

## THE GREAT RESCUE

On August 5<sup>th</sup>, 2010, the roof of the San José copper-gold mine, about 50 kms north of Copiapo, Chile, collapsed, leaving 33 miners trapped underground. Drills were used to make boreholes about 6 inches wide to find the miners, and no one knew if they were dead or alive for 17 days, until a drill reached the spot where they were, and they quickly attached a note to the drill bit with sticky tape, surprising the rescuers.

The message said “Estamos bien en el refugio los 33”—“The 33 of us are fine in the shelter.”

Hours later, cameras used in the probe into the mine made contact with the miners, taking the first images of the trapped workers. The miners had a 50 square metre shelter with two long benches, but ventilation problems had led them to move out to a tunnel. In addition to the shelter, they had some 2km of galleries in which to move around. The miners used backhoes to dig for trapped water. Some water was obtained from the radiators of vehicles inside the mineshaft. Food supplies were limited, and the men may have lost 8 to 9 kg each. Although the emergency supplies were intended for only two or three days, the miners rationed them to last for 17 days until contact with the surface. They consumed “two little spoonfuls of tuna, a sip of milk and a biscuit every 48 hours” and a morsel of peach.

This amazing situation has captured the hearts and imaginations of people around the world. It is a fascinating story to follow day by day, as first of all it was expected they wouldn't get out until Christmas time, and for a while this knowledge was hidden from them, now it seems possible they might get out as early as next week (October).

In many ways the plight of the miners is an allegory of the spiritual condition of all humanity, so much so that I thought I would base today's sermon on this situation—“The Great Rescue.”

Spiritually speaking, all of humanity has been trapped in a life-threatening environment. The Bible calls it “sin and death.”

The Chilean miners are utterly helpless to do anything about their plight themselves. They have no choice but to rely on the efforts of others, who are working day and night to rescue them. What can they do to dig themselves out of this hole? Nothing. All they can do is wait—largely, but in fact there are a few things they can do as they wait, which we'll look at in a few minutes.



But I think you can see the clear analogy with our spiritual lives! What can we do about our predicament of being held captive by sin and death?

Romans 7:14 “We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.”

We are slaves or captives to sin. Sin is what has trapped us underground, unable to get out to the spiritual level of life that God wants us to enjoy, the Kingdom of God. Isaiah 59 describes the situation.

Isaiah 59:1 “Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor His ear too dull to hear.” God can rescue us.

Verse 2 “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.” Our sins are the barrier which has cut us off from God like the rock fall cut the miners off from their right place, home.

Verses 3ff describe how we have buried ourselves deep in the rock, spiritually speaking. These verses describe the exact situation of the miners but in a spiritual way. We are utterly trapped. Note verses 9-10:

Verses 9-10 <sup>9</sup>“So justice is far from us, and righteousness does not reach us. We look for light, but all is darkness; for brightness, but we walk in deep shadows. <sup>10</sup>Like the blind we grope along the wall, feeling our way like people without eyes. At midday we stumble as if it were twilight; among the strong, we are like the dead.”

But there is good news! A rescue is coming!

Verse 20 “The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins,” declares the LORD.” Exciting news. God will come to redeem us, rescue us.

Verse 21 “As for me, this is my covenant with them,” says the LORD. “My Spirit, who is on you, will not depart from you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will always be on your lips, on the lips of your children and on the lips of their descendants—from this time on and forever,” says the LORD.”

It is to do with the receiving of the Holy Spirit, the New Covenant.

Isaiah 60:1 “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.” We can arise and shine and get out of the darkness of sin.

Verse 2 “See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and His glory appears over you.”

Chapter 60 is very encouraging.

Chapter 61 is the one Jesus quoted in a sermon He gave. Verse 1 talks of the Great Rescue—“freedom for captives and release for the prisoners.”

Isaiah 61:1-2 “The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, <sup>2</sup>to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn”

Back to Romans 7. Verses 15-23 talk about the predicament we are in as human beings.

We are prisoners: Verse 23 “but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.”

We need rescue! Verse 24 “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?”

Verse 25A “Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

Good news—rescue is on the way: from Jesus. We are just like the miners—we can’t dig our own way out of our deep pit of sin—we need to rely on help from outside. We are totally dependent on Jesus Christ for rescue.

What a great relief it must have been for the miners, when, after 17 days cut off from everything, that first narrow borehole broke through! Although it wasn’t large enough to get them out, it was a means by which food, air and news could reach them, as well as a fantastic source of hope and encouragement as they wait for the fulfilment of their rescue. It was a lifeline to the world above—the difference between life and death!

Spiritually speaking, the probe is like the gospel of the Kingdom of God, the Bible, the good news God sends down to us that assures us of our rescue and gives us spiritual nourishment, air, hope and real life.

Quote from a newspaper report: *“Living conditions have improved dramatically for the miners since the borehole reached them. At that point, they had each lost about 10kgs, after sharing only a jar of peaches and small amounts of tuna and biscuits found in the underground shelter in which they took refuge. Now, by means of the borehole, they have received flu shots, work assignments, fresh clothes, video chats with their families, live soccer broadcasts, Bibles blessed by the Pope, medicines, oxygen and food. The world below has become a self-contained microcosm of life above, transplanted to their subterranean world beneath.”*

And so for us spiritually, we need to try to model ourselves on God above, in heaven where there is no sin and death. He sends us the borehole of the gospel to give us spiritual sustenance and hope, and what a difference it makes to us once we receive the gospel! Because we have that, we already have the Kingdom of God with us, we are translated into the Kingdom of God, although we are still waiting for its complete fulfilment, when we are raised to the surface, at the return of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ has already projected Himself down through a borehole into our very world and existence, sharing the plight of being trapped and hopeless, even succumbing to death, so that we can be rescued.

It’s hard to compare His sacrifice to any physical analogy—it always breaks down because nothing can describe the extent and magnitude of His sacrifice; but sometimes examples like this can help us picture it.

Romans 8:1-3 begins to talk about this.

<sup>1</sup>“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, <sup>2</sup>because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.”

We are now rescued! Jesus has sent down, as if He is a probe or shaft, and in fact He is the way, the only way to life.

John 1:4-5 <sup>4</sup>“In Him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. <sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

He came as the light of the world, shining into the darkness we are in.

A lot of people are like the trapped miners before the borehole reached them. They don't know there is a way out! They don't even believe there is a world up above. They are totally in the dark.

That's why we need to lead them to the borehole of the gospel, the only hope of rescue. It's only possible if God calls them, but He does ask us to be involved.

John 14:6 “Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Jesus is the Way to the surface, to the Kingdom of God.

John 14:2 “My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?”

There are lots of rooms up above—all the world is above the mine. In Chile, a convoy of lorries has delivered metal containers that will house the miners as soon as they get to the top. They are designed to protect them from too much exposure to sunlight, while doctors administer medicine and glucose.

Imagine the effect of light when you've been in darkness for a few months. That's why a man can't look at God and live. We can't imagine how wonderful it will be in God's Kingdom, compared with the spiritual darkness we're living in now. The diameter of the rescue borehole will be 66cms (26 inches), meaning each miner will have to have a waistline of no more than 90cm (35 inches) to escape. So they'll have to keep trim. In order to ensure they are the correct size, they are being given an exercise regime to keep them in shape.

Similarly, we need to be in spiritual shape for our rescue—need to have our wedding garments on.

There are some things the miners can do to help with the rescue. Psychologists believe that the miners having a role in their own destiny is important for maintaining motivation and optimism. They divided themselves into 3 groups; one responsible for the drills coming up and down with the various materials they are bringing; one in charge of security and preventing further rock falls; one focusing on health. Luis Urzua became the overall leader, and the oldest miner, Mario Gomez, was chosen for spiritual guidance.

You need to have a hierarchy, according to the psychologists. So there are many aspects that are similar to the establishment and running of the Church today, as we await the time of the ultimate rescue.

God gives us the opportunity to be Co-Workers with Him in getting the gospel out. Really we can't escape through our own power at all, but He does allow us to work in partnership with Him, and there are things we can do as we await His return. Different people have different gifts and talents and are involved in different aspects of the Work.

But it is important to work. "Having a job is really important" says the psychologist in charge of the situation. "That's the key thing, meaningful work in your day. The worst thing is to be at loose ends. They need a place to focus attention, and they need a regularity to their day—at 10am you do this, at 12 you do that, etc."

The psychologist usually works with astronauts who have to stay in confined spaces for months. But he says "there is a big difference with this group. They weren't chosen, they weren't volunteers, they didn't work to get where they were going, they weren't screened, they weren't trained. In essence, they just went to work one morning."

And so it is in the Church—we don't choose our companions.

"We pray a lot here," wrote trapped miner Victor Zamora in a letter to his mother. "I have been born again. I'm 33 years old and we are 33 miners. Jesus was 33. It is a coincidence like a miracle and that gives me the strength to continue."

One thing they are certainly learning is patience, as we are.

Psalm 130:5-6 <sup>5</sup>"I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits, and in His word I put my hope. <sup>6</sup>I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning."

Sometimes the morning light is intensely awaited, for example by sailors in a shipwrecked vessel, searchers looking for a lost person, and by the lost person himself, who can't do or see anything in the night. Imagine the eagerness of the miners who wait for their deliverance, to see the light of day again! That is the eagerness we should have for Christ's return.

Psalm 130:1 "Out of the depths I cry to you, LORD;"

This seems very appropriate to the miners—and to us in our sins. But Verse 8 gives the answer—the rescue has come, and will be completed.

Psalm 130:8 "He Himself will redeem Israel from all their sins."

A helipad has been positioned at the site so the men can be transported to a hospital in the city of Copiapo. When we rise to the surface of the Kingdom of God, we will be transported to the marriage supper of the Lamb. Who knows what wondrous experiences will await us then?

1 Corinthians 2:9 "However, as it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived"—the things God has prepared for those who love Him"

John 14:3 "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."

Jesus will come back with the necessary drilling equipment to take us to the top!

“The men will be extracted in a steel rescue capsule 54cm in diameter (21 inches). It will have an oxygen supply, lighting, video link, reinforced roof to protect against rock falls, and an escape hatch with safety device to allow the miner to lower himself back down if the capsule becomes stuck.”

We won't have problems like that! Our resurrection capsule will be much better than that! We will rise up in power as spirit beings!

“With each trip to the surface taking about 3 hours, rescuing all 33 men will take 4 days.” This won't be a problem for us. The resurrection will be speedy and pain free. It will happen in the “twinkling of an eye.”

1 Corinthians 15:52 “in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.”

What will we be like?

Verse 53 “For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.”

Verse 54 “When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

The Great Rescue will be complete. We will be raised from the depths of the dark, rocky prison of sin and death, into the glorious, eternal Kingdom of God, through the power of the only Way, Jesus Christ, in the greatest rescue of all time!

