

The God who wants to rescue us

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if you've been around for any length of time, you'll know that things don't always go the way people expect, do they? In the last few weeks, we've actually seen a string of unexpected outcomes in the world.

I think two stand out for me in particular. Firstly, Ireland beating New Zealand at rugby the first time in 111 years that they've managed to do that, which was a huge upset on the rugby scene.

And as you can see in this picture behind me. And then an equally surprising upset is Donald Trump being elected as the president of the United States.

Now, Donald Trump, if you don't know him, he's a brash, offensive reality TV star. Very few people took him seriously to become the president. But, you know, they were mocking him and laughing at him.

In fact, have a look at what some of the top American movers and shakers said before the election. Now, I'm going to play the video if it works, God willing. And have a listen to what they say.

[1 : 0 2] Well, they got a surprise, didn't they? You see, they laughed at him. They mocked him. But then last Wednesday morning, they woke up and they discovered that he was their new president.

That they are now under his authority, the person that they laughed at, whether they like it or not. And I think they're still reeling from the shock of that election. It was all over the world news.

I think the world was reeling at the shock. But, of course, all those who supported Trump, like that woman. You see that woman who supported Trump and everybody laughed at her? Imagine how she's feeling now. Quite satisfied.

She's been, her faith in Donald Trump has been vindicated when he became president. And I'm sure it was very satisfying for those who did support him and were laughed at.

Well, why am I talking about Donald Trump? He's not really that important in the grand scheme of things. The reason is because the Bible describes the return of Jesus to earth in a very similar way. Similar things are going to happen when Jesus comes to earth to what we saw in the U.S. election.

[2 : 0 3] But on a much bigger scale, on a universal scale. You see, because it's going to be unexpected. Many, many, many people are not expecting Jesus to come back. And all of those people around the world who had laughed Jesus off and denied his right to rule in their lives, they will get a nasty shock on that day when they discover that he is their creator and Lord and that they are answerable to him.

This man that they never took seriously in their lives, suddenly they are standing before him. It's going to be the biggest upset the world has ever seen.

And I want to ask you this morning, what side will you be on on that day? Will you be one of those people who didn't really take Jesus seriously in your life and get a big surprise when you stand before him one day and are asked to give an account for your life?

Or will that day be exactly what you expected and what you lived towards? Because you did take him seriously and you followed him in this life. Which will you be? Well, to answer that, we need to understand just what it means to follow Jesus in this life.

Because not everyone who calls themselves a Christian necessarily follows Jesus. That's something I want to state. And not everyone who comes to church necessarily follows Jesus. So I want us to really discover what it means to follow Jesus this morning.

[3 : 25] And to see that, I want to join some of the first men who made the decision to follow Jesus. And I want us to see two things from them. And this is what we're going to look at this morning. Firstly, I want us to see the causes of these men, these early disciples following Jesus.

What caused them to do what they did? And secondly, the results. What did it look like for them in their lives? How did their lives change when they followed Jesus? And hopefully, as we look at those things, we each will have an opportunity to ask, Am I truly a follower of Jesus?

And so that's what I want us to do this morning. So firstly, the causes of following Jesus. I want to read from verse 35. You can follow along. The next day, John was again there with his two disciples.

When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, Look, the Lamb of God. And when the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Okay, so I don't know about you, but this is pretty strange.

Because John is already a bit of a weirdo, right? I mean, anybody knows anything about John the Baptist? He dresses in camel hair. He lives in the desert and he eats locusts for breakfast.

[4 : 31] So he's kind of one of the guys that you would want to avoid when you saw him in the street. And if that's not bad enough, what he does now is also pretty strange. He points out some random guy to his disciples and tells them that he's a farm animal.

I mean, that's quite strange. I mean, it's like, what if I was in the street and I pointed to some random guy and said, He's a duck. You know, you would probably want to lock me up in a loony bin. But that's what John did.

He pointed to a guy and said, He's a lamb. What does that mean? And then you'd think the disciples would sort of tell John to take five and maybe have a drink of water. But instead, you know what they did?

