

# Jesus: Rescuer of the Condemned

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Good afternoon. I don't want to preach on the coronavirus. I want to talk about Jesus. All I want to say about this: The gates of hell will not prevail against the church. Alright, let's pray.

Father, I praise You for Who You are. I praise You, Lord, for what You've done in sending Your Son because He Himself said the gates of hell will not prevail. We know the devil is a mighty foe, sin is a mighty foe. But they both are nothing compared to Who You are what You can do. Father, we praise You for the redemption You have provided us in the work of Your Son. We praise You for what You've done in the work of Your Spirit in giving new life. We praise You for what You've done in sanctifying and purifying Your people. And we praise You for what You will do on that day when we will see the living God face-to-face. Amen.

John 3. Verses 16, 17, and 18. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God."

## Death Row

If you were to get in your car out here, start driving towards Houston, Google Maps tells you in about 4 1/2 hours you'd have gone 271 miles and you would be at 3872 FM 350 in Livingston, Texas. You would be at the Polunsky Unit of the Texas Department of Corrections. The Polunsky Unit holds almost 3,000 prisoners. It also holds a few hundred prisoners of a special status. The Polunsky Unit is where Death Row is in Texas. They don't do the executions there. They do them in another prison, but the Polunsky Unit is where people who are on Death Row await their execution. I've never been to Death Row. Michigan doesn't have a Death Row. Michigan doesn't have capital punishments so I didn't have an opportunity. There are volunteers who do get to go to Death Row over in Livingston.

But what does a man or a woman who is on Death Row think? You're sitting in that cell. You know the state of Texas has pronounced its judgment upon you. What do they think? I can't answer the question. I don't know what they think. We might think, well, yeah, he knows he's going to die. But you know what? That's not revelation just to people who are on Death Row. We all know we're going to die. You think you're young. You think God is obligated to give you your three score and ten. Well, He may give you three score and ten, He may give you three score and thirty, or He may give you one score. So we're all going to die. We know we're going to die. I understand that that man or that woman on Death Row may think about their death more than we do because it's their life. They can't avoid it. There are certain things in life and a certain season in your life you just can't avoid it, and in their season, that dominates their life. That's got to be what they think about all the time. They know when the person in the next cell gets taken out to be executed. They know when the person on the other side of them gets taken out to be executed. What's their date? They don't know their date typically. They sit there. Is it three months from now? Is it two months from now? Is it five years? Is it six weeks from now?

They don't know. It might be though when it gets down to it finally when all things get settled and the well nigh infinite appeals get settled, they know it's on a day. That day approaches. Let's say it's April 1st. Tomorrow, they're one day closer. Tuesday, they're one day closer. Friday they're a few more days closer. You get out to March 30th. It's two days away. You get out to March 31st. It's one day away. They get them up on April 1st and today is the day. Condemned. They know the punishment. They know the sentence. They know that when they put them in whatever vehicle they're going to put them in on that day to take them over to Huntsville, they know what's going to happen. What does the natural man's mind think? I don't know. I don't know if somebody becomes a Christian on Death Row, I don't know what they think either. Maybe I assume in many cases though the natural man just thinks - he just thinks they're going to do what they're going to do to me and that's it. I'm going to die. They're going to put my body wherever they're going to put my body and that's it, I just cease to exist. Just like a leaf falling from the tree in October. It goes to the ground. It's gone after a certain period of time. But they're condemned. They're condemned. They know they're condemned. They know their condemnation. They can't avoid their condemnation because their life is their condemnation at that point. They know the punishment. They know what it looks like. They know when they get in that vehicle to go to Huntsville, they know what's going to happen and they know when it's going to happen. Condemned.

Look at our passage today. "God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him." He who believes - "Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already." Not future tense - past tense and present tense. Already. "Whoever does not believe is condemned already because He has not believed in the name of the only Son of God."

