

The Work of Rescue

Psalm 69:13-18

November 17, 2024

I guess you all heard about the fire at the shoe factory last night. 10000 souls were lost. They say things will heal in time.

Arthur Rostron had already gone to bed that night. Like many of us, the captain of the British Royal Mail Steamer, was fast asleep at 12:20am when the ship's wireless operator suddenly woke him up. Harold Cottam was still up relaying messages from Massachusetts to another ship. Only when he did so, that other ship replied with a distress signal and a plea for help. That other ship was the RMS Titanic and without hesitating the radioman, Cottam, ran to Captain Rostron's cabin to wake him up and share the news.

As Rostron wiped his eyes and learned of the unfolding disaster, he had a decision to make. He had his ship on its regular route between New York and Austria. He had schedules to meet and owners to satisfy. He had important passengers who had important appointments to keep in Europe. Besides, the cold waters of the North Atlantic had claimed many a ship with its icebergs hiding in broad daylight, much more in the dark of night. It would be risky to attempt any such diversion from their regular voyage and it would result in delays, possible lawsuits and even potential sinking. Rostron himself would be personally liable for whatever decision he made or failed to make that night. What did he do? What would you do? What **are** you doing?

Please open your Bibles today to Psalm 69. We are very grateful, as we mentioned earlier, for our first responders that are with us today as well as those who couldn't make it. For our Firefighters, squadmen, and law enforcement officers, all who are involved in this important work. And we're going to talk a bit about that today and see what the Bible has to say about it. We're going to begin with a prayer written by King David 3000 years ago that sounds an awful lot like a 911 call. If you are able, please stand as we read Ps 69:13 But I pray to you, O Lord, in the time of your favor; in your great love, O God, answer me with your sure **salvation**. 14 **Rescue** me from the mire, do not let me sink; deliver me from those who hate me, from the deep waters. 15 Do not let the floodwaters engulf me or the depths swallow me up or the pit close its mouth over me. 16 Answer me, O Lord, out of the goodness of your love; in your great mercy turn to me. 17 Do not hide your face from your servant; answer me quickly, for **I am in trouble**. 18 Come near and **rescue** me; redeem me because of my foes.

Say rescue. The Bible is a book about rescue and that word is used in some form 125 times. In fact, rescue is its main theme. God rescued Noah and his family from the flood. He rescued Abraham from enemies and Joseph from his brothers. He rescued the

Israelites from slavery, David from Goliath, Daniel from the lions, and the three Hebrew children from the fiery furnace. The word save is used even more than rescue at nearly 450 times. God is into rescuing and saving! King Darius said, “[God] rescues and he saves...” And so we see from this very brief glance that God rescues many people from many things including natural disasters, enemies, animals, starvation, fire, persecution, and more. And so, whoever rescues or saves someone, whether it’s from a car wreck, a burning building, or an angry relative, you’re doing God’s work whether you realize it or not. First responders are in very good company for God is the First and Greatest First Responder, which is why David made his 911 call to Him.

The song we sang, Rescue the Perishing, reminds us of the desperate spiritual state of those around us who have never accepted Jesus as their Savior. They are literally leaning over the infinitely deep ocean of eternity with no railing to hold them back, no life jacket to hold them up, and no helicopter to pull them out. If Jesus doesn’t come first, every single person now living will die. We’re all perishing physically. But we don’t have to perish spiritually. We don’t have to go to a place of great suffering, pain and sorrow. Jesus came to **rescue** us from that. He came to save us and to pull us back from the edge of the ship and take us to His place of eternal safety. John 3:16 says God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. If we accept Him we will not perish.

But we have to want to be rescued. Say want to. We have to **allow** ourselves to be saved. As crazy as it sounds, first responders, if they’ve been at it very long, have probably encountered someone who didn’t **want** help. Either they were too embarrassed for help, they were too proud for help, they really didn’t think they needed help, or they were afraid of the cost of help.

Which is all perfectly similar to our spiritual condition. We have to **allow** ourselves to be saved. We have to **want to** be saved. Sadly, some people resist it with everything they’ve got. It may be embarrassment, thinking no one else has sinned like they have, but the Bible assures that, “We’ve all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” Every single one of us. And the good news is that Jesus died for all of us! But we have to humble ourselves, get over ourselves, admit our sins, turn from them, and ask for His forgiveness and then He gives it. But He will not force it on anyone, especially those who are too proud. If we continue to resist His love and grace, and keep our noses in the air before God, we will sink into Hell with our noses in the air and experience eternal separation from the One who did everything He could to rescue us from that.

