



There are many great stories of rescue and of bravery. You hear of such stories and they always capture your attention. After all, don't you have to pause to wonder, "Who could be so brave?" You might consider those heroes and think to yourself, "Would I do the same if I were in their shoes?" You hear of military bravery as one soldier holds off enemy fire long enough for his comrades to make it to safety, only to himself die in the end. You hear of plane passengers selflessly going after plane hijackers and terrorists in order to stop a great catastrophe from getting even worse. You hear of school teachers facing the deadly gunfire to save the lives of their students, like the teacher at Sandy Hook elementary who stood up to the gunman and rescued her students. Sometimes I have to wonder, "What would my knee-jerk spur of the moment reaction be? Or would I be the every-one-for-themselves type of guy or the captain-goes-down-with-his-ship type guy?" When it comes to our greatest danger, we don't have to worry about how we would respond. We only need ask how our rescuer would respond. How would God respond to our greatest danger? The writer to the Hebrews describes for us how God was willing to put himself into a position of suffering in order to rescue us. Today we see from Hebrews 2 just how far he is willing to go in order to rescue us. Our brother from Bethlehem is our hero from heaven.

The writer to the Hebrews starts out in this reading by explaining to us God's plan. To begin with we are told Jesus' act of rescue is all part of his plan. "It was fitting..." the writer to the Hebrews records. All that takes place with God's rescue is not chaotic and a desperate last-second ploy to save. He didn't scramble to think of a rescue plan and quickly carry it out. Everything that took place in his rescue was carried out according to a carefully devised plan. He is "the author of salvation." The plan and its project were so important to him they were outlined from eternity.

His plan is summarized for us here as a rescue operation. His goal: "bringing many sons to glory." Our perilous situation is implied in this short expression. It is not one of glory. It is one of imprisonment and of fear. He describes us as people in bondage. Our bondage is one that is brought upon us by our enemy and by our own fault. The devil is a liar and was from the beginning of creation. And he is a fallen angel who is a desperately wicked spiritual being. And he is a murderer, seeking to drag down with him all who he can. All who are born of flesh and blood, every one of the human race, lives in bondage and fear of him. As Martin Luther put it in his hymn, "The old evil foe, now means deadly woe, deep guile, and great might, are his dread arms in fight, on earth is not his equal." When tempted by him, our race fell. We took the bait with so little hesitation. We lost the glory given to us at Creation and have fallen away from it. Because of the devil there is only shame and fear for everyone born of Adam and Eve. Now we suffer as slaves to sin. That is our bondage.

And just look what it leads us to! Why are there wars? Why do terrorist attack planes? One human being takes a weapon designed to pulverize and destroy its target and aims it at another human being and pulls the trigger. Why does a young man take hold of a firearm and point it at youth and children and fire at them to kill them? Why does the ungodly parent abuse their child? Why does the ungodly child rebel against their loving parents? Because of our bondage to sin. We are slaves to sin. All of us are. The man who hates another in his heart is just as guilty as the man who acts out on his hate. The one who gives in to the temptation to gossip is just as destructive and guilty as the one who throws sticks and stones.

And even if our bondage to sin is not obvious to us, its effects are. The pains of our bondage to sin pile up. Our sins lead us to awful pains in this life. Abuse, trauma, guilt, shame, endless cravings that lead to more pain. These are some of the pains of our own bondage to sin. But that's the least of our worries! We live in fear of death. Death is the price we pay for our sin. Death is the gateway to our judgment before God. Death is when the very beginning of the price for sin is paid by the sinner. All our lives we live in fear of death. And Satan stands there smiling. He isn't in control of life and death. But his lies and his temptations hold the fear death over us.

So here is our picture: The whole human race lies behind these walls of imprisonment. And the impenetrable fortress of fear that surrounds us is as real as the death that awaits us. And within those walls we are in bondage: forced to follow Satan as our master, subject to him and serving him. Greed, hatred, lies, envy, deceit, fear, fits of rage, laziness, apathy -- we are born to be wretched creatures all our lives. We are in far worse a condition than any person in danger in any rescue story ever told. And there is no man who could ever come to save us.

So how does God respond? Isaiah 59 records God looking down on our pitiful state of imprisonment under the bondage of sin. He sees that there is evil everywhere and no one who can save mankind. He sees every act of violence. He sees every dark thought. He sees us like those lost in darkness and groping our way with no light. He sees nobody willing or able to step in and rescue mankind. He sees the devil holding sway over every guilty sinner, bringing them to fear and hopelessly grasping for some way out of our plight. He looks with compassion on his lost children. "The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm achieved salvation for him." (Isaiah 59:15-16) That's what the writer to the Hebrews records for us in chapter 2. God's stepping onto the scene to rescue us.

God has a plan. And it is to bring us from bondage, fear, and death, to glory. Just how does God intended to carry out this rescue plan? That is the amazing part! The author of salvation planned to do this through suffering. Not just God grieving over our sin. Not just him sitting exalted in heaven and looking down and letting a tear of sympathy fall for the fallen human race. But him suffering as our hero, our rescuer. "It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, should make the author of salvation perfect through suffering."

God's rescue plan included putting himself in the right position to be the only one who had to do what was needed. Would you have chosen to be on that plane on September 11th if you knew it was one that would be hijacked by terrorists? Would you have chosen to take the job at Sandy Hook if you knew that you'd one day face a killer there who shot six school staff members along with twenty little children? Perhaps some might say yes. But God's rescue isn't just taking a bullet for the innocent. It is for those who by nature fear him and hate him and are destined for death and hell. And would you sign up for a special rescue mission if you knew the very people you would save would be mocking you for doing it? The author of salvation formed a plan that involved himself in the hot-seat. He chose to be the one who suffered to rescue us all. This, my brothers and sisters, is the grace of God in action.

How would he suffer? By becoming like us and making himself our brother. To save the people on the hijacked plane you need to be on that plane, God came to this world to save it. To be the teacher who takes the bullet to let the students free, you need to step into the classroom. God stepped into our world. God became our brother when he was born in Bethlehem. "The one who makes us holy and the ones he makes holy are of the same family." They share and partake together in being flesh and blood, born into this world. One is begotten from the Father through eternity, the others are created beings. But both now have flesh and blood.

Just think how amazing that fact is! Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers! Should you ever doubt if God loves you, know that he considers himself now your brother! He became your brother in the flesh. He was born to Mary. He took on human form. He identifies with you and me. This was part of his long-revealed plan. The writer to the Hebrews points us to Psalm 22 as fulfilled by the Messiah, Jesus. "I will declare your name among my brothers, in the assembly I will sing your praises." This Psalm was fulfilled as Jesus came as a man to God's temple and spoke the Word of God. Isaiah 8 is quoted, "I will put my trust in him." Jesus never lost his glory as he lived our brother, but perfectly trusted in the Father's plan. Also from Isaiah he says, "Here am I and the children God has given me." Fulfilled not just by Isaiah and his children, but also by the Messiah who brings his brothers to glory.

And so the stage is set for the rescue to take place. "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity. "God's son was made like his brothers in every way." Why? "So that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power over death, that is the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death." Our brother from Bethlehem died to save us. The brother from Bethlehem is also our priest from heaven. As we are reminded by the writer to the Hebrews, "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins." A ransom had to be paid. This is why the ancient hymn says, "Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel." He came to be our priest and offer sacrifice for our sins. Christmas is meaningless without its goal: Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Jesus was made like his brothers in every way so that he could die for his brothers and pour his flesh and blood as the atoning sacrifice for sins. In shedding his blood he opened the way that leads on high and closed the path to misery.

And he has accomplished his goal: "Bringing many sons to glory." The fear of death is gone. Jesus has become our brother. God has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of his Son whom he loves. Pulled from the depths of hell and the curse of the grave we join our brother Jesus in glory. Our bodies share in his glorified bodies. He brings us with himself to glory because our brother has paid our price. He gives us eternal life instead of the death we deserved.

And this rescue is so great because it is for the whole world. It's not angels he came to save, but you and me. All who have flesh and blood can look to Jesus as their brother, Savior. And you are a descendant of Abraham through faith in Jesus. Brothers and sisters in Christ, remember whose family you belong to! "Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." When temptation comes and pulls you down, remember your membership in his household. When the fear of death hangs over you, call to your faithful and merciful high priest from heaven, your brother from Bethlehem. He is able to help because he suffered in your place.

Do you know someone who is doubting God's goodness and care as they face life's trials and the bondage of sin? Drive away all fears that God cares about them know by reminding them that Jesus knows what it is like to live in this sin-cursed world of darkness. He understands what they are facing. Remind them that Jesus is a merciful priest who loves the sinner so much he chose to become their brother! Do you know someone facing death with fear? Proclaim to them that God became their brother and faced death in their place! Remind them that because he left his glory to face his cross in the flesh, he will now bring you with himself into glory.

Because he himself suffered when tempted, he is able to help you now, and he will until you are in glory. Brothers and sisters in Christ, Jesus is not ashamed to be called your brother. Our brother from Bethlehem is our hero from heaven.