It's 271 miles from 311 Hedges in San Antonio to Death Row in Livingston, Texas. That's the state of Texas' death row. Where is God's death row? For some, it's 311 Hedges, San Antonio. We have people in here right now who are under condemnation. Whoever does not believe in the name of the only Son of God is condemned already. Right now. 12:33 according to the clock Central Daylight Time. 311 Hedges is Death Row for some people. Those apartments over there are Death Row for some people. St. Phillips is Death Row for some people. You go up and down these streets: Hedges, Wyoming, Maryland, New Braunfels, Commerce - it's all Death Row. Because you've got the condemned there. All over. God's Death Row is this world. We have prisoners here. Maybe people got in their vehicles and drove here. Maybe you came with somebody here, but we've got prisoners here. We have people who are captive. They are captive to sin. They are bound. They might as well be in a straight jacket. They are not free. They may think they're free, but they're not. They are captive. They are held captive. They are in captivity. They're prisoners. And a lot of them don't know it and they don't care. They don't believe that they're in captivity. They don't believe that they're in bondage. They're like the guys in John 8 that Jesus encounters. "We've never been in bondage!" Well, not only have they been in bondage, they were in bondage as they spoke to Jesus and objected to the fact that He said they're in bondage.

## The Power of Sin and the Demonic

You read about the power of sin. What does this power of sin do to the way that people think? Sin does not make anybody think well. Sin never makes you think better. You can read passages about extreme examples of sin, extreme examples for instance in the Bible of demonic activity. You read Luke 8. You've got the demoniac. And it's said that he cannot even be held captive by chains and shackles because of the power of the demonic in his life. And we might go, yeah, that's pretty impressive, but I'll tell you what, you have no clue until you've actually seen real shackles. Those big things that look like this and they clasp them around a person's wrists or around their ankles. Those things are not just metal. Those are iron. Okay, they're about this wide and they're about this thick. They're heavy. A pair of handcuffs pales in comparison to real shackles.

You want to talk about the power of sin and the power of the demonic? We used to stay at the training center for the Department of Corrections in Michigan when we'd go into the prison for these three day weekends. And they had a display case there. You can ask Sheryl about this. She's seen this. They had a display case with items of interest, stuff they had confiscated over the years or other items of interest. You had your classic books hollowed out and knives in there, that sort of thing. But they had one item of interest which was far more impressive than anything like that. They had a set of shackles in there. And again, if you've never seen a set of shackles, they are heavy. They're iron. What was the thing about these shackles? These shackles which are iron this wide and this thick - iron - they were bent ninety degrees. How were they bent ninety degrees? They were bent ninety degrees by a man's bare hands.

That brings reality to the story of the demoniac in Luke 8. That is how powerful the power of the demonic is. This guy was able with his bare hands bend shackles 90 degrees. You may read that account: How could shackles not hold this guy? That's how. That's the power of sin. That is the power of Satan. But I'll tell you what, even that as impressive as that power is, we know that Almighty God is far more powerful than that. But the people who are condemned right now, they're under that power that bends shackles with bare hands. That's what they're held captive by. They're held captive by the power of sin. They are condemned. They are on Death Row. And many people are just fine with their condemnation. Or so they confess.

Those people that are on Death Row 270 miles from here, let's apply their situation to what Jesus says in Luke 12. Jesus says, "I tell you, My friends..." If you want to turn there, fine, go ahead. Luke 12, I'm going to look at v. 4 and 5. He says, "I tell you My friends..." and then He continues. I'm going to substitute prisoners on Death Row for "My friends." And you tell me how you think it reads. And I'm going to substitute the state of Texas for those who kill the body in that passage. Luke 12:4 and 5. "I tell you, prisoners on Death Row, do not fear the state of Texas, [who can kill the body] and after that has nothing more that it can do. I'll warn you Whom to fear, fear Him Who after He has killed has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear Him." Do those guys on Death Row probably have any fear as described in this passage? Most of them don't. They don't even if you tell them this, they go "whatever..." They don't care. They might tell us believe what you want. You can believe in whatever fantasy or fairy tale you want to believe. That's what they'll say to us. But woe to that man or woman who thinks that way. Woe to that person. Woe to that person who sits in this building today and does not fear Him Who after He has killed has authority to cast into hell. Woe to that person next door in those

apartments. Woe to the people that they were talking about in downtown on Friday night if they don't see the reality of this, they don't heed the warning of Luke 12:4 & 5 because that's the condemnation of which is being taught here in John 3. Casting into hell - eternity in the lake of fire. Eternity in the fury of the winepress of the wrath of God. And people just go on. They're oblivious. They don't care. They will mock you when you tell them about it. Or they'll go, well, maybe it's true, but I'm okay. They think it's going to be okay. No, they don't really understand it because if they really understood it, they would turn. They would respond.

