

## INTRODUCTION

America has always needed heroes. I think we are seeing a change in our culture where most Americans have shifted hero status away from Hollywood celebrities and professional athletes and instead have given hero status to those who really deserve it. Our heroes today are the policemen, firemen, and military personnel who risk their lives for us when they go to work.

Of all the branches of the military, the U.S. Coast guard is the smallest, and is often overlooked. However, the Coast Guard is full of heroes. Since 9/11 the Coast Guard is a strategic player in our Homeland Security. But long before 9/11, they were risking their lives in search and rescue missions. The Coast Guard saves lives, but because it's their job, they seldom seek any limelight. The motto of the Coast Guard is *Semper Paratus*, which means "always ready."

Indeed they are ready to launch a sortie whenever there is a call for distress. In the past ten years (1994-2003) they have launched 789,904 search and rescue sorties. That's an average of 216 missions per day. During this decade the Coast Guard has saved 59,720 lives. That means the Coast Guard rescues an average of 16 people a day.

I believe the greatest search and rescue mission in all of history was when God the Father sent His Son to seek us when we were lost in our sinful condition. He found us and he rescued us from sin. That's what the Apostle Peter is writing about in this passage—God's search and rescue mission.

Now this is a confusing passage of scripture for many readers. Whenever you encounter a difficult scripture, it helps to analyze the sentence structure. As you learned in grammar school, simply search for the main subject and verb. The reason this passage is hard to grasp is because these six verses are actually *one* long sentence. If you were writing a paper in college and you inserted a sentence that had 153 words in it that included 23 verbs, five conditional clauses, and one parenthetical phrase, your professor would probably flunk you! However, one benefit of the Greek language is that multiple thoughts could be built within one sentence. Even so, there is still only one main subject of this long sentence. See if you can find it:

II Peter 2:4-9: For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgement; if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)—if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.

Did you catch it? All the conditional phrases are modifying the main subject in verse nine: "The Lord." The main verb is "knows how." So, Peter wrote all of the other phrases to press home this point: "The Lord knows how." Then he provides two objects of this main subject and verb: "the

Lord knows how to rescue Godly men," and "the Lord knows how to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgement."

One of the mistakes you could make in reading this section of God's Word would be to get so sidetracked wondering about the fallen angels and Sodom and Gomorrah that you miss the whole point of the scripture. During the Middle Ages clergymen debated how many angels would fit on the head of a pin rather than obeying the main truth of scripture. So rather than spending our time in a deep theological discussion about the conditional statements that begin with "if" we'll use them to build a foundation upon which to display the main truth of this scripture.

## **I. GOD'S CHILLING REMINDER: HE PUNISHES THOSE WHO REJECT HIM**

Verse 9 says: "the Lord knows how to...hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment." Remember the context of this passage. Peter devoted the entire chapter to write about false teachers who distort God's Word. He employed three historical examples to load up his point that all false teachers will face destruction.

### **Example #1: Bad angels**

Who these angels are and what they did is not completely clear, but the main point is that God did not spare them. Jude also mentions these angels when he wrote: "And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgement on the great Day." (Jude 6) We believe these are the same "spirits in prison" (I Peter 3:19) to whom Jesus went and announced his triumph. I suspect, along with others, that this may be a reference to the beings mentioned in Genesis 6 who married women and created a race called the Nephilim, which means "giants." But we don't know for sure, so don't get sidetracked from the main point. These angels sinned against God, and He didn't let them get away with it.

### **Example #2: The Flood**

Almost everyone has heard the story about Noah's Ark. But it's important to realize WHY God sent a great flood. We read in Genesis 6: "The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time...and his heart was filled with pain. So the Lord said, 'I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth.'" (Genesis 6:5-7) Sometimes manufacturers issue a recall for a defective product. In much the same way, the Creator, the one who made man, decided to recall some of the original designs. As bad as people are today, it boggles my mind to think how wicked they must have been before the flood! This example is given to let us know God didn't let them get away with it. He knows how to punish those who reject Him.

### **Example #3: Sodom and Gomorrah**

These twin cities of the ancient world were destroyed by fire that fell from heaven. The main sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was sexual perversion, particularly homosexuality. Lot was living in Sodom and God sent three angels, who looked like men, to tell him to escape the city. Sodom's

wickedness is recorded in Genesis 19: “Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old surrounded the house. They called to Lot, ‘Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.’” (Genesis 19:5-6) God didn’t destroy the city for that one episode; that was typical of the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah. We are constantly bombarded with the message that the greatest human virtue is tolerance. But you cannot deny the fact that God doesn’t tolerate wickedness.

