

## **RESCUE – A Savior born Unto Us**

**Question:** He was born to be a Savior. Have you received His rescue?  
Luke 2:10-11

### **VIDEO BEGINS**

He was, by all accounts, a wild man. John, the baptizer. He was no respecter of persons, and he didn't sugar coat it. But then again, he wasn't the first.

- Noah's message from the steps of the Ark was not, "Something good is going to happen to you!"
- Jeremiah was not tossed into the pit for preaching, "I'm OK, You're OK!"
- Daniel wasn't thrown in the lions' den for telling people, "Possibility thinking will move mountains!"

No...Biblical history is littered with men who filled with the Spirit of God delivered a very unpopular word –

- Moses to Pharaoh
- Elijah to Ahab
- Samuel to Saul
- Nathan to David
- Isaiah to the nations
- Jeremiah to Jerusalem
- Shadrach, Meshach, Abed-nego to Nebuchadnezzar
- Amos to Israel's self-serving High Priest
- Jonah to Ninevah
- Malachi to Judah

Now...John the baptizer, "to the crowds who came out to the crowds that came out to be baptized by Him..."

"You brood of vipers!  
Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?  
Bear fruits in keeping with REPENTANCE!"

REPENTANCE! Now there's a word we're not sure we like. "*Repent? Of what?* Hey, I don't need to change? I'm doing just fine. I mean, if I could just get a few people around me to shape up, then life would really be OK. Personally? I'm good the way I am."

Here we are in the Christmas Season. Happy days to celebrate the birth of someone called Jesus, the Christ. The Lord! Someone of whom the angel said, "Here's the JOYFUL NEWS. Unto you is born TODAY in the city of David **a Savior!**" The word means "Someone who rescues someone else from danger or bondage."

Allow me to ask you something: **Do you think, do you believe that, you (personally) need**

**a SAVIOR?** I'm guessing that when I ask this, immediately 3 kinds of responses happen.

- There are some who are honestly saying in their hearts, **"I'm not sure.** I've never really thought about it. Frankly, I'm just trying to make my way through. A Savior? Not sure."
- There are others who are answering, **"No, I don't.** I don't need God, and the way I figure it, He doesn't need me. I'm doing just fine on my own, thanks."
- A third group here would say, **"Yes, I do.** There was a time when I didn't think so...but I've come to realize there's no way I want to handle all that's ahead without a Savior...without Jesus."

Christmas is about the arrival of a SAVIOR. Someone who came to rescue EVERY PERSON. So I'd like to set before you a coin of truth – a truth that is like a coin. A truth that has two sides.

**SIDE ONE:**  
**When repentance clears the way**  
**the Savior rescues.**

**OTHER SIDE:**  
**Unless repentance clears the way**  
**You're on your own.**

Now as we take a Bible in our hands, I'd like to show what happens when REPENTANCE clears the way, and the Savior is given the opportunity to do what he came to do...to RESCUE.

**JOHN THE BAPTIST'S MINISTRY OF REPENTANCE** – Luke 3:1-6 (p.858)

**Luke 3** In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, <sup>2</sup>during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, **the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah** in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup>And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>4</sup>As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet,<sup>i</sup>

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness:  
'Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight.  
<sup>5</sup>Every valley shall be filled,  
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,  
and the crooked shall become straight,  
and the rough places shall become level ways,  
<sup>6</sup>and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

As you may know, John was Jesus' distant cousin, a boy born just a few months ahead of Jesus, and a young man destined to push the envelope. His call from God was to "go before" Jesus, a "forerunner." Like a servant who would run ahead of a monarch's entourage to announce that

someone-you-can't-afford-to-ignore was about to come through. John's life and ministry were fulfilling Old Testament prophecy which predicted God would send a witness ahead of His Messiah to wake people up and give them an opportunity to prepare.