### **Where is God?**

Now, in the midst of all this stuff that's going on, we're going to hear this. You hear it every time something calamitous happens, every time there's some natural disaster. Even insurance companies have the wisdom to call, for instance, tornadoes "acts of God." They do. Where was your God when the tsunami hit? Where was your God when Hurricane Katrina...? Where was your God when Harvey hit Houston? Where was your God when (fill in the blank) whatever happens? We're going to hear it about this, our current situation. Where is your God in all of this? I'll tell you where our God is. He's still in the Heavens doing as He pleases. Psalm 115:3. He's always been there. We talked about it yesterday. This is no surprise to Him because He brought it.

We were in a Bible study at a correctional facility right after Hurricane Katrina. Some guy says during the study, he says, "Well, God didn't want the hurricane to happen." And I said, "What?" What do you mean God didn't want...? "Oh, God didn't want that to happen. Look what happened." I said, "You're telling me the hurricane happened and God didn't know about it?" "The hurricane happened and God couldn't stop it?" "God couldn't have prevented it?" "Well, no, that's not what I'm saying." I said, "Well, what are you saying?" Well, what he's trying to do is he's trying to protect God's character. We don't need to protect God's character. Scripture does a wonderful job of protecting God's character.

Why did the hurricane happen? The hurricane happened because God sent it. Why did the hurricane stop? Because God stopped it. Why did it stop raining in Houston a few years ago? Because God stopped the rain. Why did it rain in the first place? Because God brought the rain. All these unbelievers, they don't want to talk about God until hurricanes and tsunamis hit. Where's your God when this happens? Our God is in the Heavens being patient giving you time to repent. That's where He is. "Well, look at all the people that died." Okay, sure, let's look at Luke 13. People died at the beginning of Luke 13. People want to complain about social injustice to Jesus. They're running to Him: "Jesus, do something about this!" And Jesus' response to social injustice thrown out by the government of Rome is: "Repent or you too will perish."

Then He talks about another example where people died while they're worshiping. Okay, you've got the tower falling on people. Twice He says it. Repent or you too will perish. Jesus doesn't throw up His hands at natural disasters or social injustice and wring His hands going, "what can we do about this?" Jesus says turn from your sins and turn to God. Otherwise, the condemnation which is on your head remains, and I'll tell you what, you keep hearing more truth, sir, it's going to get worse. The more truth you hear, that means the more rejection you have. The more rejection of truth you have, the more wrath you're storing up. Where is our God

during the tsunami? He is still on His throne in the Heavens with His Son at His right hand, still governing His creation, still bringing tsunamis, still bringing tornadoes, still bringing coronaviruses and taking them away as He pleases and all over this is the fact that people have been given gracious time to repent. God is not obligated to keep anybody alive in their wickedness. Those people who blaspheme God in these situations using the very mouth that God gave them when He created them, using the brain that God gave them when He created them, to blaspheme God to His own face with the mouth God gave them, He's patient... to a point. "Whoever does not believe is condemned already." Turn from sin or you will die. And you will not only die once; you will die twice. People are afraid of the first death. They really need to be afraid of the second death. Condemnation. Whoever does not believe is condemned already. You see it again at the end of John 3 down at verse 36. We'll get there sometime.

### **There is Good News**

Okay, there's condemnation. Condemnation. People are under condemnation. That's really bad news. But there's good news, isn't there? Praise the Lord there's good news. Because condemnation is not the only option for the condemned. Ultimately, people who are condemned are condemned because they want to be condemned. They'll object to that. They'll say, no, no, that's not the case. Yes, it is. We're going to get to that in the next sermon which is going to be on people loving the darkness. The reason people go to hell is because they want to. They go to hell because they don't want the remedy. They don't want the solution. They don't want to be released from condemnation. They love where they are in their condemnation. Even if they deny it, that's part of the nature of sin. People deny that they love their sin. Well, that's sin. But that's what sin does. Because there is condemnation, but what's the [alternative]? Eternal life. Condemnation. Eternal life. Condemnation. Eternal life. Eternal life. Abundant. Eternal. Resurrection life. It's good news.