Then are those who don’t think they **need** saving. I’m sure some of you could give testimony of where patients have been seriously injured yet insisted they were just fine. Many people with heart symptoms refuse treatment, only to have a heart attack that takes them out. Even faced with irregular rhythms or extremely high blood pressure, or sugar, patients insist they’re OK. And how often that happens spiritually. God has

diagnosed us all with sin. Little sin, big sin, every sin disqualifies us from heaven and puts us in need of His rescue. Even a little sin will push us over the edge of the boat and into the bottomless sea. We've all told a lie, or many. We've all lusted after others, or worse. We've all been selfish and so on. We must admit it, we must confess it, we must turn from it, and we must ask God to forgive us. And then experience the saving, the rescue, He provides. Allow His Word to convince you of your need to be saved if you're not already.

Sadly, some people don't think they can afford the cost of help. Either the cost of the doctor or hospital or transport or medicine. While those are real concerns, thankfully, no one who needs help is ever turned away because of inability to pay. And the even better news is that Jesus has already paid our bill for being spiritually saved. He's already underwritten it and taken care of **all** our expenses. He didn't just make a down payment, He paid in full! It's a good thing too, because we'd never be able to pay it ourselves, even in a million years. But the good news is that Jesus poured out His blood to save your blood. And to save you. Don't be too proud or too embarrassed or too frugal or too whatever to be saved. Those people in the cold seawater freely accepted whatever help they could get.

And then after we are saved, let's live like it. Say live like it. Some people, after being pulled from a car wreck caused by their texting and driving go right back to texting and driving. Some people who are rescued from a heart attack keep eating high fat. And some people who have been saved from sin go right back to sinning. Now we all do to some degree, but that certainly shouldn't be our plan or our wish. When we realize our rescue costs Jesus His very life, we ought to love Him enough not to intentionally or casually disobey Him. It reminds me of Hee Haw. Anyone remember the Dr? Jr Samples comes in and says he broke his leg in three places and the Dr said, stay out of them places. After Jesus rescues us, we ought to stay out of sin's places. We ought to live our lives to honor and thank and glorify Him for it. Not presuming on His grace by continuing to live in unrepentant sin.

So let's accept the saving that we need and if we are, let's live like it. And part of living like it is doing what we can to save others. Say save others. I spoke about this same tragedy from the aspect of the Titanic back in August and how evangelist Jack Harper shared Jesus with many people before he and they both drowned that night. But we also highlighted the fact that the closest ship, the Californian, did not respond to the Titanic's distress calls. Even though some of the crew saw distress signals, they didn't even go and check it out. As a result, over 1500 people died that night. But that number would have been much higher.

You see, without a moment's hesitation, Captain Rostron, whom we started with today, upon being awakened and informed of the distress call, **immediately** ordered his ship, the Car-path-ee-a, to race toward the Titanic. He made the decision to go help in

spite of the cost and the risk. He added extra men to look for icebergs and only after he had done all that did he ask the radioman if he was certain of what he had heard. He didn't even wait before taking action. He and his crew accelerated the ship to 17½ knots which was 3½ more than she was designed for. Even still, it took the Carpathia 3½ hours to cover the 67 miles. On the way, Captain Rostron turned off the heat on board to get maximum engine steam as he had the crew prepare the ship for survivors. Altogether, the captain issued 23 orders before their ship ever arrived at the site. When they finally did, they rescued 706 perishing survivors out of the frigid 28 degree waters.

Praise God for Captain Rostron. In fact, he himself gave credit to God, for he was a Christian. Whenever he issued orders he often closed his eyes in prayer, and referring to the risks they took sprinting through the icy sea that night, he said, "I can only conclude another hand than mine was on the helm." Indeed it was. God is in the rescue business!

