

Titus Chapter 2 v 11 - Chapter 3 v 11

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[0 : 00] Psalm 95 says, Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord.

Let us shout aloud to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song. For the Lord is the great God, the great kings above all gods.

In his hands are the depths of the earth. Went through my mind about those Thai boys in that cave. Yeah. In his hands are the depths of the earth and the mountain peaks belong to him.

The sea is his for he made it and his hands formed the dry land. Let us come and worship together. We are going to sing number 29. Praise my soul, the King of heaven.

To his feet your tribute bring. Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven. Who like you his praise should sing. Let's pray together.

[1 : 15] Our Father, we thank you for that call to worship and that psalm and for the words of the song that we've been singing reminding us of these great eternal truths.

Who should come and sing like the people who have been ransomed and healed and restored and forgiven. Lord, truly, it's our pleasure and joy to come and worship you.

Lord, our minds get distracted and full of so many things of this world. The football or the tennis or shopping or other jobs that we need to do.

And how, Lord, sometimes they push aside the things that are eternal, the things that are the priorities, the most important things in our lives. And we just want to say as we gather this evening that, Lord, it's you that we desire.

Our hearts hunger for the living God. We cry out to you. Please meet with us this night, we pray. Fulfill your promises of the scriptures that when we gather together in Christ's name, there you are among us.

[2 : 30] We pray, Lord God, that we would feel and know the touch of your spirit. We pray, Lord, that you would move us, that you would touch our hearts and minds. Lord, we want to be thinking people tonight.

We want to think about you. We want to use our minds to understand you better. But, Lord, too, we want you to touch our hearts. Lord, our emotions would be involved, that you would move us, that you would remind us of your great salvation, that you would move us and remind us of your great love for us this day.

And, Lord, if we come feeling sad or struggling this day, we pray that we would know that encouragement, that gentle comfort of your spirit at work in our hearts.

Lord, perhaps we come wandering, being rebellious. Lord, we're here, but perhaps in our hearts through the week we've been turning our back upon you.

And, Lord, if that's the case, we pray that we would know that loving discipline that challenges us, reminds us of our first love and calls us back.

[3 : 38] So, Lord, please, touch our hearts, we pray. We thank you for one another, that we don't just come on our own to worship, but we come together. Thank you, Lord, for all that you've done in our lives.

Thank you for what you're doing in our lives. Thank you for those that might be here who at the moment don't know you, but, Lord, they're reaching out and they're searching. We pray that tonight might be the night when they meet with you, the living God, and put their faith and their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, Lord, please come and have your way. Stir our hearts, we ask. Lord, we're so prone to be sleepy in our hearts, to be slow, to be immovable, as it were, hard-hearted.

Lord, we pray that you'd soften our hearts, quicken us, we ask, that we will be sensitive to your spirit this night. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

You'll see that in many of the things I'm going to do tonight, we're thinking a lot about salvation and rescue. And my mind, frequently during this week, went to these guys, these footballers that were in that cave in Thailand.

[4 : 48] And my thoughts came to Psalm 107. I'll read the first few verses, and then I'm going to read the little section from verses 10 to 16.

Just a reminder of the way that God can break into darkness and set us free. So, Psalm 107, and the first few verses.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.

His love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say this, those he redeemed from the hand of the foe, those he gathered from the lands, from east and west, from north and south.

And I'm going to turn to the second example that he gives, which starts in verse 10. Some sat in darkness and the deepest gloom, prisoners suffering in iron chains, for they rebelled against the words of God and despised the counsel of the Most High.

[5 : 59] So he subjected them to bitter labor. They stumbled, and there was no one to help. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress.

He brought them out of darkness and the deepest gloom and broke away their chains. Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men, for he breaks down gates of bronze and cuts through bars of iron.

I hope as we meet tonight that you know something of that release, that setting free. And it's in our next song as well, 509. 509, we're going to sing And Can It Be.

And I don't know about you, but I just love the fourth verse. I love all of this song, but the fourth verse. Long my imprisoned spirit lay, fast bound in sin and nature's night.

Thine I diffused a quickening ray, and I woke the dungeon flame with light. My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed. Let's stand and sing together.

[7 : 08] Scripture is from Titus. Titus chapter 2.

And if you're like me and sometimes struggle to find Titus, it's helpful to remember that all the T's are together in the New Testament. So Thessalonians and Timothy and Titus are all together.

So if you find one of the T's, keep looking around and you'll find that Titus is the last one. I don't know if it's the same as your Bibles, but my Bible, it's page 1199.

Is that right? I think it might be the same. So we're reading Titus chapter 2 from verse 11.

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age while we wait for the blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

[8 : 44] These then are the things that you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you. remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate and to show true humility towards all men.

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.

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things that 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.

This is a trustworthy saying, and I want you to stress these things so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

[10 : 13] But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law because these are unprofitable and useless. Warn a divisive person once and then warn him a second time.

After that, have nothing to do with him. You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful. He is self-condemned. As we come to consider the passage together, we're going to sing again.

We're going to sing to the words on the projector this time. Oh, to see the dawn or the power of the cross. It all began with a birthday.

Saturday, the 23rd of June, a young man nicknamed Knight turned 17. But Knight wasn't going to rush home that evening because he'd been out with his friends.

They'd been playing football. And at the end of the football was the plan that had already been arranged. The team, 12 of them that had been at the practice, rushed off through the paddy fields on their bikes.

[11 : 57] They were heading up the hills to this cave. The Tam Luan, I think, cave. A favourite haunt of the boys.

They loved exploring the nooks and the crannies. They'd been there many times together. It seems, they say, that they'd often ventured deep into the caves and they would have some kind of, I assume, just good humoured initiation ceremony and they'd write the names of new members of the football club on the wall in the cave.

Sometimes they'd go as far in as eight kilometres, five miles in old money. They were in high spirits.

It was someone's birthday. They wanted to celebrate, so they got to the cave, they dropped their bikes and some of their possessions, just taking torches and went into the cave. They wouldn't need much with them.

They were expecting to be in the cave for about an hour. You know the story. Two weeks later, they were still in the cave.

[13 : 12] They knew that the caves were a risky place to go, especially at this time of year. In July, at some point, the monsoons would come and the water would rise and the caves would be flooded.

And in those situations, the water not only fills the caves, but it's moving water and it's dirty water and it would be a treacherous place to be, not just dangerous, but treacherous.

As the parents realised that the boys had not come back when they were expecting them, I don't know if they knew before they went, but they found out from other friends that they'd been planning on WhatsApp, some kind of app on the phones, there is some use for social media, that's where they were going to go.

So the parents went up and they saw the bikes abandoned and raised the alarm. It seems from one early account that they've got, I don't know whether you've seen this, but it seems that it's possible that they got caught by a bit of a flash flood while they were in the cave, tried to come back out but realised actually that was more dangerous and so they went back and got pushed further into the cave in order to try and find dry land.

I'm sorry if this makes you scream because it is a horrible thought, isn't it? They had no choice it seems but to go deeper into the cave. The wild boars as the team were called, the football team, found themselves marooned on a rocky shelf four kilometres from the entrance of the cave, swallowed up by a mountain, surrounded by darkness except a few torches that they would obviously want to use sparingly.

[15 : 10] And the boys and the coach that was with them lost all sense of time, wondering how long they'd been there. They managed to get some rocks, I understand, and dig a bit of a hole into the wall so that they could get a small hole where they could all be together and keep warm.

And all they could do was sit and hope for rescue. Outside the cave, of course, a full-scale rescue operation was launched.

Initial attempts included some divers going into the cave, trying to pump some of the water out. They even tried to drill down into where they thought the boys might be, but all of these things failed.

They had thermal cameras on drones trying to detect if there was any way from above they might be able to detect these boys. Sniffer dogs were sent on the mountain.

Perhaps there were cracks where they would pick up a scent. They got them to smell their clothes and they failed. And again, of course, the cry went out across the world for specialised cave divers.

[16 : 22] Whoever gets into that profession, I do not know. And of course, people came from all over the world to share their expertise. And well, you know the rest of the story.

It was Monday, the 2nd of July, nine days after the boys went missing, that two British cave divers came up into the cavern where these boys were and found them alive, all 13.

Have you seen the clip on the news or on the internet? What an experience that must have been to have finally found these boys and for the boys finally to have seen light and life.

But of course, they didn't bring any food with them and they promised after trying to encourage them a bit to come back and to feed them, etc. And to work out how on earth they were going to get them out. And that's what they did for the next several days.

They tried to get air in online and that's how one of the divers died. He was trying to help the tanks of air get through to the boys. They were trying to lay rescue lines, etc.

