



“The Rescue”

Idea: Jesus has come to be our rescue from sin.

Intro: Laden with weapons and gear, Petty Officer Marcus Luttrell grasped the rope dangling from the rear of the Chinook transport helicopter and descended into the moonless night. Twenty feet down, his boots touched ground in the remote mountains of northeastern Afghanistan near the Pakistani border. As the roar of the helicopter faded to silence, Luttrell and three other Navy SEALs—Lieutenant Michael Murphy and Petty Officers Danny Dietz and Matt Axelson—found themselves alone in the pitch darkness of a desolate warzone.

The elite four-man team was searching for Ahmad Shah, a militia leader aligned with the Taliban, as part of a mission dubbed Operation Red Wings. Soaked by a cold rain, the quartet hiked for hours through the darkness as they struggled to keep their footings on the steep mountain ridges. After the sun dawned on June 28, 2005, nearly four years into the war in Afghanistan, the mud-caked SEALs burrowed themselves behind rocks, logs and tree stumps on an outcrop overlooking Shah’s suspected location. The 29-year-old Luttrell, a sniper and team medic, concealed himself under a felled tree when he suddenly heard soft footsteps. Looking up, he saw a turbaned man carrying an axe.

The SEALs had been discovered. Not by enemy forces, however, but a local goat herder. Within moments, nearly 100 goats with bells around their necks came jingling over the mountainside with another herder and a teenage boy.

The surprise presented the SEALs with several options—none of them good. Killing unarmed noncombatants would violate acceptable rules of engagement and also likely result in a court-martial. If the SEALs tied up the three and left them behind, they still faced the problem of what to do with the bleating herd without raising suspicions. Dietz, who was in charge of communications, tried to radio headquarters for instructions but could not connect.

Left to make their own decision, the unit released the unarmed men, knowing it was very possible that the herders would inform the Taliban forces. It was a decision Luttrell “knew could sign our death warrant.”

With their mission compromised, the SEALs tried to move to a defensive position, but barely an hour later, dozens of Shah’s forces emerged over a ridgeline. An avalanche of AK-47 fire, rocket-propelled grenades and mortars cascaded down the mountain. The terrain proved just as vicious as the enemy. As the Taliban fighters advanced, the SEALs scrambled, fell and jumped hundreds of feet down the mountain. One fall shattered three

of Luttrell's vertebrae.

Dietz was shot multiple times during the firefight, and although his right thumb had been blown off in the battle, he continued to shoot at the enemy to protect his unit. As Luttrell hooked his arms underneath the shoulders of his badly wounded comrade to drag him down the slope, a bullet hit Dietz in the back of his head. He died in Luttrell's arms.

The badly wounded Murphy knew their best chance at survival was to call in reinforcements. Without a workable radio connection, the team leader cast his personal safety aside and moved to a completely exposed position, the only location where he could get a signal on his satellite phone. As Murphy phoned for backup, a bullet ripped through his back. The lieutenant managed to complete his call and even keep up the fight, but he could not survive. Luttrell holed up with Axelson, who had sustained a terrible head wound, when a rocket-propelled grenade blasted the two apart. Luttrell never saw Axelson again.

Luttrell miraculously survived the blast and managed to elude capture by the time reinforcements arrived. Alerted by Murphy's call, two Chinook helicopters carrying Special Operations Forces rushed to the area of the firefight, but as one of the aircraft hovered to discharge its troops, a rocket-propelled grenade shot it out of the sky. The eight SEALs and eight Army Night Stalkers aboard all died.

By the time the sun set on the disastrous day, 19 Americans were dead. Luttrell was presumed to have been a 20th victim, but in spite of bullet wounds, a broken back and rocks and shrapnel protruding from his legs, the SEAL survived. Unaware of the tragedy that befell the rescue operation, Luttrell crawled seven miles through the mountains. In spite of his wounds, he killed chasing Taliban with his rifle and grenades as he continued to evade capture.

As the sun blazed down, the thirsty Luttrell licked the sweat off his arms until he found a waterfall. As he sipped its cool waters, he suddenly found himself surrounded once again by a band of local men. These men, however, proved to be more friend than foe. One of the men, Mohammad Gulab, assured Luttrell they were not Taliban, and he and three others carried the wounded warrior back to their village of Sabray. Bound by a tribal code of honor known as Pashtunwali, Gulab gave Luttrell food, water and shelter. Although the Taliban encircled the village and threatened his family and neighbors if he didn't turn over the American, Gulab refused. For four days, Luttrell was shuttled among houses and even into a cave to prevent his capture.

Finally, Gulab's father traveled to a Marine outpost with a note from Luttrell. The military launched a large combat search-and-rescue operation with warplanes and ground forces that attacked the Taliban fighters and brought home their missing man. As Gulab helped the limping SEAL to a waiting helicopter, an Air Force pararescueman held out his outstretched arm to Luttrell and said, "Welcome home, brother."

For his actions, Luttrell received the Navy Cross in a 2006 White House ceremony, and Axelson and Dietz received the same honor posthumously. Murphy posthumously received his country's highest military honor, the Medal of Honor.

<https://www.history.com/news/the-real-life-story-behind-lone-survivor>

The incredible story of Operation Red Wings is one of heroism and sacrifice. It reveals the sadness of war because precious lives were given, but it also demonstrates the courage and love that is so often forged in the crucible of war. For Marcus Luttrell and anyone who has ever been pinned down in a firefight, there is no better sight than seeing your rescuers on the horizon. He knew they would come for him.

Inquiry: There is a greater story of heroism and sacrifice. It is the story of the Bible. There are four scenes in it: creation, fall, rescue, and restoration. Over the last two Sundays we have examined the first two scenes. We have learned that in the beginning there was God. He created all there is, and His creation was good. Adam and Eve were the pinnacle of God's creation. He placed them in a beautiful garden in Eden. All was good as

the first two humans enjoyed intimacy with God, with one another, and His creation. But then something terrible happened.

Adam and Eve chose to listen to the tempting words of the deceiver and disobeyed God's Word. They rebelled against the Lord and chose their own path. The consequences were devastating. Just as God had warned, the man and woman died. Their sin ushered shame, separation, and brokenness into their lives. The once sinless and innocent creations of God instantly became totally depraved. They fell without any hope in and of themselves. They were pinned down and cut off in and by their sin. They needed rescue. Thankfully, as we saw last Sunday, God the Creator is also God the Savior. He was a seeking, suffering, and saving Savior to them. He mounted a rescue operation to save and redeem. Today, we are looking at the rescue operation of Jesus. There are two pieces we need to see.

1. Promise Made

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.

– Gen 3:15

God removed Adam and Eve from Eden as a result of their sin but left them with a promise of rescue and hope. He promised them one of their descendants would someday rescue mankind from sin. Over the next several centuries, God prepared the way for this person who would become the Savior of the world. Exact details of His birth, life, and death were spoken by the prophets and recorded in the Bible centuries before His coming. In fact, the whole Bible ultimately points to this one person as the focal point of all human history. His purpose in coming was *“to seek and to save the lost”* (Luke 19:10).

In the midst of God's judgment upon sin, He made a promise to Adam. That promise was reiterated through the Law and prophets. We see it in the ark that carried Noah and his family safely through the judgment waters of the flood. We see it in the blessing of Abraham. We see it in the establishment of Israel as God's called-out people. We see it in King David who was a man chasing after the heart of God. We see it in the prophecy of Malachi as the Old Testament closes. We see that the promise of a coming Messiah who would take away sin was made, but that is not all we see. We see it also in the words of Jesus, Himself. Read Luke 22:19-20. The Lord Jesus promised to rescue, and secondly we see the promise was kept.

2. Promise Kept

The Bible tells us that the promised Savior, simply, was God. He took on humanity in the person of Jesus Christ almost 2,000 years ago, fulfilling all the predictions in the Old Testament. Jesus' birth was miraculous since His mother was a virgin. His life was unique: He perfectly enjoyed and obeyed God the Father without sin. This ultimately led to His agonizing death on a cross as He willingly, obediently, and sufficiently died to pay for the sins of mankind, according to God's plan. In the greatest display of mercy and grace the world has ever known, Jesus' life was traded for ours. His death became a substitute for all who would trust in Him. The perfectly innocent died to rescue the hopelessly guilty from sin and Satan.

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit

– 1 Peter 3:18

You see, the grave could not hold Jesus. The Bible tells us that three days later, Jesus emerged from His tomb, fulfilling His earthly mission to defeat sin by dying on the cross and to defeat death by rising from the dead – just as God promised. Forty days later He returned to Heaven where He reigns as the rightful

King.

Conclusion: Jesus is our rescuer who heroically sacrificed His life for ours. His death perfectly and sufficiently satisfied the wrath of God against our sin. Today, we can experience life with God the Father because of the substitute of God the Son. Our shame, separation, and brokenness and be healed through faith in Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul sums it up perfectly.

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. 18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

– 2 Cor 5:17-21

When we place our faith in Jesus Christ, He takes away our sinful past. It is now in the rearview mirror of our lives. In its place, Jesus gives us new life in Him. This is life free of shame and separation. And as we live our lives through Him, Jesus begins to heal the broken spaces within us. We will talk more about the restoration next Sunday.

Today, have you been rescued by Jesus? If not, it is simple. The Bible tells us to confess and repent of our sin and by faith to believe in Jesus and His work on the cross. If you have not experienced His rescue, you can today. What would keep you from surrendering to Jesus today?

If you have been rescued, celebrate it. Cherish it. Draw closer to Him today.