They dropped everything to follow this mysterious man who they had just been told was a farm animal. So what's going on here? Well, the first thing we've got to understand about what John was telling these people is that a lamb in the Bible is not just any farm animal.

You see, it's got significance. A lamb in the Old Testament was seen as a sacrificial animal. The Jews used the blood of a lamb to paint on their doorposts to escape God's judgment in the Passover back in Egypt.

[5 : 38] We can read about that in Exodus. And one of the Old Testament prophets, Isaiah, who we heard from earlier, predicted the coming of someone who was going to suffer on behalf of God's people to take away their sins.

And you know how he was described in Isaiah? He describes him as a lamb being led to the slaughter. Now, we know with hindsight, as Alan said, that this prophecy from Isaiah was talking about Jesus.

But the people that day didn't know that. They didn't actually know who Isaiah was talking about. So John's disciples didn't know who Isaiah was talking about, who this mysterious figure who's going to be a lamb led to the slaughter was.

Until John pointed to Jesus and said, look, the lamb of God. And then suddenly it clicked. It all made sense to them. And they realized this is the guy who Isaiah was talking about.

This is the man who is able to take away sins, which is quite a revelation. And they saw him in a whole new light. He wasn't just some carpenter from Nazareth.

[6 : 37] Suddenly this was the man who the prophets centuries ago were talking about. Imagine that revelation when they saw the guy standing in front of him. Imagine how they would have felt.

Imagine, you know, how their hearts would have started beating faster as they considered who this man was. That this man was the man that God has sent to take away sins. Now, of course, they didn't know quite how he was going to do that, which we read on in the rest of the gospel.

But they didn't really need to know at that point how Jesus was going to take away sins. Just knowing, just knowing that there was a way for their sins to be taken away was more than enough for them to drop everything and follow this guy.

Which tells us something about the disciples, doesn't it? It tells us that they knew their sins were a problem. And that's why they were so excited when they were told that the solution to sin has come.

Because they knew firstly that their sins were a big problem, which is more than I can say for many people today, right? I mean, how do people consider sin today a big problem?

[7 : 44] I don't think so. People don't really take sin seriously at all today. And that's why people are not interested in following Jesus. And so you see the primary cause of these men following Jesus is not only that they realized that he was the solution for their sin and the only solution for their sin, but also they realized they had the problem in the first place.

You see what I'm saying? That's so vital as a requirement to truly follow Jesus. They need to be convinced that they have the problem that he came to solve.

If any of us are going to follow Jesus, we need to first be convinced that he has the solution to our greatest problem. Let me explain it another way. Okay, imagine we go, as a church, we go on a church cruise on a luxury cruise ship to Mauritius.

Would you like that? No. Who said no? That's crazy. Levona. That's insane. Who wouldn't want to go on a church cruise? Okay, just imagine, you know, other churches go on church camps to dusty campsites.

We're going to go on a church, St. Mark's church cruise. And it's all expenses paid. Maybe that'll change your mind, Levona. All expenses paid. We've asked the denomination to give us, you know, because we need the fellowship to give us money.

[9 : 06] So we've got this all expenses paid church cruise to Mauritius. And we're there cruising along and nighttime comes and there's this big ballroom and we've all had dinner and we all go to the ballroom and we're having a great party.

We're dancing the night away. You can just imagine St. Mark's in a ballroom dancing the night away with fancy clothes and bow ties and everything. And then as we're dancing the night away and everybody's having a good time, Michiel runs into the ballroom and he says, everybody, everybody, I found the lifeboat.

Now what would we do? We'd probably say, okay, thanks, Michiel. Well, I'm sure that's very exciting. Why don't you come and join us for the party?

All right. But imagine, imagine that's not all Michiel said. Okay. Because if that's all he said, we would go, okay, so what? But imagine he said this.

Imagine he ran in and he said, guys, that little bump that you felt earlier while you were dancing, that was an iceberg. Okay. And it's punctured a hole in the side of the ship. And I've just come from the engineer.

[10 : 14] He says we're sinking. We're taking on water and the ship is sinking. But don't worry. I found the lifeboat. Okay. Now would we react differently? Yes, of course we would.