[17 : 28] And for several days they tried to work out what they were going to do. Several of the boys couldn't even swim, let alone swim underwater in water like that. It was a dangerous place to be.

And the example, of course, of the diver that died. And after several days planning, Sunday the 8th of July, just last Sunday, I don't know if you met at church last Sunday, we just had heard the news as we came to meet together and we prayed that this rescue would be successful.

Three days the rain stopped and for those three days they went in and each day rescued four of the youngsters and another four of the youngsters and then on the final day including the coach.

even the divers that were in the cave watching the divers that were actually doing the rescue said that what they did was superhuman.

All 13 emerged from the mouth of the cave. The final ones on Tuesday the 10th of July. Just in time, apparently as they came out of the cave, the rains had returned, a pump broke down and the water was rising at the rate of one foot every hour as they came out.

[18 : 55] Yes, it is painful to even think about being in a situation like that. They were helplessly trapped, unable to save themselves, needing a rescue.

And all I want to do this evening is to consider this as a modern parable. Grasping a deep spiritual truth from this real life story.

I want to compare and contrast the physical rescue of these 13 people with the spiritual rescue that Christ has achieved for us.

And the title of my sermon is The Greatest Rescue Ever. And looking at Titus chapter 3, I want to show you that this great act of salvation is greater than the one that we witnessed a few weeks ago in three ways, in probably many ways.

The situation firstly, that we are in without God as our saviour, is worse than the situation that those 13 guys sat in for two weeks.

[20 : 21] I want to suggest to you that the rescue itself was better even than the rescue that we witnessed and watched on the television.

And I want to suggest that the end result, what was achieved by the rescue of Christ, is even better than the rescue that was achieved for those Thai boys.

first of all. Firstly, then, without Christ, we were in a much worse situation than they were in. I don't know about you, if you're like me, I wouldn't have said I'm particularly claustrophobic, but even the thought of getting trapped in a lift does not please me.

I don't like the thought. In fact, I don't know if I mentioned this here before, but one, I can't remember, Caroline and I were away and the grandparents were looking after the children and they came to Whitby for the day and they got stuck in the lift, the one that goes through the cliff.

Forty minutes they spent in that cliff and they weren't very happy when they came out and reported it to us. It's not a nice thought to be trapped in a confined space, but to be trapped in a cave, facing death, absolutely horrible.

[21 : 42] But think, of what it is for a moment to face God. He's holy, he's pure, and he is a judge.

He's many other things, but he is holy and he is pure and he is a judge. He has the power to separate us from him because of our sin forever.

hell. Eternal spiritual death. That's what's facing people who are not saved by the Lord Jesus Christ.

As I say, it's a terrible thing to think about being in a lift or your death, your physical death, being in a cave, but eternal spiritual death is what faces every single sinner before the living God.

And of course, that's what everyone is. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Which one of us could say that we had completely followed the Ten Commandments?

[22 : 56] Which one of us could say that we have loved the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength? Which one of us could say that we truly love other people as we love ourselves?

That's the summary of the law, to love God and to love others. By that test, I fail and by that test, you fail. So as things stand then, we all expect to face an angry God, a God who is opposed to our sin, a God who is pure.

And we are rebels. He is a good God, but like all good judges, he knows that sin must be punished.

And if you find these sort of thoughts hard to listen to, and I assure you, I don't find it any pleasure to think or speak about them, except as a warning. It says here in 2 Thessalonians chapter 1 and verse 8 and 9, as plain as day, he will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power. If that was not written in scriptures, I wouldn't dare say such a thing, but that's what the Bible says.

[24 : 21] What a terrible situation. The Thai boys, the football team, were totally helpless. some of them couldn't even swim.

There was absolutely nothing they could do to save themselves. Now, just look at Titus chapter 3 and verse 3.

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. Think about those words, foolish. foolish. Well, certainly those Thai boys were foolish.

Whatever else they were, it was a foolish thing to do with the monsoon season coming. But have we not been foolish? Not listening to the commands of God?

[25 : 26] Not obeying him? Not listening to his word? Disobedient? Deceived? Or perhaps it would be helpful to say self-deceived?

Thinking that everything's okay when clearly it's not. Can you imagine the Thai lads going in? Surely it got a little bit wet before it eventually flooded in. They deceived themselves.

It was fine. They were okay. It was all right. There wasn't really a problem. We'll get out quickly. We're quite fast. We're young and healthy. We'll escape. But clearly they couldn't get out quick enough.

Catch the next bit. They were enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. So let's just think about the Thai boys for example.

It was their fun. It was their after a football match. It even stopped this lad going home on his birthday because he wanted to be with his mates. It must have been exciting. They were exploring things.

[26 : 31] They were taking risks. It was good fun. But what seemed to be a passion and pleasure turned out to enslave them, entrap them.

And is that not exactly what sin is like? It feels pleasurable. It feels exciting. It seems risky. We enjoy it.

We resist listening to the warnings and then we find ourselves entrapped by sin with no way out. Trapped by our own selfish hearts.

[illegible]

Look here verse 4 in Titus chapter 3. But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared he saved us not because of righteous things that we had done but because of his mercy.

He saved us through the washing and rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. you might say they were certainly foolish but you might say well the Thai boys were a little bit unlucky.

[32 : 32] They chose the wrong moment. But people were ready to risk life and limb to save them. You know God could have acted justly and he could have left us in the mess that we had made for ourselves.

But he acted out of his infinite kindness and love and mercy. Even though it was our rebellion against him that had put us in that position he reached out to us.

This was not a rescue that we deserved. Just like the Thai lads it wasn't a rescue they deserved they'd been foolish. But people were willing to rescue them. And so too the Lord. rescues us. Not because we've earned it or deserve it. Because out of his infinite kindness and mercy he wants to save us. Think of the timing of the plan.

The Thai boys the plan took three days to put together. They were trying to work out how on earth they would move little boys that couldn't swim through a network of caves.

[33 : 44] Trying to work out the mechanisms. I think there was some drugs involved to help them sedate them. But how on earth would they get that right and how would they make sure they got through the etc.

They spent a few days. Ephesians chapter 1 tells us that the plan of our salvation goes back before the creation of the world.

and then this verse came to my mind in Romans chapter 5 verse 6 you see at just the right time when we were still powerless Christ died for the ungodly.

very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die but God demonstrates his own love for us in this while we were still sinners Christ died for us.

The plan was set before the creation of the world and even despite knowing our sin and rebellion he set out on that mission of rescuing us.

[35 : 03] Think for a moment about the cost of the plan. In the Thai situation what a cost. But no one talked about money I didn't hear anyone talk about money.

There were volunteers coming out the woodwork left right and centre there were people flying across the world there were airlines paying for people to come there were ladies doing the laundry every night I don't think any money was changing hands but there was a cost a human cost there was equipment being thrown in what's his name who's the guy from America Elon Musk whatever his name is he flew in didn't he he had a little submarine that he thought might be helpful he left it with them thought it might be helpful one day for them so he left it with them I'm sure that was a lot of money there was cost there was a cost even of a diver someone's life was laid down but how how could we measure the cost of God sending his only son to rescue scumbags like us sinners rebels how how how could we measure that cost 1 Peter chapter 1 and verse 18 for you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers but with the precious blood of

Christ a lamb without blemish or defect and let's not just get in this idea and there is a picture certainly of someone laying their lives down this diver that laid his life down trying to help these young boys it's true there's a parallel but let's not just look at Jesus as a man who was laying his life down for us many people have done that some of you might have relatives that laid down their lives in a war for their country and for their fellow soldiers we're talking about the son of God the one who sustains all things by his powerful word we're talking about the one that it calls in Acts the author of life it's him the author of life laid down his life for us what an incredible cost no wonder it says 2 Corinthians 9 15 thanks be to God for his indescribable gift his one and only son given on a rescue mission for us think for a moment of the certainty of the plan it's impossible for a plan of

God's to go wrong I don't know about you but I was watching the news each day to see what was happening and you kept thinking there's going to be some bad news and you could hear them it was obvious it wasn't an easy thing and it seemed like they were surprised each day when everyone got out well they were breathing a massive sigh of relief thankfully the plan proceeded and the people were rescued but with God's plans there's no doubt he has given his son for his people and they will be saved just just marvel again at those words in Titus chapter three verses five and six he saved us not because of righteous things that 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 saviour so that having been justified by his grace we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life what a marvellous rescue plan that's been laid for us we sung about it before we came to the word the power of the cross the one who laid down his life paying the penalty for our sin so that we can put our faith and trust in him and out of our darkness and bondage and death find real life and hope and joy that's what Christ has done for us and let's just think briefly about the end result the end result of this rescue plan is far above the result of the rescue plan of those Thai boys it tells us that when we were saved we became new people we were a new start so truly those