How were they to prepare? Look at Luke 3:4f. "Straighten the pathway, fill in the valleys, level out the mountains." Prepare a clean, straight, level pathway for the monarch to come through and come in." Ancient oriental practice sent crews out ahead to clear the path of obstacles and stones and rough places so that nothing would restrict the coming of the royal.

John's point? Whatever is in the way in your life from receiving the Savior...clean it up, clear it out. In other words, **REPENT**. And will you notice (Luke 3:2) that this word, this message, came to John *from God*.

Do you have the courage to really listen to God through John the Baptist this morning? Or let me put it this way: *What are the obstacles in your heart's road that keep you from inviting the Savior into your life?*

**ILLUSTRATION:** You know, I've had the immense privilege of serving my Lord as a pastor for almost 40 years. Over those years, I've personally interacted with tens of thousands of people on all kinds of questions and subjects about God. And it never fails. When I ask people who now belong to Jesus what it was that kept them – for too long – from coming to Christ, I get one answer over and over and over again. **PRIDE**. "I was too proud." "I didn't want God interfering with me." "I insisted that what I already thought was true." "I was self-centered...it was all about me."

- Martin Luther: "PRIDE is the head, life, and very nature of all sin"
- C.S. Lewis wrote and commented extensively on pride, simply because it kept him...for so long...away from God. He said,
  - ◆ "Pride is spiritual cancer: it eats up the very possibility of love, or contentment, or even common sense. . . .The real black, diabolical Pride comes when you look down on others so much that you do not care what they think of you."
  - ◆ "The Christians are right: it is pride which has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and in every family since the world began."
  - ◆ "Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind."<sup>ii</sup>

In other words -- to echo John the Baptist--PRIDE is something from which to repent. To willingly make a U-Turn. It's a rock in the road. It's a mountain that needs to be leveled...so that someone who can RESCUE you can come through, and in.

**JESUS' RESCUE FROM DANGER** Now, if I may, let's allow Dr. Luke to show us in His Gospel

account how Jesus rescued 3 very different people from danger

## 1<sup>st</sup> - A woman of the city: a love gushes in worship

**Luke 7:36-50** (p.864 ESV)

<sup>36</sup> One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at table. <sup>37</sup> And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, <sup>38</sup> and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment.

<sup>39</sup> Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." <sup>40</sup> And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher."

<sup>41</sup> "A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. <sup>42</sup> When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" <sup>43</sup> Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly."

<sup>44</sup> Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. <sup>45</sup> You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. <sup>46</sup> You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. <sup>47</sup> Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." <sup>48</sup> And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." <sup>49</sup> Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" <sup>50</sup> And he said to the woman, "**Your faith has saved you; go in peace.**"

To me, the most fascinating moment in this encounter is verse 44. Jesus asks Simon, the righteous Pharisee, if he "sees this woman." Are you kidding me? She's the *elephant in the room!* And yet Jesus asks Simon not to turn away, or to throw her out, but to take a good look at her. Because she's the only one in the room who's been rescued by the Savior. The only one in the room who's been forgiven of everything. The only one in the room whose guilt and shame has been taken out of her life because, in faith, she looked to and believed in Jesus.

Jesus wanted Simon to know that she wasn't washing and kissing his feet IN ORDER to be saved; she was washing and kissing his feet and worshipping BECAUSE she was experiencing her rescue. "Look at her simple faith," Jesus challenges Simon. "I've forgiven her. I've rescued her from her sin. I've taken away her GUILT and given her peace."

### **SIDE ONE:**

**When repentance clears the way, the Savior rescues.**

### **OTHER SIDE:**

**Unless repentance clears the way, you're on your own.**

## 2<sup>nd</sup> - A man of success: a heart eager with grace

**Luke 19:1-10** (p.878 ESV)

<sup>1</sup> He entered Jericho and was passing through. <sup>2</sup> And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. <sup>3</sup> And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. <sup>4</sup> So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. <sup>5</sup> And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.” <sup>6</sup> So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully.