Because now the lifeboats are suddenly really important to us. We weren't concerned about the lifeboats before. But now that the ship is sinking, suddenly the lifeboats take on a whole new importance.

And we listen to Michiel and we follow him to the lifeboats. Because we realize that we have a problem. And suddenly the solution becomes important. You see what I'm saying? It's the same with Jesus.

John coming in and announcing to the people, basically, I found the lifeboat. I found God's rescue in this man, Jesus. But of course that only makes sense to people who first realize that there's a problem.

That they are sinners and that without Jesus they're going to face God's judgment. And so I guess I want to ask you this morning. Do you realize that about yourself? Are you dancing the night away?

[11 : 14] But do you realize that the ship is sinking? We're heading for death. We're heading for eternity. We're all going to stand before God one day. Do you realize that there's a problem here? That we all have this problem called sin.

Because unless you do, unless you realize that and it really gnaws at you and you really are scared of what's coming. Unless you are, then you'll never follow Jesus.

You'll never get into the lifeboat. You'll never accept the solution. If you think you don't really need it. So that's the first requirement to following Jesus.

Okay? That's the cause of these disciples following Jesus. But now before I move on to see the results of following Jesus, which is really important. I want to pause here. I want to stop for a second.

And I want us to consider just what we learn about God from this passage. Because this series that we're doing is called Getting to Know God. And so that's what I want to try to do. Every Sunday I want to stop and think and meditate on what do we learn about God from today's passage.

[12 : 14] And what we learn about God here, just from what we've read, is the simple fact. We often overlook that God wants to rescue us. Okay?

God wants to rescue us. He wants to give us a way out of the punishment that he has a right to give us. Just think about that for a second. He wants to give us a way out of the punishment that he has a right to give us.

Okay? One of the things that everybody here needs to understand is that God didn't need to send Jesus. God didn't need to give us a solution for our sins. He had every right.

God had every right just to leave us be, to face death and judgment, because that's what we deserve. Because we have sinned. Let's be honest. We've ignored God in the world that he's made.

We don't tend to give him any say in running the lives that he has given us, in the world that he has given us. The world that belongs to him.

[13 : 13] Lives that we have that belong to God. And yet we, how much say do we give him in how we run our lives? You see, we've sinned. We've broken God's laws thousands of times in our lives.

Thousands. Each of us. Isaiah 53 verse 6 says, We all like sheep have gone astray. Each has turned to his own way. And you know what? It could have stopped there.

It could have easily stopped there. And we could have been doomed. Romans 3.20 could have just said, No one will be declared righteous in God's sight by works of the law. Rather, through the law, we become conscious of sin.

And it could have stopped there. Romans 3.23 says, All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. It could have just gone full stop right there. And doomed us.

Ephesians 2.3 could have just said, All of us gratify the cravings of our flesh and follow its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

[14 : 13] And it could have left it there. Okay, imagine that's all the Bible said. We would be doomed, wouldn't we, to God's wrath. The Bible would be bad news. But that's not all the Bible says.

Mercifully, these passages continue. Isaiah 53 goes on to say, And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. Romans 3.20 goes on to say, But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been made known, a righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ.

Romans 3.23 goes on to say, And all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. And finally, Ephesians 2 goes on to say, But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in our transgressions.

It is by grace you have been saved. And when we read those verses, those second parts of those verses, we should take, you know, time to just stop and go, wow.

And we should breathe a huge sigh of relief that the Bible promises these things, because the Bible didn't have to say that. God didn't have to give us those promises. If they had stopped at wrath and judgment, justice would have been satisfied.

[15 : 33] The universe would have been made right. God would have been right to do that. God doesn't owe us salvation. Okay? He never had to send Jesus for us. He doesn't owe us salvation.

And yet that is what he wants to give us. He wants to, out of the depths of his heart, he looks at these sinful, rebellious creatures. And while we, if we were God, we would want to judge them and smite them and get revenge, he's not like that.

Because he looks at us and he has compassion. Because he wants to rescue us. Because he's a God of endless love and mercy. God wants to save helpless sinners that deserve nothing but judgment.

And not only to save us, but to come to earth as Jesus and actually sacrifice himself to save us by taking on his own wrath for our sins.

Isn't our God incredible? Isn't our God incredible? That he would do that when he didn't have to do that. That not only would he work to find a way to save us while still satisfying justice when he didn't need to do that, but he goes so far as to sacrifice himself to do it.

[16 : 48] That's the most amazing act of love that we've ever, ever seen. That we can ever see. And in fact, it was beautifully portrayed. In the movie, we watched Friday Night Narnia, which is really just a big picture of the gospel.

When the lion Aslan gave himself to the white witch to suffer in the place of the boy Edmund, to satisfy the law that he had made.

Well, that's what God did for us. That's what Jesus came to do for us. So that's what we learn about God from this passage. And I hope that it struck you afresh this morning. I hope that you have new reason to praise and worship God this week.

Because we learn that God wants to rescue us. He didn't need to. He didn't have to. But he wants to. He wants to save you. He wants to rescue you. He wants you to enjoy eternal life.

And these disciples at that moment realize that Jesus is the way they can be rescued. So they decide to follow him. So that's the cause of following Jesus.

[17 : 50] Recognizing God's rescue and recognizing our need for it. But then, before we finish this morning, I want us to briefly consider what is the result? What does that really mean?

What does it look like to follow Jesus in our lives? Well, we see there's basically three things that we see in this passage. The first is investing ourselves in Jesus.

That's the first aspect of what it means to truly follow Jesus. From verse 37. When the two disciples had heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Now, look what they did.

Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, What do you want? As anybody would if you've got two strangers following you. And they said, Rabbi, which means teacher, where are you staying?

They obviously wanted to learn from him. Be with him. Come, he replied, and you will see. And so they went and saw where he was staying. And they spent the day with him. It was about four in the afternoon.

[18 : 46] I mean, four in the afternoon, you kind of want to go home to supper. You want to put your feet up. You want to watch some TV. Although the disciples didn't have that. Maybe they want to read some scrolls. I don't know. But they didn't.

They decided to sacrifice their evening to follow Jesus. And not just their evening, but the next three years of their lives. And not just the next three years, but the rest of their lives on earth.

You see, to follow Jesus, we learn from these disciples, doesn't just mean to give him an hour a week or two hours a week. These disciples dropped everything that they were doing and went to be with Jesus and to stay with him.

Because they knew the seriousness of their sin and they knew that this man was the solution. So, of course, they would drop everything to follow him. They made sure they prioritized being with him and learning from him.

And they invested time and energy and money in Jesus. Do you? Do you? Do you invest your life in Jesus like these men did?

[19 : 47] Because that is the first aspect of what it really means to follow Jesus, to be a disciple. Secondly is talking about Jesus. And notice the first thing these disciples did after finding out about Jesus.

You may have picked it up as we were reading from verse 40. Andrew is an example. Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus.

The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, we have found the Messiah, that is the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus. Okay, someone who has truly discovered that Jesus is the solution to their greatest problem can't keep quiet about it.

That's how you actually know someone is a disciple of Jesus. They're so excited by what they've discovered in Jesus that they want others to know. You know, because Jesus is the solution to their greatest problem as well.

All the other people in the world. Because all have sinned, the Bible says. So that means your brother has sinned, your sister has sinned, your mother has sinned, your father has sinned, your cousin has sinned, your work colleague has sinned.

[20 : 57] All the people you pass on the street have sinned. And they all need the solution to sin. And there's only one solution to sin. The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. So everybody needs to know about him. Okay?

And if we truly believe that, if we truly believe that every person that we pass on the street is under God's wrath and needs rescue, then how can we keep Jesus to ourselves?

How can we? How can we come and pray at church and sing songs about salvation on Sunday, but then keep it a secret during the week from the people who desperately need to hear it?

How can we do that? We can't. And that's why true followers of Jesus talk about Jesus, because they love Jesus. And they're excited about him. And then finally, true followers of Jesus become the people Jesus will make them.

