

**Series: THE ANSWER NO ONE EXPECTED - April 3, 2011**

## **OPERATION RESCUE**

**Acts 4:12**

Speaker: Ken Davis

1. Has anyone here ever been on a cruise? Several weeks ago, I watched a show that featured what **no one** ever wants to think of if they're going on a ship: It was the sinking of a cruise ship! In August of 1991, the *Oceanos*, [pic] a Greek cruise liner hit 50 mph winds 30 foot swells as it was cruising off of what is known as the **Wild Coast**—part of South Africa. The entertainment crew did their best to create a party atmosphere—but in those conditions, no one felt a whole lot like partying. I mean, if you've ever been seasick, you don't want to even **think** of eating shrimp cocktail! -Unfortunately—time and lack of repair had taken its toll on this ship—and it had loose hull plates—and a 4 inch hole in what was supposed to be a watertight bulkhead. A series of problems led to an explosion—and the ship lost power—and water began flooding the generator room—and then the lower decks. The **Oceanos** was drifting—and going down. [pics]  
  
-What happened next was an incredible rescue by 16 helicopters who performed what is now seen as one of the world's most dramatic and successful rescue operations. All 571 people were saved. One of the most moving stories was of an elderly couple being rescued. As they were being lifted into the helicopter, the husband realized that his harness was not properly attached. At first he clung to his wife and she clung to him—but neither could hang on—and he dropped about 150 feet into the ocean. She was certain she'd lost him for good—until hours later when she saw him on a stretcher—bruised, but alive!  
  
-Minutes after the last people were rescued--entertainers hired by the cruise line—the ship wallowed and sank—bow first. [pic] It was a moving, powerful story of disaster, rescue and the saving of human life.
  - a. When you think about it, at the core of most good stories—and most movies—is a story about rescue. Apollo 13 fits that. The rescue of the Chilean miners is an **amazing** story—one the whole world followed. **Behind Enemy Lines?** Same thing. In fact, many story lines follow a pattern. There's a desperate situation. Lives are at stake. And the rescue is **risky**—but someone is willing to at **least** try. And they do—sometimes losing their lives in the process—as in the movie, **Saving Private Ryan**.
  - b. Something about stories like this moves us more deeply than almost anything else. Maybe it's because **we** would like to be that hero. Or maybe we hope that someone would be willing to risk their lives for us. But under it all—is this deep sense that a human life has **incredible** value. And maybe, just maybe, it's because this is the story of salvation—built into our souls by the One who made us. A story of beauty, disaster, danger, love—and rescue. Maybe.
2. To bring up the word **save** or **saviour** or **rescue** in Jesus' day would bring up the story of the people of Israel. God had told Abraham that He would make him into a nation,

and give his descendants land to live and prosper in. And then He would bless him—and through him—bless all nations. But the story took a couple of strange turns. Abraham's great-grandsons ended up moving to Egypt—and being enslaved there. -400 years later when we pick up the story—Israel has become a nation—but a nation of **slaves**. Life is brutal—and it seems as if God has totally abandoned them. But God chooses a **deliverer**—Moses. But God does all the heavy lifting—all the rescuing. And in a dramatic act of salvation, God wrenches his people out of slavery, proves that He is a powerful Saviour—a Saviour without limitations—and brings people into their own land.

-God's power to **save** is multi-faceted. In the desert—he saves them again by giving them food to eat and water to drink. He supernaturally guides them, preserves them from enemies, gives them access to wisdom and forgiveness. And in the record written down by Moses and others, God reveals Himself as the God who **Sees**; the **God Who Heals**; the **God Who Provides**, and the God who gives **Peace**.

-The **point** is that, unlike Bette Middler's song, **From A Distance**—God has chosen to **be engaged actively in our lives**. As David says in the **23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm**—God is like the best shepherd out there; giving us all we need, helping us find rest, looking for us when we lose our way, protecting us when we're afraid, going ahead of us to prepare the way. He's loving, compassionate—full of kindness and mercy.