And the good news is not merely a message. The good news is a Person. The good news is Jesus Christ - the Person of Jesus Christ; what Jesus Christ has done. He comes on this divine rescue mission. "Sent," it says. "Sent by the Father." He was sent. And He's going to save each one of those given to Him by the Father. We'll look at that when we get to John 6. And when He saves a man - when He saves them, what does He do? Scripture tells us they're here. They're here in His hands. And nobody or nothing can take the redeemed out of the hands of the Son or the hands of the Father. You read Isaiah 49. God's people are graven. (Incomplete thought) I know God is a Spirit. There's imagery there. We sing it: my name is graven on His hands. Etched. It's not going away. When a man or a woman is in His hands, he's there. Because he is no longer condemned, he is now redeemed. He has life and he has life eternal. Jesus comes on this divine rescue mission. And once He puts somebody in His hands, let's face it, what can separate that person from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus? Nothing. Nothing. That's how Romans 8 ends. How does Romans 8 begin? There is therefore now how much condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus? None. No condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Once Jesus rescues a person from God's Death Row, he's not going back. There's no condemnation.

You talk to prisoners. Zeke can tell you. My wife can tell you. The overriding thing that almost all of them want to do is very simple: they just want to go home. They just want to go

home. Well, you know what? We want to go home too. But the condemned in God's economy don't know it until they have their eyes opened. We don't know we have another home until our eyes are opened up through what we see in the first part of John 3 with the new birth. But we know, we know that we have a home which is not here. We're just passing through here. I want to go home. A few more rolling suns at most shall land me safe on Canaan's coast. Praise God. The condemnation gone because of what Jesus Christ has done. Look at what He came to do. He came to set prisoners free.

Now, one of the very first guys I ran into back in Michigan, 1996. I could tell you his name. I won't. He was one of these guys that when he reads that passage in the Old Testament: "captives are going to be set free," - my wife is laughing because she knows who I'm talking about - yeah, you smile about it, but he looks at it as okay, God's going to set all of us free. We're all going home. He said I know I'm going home. Well, I know that the last time I really looked in 2010, he had yet to go home. He was still incarcerated.

Jesus didn't come to set criminals free from the state of Texas' prison. Jesus came to set the criminals free from God's prison. Jesus came to rescue the condemned. Because in God's courtroom, in God's economy, there's no such thing as a misdemeanor. You don't serve probation. You don't do community service. You don't do one to three. You do damnation in God's economy. But Jesus came to rescue the world from that. He came to rescue people from the power of sin which is so great. You know that power of sin that deceives people such that people don't think that they're sinful. That's one of the deceptions of sin. They don't understand that they're separated from God. They don't understand. There's a simple truth: You've got a problem. Here's the simple solution. The simple solution is Jesus Christ came to save.

So my title of this message is: Jesus: the Rescuer of the Condemned. That may not be very sermonic. It may be more exhortative than anything else, but that's okay. Let's look at our passage: John 3. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God." Look at the whoever's. Nobody's exempt from these whoever's. Whoever believes, whoever does not believe. That's everybody. Man, woman, male, female, young, old, Jew, Gentile, rich, poor, whoever. Everybody in this room and everybody in this city and everybody on planet earth falls into this category. You either believe or you don't. Everybody.

### **Why Did Jesus Come?**

But Jesus came to do what? He came to save, not to condemn. I know. I know what John 9 says. I know John 9 says, "For judgment I came into the world." I'm not going to ignore that when we get to John 9. We'll cover it. John 3 and John 9 don't contradict each other. We'll get there with John 9. But this passage is talking about the fact that Jesus came not to condemn, but to save. Verse 17: He came because He was sent. He came to do the will of Somebody else. He came to do the will of Another. He came because His Father sent Him.

There's a passage we're going to look at in John 4 in more detail, but in the passage in John 4, the disciples are trying to get Jesus to eat. And Jesus says in response to the issue of

trying to get Him to eat, He says, "This is My food..." What does He say His food is? "My food is to do the will of the One who sent Me (Him) and to accomplish..." the work of the Father. He came to do the will of the Father and to do the work of the Father. What's the will of the Father that He talks about? John 6. "This is the will of Him who sent Me that I should lose nothing of all that He has given Me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." I love that passage! Every single one of the people Jesus came to save, He will save. Every one of the people that Jesus was sent on His rescue mission to rescue, He will save.