Okay, let me explain what I mean by that. Now, something strange happens when Jesus meets Simon. I wonder if you noticed the introduction was quite unorthodox. Jesus looked at him and said, you are Simon, son of John.

[22 : 05] You will be called Cephas, which, when translated, is Peter. Now, it's an odd way to make an introduction. You know, hi, my name is Jesus. Oh, hi, pleased to meet you. My name is, I know what your name is.

Your name is Simon, but I'll call you Cephas. Okay? How can Jesus do that? How can he just change the name of this guy that he's met for the first time? Well, the reason he can do it is, we discovered last week, Jesus made Simon.

He created Simon. He gives Simon life. He knows Simon already, way before he's met him. And even before he meets him, he has plans for Simon.

Jesus has Simon's whole life mapped out in his head already. Jesus knows what Simon is going to become, even before he knows it. He's going to become Peter, the great apostle, the rock on which the church will be built.

And that's why Jesus gave him a new name, not because of who he is now, but because of who he's going to become. Who Jesus sees that he's going to become.

[23 : 09] Who Jesus is going to change him into. And that tells us something else about following Jesus, doesn't it? It tells us that following Jesus isn't about who we are now.

And most of us will breathe a sigh of relief at that. It's about who Jesus is still going to make us. That's what following Jesus is about.

You see, when Jesus calls people to follow him, he calls them to make them into new people, to be born again, and to be remade in his image, to be made perfect one day in the new creation.

And when Jesus looks at you, if you've trusted in him, he doesn't see you as you are now. He sees who you're going to be.

Isn't that a relief? He doesn't see the person you see when you look in the mirror. He sees the person you're going to be in eternity. And he loves you for it.

[24 : 08] And you should see that person too, if you're a Christian. You should root your identity in who Jesus saved you to be, not in who you are now, but in who you will become in him.

And you should work towards being the person that Jesus already sees you as, and the person that Jesus died for you to become. Because that is what following Jesus is all about.

And so to close, I want to ask you, are you a true follower of Jesus? It's the most important question you could ever be asked in this life. Are you a true follower of Jesus?

Really, ask yourself in your heart of hearts. Because if you aren't, then you are still dancing in the ballroom while the ship is sinking. And you need to realize the trouble you're in.

That you're going to face God one day. But also you need to realize that he, out of his mercy and his love for human sinners, has made a way to rescue you. He has provided the rescue boat.

[25 : 13] He has provided the lifeboat. But you know what you need to do? You need to stop looking at the lifeboat, and you need to get into it before the ship sinks. You need to stop coming to church on Sunday and just hearing about the lifeboat.

You need to get into it before the ship sinks. You need to decide to follow Jesus today and invest your life in him today before it's too late.

Will you do that? So if you want to do that now, if you realize this morning, you're looking at Jesus' first followers, and you realize I'm not one of those. I'm not a follower. I haven't invested my life in Jesus.

I haven't realized the trouble I'm in. I don't really want to tell others about Jesus. I'm not that excited about Jesus. If you realize that about yourself, then you can change now. You can invest. You can step into the lifeboat right now.

You don't have to do anything to step into the lifeboat. I invite you to pray a prayer after me if you want to do that now. So everybody, I ask you, bow your heads, please.

[26 : 15] And those who want to step into the lifeboat, if you haven't yet, those who want to commit themselves to investing in Jesus, to following him, then pray these words in your heart after me.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, you made me and you own me, but I've sinned against you, and I've ignored you in my life.

Lord Jesus, you are the Lamb of God who takes away sins of all those who trust in you. And so I trust in you now.

Thank you for taking my sins on the cross. Forgive me. Wash me clean. And help me now to follow you, to give my life to you, and to become the person you made me to be.

Amen. If you prayed that prayer and you want to find out more, I've got some booklets that I'll be happy to give you, a booklet just to tell you and show you what it means to follow Jesus.

[27 : 31] And what an amazing thing you've done if you prayed that prayer this morning, because you've passed from death to life the moment you put your faith in Jesus. It's the most amazing thing. And please come to me so you can get one of those booklets.

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