Oh my friends, rescue work is not just for first responders, it's all of us work. When it comes to saving souls, every Christian is a first responder. And my prayer is that, like Captain Rostron, we're constantly turning our ships toward those most in need. Our theme at Antioch this year is Jesus' Great Commission to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything Jesus commanded. Just as Arthur Rostron was commissioned to captain the Carpathia, you and I have been commissioned by our High King Jesus, to captain our ship in His service and our highest responsibility and chief calling is to rescue and save others and recruit them into His Royal service.

Will you turn your ship around? Will you head into the icebergs of ruined reputation, mockery, and loss of friends? Will you value souls over schedules? Eternal life over temporary pleasures? What happened that night was a horrendous tragedy when 1517 people entered eternity ready or not. But if the Carpathia hadn't gone to help, that number would have been much higher.

Back in August, we learned that the motto of the early rescuers along the Atlantic coast was, "We have to go out, we don't have to come back!" Like Captain Rostron, we have to go! Don't hesitate! Don't make excuses! Don't pretend you didn't see like those on the Californian. Don't be too busy or too self-absorbed to rescue someone who is drowning in the icy deep waters of sin. Hear their 911 calls. We have to go out! We have to! We have no choice! Out of love and devotion and duty, not only to our fellowman, but to our Captain Jesus Himself. Rescue work is dangerous work. One of the first concerns on any call is the safety of the rescuers, the safety of the firefighters going in to save others; the safety of the EMTs rushing to the accident; the safety of the officer with the disabled car. Please know that we pray for your safety. Thank you for

risking your life to save ours. Some of the risks are enormous but that's the nature of rescue.

Most of the Scriptures regarding rescuing souls are found in the New Testament, but Prov 24:10-12 speaks to the risks involved and decision to help or not. It says, "10 If you falter in times of trouble, how small is your strength! 11 Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter. 12 If you say, "But we knew nothing about this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done?" Those who die without Jesus are staggering toward eternal death, eternal hell. And if we claim to be ignorant of their need or of the 911 calls, their distress signals or signal flares, God knows. And He will repay accordingly as this passage assures us. Captain Rostron did not fail in that time of trouble. And with God's help, neither will we.

Speaking of repayment, a few months after his heroic rescue work that night, Captain Rostron was awarded with the highest award a civilian could receive, the Congressional Gold Medal by President Taft. On the same day, he received the American Cross of Honour from the British Ambassador. He also received medals from the Shipwreck Societies of New York and Liverpool. Perhaps the awards that meant the most to him were the silver cup and gold medal he received from the Titanic survivors themselves. That cup was auctioned off in 2015 for over \$200,000. But Captain Rostron wasn't thinking about medals or honors or dollars that night. He was thinking about human beings. Our medals will not be awarded to us here, but hereafter in that place we talked about two weeks ago. One day in heaven, the Bible assures us that Jesus will honor each one according to his or her deeds and what a celebration that's going to be! But imagine the gratitude of the souls who will be there with you because you shared Jesus with them.

Inscribed on his tombstone in St. James Church Cemetery in Hampshire, England are these words, "Sir Arthur Rostron, Captain of R.M.S. Carpathia, saved 706 Souls from SS Titanic 15 April 1912." How many souls will be put on your tombstone? Not saved from the Titanic or the North Atlantic. Not saved from physical death, but saved from eternal hell? Rescue the Perishing, care for the dying. Jesus is merciful, Jesus will save.

Returning to our Scripture today, hear the 911 call from those in sin's icy waters now, "**Rescue** me ... do not let me sink; deliver me ... from the deep waters. 15 Do not let the floodwaters engulf me or the depths swallow me up or the pit close its mouth over me. ... answer me quickly, for **I am in trouble**. 18 Come near and **rescue** me; ..." God answered that call and He's done His part. He has answered and provided salvation and deliverance for all. I Thess 1:10 assures us that Jesus rescues us from the coming wrath and 1 Tim 2:3 tells us that God is our Savior and wants all men to be saved and to come

to a knowledge of the truth. It's not His will that any should perish. Not even you, not even your neighbor.

We said earlier that the Bible is book of rescue. That's true because it's all about the greatest Rescuer of all, Jesus Christ. He came to earth on the greatest rescue mission of all and He lost His life rescuing us! He is our Deliverer, our Redeemer, our Rescuer, our First Responder, and our Savior. If you've never allowed Him to save you, do that today as we pray, and if you have, do what Captain Rostron did and work to save every other soul you possibly can.