Some of today’s loudest preachers of tolerance insist Jesus was the very example of tolerance, and that this was just a story from the Old Testament where God was pictured as a cruel, intolerant bigot. The God of the Old Testament IS the God of the New Testament. If you don’t believe it, here is what Jesus said about this event: “The day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulphur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.” Then he said, “Remember, Lot’s wife!” (Luke 17:29, 32)

We must not miss what God is saying here—wickedness may exist for a season, but as the Bible says in Galatians 6:7, “Do not be deceived; God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.” Over the past twenty-five years, our nation has departed from God’s Word and our standard. We must not miss what God is saying here. He punishes those who reject Him. Two days after the Muslim terrorists attacked the Pentagon and the World Trade Center, Anne Graham Lotz was interviewed on the CBS Early Show. Jane Clayson asked her where God was on September 11. Lotz replied: “For years, we’ve been shaking our fist at God, telling him to get out of our schools, to get out of our government, to get out of our marketplaces, and to get out of our lives; and being the gentleman that he is, I believe that he has calmly backed out. How can we expect God to give us his blessing and his protection if we demand he leave us alone?” (Sept. 13, 2001)

## **II. GOD’S THRILLING RESCUE: HE DELIVERS THOSE WHO TRUST HIM**

vs. 9: “the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials.”

I’m always moved when I hear of a fireman who has gone into a burning building to rescue people who are trapped there. There are many stories of thrilling rescues. In two of the three historical examples of God’s judgment, there is also a story of a thrilling rescue.

### **Example #1: Noah**

God rescued Noah and his entire family from the flood. Everyone else could have been rescued from judgement if they had turned to God. It took Noah 120 years to build the ark, and every hammer blow was a reminder for people to repent. But the people only laughed at old Noah and his message of doom and gloom. Some people say, “I don’t want to believe in a God who would be so cruel to send a flood to destroy the world.” I believe in a God who is so patient that He gave the people 120 years to repent. I believe in a God who is so good that He put a rainbow in the sky as His promise that He will never again destroy the world with a flood. I believe in a God who rescues people from the mess they’re in.

### **Example #2: Lot**

God rescued Lot, his wife, and their two daughters from Sodom. The angels of God led them outside the city, and God commanded them to leave and not to look back. But Lot's wife was so in love with the city and the ways of the people she couldn't resist one longing glance at Sodom. It was her last chance and her last glance.

Again, before you consign God away as some homophobic gay-basher with a hair-trigger temper, remember God was willing to rescue Sodom. Abraham asked God if He would withhold judgment if Abraham could produce fifty righteous people. Abraham looked around, and said, "Well, what about 45?" God said, "Sure." "What about, forty, thirty, twenty, ten?" God said, "Okay, for the sake of TEN I will not destroy it." But there weren't even ten good people there! God would rather rescue than destroy, but He will not tolerate wickedness.

Let's call a time-out and look at the parenthetical sentence in verse 8 (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard). God rescued Lot from Sodom because Lot was a man who was tormented by the wickedness and evil he saw around him. How did you feel when you saw the beginning of the Monday night football game a few weeks ago when a naked desperate housewife jumped into the arms of Terrell Owens? I was disgusted. How did you feel when you saw the "basketbrawl" in Detroit when the fans and players were swinging away at each other? I was sick to my stomach. You see there are some people in America when they hear Howard Stern fill up the airwaves with filth, or they watch Janet Jackson bear her breast at half-time they say, "What's the big deal?" But I pray we are seeing a growing number of people in America who become *outraged* at the wickedness around us. We need some more people like Lot who are tormented because of the wickedness around us!

### **Example #3: Peter**

Peter could write these words about how God knows how to rescue, because he had been rescued—at least twice! On one occasion Peter and the disciples were out in a boat in the middle of the Sea of Galilee, in the middle of the night, and in the middle of a storm. Jesus came walking across the water. At first they thought He was a ghost, but when they were convinced it was Jesus, Peter wanted to try his sea legs. He asked Jesus if he could walk on the water and Jesus summoned him. Here's what happened: But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. (Matthew 14:30-31)

Peter's second rescue is described Acts 12. Peter had been thrown in jail and was to be tried the next morning. The church was praying for Peter's release, and while they were praying, God sent angel to rescue Peter from prison. The Bible says, "Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. 'Quick, get up!' he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists." (Acts 12:7) So Peter was a living, breathing example of how God knows how to rescue His children.

### **III. PERSONAL APPLICATION: JESUS CAME TO RESCUE YOU**

God loves you so much that when you were lost in your sin, God sent His Son, Jesus on a search and rescue mission. Jesus said, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." (Luke 19:10). Everybody needs to be rescued from two serious dangers.

### **(1) Jesus can rescue you from the penalty of sin**

There was a time when I was in desperate danger of going to hell. But Jesus rescued me. As the old hymn says: "I was sinking deep in sin; far from the peaceful shore. Very deeply stained within; sinking to rise no more. But the Master of the sea; heard my despairing cry; from the waters lifted me; now safe am I! Love lifted me; love lifted me; when nothing else could help; Love lifted me!" (Words by Howard Smith, 1863-1918)

The only source of forgiveness is Jesus. The Bible says, "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." (Colossians 1:13)

I read about a letter to Santa that said: "Dear Santa, There are three boys living at my house. Jeffrey is two, David is four, and Norman is seven. Jeffrey is good some of the time, David is good some of the time, and Norman is good ALL of the time. I am Norman." The problem is none of us is good all the time. That's why we need a Savior to rescue us.