We read about military covert ops. Military guys get sent in to somewhere where people are held captive. There may be ten people there. Is there any guarantee that all 10 are going to get out of there alive? There is absolutely no guarantee. But I'll tell you what, on this rescue mission that Jesus gets sent in, this is not covert; this is overt, it's out in the open, and every single one of those people in captivity that Jesus came to save, He will rescue from their bondage. Every single one. Jesus Christ did not come to fail. He came to do the will of the Father and to do it perfectly. He will not fail. The gates of hell will not prevail.

I know, I know the passage doesn't say anything about (pardon me) about the word rescue, but I'm going to use it anyway. Because that's what He came to do. In the places where rescue is used in the New Testament, the word gets translated as rescue, you look at one of the lexicons - one of the standard lexicons, and it says, "in content, that word always means 'to save.'" Men are always the object and God is always the author of salvation. Quite often in the New Testament, (incomplete thought) the word that comes into English as "rescue" is translated as "deliver." To take out from. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Rescue us from evil. I think it helps us understand the nature of what Jesus came to do. Jesus came to get people who couldn't do anything to rescue themselves. However you want to picture somebody in captivity who has no way of getting out. I'm not even talking about somebody who knows they're in captivity and wants out. The problem with people who are lost, they tend not to know that they're captive and they don't even want a way out.

But let's think about it, somebody who is absolutely secure, held securely in their captivity, they can't do anything. They're not David Copperfield. They can't do this magic thing and get out of there. Jesus gets them out of there without fail. That person who's in captivity, if the love of God has been set on that person, Jesus Christ will go get him. That person will be chased down. And as lost as a person may be, if Christ has set His love on that person, He will go find them. They can keep running, but they can't run far enough. And you know what? Once Jesus finds them and then wraps them in like this, they praise God that Christ chased them down. Shouldn't that be us? Praise the Lord that He chased us down when we didn't know that we were running. We get rescued from captivity.

Paul uses that word. And it gets translated in the ESV at least as rescue. He uses it in 2nd Timothy 4. Paul's at the end of his life. He knows that he's not going to live very much longer. What does he write? He writes about a guy who did him harm. Alexander the coppersmith. He says, "Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm. The Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message. At first defense, no one came to me to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against

them, but the Lord stood by me and strengthened me." That's just reiterating what Evan said in the first hour. The Lord stood by me and strengthened me. Even if nobody else does. Christian, even if everybody else walks away, stand firm because the Lord will stand by you and strengthen you. It doesn't matter what other people do. Everyone else walks away? Paul says, "all deserted me." Now it's relative because he's writing to Timothy who clearly hasn't deserted him. But it's relative there. Even if everyone deserts you, stand firm, because the Lord will stand by you and strengthen you. "So that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it, so I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and deliver me safely into His heavenly Kingdom. To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen." He knows the Lord will rescue him. The Lord will take him out. The Lord will do this. The Lord will be active, not merely passive in this. You read some other lexicons about this word, and a couple of them say the word even has the force of dragging. Not just merely going like this. I mean going and getting somebody. Taking them by some show of force. Paul says I know the Lord is going to rescue me, take me out of here and deliver me safely into His heavenly Kingdom. So it is for each one of us. We know because of this divine rescue mission that because of what Jesus has done, He's going to deliver all of us from every evil deed and He's going to deliver us on that rescue mission into His heavenly Kingdom. We have the seat in the Kingdom now. Paul knew that he was going to go to another realm pretty shortly where he was going to be with Christ. Don't you want that?

We sat in a study at a prison - Sheryl and I did. This one guy says, "I'm not ready for the Lord to come back yet." You know why? "I've still got things I want to do with my kids." "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength." "Hate your mother and father..." I know that's relative. Think about it. Is there anything that you think you need to do and Jesus shouldn't come back yet because I'm not ready for Him to come back yet? I hope not. Because that means you love whatever that is more than you love Jesus. And that's not a good place to be in. That guy was not in a good place saying that. Do you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength? Do you love your neighbor as yourself? Do you obey the law of Christ? Because you have been rescued. Have you been rescued from that which is carnal? That desire of that man to be with his kids over and above the return of Jesus Christ was carnal. Absolutely carnal. People say I can't wait to go to Heaven to see my wife. I can't wait to get to heaven to see Jesus. If my wife is there, that's gravy. Because the focus of Heaven and the end of our Bibles is not about us. It's about seeing Jesus. It's about seeing the face of God in His fullness. We have to kill that which is carnal with us. We have to kill that. Jesus didn't come so you could see your wife. Jesus didn't come so we could hang out with our kids for eternity. Jesus came to save us from that! I'm not saying you don't love your kids or your wife. Yeah, you love your kids, your wife, your husband, your friend, your mom, your dad. But that's all secondary. Anything else, if you put anything even at the same level - not more than Jesus - anything, you've got Jesus here, you've got something else here, that's idolatry. Kill that! Send it away! Cast it out like that goat in Leviticus 16. You've got to send it out into the wilderness.

We know. We know that the only reason we have been redeemed is because God did something we didn't do, we couldn't do. You read about salvation being a work of God. We read about the Lord rescuing Israel from captivity - Exodus 2. Did the Lord sweep Israel out of Egypt? Yes, He did in one sense. He removed that which kept them in bondage. But what did Israel



have to do? They still had to walk out. They still had to do something. We have to be careful here that we don't get out of balance. You read that passage in Joshua 24. If anybody knows the passage in Joshua 24, it's Joshua 24:15. "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." What comes before that? A whole lot of statements about what the Lord did. "I took your father Abraham..." "I led him through the land of Canaan..." "I gave him Isaac..." "To Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau..." "I gave Esau the hill country..." "I sent Moses and Aaron." "I plagued Egypt." "I brought Israel out..." "I brought out your fathers to the sea..." "I put darkness between you and the Egyptians..." "I made the sea come upon them..." "I brought you into the land of the Amorites..." "I gave them into your hand..." "I delivered you out of the hand of Balak..." "I gave Jericho and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, and the Hitites, and the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites into your hand. And I sent the hornet before you, which drove out the two kings of the Amorites, and I gave you a land on which you had not labored and cities which you had not built." Who is the active party in all of those statements? The Lord God is the active party in all of those statements. With regard to the exodus, setting the captives free. He did that which set the captives free. The captives still had to walk out. And we know that the picture of the exodus is something pointing forward to something much greater. We know. We know that everybody who left Egypt was not saved. They were saved in that Old Covenant sense. They were redeemed in that Old Covenant sense. They were brought out of captivity - physical captivity. We know though from what we see in the rest of the account of the exodus that not everyone who was redeemed was saved.

But that's pointing forward to the greatness, and to invent a word maybe, "betterness" of the New Covenant. Because that's pointing toward a much greater redemption, a much greater salvation, a much greater freedom. When Jesus says "if you abide in My Word, then you are truly My disciples, and you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free," then a few verses later, "When the Son sets you free, you are free indeed," what are you freed from? You are freed from the bondage about which He is telling His opponents there in John 8. You are freed from your captivity to sin, but you are not free to do whatever you want to. You are now free to obey God. Because Romans 8 tells us the people who are held captive do not obey because they can't obey. But freedom in Christ is not an absolute freedom to do what we wish. Freedom in Christ is freedom to obey. We just exchange one form of slavery for another. We were slaves to sin. Now we're slaves to righteousness. But that's what biblical deliverance is. That's what the biblical rescue mission is. It is to deliver us from the power of sin, the captivity in which we live.

And when you get to these passages here especially starting in v. 14 and 15, where Jesus is talking there, and He's talking about the serpent being lifted up, "that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life," you get to John 3:16, "Whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." You get to John 3:18, "Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God." That's man. What does man have to do? We have to make sure we keep a biblical balance on our teaching. Those first, especially, 8 verses in John 3 are talking about the work of God - a work of God. It's not every work of God. John 3 is not a comprehensive treatment on the doctrine of salvation. It's only a partial treatment. You don't see repentance mentioned anywhere in John 3. Don't let people tell you just because John 3 doesn't say

anything about repentance, it's not necessary. Yeah, it is, because elsewhere it says it is. But for the purposes of what Jesus wants Nicodemus to know - and if you believe that Jesus is still speaking in v. 16 which many do, yeah, you've got to believe. Because either you believe or you don't.

### **Why Do People Believe?**

Why do people believe? People believe because God has done something. Then people will say as I've said before, "well, God hasn't given me faith yet. That's why I don't believe." No, no. What does the Bible say? The Bible says believe. Scripture commands people to believe. Scripture commands people to repent. "Well, God hasn't done it for me yet." No, you don't get to have that objection. Just because somebody doesn't believe, it's not God's fault. If a person doesn't believe, it's their fault. God places the blame and responsibility on man. That's why we press men. That's why they go downtown. That's why Zeke goes to San Diego. That's why I go to Cotulla. Because we say to men what they are responsible for doing. They are responsible to repent and believe. Yeah, we know the divine part of the equation is God has to do something, but we don't live there. We don't command men to be passive and wait for God to do something. God commands us to command men to do something now. Now. Why? Because they're condemned now. Whatever happens to stop the numbering of their days, however many days a man has, if they haven't believed on their last day, they can't say come the last day: God, it's Your fault. You didn't do this. That's why I'm here. God will say: Depart from Me because you didn't believe. Let's not fall into that error of emphasizing the divine part of the equation over the man's responsibility part of that equation.

So, what about this rescue mission? Those people out there, the people in here who sit under condemnation, who are on Death Row right now just waiting for the sentence to be carried out, when's their day in court? Somebody tell me when their day in court is. What date on the calendar? Who knows? Nobody knows. Could it be 1:14? It's now 1:13. Sure, it could be. Who knows? Who knows? Nobody knows. That person who is condemned, how much mercy have they received in their lives? Maybe they're 10 years old, 15 years old, 20 years old, 70 years old. Whether they've heard truth or not, how much mercy have they had in their life? Far more than they can count. Maybe they say if your God is who He says He is, things wouldn't have been so bad in my life. Maybe people have had horrible lives. But you know what? You've had a life. You've had time. Maybe a person's been angry at God for 70 years. God's been kind to that person giving them time to turn from their sins. And they can still receive eternal life even after all of those years of rebellion. Even at the end of their life. You know we only have one deathbed conversion in the Bible. But we do have one, but we don't want to presume upon deathbed conversions because people don't always get the time to ponder their death like the guys over in Livingston. Because the gavel may fall on their life like that. We don't know. But there's still mercy for those people. There's still redemption to be had.

Think about our lives. Why in the world was God kind to you? Why was He kind to me? Why? Why? Why did He send His Son on a rescue mission to save anybody? Matthew 1:21. What did Jesus come to do? He will save His people from their sins. Because He will be called Immanuel which means God with us. He doesn't say He'll "possibly" save His people. "There's a pretty good chance He'll save His people." No, it says He will. When it says He will, He will. He

will save His people from their sins. The one who endures to the end will be saved. "I am the Door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved." He will be saved. He does save and He does save to the uttermost.

And as we look backward, think about if we look backward in our life - those people here who are Christians. Look backward. We think it's all so simple now. Why didn't I understand this before? Well, we didn't understand it before because we couldn't understand it before. The Gospel is very, very simple at the end of the day. The Gospel's a Person: Jesus Christ. And you have to turn from your sin and turn to that Person - Who He is and what He did. That is very simple. But people don't want to do it. Why? People love the darkness. But we know, I've talked before about the inclusive nature of Christianity. Whoever believes without respect to persons - people from every tribe and language and people and nation. Christ bought a people for Himself. But there's a flip side to that. The condemned are also from every tribe and language and people and nation. God is no respecter of persons come judgment day. God is no respecter of persons come judgment day. (Incomplete thought) We know there's injustice in our system; we know that there are times when the innocent are said to be guilty and they're really not guilty, but we also know that in God's courtroom, there's no such thing as injustice. One of two things happens. One of two things happens on that last day. People either get justice or mercy. And you know what? Everybody's standing there defending themselves if they're lost. The only people that have an Advocate there are the redeemed. You stand before God on judgment day by yourself, it's not going to go well. And that's where we all were before Christ redeemed us. He rescued us on this rescue mission. I think now about if I had to stand before God Almighty on that last day, and say this is why You should let me in knowing what I know now, I can't put it into words. Think about what does a person say standing before Jesus the Judge on the last day? "This is why You should let me in even though, yeah, I said You're a liar." Because that's what the lost are saying. That's what we said when we were lost. We called God a liar by our lies. Because in God's economy, God does not discriminate. God is just.

### **There Is Hope for the Condemned**

But I just want us to know that there is hope for the condemned. That lost relative of yours, that lost child of yours, that lost parent of yours, that lost coworker of yours, there is hope. Never give up. Maybe you pray and pray and pray and talk and talk and talk, and you die and they're still lost, as long as they're alive, there's still hope. Then the surviving can pray and pray and pray. There's always hope as long as a person has breath. There's hope. Because there's always room at the Lord's table for one more. Or two more, three more, or for a city which is a three days walk across. There's room at the Lord's table for all of those people. That ought to encourage us. And Jesus is not going to come back until every one of His people is saved. He's not going to let any of the sheep remain lost. He's going to go find them from all four corners of the world, all four corners of San Antonio. He's going to go find them.

So for that person who may sit here today under condemnation: you need to run. You need to flee. I love that word flee. Because fleeing is not just: turn around and sauntering away from something. It's not jogging away from something. When people flee, they run! Even if you're old and your knees and hips don't work. You run as fast as you can! You flee from something. You want to flee that wrath to come. Because the wrath is coming like that train

down the tracks. The only problem is you don't know when it's coming to the station. So turn. Run away from the condemnation like a lot of people in this room have done. Run away from it. Come to Jesus Who will rescue you from every evil deed, and He will deliver you safely into His heavenly Kingdom.

There was a movie back in the 80's. There was this phrase in the movie. These guys would say they were on a "mission from God." It was a pagan movie. Some people know what movie I'm talking about. Think about the mission Jesus Christ came on. What did He do? He left the perfections of Heaven, took the form of a man, came as a servant, humbled Himself, born in the likeness of men, humbled Himself to the point of death, even death on a cross. But, didn't God exalt Him? God exalted the Son by bestowing on Him the name which is above every name. And at the name of Jesus, what? Every knee should bow and every tongue confess in Heaven, on earth, and under the earth that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Every tongue. Everybody's going to confess one day. And He did that knowing everything that was going to happen. Think about it. Even before creation, He knew. He knew what they were going to do to Him as they scourged Him and tore His back apart. He knew what they were going to do to Him as He hung on that cross naked. He knew what they were going to say about Him. He knew people were going to reject Him. He knew His disciples were going to walk away. But He came to do the will of His Father. He knew that He would see the travail of His soul and be satisfied. He knew that His mission would do what His Father wanted Him to do.

And because He came on this rescue mission we can sing a lot of songs. We can sing songs like the ones we sang today. We can sing songs: He brought me out of the miry clay. He set my feet on the rock to stay. He puts a song in my soul today, a song of praise, Hallelujah! Do you know what hallelujah means? Praise the Lord. It's a command when it gets used. Praise Yah is what it's talking about in Hebrew. Praise the Lord. He brought us out of the miry clay. He set our feet on the rock to stay. He puts a song in our soul today.

So, I just want to encourage us. Again, I didn't want to talk about current events. But I want to encourage you. The rescue mission that Jesus came on, praise the Lord. And in spite of what's going on - Zeke talked about do I go because of this? Do I go because of that? You know, Zeke goes into a prison. You want to talk about a petri dish. Really. You've got all these guys and it's very confined. Yeah, that's a petri dish. I know a volunteer who got Hepatitis C in the prison just from going in there. But he still goes. Why? Because of Jesus Christ. Well, he might die! To depart is far better. In 2011, I got a staph infection inside there. That staph infection almost ended up killing me. I'm not saying this because I'm some great guy, but I still go. Prisons are prisons. They are petri dishes. There are staph infections wherever we go. But I still go. Why? Why? I go first to give glory to God. But I go because I know that Jesus Christ has redeemed a people for Himself from every tribe and language and people and nation, and there may very well be people in there and I'm supposed to go and tell them about Jesus. So yeah, are we supposed to be wise. Yes, let's be wise. Let's be wise, but let's not be people of fear. Perfect love casts out all fear. Now, I know the context there is fear of judgment. I get it. But we still have a mission. Are we on a mission from God? Yeah. Even if your mission is your home. Even if your mission is your child. Praise God that Jesus came on a rescue mission 2,000 years ago in a little inconsequential strip of land at the Eastern end of the Mediterranean. Hallelujah, what a Savior!

**Prayer**

Let's pray. Father, in a few minutes, we're going to remember what Your Son has done as we celebrate the Lord's table. Father, You tell us to do that in remembrance. You've told us in Your Word: remember, remember, remember. But you've also told us there that we proclaim Christ's death until He comes again. Praise God, Praise God for the cross. Praise God for Jesus. And praise God for eternal life. Amen. Thank you.