

**WE BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST'S VICARIOUS AND ATONING DEATH THROUGH HIS SHED BLOOD.** (Colossians 1:14, 20; Romans 5:8-9; Ephesians 1:7)

Have any of you ever been rescued from a deadly, or maybe just a difficult situation?

I can only imagine how it would feel to have been rescued from a deadly situation; the feeling of gratitude; the new and greater appreciation for life.

On the other hand, if the one who rescued me died in their effort, I can imagine there might be feelings of guilt—especially if it was my own carelessness or foolishness that caused the tragic rescue effort.

On Sunday, July 7, 2014, Ben Carlson, 32, a Newport Beach lifeguard of 15 years, jumped into the water around 5 p.m. after a rescue boat spotted a distressed swimmer off the coast of 16th St. Once Carlson reached the man to make the rescue, both were hit by a large wave and Carlson vanished.

Other lifeguards who rushed to help were unable to find Carlson due to huge waves with swells as high as 12 feet. Chief Scott Post of the Newport Beach Fire Department said a crew of 25 rescuers searched for Carlson, with members of multiple lifeguard and fire agencies, plus a helicopter. He was found three hours later at about 8 p.m., and was rushed to a nearby hospital where he was pronounced dead.

The man Carlson was rescuing made it to the shore and survived.

What inspires someone to rescue another? It may be instinct or a sense of responsibility. We've all heard stories of strangers who risked their lives to pull someone from a burning building or swim through frigid waters to save a drowning victim. And, like the lifeguard in the tragic story, there are those who have accepted the responsibility for rescuing people in trouble.

Jesus said, ***Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.*** (John 15:13 NIV)

We have the greatest respect and admiration for the soldier who throws himself on a grenade to save his fellow soldiers. We award them the highest honor and award—the Medal of Honor.

How would we feel if a soldier threw himself on a grenade in order to save his enemy!? We'd be mystified, even angry! We might think of that soldier as a traitor.

One of the most profound passages in all of Scripture is Romans 5:7-8:

***Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*** (Romans 5:7-8 NIV)

And verse 10 of that same passage says we we're not only *sinners*, ***we're God's enemies!***

How are we *God's enemies*?

We have to go back to the beginning.

The Bible says we were created in God's image, according to His likeness. Furthermore, God gave mankind dominion over the earth. We were to be both a reflection of God and a representative of God in this world.

What a great privilege! What a great responsibility.

But instead of being grateful and faithful, we rejected God—even rebelled against Him—and followed the one who instigated rebellion against God: Satan. We deserted and joined the enemy and so became enemies of God!

Now, most people either don't know this, or don't see themselves as God's enemy. But when we don't believe and obey God, and instead believe and obey the lies of Satan—which is anything contrary to God's Word and Character—we are, in fact, enemies of God.

So not only do we deserve God's wrath as His *enemies*, but there is also the simple fact that such disbelief and disobedience leads to death. That's what God told Adam and Eve: *the day that you eat from the tree I told you not to eat from, you will surely die.* (Gen. 2:16-17)

It's the same truth as: *if you don't believe the warning on the label and drink deadly poison, you will surely die.* It's just a simple statement of fact.

This truth is stated in Ezekiel 18:4,20: ***The soul who sins is the one who will die***, and in Romans 6:23: ***the wages of sin is death***. The consequence of disbelief in and disobedience to God is death. If God is the Giver and Sustainer of life and He has given us everything we need for life and godliness (Jn. 14:6; 2 Pet. 1:3), and we disbelieve and disobey Him, the only thing left is death.

But some will argue *God is love*—that's what the Bible says! How can a loving God condemn anyone to death!? Can't He just forgive everyone? He's God, so He can do whatever He wants, right?

How would we feel if a judge just forgave someone who had committed terrible crimes—maybe a terrorist who had tortured and beheaded innocent children? How would that make us feel?

We'd be outraged! We'd demand justice! We'd seek vengeance!

What is justice? Justice is simply what is right; what is fair—according to a standard, whether ethical, moral or legal.

Let's remove the emotional factor that was present in our example of the terrorist who tortured and beheaded children, and use another example.

How would we feel if a judge forgave someone who had swindled insurance companies out of millions of dollars? Some might argue, "the insurance companies 'swindle' customers out of money, so they deserve to be swindled!" But most of us would say, "the one who swindled the insurance companies is a law-breaker, and he deserves to be punished. We can't allow people to break laws and get away with it; such action would lead to anarchy and destroy society."

If we appeal to such a sense of justice, we must realize that God is also just. And God cannot allow disbelief and disobedience to go unpunished—not just because it offends Him, but because it necessarily leads to death.

And because God is love and doesn't want anyone to die, but all to live, He's faced with a dilemma. In love, does He just forgive everyone? In justice, does He condemn everyone?

But God can never be stumped with a dilemma! Indeed, He has the perfect answer. He has been faithful to both His love and His justice. The Bible says *God so loved that He sent His Son to punish for our sin.*

Isaiah 53:

***4 Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.***

***5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.***

***6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.***

**10 Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.**

**12 Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.**

Jesus said of Himself, ***For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*** (Mark 10:45 NIV)

A *ransom* is a payment for the release or rescue of something or someone. What did Jesus *release* and rescue us from?

Jesus spoke to our *condition* because of our disbelief and disobedience, when he quoted from the prophet Isaiah:

***"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim FREEDOM FOR THE PRISONERS and recovery of sight for the blind, to RELEASE THE OPPRESSED,*** (Luke 4:18 NIV)

The apostle Paul spoke to our *environment* when he wrote,

***... the Lord Jesus Christ ... gave himself for our sins to RESCUE US FROM THE PRESENT EVIL AGE ...*** (Galatians 1:3-5 NIV)

***For [God] has RESCUED US FROM THE DOMINION OF DARKNESS and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,*** (Colossians 1:13 NIV)

But as we said last week, Jesus never sinned. He lived in perfect faith and obedience to the Father. He was not a *prisoner* of sin, *oppressed* by Satan. He didn't need to be *rescued from the present evil age, or from the dominion of darkness.*

And yet He died, on a Roman cross, like a criminal!

Why!?

Jesus died to demonstrate God's perfect love *and* to fulfill God's perfect justice.

***This is love: not that we loved God, but that HE LOVED US and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (1 John 4:10 NIV)***

***God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. HE DID THIS TO DEMONSTRATE HIS JUSTICE, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—(Romans 3:25 NIV)***

***He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:2 NIV)***

***So In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. (Ephesians 1:7-8 NIV)***

***Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! (Romans 5:9 NIV)***

And so, we believe in Jesus Christ's vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood. ***God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21 NIV)*** Jesus died in our place, taking upon Himself the punishment due for our sin. He shed His life's blood, so that we might have eternal life.

I remember reading a story one time of a young girl who was deathly sick. She needed a blood transfusion in order to live. She had a rare blood type, and the closest one with the same type was her healthy 5-year-old brother.

The parents explained as best they could, and the brave little boy agreed to give his blood for his sister.

The two were laid side-by-side and the blood lines were connected. As the blood began to flow from the little brother to his sister, he asked, "How soon?" "How soon until what?" his parents asked. "How soon until I die?" the little boy responded.

The brave little 5-year-old believed that, by giving his blood so his sister would live, he would have to die.

I'm not sure the story is true, but it helps us appreciate the very real fact that Jesus shed His blood so that we might have life that is truly life—abundant and eternal.

***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. (John 3:16 NIV)***