[40 : 11] Thai lads have had a new start haven't they in fact it's interesting Knight the one whose birthday it was his grandfather whose name I definitely will not try and pronounce said this it's like they have died after going into the cave and now have been reborn he saw that it was like receiving a child out of the womb it was as if they'd gone and they were dead and buried and now they've been received back to a new life and so we can't dispute it it was a new start for them but we are reborn by the spirit of God for all eternity this washing of rebirth and renewal by the spirit it reminds me too of the helper that we have the

Holy Spirit that once we are saved once we have placed our faith in the Lord Jesus once we have escaped this cavern once the chains have come off we have a new helper a comforter the Holy Spirit he is with us always and whilst those Thai boys had rescues in fact they each had two didn't they one went in front and one went behind right through the cave system and no doubt over the way through there were plenty more people put in there or beside making sure they were safe but at least two all the way and now they're in hospital but the rescuers have gone home they won't have a guardian with them forever a comfort and a strength but we do but these are the two things these last two things are the things that I think are the most astounding things the new status that we receive when we are born again when we escape this sinful bondage it says in verse seven that we become heirs of

God having been justified by his grace we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life in our prayer meeting before we came out Frederick was praying about being royal we are a holy priesthood we are also heirs together with Christ heirs of God this is what we have been delivered from the depths of deserving hell and we have been lifted up not just back to where you might say we should be as human beings that aren't with their sin dealt with but lifted beyond that into the heavenly realms we've been seated with Christ heirs with Christ you know several of the boys did you hear this several of the boys didn't even have legal papers they didn't have a citizenship at one point they were going to try and get them to be able to go to the world cup but they said it would be a bit of a problem because they haven't got passports and some of them haven't even got any kind of proof of their identity or their citizenship so in one sense they certainly were lifted up these guys that had no human status were lifted up for all the world to watch on and say wow but in a spiritual sense what a marvellous thing God's doing for us lifting us way beyond way beyond anything that we deserve and being heirs of God we gain a new citizenship heirs of God and seated in heavenly places and lastly the end result is even better because it's eternal says it again doesn't it verse 7 we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life that life that we are given is eternal those boys no doubt they've been brought into the the spotlight of the media and I guess in some sense their lives will have changed forever but at some point they're going to go back to ordinary life back to school back to the football club and one day they'll have to face death again unless the Lord comes but our rescue the spiritual rescue that we have enjoyed is eternal it lasts forever we can confidently look ahead and believe that whatever we face we will be with Christ we will be in his kingdom enjoying the new life that he has brought to us and so the call to us is very simple to respond to this message

I don't know you very well I know some of you I know some of you have been Christians for a long time but perhaps there's people here who have never actually responded to this call and the call is being offered to you tonight not by me but by the Lord himself I wonder if you'll respond to him I wonder if you'll see that really yes that is you you are trapped in sin still the Bible says that what we need to do is repent from our sin turn away from it believe the Lord Jesus that he died for you and follow him I really hope that you never find yourself in a physical situation like we've been thinking about these lads in a cave awful but perhaps you can identify with this spiritual trap this spiritual bondage and you know that you need to be set free or perhaps even you're a Christian who's stuck in some kind of sin the Lord wants to set you free tonight come to him repent believe him and follow him let me commend to you again today the one who came into this world the God of the universe humbled himself to come into this world in order to accomplish this rescue mission your sins can be forgiven a way has been opened up for you to escape all you need to do is place your faith and trust in him words what we've been thinking about who oh Lord could save themselves their own soul from hell our shame was deeper than the sea but your grace is deeper still you alone can rescue you alone can save you alone can lift us from the grave you came down to find us led us out of death to you alone belongs the highest praise you oh Lord have made a way the great divide you heal for when our hearts were far away your love went further still yes your love goes further still you alone can rescue you alone can save you alone can lift us from the grave you came down to find us led us out of death to you alone belongs the highest praise let's pray father God we thank you for your great rescue plan we thank you that you've done it for us and we pray that each and every person here might know that experience of being set free by the power of God through the Lord

Jesus Christ I pray Lord that you would speak to our hearts I pray Lord that you would send us out to tell others I pray Lord that you'd excite us about the deliverance that we have we have had that now we are not getting what we deserve which was hell but we're going to be seated in the highest place in heaven heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ in Jesus name we pray Amen Amen