-And God showed that He is **more** than able to protect from enemies. Sometimes the odds were **totally** overwhelming—in one case, a thousand to one—but when **God** engaged as the **One Who Saves**—the enemy was a non-issue. And God made it clear through the Prophets that He was going to send a powerful deliverer—like Moses; that he would be a king like David—who never lost a battle.

a. Now, when you think about this history, can you understand why the Jewish people would think that the Messiah—the **Deliverer** would deliver them from the oppression of the Romans? The **clearest** teaching from God's action in Israel's history is that allies can't save. Money can't save. Walls and towers and weapons can't save. God **can** save—and has chosen to not leave people stuck in their misery and slavery and pain.

-If I were in their shoes—I would think that deliverance from the oppression of the Romans—would follow the same pattern as what God did to the Egyptians. But God's plan is very different! A baby is born—with the name **Jesus**—translated—**Saviour**. And the angel, Gabriel, says why. **He will save his people from their sins—not the sins of the enemy!**

b. Now, with this kind of history, you can perhaps understand why Jesus didn't seem to quite fit their idea of a Saviour or Deliverer. Moses demanded that Pharaoh release God's people...or **else!** And when he refused—the destruction was unbelievable. **Everything** was touched by destruction—even Pharaoh's oldest son! Yet Jesus never had a single meeting with Caesar—or Herod—the rulers of his day. And Jesus seemed to be at odds with the most respected religious leaders of his day—including the priests at the temple!

-And then He died in shame on a Roman cross—like every other Messiah wannabe—well, that didn't fit **any** of their mental categories of salvation, deliverance or freedom.

3. Now, **this** is where two world-views collide. In Jesus' day, people expected salvation to look like the Exodus—a mass release of people from oppression and humiliation. When that happened, their status as God's favoured people would be restored, they would once more be free and live with dignity, and the problems of hunger, thirst, peace and safety would be solved **forever**.

-**Our** tendency—at least **my** tendency has been to think of salvation in individualistic terms. That when we respond to what Jesus accomplished on a cross for us—our sins are forgiven, the relationship with God is restored, and one day—we will be rescued from sin and death forever. In fact, it might look a little like the airlift from the cruise ship, **Oceanos**. That this cruise ship we live on—called Earth—is being knocked to pieces by a massive storm—and one day the whole thing will go down. But before that happens—we'll be rescued.

-Now, do I believe in Jesus as the ultimate rescuer? Absolutely! Do I believe that time and circumstances and the weight of sin are at work—wreaking havoc on this planet and everything on it? I sure do! Do I believe that there will come a day in history when Jesus will return and dramatically complete the rescue operation? **With all my heart!** What's different is that I believe that God is at work right **now**—and that His plan is to rescue everything! The rescue is way bigger, way more profound, and way more comprehensive than I could've ever imagined.

- a. Let me tell you why I believe that. I believe that God is consistent. If you follow His trail through history—you'll see that while He is **not** predictable, there are core eternal values that He **consistently** follows. One of those values is that He doesn't have a trash can. He redeems, rebuilds, renews, rebirths, restores, resurrects—and rescues!

-Now, we're not like that. Especially 21<sup>st</sup> century westerners. I mean, we **recycle**—but we don't renew or remake things. If something stops working—well, you just get rid of it, right? But **we** were not made to be disposable—and neither was this planet—or the universe we find ourselves in.

-Now, I know this contradicts current thought. Writers like Bertrand Russell, from an atheistic point of view, basically says that we are just infinitesimal specks of plasma running around on a planet that will eventually run down or brown out. Whatever happens—the whole thing will blip off the screen into the silence of nothingness. In the end, **nothing** matters—not us—or **anything!** Pretty dismal, huh?

-The Bible teaches—and I believe—that God **never** creates anything that doesn't matter. Nothing is disposable. Everything has a purpose—to glorify God. But the Bible **also** teaches that the core problem in this world is **not** what most people think it is. Most people in our world—if asked what the core problem is—would say things like, “hatred and intolerance,” or “hunger, thirst

and disease,” ...or they might say, “**Religion** is the main problem,” or “aging and death.” And those are all huge issues.

-But if you trace the mess, the suffering and hatred and death back to its source—you find a single warning in the Bible:

**And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”**  
(Genesis 2:16-17 NIV)

- b. I believe that **death** is not just the ultimate diagnosis of what’s going on—it is the most obvious fact of our world. I don’t mean to be morbid, but death and decay is certainly the most obvious fact about my body, my face, my hair, my hearing. It chases me every time I run! Have you ever noticed that in aging—everything heads for the floor—until it finally gets there?

-Death reigns in nature—in natural disasters, in the animal kingdom—and pretty much in everything humans touch and control; governments, corporations, money, nature, oceans, lakes. Unless something profound happens, **death** is the ultimate diagnosis.

- c. The other core thing to notice is that life **only** comes from God. When we are disconnected from the very source of all life by sin—**rebellion and defiance**—what do you think happens? Well, the same thing that happens when our brains and bodies are cut off from oxygen. Everything dies.

-At the beginning, God gave humankind an **unbelievable** amount of power and responsibility; to **manage** the entire planet. Sin has had a **dramatic** effect on our management—and the result is--**mis**-management. I mean, let’s just be honest; we have mismanaged power—and left whole populations—and genders—angry and hurt. We have mismanaged entire governments. We have mismanaged peace, resources, families, commerce. On a personal level, we mismanaged our own appetites for sex, for money, for safety, for popularity—to the point where if **anyone** gets between us and what we want—**watch out!** And the result is...**death**.

-Thousands of years of the mismanagement is now endangering the entire ecological balance of our planet; mismanagement has left a **billion** of earth’s people struggling to survive on less than \$2 a day. Every day, our world pays a massive price for our mismanagement. People stagger under the crushing weight of disease, need, polluted water, global warming, sexual and emotional abuse—it is an almost unbearable load. What’s strange is that people shake their fists at **God!**

-Friends, **sin taints, diseases, hurts and brings death wherever it spreads.** Satan and his kingdom of darkness—dress this stuff up as a fun way to live your life, make your mark and get ahead. When, truth is, it **kills!**

- d. And that's why Jesus, all through his life, makes it clear that the main problem in the entire world system is **not** the Roman Empire—or even a ruthless, greedy leader like Herod. Sin, rebellion, doing life **my** way is the core issue—and it affects **everything!**

-The only solution is a **powerful** Saviour. God will have to step in Himself. Know why Jesus, God's Son—**had** to come? Because He's the One who **created** everything. John, close friend of Jesus and early leader in the church puts it like this:

**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (John 1:1-5 NIV)**

-Apparently, the only way to save all that God had made was to come into it himself—to bring life—and then defeat sin and death by suffering the penalty Himself that was keeping everyone and everything locked into the downward spiral. And that's exactly what Jesus was saying to a brilliant professor of religion named Nicodemus:

**For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. (John 3:16-17 NIV)**

-In another context, when He was being criticized for having dinner with the worst sinner in the entire city of Jericho, Zacchaeus, Jesus basically said, "People like this are my **mission!**"

**For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (Luke 19:10 NIV)**

-The idea of being **lost** offends most of the people in our world, doesn't it—maybe some of you. When Jesus talked about sin, he described it as a downward, disintegrative process of the soul. Jesus was the first to use a word that describes the ultimate result of that process if it's not stopped. Hell. Hell is not the weird thing that cartoons have made it out to be—you know, some guy with horns in red pajamas tending a fire deep in the earth. It's worse than that. It's ultimate separation from the source of **everything** that's good and right and alive. Here's the deal; Jesus came because **we can't save ourselves from this process.**

-Peter, in speaking about Jesus, put it like this:

**Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12 NIV)**

-If we don't want God and the giving of His Son, He do **everything** to draw us toward life, but He will not force Himself on us. How many of you, as parents, try to give your kids **every** advantage? We tell them, show them, **You don't have to learn the hard way!** Has anyone here ever seen children reject **every** advantage they could've had, screw up their lives, and blame their parents for it? Without violating our ability to choose, God has done **everything** He can to give life to **everyone**. If you don't choose **life**—the only other choice is death. Author, C.S. Lewis, put it like this:

**There are only two kinds of people—those who say, “Thy will be done” to God, or those to whom God in the end says, “Thy will be done.” All that are in Hell choose it. Without that self-choice it wouldn't be Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it.”**

4. To stop **any** massive issue—you have to go right to the source of the problem. How many of you remember the BP oil spill in the Gulf? **[pics]** It affected **everything** didn't it? Huge blobs of oil were washing up on shore, killing marine life—fishing, beaches, boating—**everything** in the entire Gulf region was affected. How many of you would've been happy if the people in charge had said something like, “Well, we just need to develop some good oil-management techniques. Let the wildlife swim in it for a while. Evolution works--they'll adapt themselves. Just wear oil-proof lotion when you swim. Look on the good side; you don't have to cook the fish you catch—you just have to **light** them!”

-There were two aspects to fixing the mess—both of which were critical. The first was to immediately go right to the broken pipeline where the oil was gushing out—53,000 barrels a day—and cap it. And, of course, the other side was containing the spill—and cleaning up the **places** and the **wildlife** covered in the black, slimy goop pouring out of this well.

-And the Good News is that God, through Christ has done **precisely** that to save us—and everything else. Jesus paid for our sin by his death—and defeated Satan once for all by rising from the dead. And right now, God is at work everywhere **rescuing** wherever people will cooperate with Him. See, Jesus proved that there is **no** problem too big for Him to solve, any one too hopeless for Him to save and transform—**nothing** was outside his power. He was clear: **All power and authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me!** In other words—my power to save is unlimited!

\*He has power over quality—He turned water to wine

\*He has power over quantity—He fed 5000 from a single bag lunch

\*Spiritual authority over darkness? The demons were **terrified** of Him!”

\*He freed a Samaritan woman from the emptiness caused by her sexual addiction.

\*There was not a **single disease or disability** that He could not—and **did** not instantly cure.

\*And He was able to not just **stop** but reverse the most complicated problem we face; death and decay.

-And here's the **amazing** thing; He offers His power and His authority and His victory to people who will follow Him, join His rescue operation, and call on His name! So.

With that kind of power—you'd think His rescue operation would've been over **years** ago. What's holding it up?

a. One of the hold-ups is the pride and arrogance of the human race. And it's not just **out there**—it's **in here!** In my heart and yours. We would rather **die** than admit that we desperately need a Saviour and need to be rescued. Have you ever noticed in our world this really weird dynamic of an endless stream of depressing news—and **then** we say or imply, "Yes it's bad, but we'll solve our **own** problems! We don't need this "god" crutch to prop us up. We're smart, resourceful and strong. We'll save the day!" I want to say, **Really!?** So, how's **saving the day** going?

b. I'd say another problem is the human love affair with sin. Rebellion. Destructive behaviour. Let me clarify that. There's not a person on this planet that doesn't want to be forgiven and saved from the **consequences** of our sin, right? No murderer wants to go to jail. No one who speeds wants to have their license taken away. No one who has casual sex wants to get caught—or get STDs—or get pregnant. No one who cheats on the job wants to get fired.

-The way we'd **like** for it to work—is that we do whatever we feel like doing—that we live like hell—without getting burned. But it just doesn't work like that. Sin is wrong—not because God doesn't like it—but because it kills people and things He loves. Every time. Paul wrote these words to us—and to our world:

**Don't be misled—you cannot mock the justice of God. You will always harvest what you plant. Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful nature will harvest decay and death from that sinful nature. But those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life from the Spirit. (Galatians 6:7-9 NLT)**

-So—how often do you harvest what you plant? **Always!** So, before the harvest comes—you have to understand what you're planting, right?

c. One more problem—which I think is behind most of the ones I've talked about. It's living with God or Jesus as our **mascot**—but actually trusting in **other** things to **save** us. See, sometimes we have this strange way of thinking; that we want Jesus to save us from the consequences of sin and give us eternal life—but we look to other things, **other** saviours when it comes to something that we think will bring us joy, meaning, safety, security, popularity, hope—whatever it is we think will scratch the itch inside. Those saviours take a **lot** of forms; money, success, a man, a woman, friends—are some of the main ones out there.

