sins forgiven, the person is delivered. And the result? **We are heirs having the hope of eternal life.** We are rescued from death and eternal wrath and destruction, and instead we are heirs of the Kingdom of God, inheriting all that belongs to God, and it is a gift that we receive and belongs to us, not just for a while; not just a few decades... but it is a gift that is ours for all eternity!

Can you imagine a more dramatic rescue?! And this is your story. No, you’re not in a river heading toward a waterfall. Instead, you are going through life in sin and rebellion. It isn’t a rocky waterfall ahead... it is the eternal, righteous wrath of God. Today God has alerted you of your dangerous situation. And good news! There is rescue through the Lord Jesus Christ. His perfect life and innocent death on your behalf makes him your perfect rescuer. And so through Word and Sacrament, the life preserver is cast out to you. Believe and be baptized and you will be rescued! Cling to Jesus and know that through him you are declared not guilty, you are spared from certain destruction and instead you are given as a gift the riches of life without end!

Rejoice in your rescue story all the days of your life. Remember your baptism daily because through that washing, God gave you new life and rescued you from sin and death. This rescue story is one worth sharing!
Amen.