<sup>7</sup> And when they saw it, they all grumbled, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.” <sup>8</sup> And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.” <sup>9</sup> And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. <sup>10</sup> For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

One of the things Luke’s Gospel constantly reminds us of is that Jesus was constantly being criticized for hanging out with sinners.

**Luke 5:30** And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”

**Luke 7:34** The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’

**Luke 15:1-2** Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

Here (wouldn’t you know it?) the SAVIOR does it again. This time with an accomplished professional businessman, who has made his first “mill” and is working on his second. He’s as successful as it gets...but he’s empty. So empty he climbs a tree just to get a look at Jesus.

You know the fascinating thing about a Sycamore tree is that you can hide pretty well up in its long, sturdy branches...but those branches also bear fruit. There was a reason Jesus passed by that tree, a reason why he stopped and called out to a hiding Zaccheus sitting their midst the fruit. Despite all his success, despite all his money...Zaccheus needed to be rescued. From his sin, from his greed, from his dishonesty, from his selfishness. And when he climbed down out of that tree, his repentance cleared the way.

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### 3<sup>rd</sup> - A criminal at the end: a hope for eternity

#### Luke 23:35 (p.884 ESV)

<sup>35</sup> And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!” <sup>36</sup> The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine <sup>37</sup> and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” <sup>38</sup> There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.”

<sup>39</sup> One of the criminals who were hanged railed (εβλασφημημι “blasphemed”) at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” <sup>40</sup> But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? <sup>41</sup> And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” <sup>42</sup> And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” <sup>43</sup> And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

The contrast between the two criminals who hung on either side of Jesus is stunning.

One of them (vs. 38) Luke says “railed” at him. The word Luke uses is εβλασφημημι, “blasphemed”. This criminal is not making a serious request. He’s mocking. The word means to employ language profanely so as to damage another person. His dying gasps are used to dismiss Jesus. As God the Father displays his majestic love by offering up His Son as the Lamb which takes the sin of the world, all this criminal can muster is a faithless, bitter mock.

**ILLUS:** By the way, that’s what you are doing when you belittle Jesus the Christ, when you dismiss and describe him –either casually or purposefully--as something less than he is. You join the mockers. You join the chorus of those who deny the truth and speak harm against the reputation of God’s Son, God’s Messiah.

But, the other criminal gets it. He uses his last gasps to simply ask for salvation. Simple as it gets, “Jesus (name means “God saves”) REMEMBER ME when you come into your Kingdom.” Someday...some day ahead, Jesus...don’t forget me. My only hope, my last hope...is the chance that you will REMEMBER ME.

And Jesus...the SAVIOR...responds with more than he could ever imagine. “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.” Quite honestly, every one here is either one side of the cross or the other. Which “criminal in need of rescue” are you?

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## CONCLUSION

C.S. Lewis' classic work remains a small book entitled *Mere Christianity* (1943). Lewis deeply understood that you could not effectively talk about the truthfulness of Christian faith without talking about what keeps people from realizing they need a Savior. So he set forth this:

In God you come against something which is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself. Unless you know God as that—and therefore, know yourself as nothing in comparison—you do not know God at all. As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you. ... Pride is a spiritual cancer: it eats up the very possibility of love or contentment or even common sense.

If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think, tell him the first step. The first step is to realize that one is proud. And a biggish step too. At least, nothing whatever can be done before it. If you think you are not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed.<sup>iii</sup>

**Jesus' rescue always replaces pride with the JOY of Salvation.**

**What needs to be cleared away so that salvation can enter in?**

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<sup>i</sup> Isaiah 40:1 Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

<sup>2</sup> Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

<sup>3</sup> A voice cries:

"In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

<sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.

<sup>5</sup> And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

<sup>ii</sup> from [http://www.cslewisinstitute.org/webfm\\_send/885](http://www.cslewisinstitute.org/webfm_send/885)

<sup>iii</sup> from <http://www.christianity9to5.org/pride-the-great-sin/>