-Salvation, friends, belongs to God. **God Alone!** He is the **Only One** who has the kindness, the tenacity, the grace, the power, and the resources to save us, rescue us, set us free—and give us the life we crave! The question is not if He **can** rescue us; the question is—will we **let** Him?

5. Remember the cruise ship I told you about at the beginning—the **Oceanos**? There's a part to that story I didn't tell you—a part that, when I heard it, made my jaw drop.

When the ship began to flood, guess what the captain and his key crew members did? They packed up and got ready to leave the ship—without even telling anyone that the thing was going down.

-In fact, the captain was one of the first **off of the ship**—leaving everyone else there to fend for themselves! It was two entertainers on the cruise that realized the danger, sent out an SOS, and organized the entire rescue effort. And they waited, helped, and served until everyone else was safe—then they got off the ship—right before it sank. **[pic]** For the 571 person save from certain death—**they** were the heroes. The captain and his crew? Not so much.

-Jesus calls us—His followers—to be among the heroes. See, it's possible to be totally pre-occupied with just saving ourselves. Saving our futures. Saving our money. Saving—everything. I mean, it can literally take up **all of life**. Here's the deal. God's Mission is rescuing, redeeming, renewing, remaking—**every** person and **everything**. The only ones who will not be rescued are those who refuse it. And He doesn't just want to rescue us—He wants to use us—our talents—our gifts—our resources—even our pain—in his rescue operation.

-Now, could He do it all Himself? Of course He could—He's God! But somehow—for some reason—He's chosen to use the same race that made the mess—to rescue the whole thing. That's **our** calling—as inadequate and small and helpless as we feel. And to engage in His rescue operation is one of the most powerful, life-changing, meaningful ways that we can worship Him.

- a. Here's the cool thing about that. Everywhere you look—there are opportunities to make a difference. You don't have to be downtown in a homeless shelter, you don't have to be in a village in Congo helping AIDS patients; you don't have to be witnessing on a street corner. Now you **might** be—but the great news is that **all** you do matters—if you go in with the attitude of helping others, loving, and giving back.

-Think for just a minute about the **thousands** of years of mismanagement of our planet—and the effect it's had on business, governments, and schools; how entire races have been affected by the misuse of power. Think of how our mismanagement has affected the air, the forests, the water, wildlife. Think of how mismanagement has affect how we think about sex, family, friends, driving, and accumulating.

-Question: Has **anything** been left untouched? Not that I know of. I think that God is looking for ordinary people—who have made their own share of messes—as I have--to engage, heal, love, and give wherever what and who He's made has been mismanaged and hurt. What we do matters. All of it!

- b. At the very center of God's concern—is people. Anyone here who goes through a day—without running into one of them—you know, a **people?** Pretty hard **not** to, right? And even the ones who are tough to love—are people Jesus died for.

And we have the chance, in Jesus' Name, with His Spirit in us, to, if nothing else, be **Good News** in their day. Jesus said that even cups of cold water given in His Name—count! It's **Operation Rescue**. God wants it all back—will you be a part?

## Q&A

6. I don't know if any of you know Tim Huff or not. He has been involved in youth work for years—and some amazing work in downtown Toronto working with people who are in a lot of pain—from teenage male prostitutes to the homeless. I'm going to have him come to speak sometime this Spring. Tim and I had lunch last week, and he said something that was **amazing**—and yet so incredibly true. He said, "You know, I've been working with homeless people for almost 20 years—and the number of programs have gone up **dramatically**—but the problem is still growing." Then he said this—something he says in talking to teachers; "**Every homeless person was once in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. What *happened* between there—and the streets? Maybe *that's* where we need to concentrate our efforts!**"

-This was his point. Rescuing is not as dramatic as it appears. Maybe a **lot** of people could and should be rescued before the messes start? What if, every single day—you and I handed out hope, approached life with a servant heart, and gave grace wherever it was needed. Even **I** can do that! You can too!