

The Rescuer

Acts 19:23-41, 2 Cor 1:8-11

It's rather like the person saved from a collapsed building. There they are, almost crushed under the rubble and just as they despair of life, the rescuers arrive with their search dogs and thermal image camera and find him and bring him to safety.

We all have times in our lives where we need to be rescued. Sometimes it's the case literally, other times circumstances just seem to crowd in and our troubles are as I described them last week – they are things that pressurise us, squeeze us, crush us.

That was Paul's experience at Ephesus when he and his team found themselves in the middle of a riot and they were at the centre! (Acts 19) And now Paul brings us to the situation where he felt crushed and despaired of life. Actually he uses a much stronger word for crush here. He did really feel he was in a life or death situation. Some have suggested that the event to which he was referring seems more drastic than Luke's account of the riot at Ephesus. In truth we don't know, but he was caught up on the wrong side of a riot! Whatever the event he felt as if they were going to die and seemed to have little hope.

When we believe that we are doing the right thing, serving the Lord, seeking to obey Him, following His will, acting with integrity, we are always hopeful that the blessings will follow. We're on a high because we know we're doing the right thing! Then a crushing situation arises and we wonder what's gone wrong. Paul found himself in that place, thinking it was the end. What went wrong? Nothing.

IN those very dark moments they learned in a very practical way how God is a deliverer, a rescuer, a saviour. As Paul puts it, when they felt that death was upon them and that they were in an impossible situation, they were reminded that God raises the dead. He makes the impossible possible. And that's what happened and they lived to tell the tale.

God is by nature a deliverer, a rescuer. That's what Paul is trying to put across in this passage. I've often found the God's rescue comes in the strangest of ways – ways I would never have thought. I remember that once I was working at a school and everything went wrong; the job was a disaster, so much so that it made me ill. I prayed but there never seemed to be a clear answer and way forward. Finally I came to the point of despair. Where was the way out? One morning felt so ill that I rang in sick. It was on that day off that the phone rang. It was one of my old bosses. He was starting in a new college and needed people he could rely on. Was I available to come in and have a chat? I knew what it meant. I was being head-hunted. I may have been ill that day, but two hours later I was in his office. I never looked back.

Why do we end up in these places where we feel stressed, crushed, pressurized. Because we have a God who wants us to rely on Him never mind what, even when we have no idea what He's up to. Paul was rescued on many occasions, but there were others where he went through painful experiences, then came the occasion where there wasn't rescue and his work

was over. But through all these things God used him powerfully to change lives and change the world. Yet through all of Paul's pressures he could say this: "*He who rescued us from so deadly a peril will continue to rescue us; on him we have set our hope that he will rescue us again.*"

God is our rescuer. What does being a rescuer mean. The word for rescue here is interesting. It's *rhuomai* which to rescue, preserve, deliver, particularly in the context of rescuing for oneself or one's own ends. God rescued Paul – delivered him so he may continue to serve. Paul uses the word much more commonly in the redemptive sense e.g. Col 1:13 *13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves*

1 Thess 1:10 ... *Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.*

2 Tim 4:18 *The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom*

What's interesting about it's use is the context of rescue from evil forces. It underlines the idea that behind troubles that we have in life is the spiritual battle that we entered into on trusting and following Jesus. We're not immune from the problems of life, quite the opposite. We are under attack and we have a God who addresses that attack and delivers us from it. The troubles we feel and the attack may be two different things. We may be sick (a natural occurrence) but the spiritual attack may well be on our minds not out bodies, as it tries to lower our spirits. The deliverance may not bring our healing (whether that happens or not is in the sovereign purposes of God) but it certainly can break the attack on our spirit – it's something we can reasonably ask for and expect when our spirits feel crushed as Paul did. He knew from past experience that we have a God who delivers, rescues. He did that for Paul and He will do that for us, but expect His rescue to be in ways we never thought.

It reminds me of the story about the man whose house was caught in a flood and he was left in the upstairs of the house. Some rescuers came in a boat but he refused saying that he was a Christian. "I have prayed and the Lord will deliver me." The waters continued to rise and he ended up seated on the roof of the house. A lifeboat arrived. He refused again: "I have prayed and the Lord will deliver me." The water continued to rise and he ended up on the chimney pot. A helicopter arrived but as the winch man was lowered he again refused: "I have prayed and the Lord will deliver me." The waters rose and he drowned. Being a Christian he went to heaven and met Jesus. "Lord, I prayed for rescue but you let me drown. Why?" The Lord replied "I sent two boats and a helicopter, what more did you want?"

We have a rescuer, a deliverer. When we need rescue, it's there. Pray that you will have the discernment to see the lifeboat and climb in!