One of my favorite toys when I was a kid was an Etch-a-Sketch<sup>®</sup>. By turning the two knobs you could make an image appear on the screen. The best thing about an Etch-a-Sketch<sup>®</sup> was if you made a mistake you could turn it upside down, and the mistake was gone! As each of us stands before the holiness of God, we must admit, "I am guilty." The Bible says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) But when we trust Jesus, it's as if He takes the Etch-a-Sketch<sup>®</sup> of our guilt and turns it upside down, and our sins disappear. Our guilt is replaced with the message: "FORGIVEN." The Bible says, "If we confess our sins he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9) Have you made some bad mistakes in your life? Don't you wish you could make them disappear? That's why Jesus came to earth—to seek you and to save you—to rescue you and forgive your sins.

### **(2) Jesus can rescue you from the fear of death**

In His death, Jesus not only made a way for us to be forgiven, He also removed the fear of death. The writer of Hebrews says, "By his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death." (Hebrews 2:14-15) The reason people fear death is because of the uncertainty of what will happen after death. But the Bible makes it clear there are only two possible eternal destinations, heaven or hell. If you have trusted Jesus as your Savior, you can say like the David, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; you rod and your staff they comfort me." (Psalm 23:4-5)

If you have been rescued by Jesus, it's also our job to let others know they can be rescued as well. If we truly believe there is a heaven and a hell, we will be passionate about telling others how to be rescued.

Charley Peace was a notorious murderer and burglar in 19<sup>th</sup> century England. As he was preparing to be executed on July 4, 1854, an Anglican priest was sent to his cell. The priest was reading the lesson of the day out of his prayer book. He read these words: "Those who die without Christ experience hell, which is the pain of forever dying without the release which death itself can bring." When Charley Peace heard those words he asked the priest: "Do you believe that?" "Well, I suppose I do." "Well I don't, But if I did, I'd get down on my hands and knees and crawl all over Britain, even if it were paved with pieces of broken glass, if I could rescue one person from what you just told me."

The bad news is that those who die without faith in Christ spend eternity separated from God's love. But the good news is God loves you so much He sent Jesus to rescue you from the penalty of sin and the fear of death.

## CONCLUSION

God loves you so much He organized a search and rescue mission just for you. He sent His only Son all the way from the riches of heaven to seek you and save you. And this is the time of year when many people are thinking about this rescue mission we call Christmas. God loves you more than you can ever imagine. Maybe this final story will help you understand just how much God loves you.

Grandpa was walking across the room when he saw little Jeffrey standing in his playpen. Jeffrey was sniffing and his red eyes were a clear sign he had been crying. He looked so cute standing there in his diaper and baseball t-shirt that Grandpa couldn't resist coming to his aid. Jeffrey's eyes lit up when he saw Grandpa, and he lifted up his chubby arms and said, "Out, Grandpa! Out!" As Grandpa reached down to rescue the lad, a voice came from the kitchen door that said, "No! Dad, don't pick him up." It was the firm voice of law and order, Jeffrey's mother. As she walked into the room drying her hands with a dishtowel she said, "Jeffrey, you're being punished, and you know why. I told you that you have to stay in the playpen until I said you could leave. So, please, Dad, just leave him there."

What could the Grandpa do? It was hard for him to resist the tears of his grandson, but he surely didn't want to interfere with a mother's discipline. The rules had been broken, and the punishment must be endured. He tried to read the newspaper and ignore the little boy for awhile, but he found himself watching his grandson more than reading the words on the page. He started to get up and leave the room, but he didn't want to betray his little pal. What could he do?

Love found a way. Since Grandpa couldn't take Jeffrey out of the playpen, he decided to climb into the playpen with Jeffrey. He climbed in as gently as his old joints would allow, and sat down with his grandson. He said, "If you're in the playpen, Buddy, I'm in the playpen. How long are you in for? And when Jeffrey found his grandpa with him in the playpen, suddenly his captivity was turned to comfort."

That's what Jesus did for us. As much as God may have wanted to pick us up, we are all guilty and we deserve the punishment of death and hell. Jesus Christ became a living, breathing,

person. He came down into our playpen called earth, taking on flesh and blood for one reason—so He could die in our place. The Bible says, "Jesus... being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing...And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:6-8) That's the greatest rescue mission the world has ever known!

Are you in trouble? Do you feel as if you are going down for the third time? Remember the last stanza of Howard Smith's hymn says: "Souls in danger, look above; Jesus completely saves; He will lift you by His love, out of the angry waves; He's the Master of the sea; Billows His Will obey. He your Savior wants to be; Be saved today. Love lifted me; Love lifted me; When nothing else could help, love lifted me!"

## OUTLINE

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Example #1: Bad angels

Example #2: The Flood

Example #3: Sodom and Gomorrah

### II. GOD'S THRILLING RESCUE: HE DELIVERS THOSE WHO TRUST HIM

Example #1: Noah

Example #2: Lot

Example #3: Peter

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*"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." Luke 19:10*

(1) From the penalty of sin

(2) From the fear of death



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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes